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# Executive Director Search

July 1, 2025

# NWAIS

Northwest Association  
*of* Independent Schools

## Information for Candidates

**Presented by :**



**Educators Collaborative**

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# Information for Candidates

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The Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) is a nonprofit membership association that provides accreditation, professional development and support services to over 110 elementary, middle, and secondary independent schools in Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Formerly the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools (PNAIS), NWAIS is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and accredited by International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA).

As a major accrediting agency, NWAIS offers member schools a thoughtful process to support continuous improvement, effective leadership at all levels, and the ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Robust professional development offerings and support to individual schools managing particularly difficult issues round out the overview of care provided by NWAIS.

Based in a friendly neighborhood of Seattle, Washington, the NWAIS office is a bright and inviting space where the staff of six, plus the ED, do their work. It is expected that the ED will be based here and live in Seattle; however, there is room to consider living anywhere within the NWAIS geography, though commuting costs would fall to the ED in this case.

A 14-member Board of Governors, all NWAIS heads of school, is responsible for oversight of the organization and for supporting and managing strong leadership from the Executive Director. The ED sits on the Board as an ex-officio member and currently enjoys a very productive partnership with this group. A retreat for member heads of school is planned by the staff and takes place each Fall and Spring.

In partnership with the board, the Executive Director is responsible for setting the association's strategic priorities and for articulating and actualizing a compelling vision. As the intellectual, interpersonal, and administrative leader for NWAIS, the Executive Director is responsible for modeling the association's values and managing all aspects of the association, including accreditation, professional learning operations, financial health, membership relations and Head of School support. The next Executive Director will be an exceptional listener who strives to build trust among all stakeholders and will bring thought leadership to the association. Under this leader, NWAIS will continue to support exceptional schools, lead in growing the craft of teaching and provide a model for school improvement.

***The Northwest Association of Independent Schools promotes the ongoing improvement of its member schools and advances independent school education***



# Guiding Principles

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## Core Values

### **Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Communities**

Independent schools are obligated to grow as equitable communities. NWAIS prompts schools to think of diversity beyond mere representation and inclusion. Our policies and standards thus require member schools to aspire for cultures of true belonging, where each individual is valued for their own identity and contributions. How these individuals come together in community is vital for institutional and societal progress.

### **Continuous Improvement**

In such a complex and dynamic world, schools must continually evolve to prepare their students for the future. The NWAIS vigorous accreditation process, along with its array of programs and services, prompts the reflection necessary for continued improvement. Further, the NWAIS culture of collaboration encourages members to learn and innovate together.

### **The Transformative Power of Leadership**

Leadership inspires. It opens possibilities. A school community flourishes when guided by deft and visionary leaders who put people first. To foster that ethos, NWAIS programming and mentoring supports leaders at every level to make a positive impact in their schools and beyond.

### **The Positive Impact of Independent School Education**

Mission-driven schools nurture purpose-driven people by offering thoughtfully designed programs that instill strong scholastic, ethical, and civic values. Through its programs, consultation services, and accreditation process, NWAIS helps schools provide exceptional educational experiences. In turn, we empower our schools, their students, and alumni to contribute to the larger public good.

**NWAIS**  
Northwest Association  
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# Guiding Principles

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## Essential Characteristics

### **Commitment to the Public Good**

As nonprofit organizations under the IRS code 501(c) (3), NWAIS schools must provide for the public good. We expect schools to accomplish this by offering an independent educational option for a wide variety of families and by giving back to their community through service, economic development, organizational citizenship, and providing models of quality organizations, curriculum and instruction.

### **Effective Governance and Operations**

Success of NWAIS schools is secured through governance structures that provide fiduciary responsibility and strategic oversight, the goal of which is long term viability. These structures work in partnership with an administrative structure that effectively manages the daily operation of the organization, ensuring the sustainability of the school for faculty, staff, and families.

### **Primary Focus of Academic Education**

NWAIS only accredits schools whose primary focus is academic education. In addition, the Association only accredits schools in their entirety; it does not accredit parts of school programs. The mission, philosophy, and goals of our schools articulate a commitment to academic preparation; ensuring students are inspired toward and prepared for subsequent educational opportunities. This requires NWAIS schools to create relevant and current curricula, with pedagogies based on present understanding of learning. NWAIS does not accredit schools whose primary focus is therapeutic, wilderness based, or athletic. NWAIS schools prepare students for pursuit of future educational opportunities.

### **Commitment to the Best Interest of Children**

NWAIS schools demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the best interests of the students and families they serve. This includes commitments to the long term sustainability of the school; providing the continuity of educational experience through to the graduation of the child; promoting a safe and inclusive community; adequate resources for advising and counseling of students at their developmental age; and comprehensive programming for residential programs in schools that have them.



# Association At-A-Glance

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## Service Offerings

The association has carefully constructed a slate of offerings to the membership that also supports the financial needs of the association. Notable is the accreditation process. This flagship effort for school improvement is a school's most significant return on investment for NWAIS membership.

One can employ a simple scan of the [professional development calendar](#) and see the deep and broad range of offerings that rival any other regional association. Those offerings occur all year long and are delivered in a host of modalities. There are large and small conferences, roundtables, job specific trainings and local cohorts.

All of this, combined with annual membership dues, creates predictable revenue for the association and furthers its mission to support schools as they advance their brand of independent school education.



## Staff

A highly functioning staff is critical to any organization. NWAIS is no different. Collaboratively shaping the day-to-day operations of the association are six intrepid professionals who cover finance, accreditation, community engagement, member support and assistant leadership. The staff is well organized and represents a mix of tenures. The NWAIS staff work primarily on site and bring expertise and experience to their areas of responsibility.



## Leadership Opportunity

The NWAIS Board of Governors has launched the search to replace current Executive Director (ED), Mark Crotty, who will retire in 2025 after a very successful six years at the helm of the association. Mark is eager to support new leadership and help his successor understand the organization's culture, personalities, and protocols.

Eric Temple, Sally Mixsell, and André Withers of Educators Collaborative, LLC (EC) are assisting the Board in this search. Based on a members-wide survey and visits with the full Board, the Search Committee, and member Heads of School, the EC team offers the descriptors below that represent association-wide sentiments about NWAIS' strengths, the challenges and opportunities lying ahead, and the attributes and skills desired in the next Executive Director.

# Strengths of the Association

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- The network afforded among member schools and, especially, Heads of School provides a collaborative community, appreciation for which runs deep.
- Professional development opportunities are abundant, varied and meaningful. Member schools engage regularly with the association through these offerings.
- There is great trust and respect for the quality of the NWAIS accreditation process. School Heads feel the ED and staff know them and their schools well and support their work in notable ways through the accreditation process.
- There is tremendous pride in the fact that NWAIS has put a stake in the ground around the importance of inclusion and belonging. This “stake in the ground” is reflected in a variety of public statements, documents and accreditation standards.
- The competence and quality of the NWAIS staff is appreciated by all member schools and offers a strong team to collaborate with and support a new ED.
- Strong finances and responsible decision-making ensure solid foundational support for the work of the incoming ED.
- Active participation of Heads of School on various association committees exemplifies the robust engagement of its membership.

# Opportunities for the Association

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- The post-COVID environment has posed significant challenges to many of the smaller NWAIS schools and/or those that did not do well through COVID. Many of these schools are significantly tuition-driven and, in the face of changing demographics, enrollment challenged. Supporting struggling schools through these challenges will be a focus for the next ED.
- The job of a NWAIS Head of School, as in every part of the country, has become more complicated and nuanced. An ED who supports the complexity of a Head of School’s job will be vital.
- There has recently been more turnover of Heads of School in the NWAIS network and this cadre of new Heads of School will require support from the association.
- As schools grapple with new leadership and complex issues, there is a need for additional governance training and support at schools of all sizes.
- Unlike many of the regional independent school associations, NWAIS is challenged to manage its relatively vast geography. Providing equal support to all member schools will require an ED willing to travel in order to maintain regular and balanced outreach to all member schools.

# Skills, Traits and Attributes of the next Executive Director

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## ATTRIBUTES DESIRED

There is consensus among NWAIS community members that the next ED should be someone who:

- Is a thought leader who engages with current research in order to develop programming, help solve problems, and envision what's possible.
- Is an accomplished strategic thinker who will develop and act on a shared vision for the organization.
- Is highly skilled at clear and effective verbal and written communication. Has an interest in representing the organization at a number of events to varied audiences.
- Has a collaborative spirit and is someone others will look up to and trust to lead the organization.
- Listens and reflects by asking probing questions to encourage processing, rather than coming up with quick answers to "satisfy." A skilled distiller and synthesizer of information will be appreciated.
- Has a creative and entrepreneurial mind, using creativity to bring a diverse set of schools together.
- Has high EQ and enters every conversation with curiosity, compassion, and an open-mind.
- Does not hesitate to "roll up their sleeves" when needed.
- Is an optimist with a steady disposition who demonstrates respect and care for all, including staff.
- Holds on to NWAIS values in the face of challenge and/or crisis.
- Is willing to be available and accessible both in everyday situations and when called on to help solve a particular problem.

## SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES DESIRED

The next ED of NWAIS will bring:

- Experience as a leader of leaders; experience as a Head of School is a plus but not mandatory.
- Deep knowledge and understanding of the role of Boards in non-profit organizations.
- Broad experience in and commitment to DEIB work in order to help NWAIS schools continue work toward the goals of the association.
- The ability to maintain confidentiality as a supportive partner with Heads of School.
- Knowledge of and experience with accreditation.
- The ability to manage difficult conversations.
- An advanced degree.



# The Search Team

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## André Withers

André joined Educators Collaborative in 2022. As a trained Executive Coach, he is active in not only leadership searches but DEI work and strategic planning. He has worked with NWAIS on several occasions to advance its work in inclusivity and belonging.

André can be reached at [awithers@educatorscollaborative.com](mailto:awithers@educatorscollaborative.com). For more about André, please click [HERE](#).

## Eric Temple

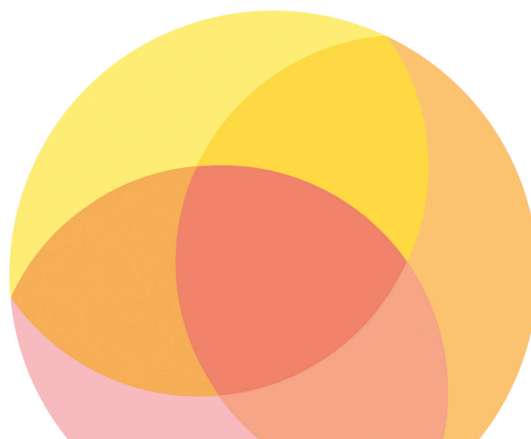
Eric joined EC in 2022 after several headships in California. In addition to his search work, he enjoys executive coaching and anti-bias work. This past year he has served as Interim Head of The Overlake School in Redmond, WA, a member of NWAIS.

Eric can be reached at [etemple@educatorscollaborative.com](mailto:etemple@educatorscollaborative.com). For more about Eric, please click [HERE](#).

## Sally Mixsell

As an EC consultant, Sally has assisted in five NWAIS Head Searches, coached three Heads of School in the association, and worked with three NWAIS Boards. Sally joined EC in early 2019 and was appointed a co-managing partner of the firm in 2021.

Sally can be reached at [smixsell@educatorscollaborative.com](mailto:smixsell@educatorscollaborative.com). For more about Sally, please click [HERE](#).







## To Apply:

The deadline for applications is July 22, 2024.

Candidates interested in this position are asked to **submit the following materials in a single merged PDF document, in the order listed:**

- EC Candidate Summary Sheet (contact a consultant for this document)
- Letter of Interest, addressed to the NWAIS Search Committee
- Current résumé
- Statement of leadership philosophy
- A list of five or more references with contact information (including phone numbers, email address, and time zone the reference is in)
- EC Disclosure Form (contact a consultant for this document)

We encourage candidates to reach out to us for a preliminary conversation, if desired, before submitting their materials. The search committee expects to complete the search in Fall 2024.

Per the state of Washington's salary posting requirement, the salary range for this position is \$250,000 to \$315,000 annually depending on experience. Full benefits are included and can be detailed as semifinalists are identified.

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