



Day and Boarding; Grades 6-12

THE PENNINGTON SCHOOL



HEAD OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SEARCH

Pennington, New Jersey

July 1, 2024

The Pennington School is committed to developing individual excellence in all of its students.



EDUCATORS COLLABORATIVE
EXPERTS IN SEARCH, TRANSITION & STRATEGY



EDUCATORS COLLABORATIVE



A THRIVING MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The Pennington School is justifiably proud of being a school where, in the words of one faculty member, “community is everything.” This sense of community is more than simply a promise at Pennington—it is championed and nurtured by every member of the School and supported by intentional programs in the Middle School and beyond. Evidence of this culture is readily apparent to every visitor to the campus, as they are warmly greeted by students and teachers alike. Pennington is an exceptionally welcoming place, and the warmth of its atmosphere provides the School a distinct culture that attracts families that are aligned with its values.

The Pennington program starts in grade 6 with what is described by one administrator as “the magical Middle School.” The division is intentionally small (100 students) and families are attracted to it because of its intimacy. Its size allows every student to be seen, known, and heard. As students navigate the often challenging middle school years, they are supported by a highly regarded faculty that understands and appreciates the unique academic and emotional needs of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders.

The Middle School also benefits from having the resources of a larger school. Academically advanced students can take classes (usually in math or world languages) in the Upper School and Pennington’s impressive facilities serve a total student body of over 500 students, including boarders from all over the globe. Students thereby experience the best of both worlds—a small environment that serves their distinct needs and a larger environment with myriad resources in which to explore their passions.

Pennington’s Middle School teachers are universally praised for their care and nurturing approach to their students. In the words of one parent, “I can’t say enough good things about the faculty.” While faculty members cover the range from relatively new to deeply experienced, they share a common philosophy about how they approach their craft. As one faculty member put it, “Our intent is to serve students who are still curious about the world. That curiosity is captured and fed.” Moreover, the faculty is genuinely close. “We really enjoy working together,” in the words of one teacher.



PROGRAMS THAT SERVE THE DISTINCT NEEDS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Pennington understands that the needs of Middle School students are different from those of older students. The program for Middle School, and the educators that teach it, are thus distinct from those that serve the Upper School. The hub of the Middle School is Stainton Hall, where students take most of their classes. The building provides a home base for students that is theirs alone and provides students with an identity that is distinct from the rest of the School. With that being said, Middle School students are very much a part of the overall Pennington community. These connections are fostered by the Junior Proctors program, which provides an opportunity for leaders in eleventh grade to meet weekly with Middle School students to engage in fun and purposeful activities that address issues of adolescent life and help foster respect and cooperation throughout the middle school years. The Junior Proctors also host the Middle School Launch, a special orientation program which helps welcome students back to campus at the beginning of the school year. They serve as role models and peer mentors to the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and work together to form the bridge between the Middle and Upper Schools.

The Middle School academic program follows a traditional sequence of courses in math, science, social studies, English, and world language instruction. These core offerings are supplemented with exploratory courses in music, health, and the arts, in addition to a wide variety of elective courses that allow students to learn something new, satisfy a specific area of interest or strengthen a flourishing talent. There is also a unique Physical Life Skills program. Learn more about Pennington's Middle School academic program [here](#).

A SCHOOL THAT IS HOME

While the majority of Pennington's students come from the surrounding communities, the School has a boarding program that serves approximately 140 students from the United States and abroad. There is a small boarding program (currently four students) for Middle School students. Many students are attracted to the boarding experience at Pennington because of the independence it affords them. Boarding students find that



they are better prepared for the academic rigor and social challenges of college by learning and living together in secondary school. You can learn more about how Pennington serves its boarding population [here](#). Over 50 members of the teaching faculty live on campus, and the family-style living and dining arrangement furthers the sense of community. They consider Pennington to be their home because, in fact, it is where they reside.

A DEEP COMMITMENT TO SERVING STUDENTS WITH A RANGE OF LEARNING STYLES

Since 1975, The Pennington School has been at the forefront of educating students with specific learning difficulties. The School's [Cervone Center For Learning](#) provides a range of services for about 15% of Pennington's students, who receive 1:1 support for building their strengths and maximizing their success. In the Middle School, this takes place during students' study periods; they otherwise follow a standard curriculum with their classmates. The Cervone Center also coordinates arrangements for students who do not receive 1:1 support but who qualify for specific learning accommodations.

At a time when many independent schools are just now seeking to serve a broader range of learning profiles, Pennington is able to draw upon their long history of such work and the expertise that the School has developed over time. The Cervone Center is widely regarded as a leader in the field of learning differences and its dedication to this work is an important reflection of the School's commitment to eliciting the very best from every student.

AT A GLANCE

- Established: 1838
- Number of Students: 535, of which 100 are enrolled in the Middle School
- Boarding students: 140, of which 4 are enrolled in the Middle School
- Countries represented: 37
- Teaching Faculty: 85
- Average class size: 13 students
- Student to Teacher Ratio: 6:1



[Pennington's 55-acre campus](#) has been completed updated over the past six years, including:

- Yen Humanities Building (2017)
- Meckler Library (renovated in 2018)
- Makerspace (2018)
- Four outdoor classrooms (2018)
- Arts and Community Center (renovated 2018)
- Indoor aquatic center (renovated 2021)
- Beach volleyball court (2021)
- Outdoor student lounge (2022)
- Fitness and conditioning center (renovated in 2023)
- Snack bar (2023)
- Dining Hall (upgrades in 2023)
- All-weather turf athletic field (renovated 2023)
- Tennis and pickleball courts (renovated 2023)



A SCHOOL WITH A LIVING HISTORY OF INCLUSION

The Pennington School, with its roots in the Methodist church, has long been a place notable for its diversity and inclusion. Early on, the founders identified three guiding principles for the School: “the education of the physical, the training of the mental, and the grounding of the soul in character.” These principles reflected the vision of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who envisioned schools as places that cared for the whole individual. The Pennington School welcomes students from all religious, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they have found it to be a warm and welcoming place to learn and live.

Further Explore What Makes Pennington Distinctive

[Student Activities](#)

[Technology at Pennington](#)

[The Arts](#)

[Middle School Athletics](#)





FUTURE LEADERSHIP PROFILE

The Pennington School seeks a leader who enthusiastically embraces and champions the School's mission, which is grounded in providing a strong academic program that prepares students for continued educational success.

The successful candidate will be a leader distinguished by a warm, welcoming, and inclusive personal manner, exceptional verbal and written communication skills, a commitment to the School's mission, and a love for middle school students. They will also bring the skills, initiative, and drive to help further realize a compelling, and sustainable vision for the future of the Middle School.

The Pennington School is conducting a national search to identify its next Head of Middle School. Search consultant George Sanderson of Educators Collaborative solicited input from all stakeholders during an on-campus visit and gathered additional input from stakeholders through an online survey. Based on this input, the following represents a summary of the Middle School's strengths, challenges and opportunities, and the skills and attributes desired in the next Head of Middle School of Pennington.



Strengths of The School

- Pennington is justifiably proud of its close community. Supported by over 50 teachers who live and raise their families on campus, the School is a place where there is a palpable sense of belonging.
- The Middle School at Pennington has an outstanding reputation. The School is fully enrolled and is in the enviable position of being able to select students for admission who are fully aligned with Pennington's mission and values.
- Pennington has benefited from stability in its strong and supportive administrative team. Turnover is relatively low and the impressive leadership of the School is reflected in Pennington's strong enrollment, retention, and the extensive improvement in its facilities.
- The Middle School faculty is exceptionally dedicated and aligned in their mission to serve students with a range of learning styles. Teachers are universally praised for their support of their diverse community of learners.



- Parent satisfaction with Pennington’s culture and program is reflected in the low student Middle School attrition rate and the fact most eighth-graders continue at Pennington through the Upper School.
- As noted elsewhere in this document, Pennington has made a significant commitment in recent years to upgrading its campus and buildings. The School’s 55-acre campus is well-maintained and the School’s facilities serve the program extremely well.
- Pennington is deeply committed to supporting its diverse student body and its dedication to creating a culture of belonging is unequivocal.

Opportunities and Challenges

Manage, support, and inspire an outstanding faculty

Pennington’s Middle School teachers are dedicated, talented, and respected. The next Head of Middle School at Pennington will be responsible for continuing to nurture and develop its faculty. Although recent attrition is low (there was no turnover leading into the current academic year), the Head of Middle School is responsible for partnering with the Dean of Faculty to recruit, onboard, and retain talented teachers when turnover occurs.

Appreciate and champion Pennington’s mission to serve a range of learners

Pennington is well-known for its superb program to support students with learning differences. At the same time, the School mostly serves more traditional learners who thrive in a rigorous academic program. Continuing to balance this range of learners, and the messaging associated with serving both well, is an important priority for the next Head of Middle School.

Continue to develop a philosophy and practice of supporting the emotional and behavioral needs of middle school students

Pennington prioritizes the support of students both academically and emotionally. In recent years, like most middle schools, Pennington has experienced more challenges around student behavior and emotional health. The School places a high priority on supporting students’ positive interactions, and the next Head of Middle School will continue to refine how the School responds to behavioral situations that are inconsistent with the School’s mission and values.

Balance the competing demands on teachers and students created by the current daily schedule

At present, the daily academic schedule of the Middle School aligns with that of the Upper School to allow for advanced students to take courses in the Upper School, especially in math and world languages. Although there is no simple solution to creating a schedule that meets the unique needs of middle school students while also providing flexibility for advanced students and crossover teachers, the next Head of Middle School will have the opportunity to devise creative solutions to serve all students and faculty.

Support the development of distinct programs that differentiate Pennington from its competitors

Like most schools, the pandemic forced Pennington to focus on its operations and the health and well-being of its students. As a result, curricular initiatives have been slower to develop in recent years. The incoming Head of Middle School will have the opportunity to support the faculty as they develop new curriculum initiatives and innovative programs.

Support the Middle School as an important part of the overall Pennington experience

Given its size relative to the overall school, the Middle School at Pennington sometimes perceives itself as

receiving less attention than the Upper School. The next Head of the Middle School will have the opportunity to raise the profile of the Middle School both internally and externally to make sure that it is appropriately valued and celebrated.

Continue to evaluate the potential of the boarding program for Middle School students

Currently, four Middle School students live on campus as boarders. The next Head of Middle School will continue to evaluate how the boarding program can best serve Middle School students, including what the appropriate number of Middle School should be in the residential program.

Skills and Attributes of the Next Head of Middle School

Pennington seeks a passionate educator to step into the role of Head of Middle School. The School takes great pride in nurturing an environment that is compassionate and rigorous, joyful and disciplined, and intentionally develops head, heart, and spirit. An individual who brings energy, integrity, and intellect will thrive and experience success in the Pennington community.

The ideal candidates will possess many of the following skills and attributes:

- A demonstrated commitment to the unique academic and emotional needs of middle school students
- Demonstrated success in the classroom and in leadership roles in middle school settings
- A genuine appreciation for Pennington's commitment to serving a range of learning profiles
- A leadership style that reflects the ability to be flexible, adaptable, proactive, and reactive
- Thoughtful, respectful words and actions that reflect a depth of self-knowledge, humility, and commitment to the mission of the School
- The ability to inspire a highly capable faculty that includes teachers across the spectrum of experience
- Kindness, patience, and a sense of humor
- An inspiring communicator who is warm, personable, transparent, and approachable and who listens deeply to all community members while taking the time to understand the culture of Pennington
- Charismatic and skilled in building relationships within and beyond the Pennington community, generating excitement about the Middle School experience





SUMMARY OF THE SEARCH PROCESS

Candidates interested in this position are asked to submit the following materials by **February 15**:

- EC Summary Sheet and Disclosure Statement (Contact George Sanderson for these documents)
- Letter of Interest addressed to the Search Committee
- Current Resume
- Statement of Educational Leadership Philosophy
- A list of five or more references with contact information (Name, relationship to candidate, phone and email addresses)

Application materials are to be sent electronically via email to:

George Sanderson, Partner, Educators Collaborative
Email: gsanderson@educatorscollaborative.com

The Pennington School does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, military service, or any other characteristics or activity protected by law.

The Search Schedule

Pennington plans to identify a preliminary group of candidates to interview (virtually) in late February. From this group the School will select finalists for a full day of interviews on campus in March. The Head of School expects to reach a decision and appoint a Head of Middle School-Elect shortly after finalist visits with the term of office to commence on July 1, 2024.



The Pennington School
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Honor. Virtue. Humility.