

SHANGHAI AMERICAN SCHOOL



HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

Shanghai, China

Position Start Date: July 2027 (flexible)

Mary Seppala, Partner, Educators Collaborative

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EDUCATORS
COLLABORATIVE



Information for Candidates

- Position:**
Head of School
- Start Date:**
July 2027
- Grades Served:**
PreK-12
- Type of School:**
Independent
Co-educational
Non-Profit International Day School
- Enrollment:**
Approximately 3,000 students
across two campuses (Puxi and Pudong)
- Location:**
Shanghai, China
- Website:**
www.saschina.org



A Century of Legacy and Leadership

Founded in 1912, Shanghai American School (SAS) stands as one of the oldest and most respected international schools in Asia. This vibrant, mission-driven institution has shaped generations of globally minded students. For over a century, SAS has served as a beacon of American-style education in China, blending academic rigor with cultural fluency, creativity, and innovation to prepare students for leadership in a complex and interconnected world.

Today, SAS is a non-profit, independent, co-educational day school serving approximately 3,000 students from more than 50 nations across two PreK–12 campuses. Its dual-campus model—one in Pudong and one in Puxi—reflects both Shanghai’s dynamic geography and SAS’s commitment to meeting families where they are while sustaining a unified mission and standard of excellence.

As SAS enters its next chapter, the school seeks an experienced, visionary Head of School—a strategic, globally minded leader who can guide a complex, high-performing international community with clarity, compassion, and courage. The role has been described as a blend of Chief Executive, Educator, and Community Ambassador, requiring an uncommon combination of educational insight, cultural fluency, organizational acumen, and integrity.



Mission and Educational Philosophy

Mission

Shanghai American School’s mission is both clear and compelling: to inspire a love of learning and to prepare students to thrive as global citizens and ethical leaders.

The school’s guiding mission statement expresses this simply and powerfully. SAS seeks to inspire in all students:

- A lifelong passion for learning
- A commitment to act with integrity and compassion
- The courage to live their dreams

This mission is evident across both campuses—in classrooms, studios, laboratories, and playing fields—where students are encouraged to think critically, act responsibly, and engage with the world around them with curiosity and purpose.

Educational Philosophy

Shanghai American School’s educational philosophy is rooted in the belief that learning should be both innovative and individualized, equipping students to transfer their knowledge and skills beyond the classroom and into authentic, lifelong contexts. The academic program models innovation, nurtures individual growth, and empowers students to design personal pathways to success—in school, in college, and in life. SAS’s dynamic learning environment combines rigorous intellectual challenge with creativity and exploration, where exceptional educators inspire students to think critically, communicate skillfully, collaborate effectively, and lead with integrity and compassion.

SAS fosters a culture of personal growth and ethical global citizenship, grounded in the core values of respect, responsibility, honesty, compassion, and fairness. Learning extends well beyond the classroom—through the arts, athletics, service, and experiential opportunities that cultivate curiosity, resilience, and character. United by mission and aspiration, the SAS community prepares students to live their dreams and to engage with the world as thoughtful, innovative, and principled global citizens.

The SAS experience blends the best of American educational philosophy—collaborative learning, personalized instruction, and student agency—with the advantages of an international environment defined by multilingualism, cultural diversity, and global perspective. The academic program is both robust and expansive, offering Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme courses, as well as teacher-designed electives that foster creativity and depth. Extensive co-curricular offerings, a renowned arts program, competitive athletics, global travel experiences, and service-learning opportunities contribute to a rich and balanced educational journey for every student.



Two Campuses, One Mission: Pudong and Puxi

United by a single mission, SAS's two campuses provide distinct yet complementary environments, each enriching the shared experience of the school community. The two expansive locations are custom-built with university-level facilities that make SAS a popular host for conferences, tournaments, sports leagues, and events. Each of the beautiful campuses feature an aquatic center, performing arts center, green screen rooms, recording studio, baseball field, pool, softball field, track, playing fields, black box theaters, a teaching kitchen, training facilities, design studios/maker spaces, playgrounds, multiple libraries, cafeterias, lecture spaces, classrooms, and lots of other spaces for dreams to come to life.

The Puxi Campus:

Located on Shanghai's historic west side, the Puxi campus is situated in the Huacao area of Minhang District—a leafy, well-established neighborhood known for its international schools, welcoming residential communities, and easy access to central Shanghai. The campus serves a long-standing international and expatriate population, many of whom have deep roots in the city's global business, diplomatic, and cultural networks.

As the larger of SAS's two campuses, Puxi offers an expansive and well-appointed environment for learning and community life. Modern academic buildings, arts and athletic facilities, and open green spaces create a dynamic setting where students can thrive both intellectually and socially. The campus combines rigorous academics with a vibrant co-curricular life, from championship athletic teams and acclaimed arts performances to service projects and student-led initiatives that build leadership and character.

Beyond the school's gates, the surrounding area offers an abundance of family-friendly amenities—parks, cafes, shopping centers, and international dining—while the nearby Hongqiao transportation hub provides convenient connections to the rest of Shanghai, China, and the region.

Puxi is a community with a strong sense of tradition and pride. Its faculty, students, and families describe it as the heart of SAS's legacy: a place defined by academic excellence, creativity, and enduring connection, where generations of learners have found inspiration and belonging.





The Pudong Campus:

On Shanghai's fast-developing eastern side, the Pudong campus is located within the Shanghai Links Executive Community, a family-friendly area known for its international community, leafy residential neighborhoods, and easy access to the city's expanding business and cultural centers. The campus sits in a park-like setting surrounded by open green spaces and landscaped walkways, creating a calm and inspiring environment for teaching and learning.

Adjacent to a golf course that feels like an extension of the school's grounds, the campus enjoys scenic views and a sense of openness rarely found in a global metropolis. The Links offers well-designed housing nearby as an option for faculty which contributes to the warm, family-friendly atmosphere that defines daily life at Pudong.

While slightly smaller in size, the Pudong campus is dynamic and forward-looking and home to a close-knit community of faculty, students, and families who share a deep sense of pride and purpose. Like Puxi, Pudong is defined by academic excellence, creativity, and connection, where innovation and collaboration flourish in a warm, supportive environment. Its program emphasizes curiosity, inquiry, and joyful learning, providing students with abundant opportunities to explore, lead, and grow.

Across both campuses, SAS offers an exceptional and cohesive educational experience. Each reflects the school's shared mission and values—a nurturing, globally minded environment that combines intellectual rigor with authentic community and a spirit of belonging. The next Head of School will steward this unity of purpose, ensuring continued alignment of mission, coherence of experience, and celebration of the strengths that make SAS one exceptional school across two vibrant campuses.

The Program

At Shanghai American School (SAS), learning begins with curiosity and grows through exploration, collaboration, and reflection. From the earliest years through graduation, students are encouraged to question deeply, think critically, act compassionately, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. SAS offers an American-style education with an international perspective, preparing students to thrive as global citizens and ethical leaders.

Early Childhood and Elementary School

(Pre-K through Grade 5)

In these years, students develop essential skills in pre-literacy, curiosity, discovery, and cooperation. With the Reggio Emilia-inspired curriculum, students are supported socially, emotionally, and academically as they explore their self and their world. All our students are seen as unique individuals with incredible potential, and we journey alongside them each day in this era of monumental growth. You will see that the programs, learning spaces, and our passions are fully geared to nurture in each child a deep love of learning, and all the tools necessary for thriving in the elementary years ahead.

Middle School

(Grades 6–8)

Students deepen their academic understanding while building independence, self-awareness, and a sense of responsibility. The program balances increasing academic rigor with support for social-emotional growth, offering diverse courses, electives, and co-curricular opportunities. Students engage in service learning, athletics, clubs, and performance activities that cultivate leadership, collaboration, and confidence—hallmarks of the SAS experience.

High School

(Grades 9–12)

The High School prepares students for university and life beyond SAS through a rigorous, personalized academic program that combines Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, and SAS-designed courses. This flexible framework allows students to design personalized pathways for learning—integrating challenge, inquiry, and real-world application. Co-curricular programs in the arts, athletics, leadership, and global service complement academics, encouraging students to discover their passions, express their voices, and lead with purpose.



Across both campuses, SAS students are known for their creativity, compassion, and determination. In classrooms and labs, on stages and playing fields, and through service to others, they bring the school's mission to life: to inspire a love of learning and prepare students to thrive as global citizens and ethical leaders.

SAS faculty are passionate educators who engage fully in the life of the school—as teachers, mentors, advisors, coaches, and collaborators. They encourage students to approach challenges with imagination and resilience, and to see themselves as part of a diverse, dynamic community of learners who strive for excellence together.

The ****SAS Core Values—Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Compassion, and Fairness—****are woven into every aspect of school life. Graduates leave SAS with a strong sense of purpose, curiosity, and possibility. They attend leading universities around the world—most in the United States—and go on to distinguish themselves as innovators, thinkers, and changemakers across every field.



The Community

SAS is widely regarded as a destination school and as the institution of choice for families seeking an exceptional American-style education in China. With approximately 3,000 students in Pre-K through Grade 12, the school attracts a diverse international community supported by nearly 700 dedicated faculty and staff who bring deep global experience and a shared commitment to student success. Graduates of SAS matriculate at leading universities around the world, predominantly in the United States, where they are recognized for their academic preparation, global perspective, and leadership.

The school's reputation is deeply prized by parents, instantly recognized by universities, and highly respected among international educators. SAS consistently draws extraordinary teaching talent, routinely receiving more than 100 applications for each faculty opening, which is a testament to its prestige and standing as a career pinnacle for educators worldwide.

Community engagement is a defining strength of SAS. Faculty and parents work in close partnership to support students, and the school's PTSA-led International Fair, which draws more than 3,500 participants each year, exemplifies SAS's inclusive, joyful, and globally minded culture.

Notable Recognition

In the [2025 Forbes China International School Rankings](#), SAS's high school program earned the #1 spot nationally among international schools—achieving an overall score of 98 across indicators such as academic achievement, teaching quality, innovation, and student development. Additionally, SAS was ranked first among all international schools in Shanghai by Forbes China, with its Advanced Placement (AP) program also receiving the top designation in the city.



In recent years, the school has experienced a demographic shift, with a growing proportion of globally minded Chinese and Asian families joining traditional expatriate families. This evolving composition brings both rich opportunity and new complexity. Supported by almost 700 dedicated faculty and staff, the next Head of School will play a pivotal role in nurturing cohesion, fostering belonging, and articulating a shared vision for what it means to be part of Shanghai American School today.



Governance and Leadership

Board of Trustees

Strong governance has long been central to SAS's stability and success. The Board of Trustees oversees the school's long-term strategy, fiscal stewardship, and the appointment and support of the Head of School.

The Board's composition is intentionally structured to balance continuity, expertise, and fresh perspectives. The up to 15-member body includes seven trustees elected by parents, six trustees appointed by the Board and selected for their professional expertise and strategic insight, and one trustee appointed by the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. This structure ensures consistent parent representation while drawing on broad experience in education, business, finance, and governance.

By design, this structure strengthens institutional memory and supports thoughtful succession, ensuring that transitions on the Board preserve both stability and innovation. Trustees serve staggered terms, allowing for overlap and mentorship among new and experienced members. The result is a governance body that combines deep commitment to the SAS mission with the strategic perspective and discipline needed to guide one of the world's leading international schools.

Grounded in trust, communication, mutual accountability, best practices, and a spirit of lifelong learning, the relationship between the Head of School and the Board is a cornerstone of SAS's success. Together, they work to sustain SAS's mission, advance its vision, and ensure the school's continued excellence and relevance in an evolving global context.

School and Centralized Leadership

SAS is a well-resourced school with a deep and sophisticated leadership model designed to sustain excellence across two large, complex campuses. Each campus—Puxi and Pudong—is led by its own Head of Campus and Operations Team, providing on-the-ground leadership, continuity, and responsiveness to the distinct needs of each community. Within those campus models, Principals and Vice Principals oversee the three divisions (Elementary, Middle, and High School), ensuring close connection to students, faculty, and families.

Providing unifying oversight and strategic coherence across both campuses is a centralized leadership structure that manages key enterprise-wide functions including education, finance, communications, and strategic operations.

The Central Leadership Team, managed by the Head of School, includes:

- Two Heads of Campus (who oversee campus operations, instructional delivery, and community building on the respective Puxi and Pudong campuses)
- Head of School Office Manager and Executive Assistant to the Board of Trustees
- Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
- Director of Admissions and Enrollment
- Director of Advancement and Marketing
- Human Resources Director
- Director of Legal Affairs and Government
- Director of Partnership
- Trip Management Office Director



This complex yet deeply collaborative organizational design allows SAS to operate with agility and strength across both campuses. It provides the next Head of School with exceptional leadership capacity, enabling effective management of the multifaceted demands of the role as Chief Executive, Chief Educator, and Chief Diplomat.



Life and Leadership in Shanghai

Shanghai is one of the world's most vibrant and cosmopolitan cities—a place where ancient tradition and cutting-edge innovation meet on a grand and dazzling scale. As China's financial, cultural, and creative capital, Shanghai offers a dynamic blend of East and West that continues to captivate residents and visitors alike.

With a population of more than 24 million, Shanghai is home to a truly international community and a spirit of opportunity that energizes every corner of the city. Here, global perspectives thrive alongside deep cultural roots—offering an extraordinary environment for students, educators, and families.

- A thriving international hub with world-class arts, culture, cuisine, and entertainment
- Safe, efficient, and affordable public transportation with easy global connectivity
- Exceptional healthcare, modern housing, and outstanding expatriate services
- Easy access to historic water towns, scenic landscapes, and high-speed rail travel across China and Asia

For educators and their families, life in Shanghai is both a professional opportunity and a personal adventure. The city rewards curiosity, adaptability, and a sense of wonder—inviting those who live here to explore, connect, and grow within one of the most exciting urban environments in the world.



Leadership Profile

Notable Strengths of the School

The next Head of School will want to safeguard and build upon the many strengths of the SAS learning community, including:

- **Academic Excellence and Whole-Child Focus**
Rigorous, inquiry-based programs are delivered within a nurturing, balanced environment that supports both intellectual growth and personal well-being.
- **Motivated and Kind Student Body**
SAS students are exceptionally driven, self-motivated, and socially kind. They demonstrate respect, empathy, and a genuine commitment to learning. The school community is defined by engagement, mutual support, and a shared commitment to excellence and integrity.
- **Global Reputation and Legacy**
With more than a century of history, SAS stands among Asia's most respected international schools, known for academic excellence, innovation, and impact.

■ **Financial Strength and Strategic Investment**

With a solid foundation of fiscal stewardship and forward-looking planning, SAS maintains exceptional financial health and a strong commitment to investing in its future. Resources are strategically allocated to sustain educational innovation, attract and retain outstanding faculty, and enhance facilities—ensuring long-term stability and continued growth.

■ **Exceptional Facilities and Resources**

State-of-the-art academic, arts, athletic, and technology facilities across both campuses provide students and faculty with the tools and environments needed to pursue excellence, creativity, and well-being.

■ **Inclusive and Supportive Community**

A deep sense of belonging, collaboration, and trust unites students, families, and staff across both campuses.

■ **Innovation and Global Mindset**

Creativity, cultural fluency, and future-ready learning are hallmarks of the SAS experience, preparing students to lead with adaptability and purpose in a rapidly changing world.

■ **Exceptional Location and Lifestyle**

Situated in one of the world's most dynamic and cosmopolitan cities, SAS benefits from Shanghai's cultural richness, global connectivity, and opportunities for experiential learning. The city also offers faculty and families an exceptional quality of life, with access to world-class amenities, travel, and cultural exploration.

■ **Outstanding Faculty and Staff**

SAS attracts exceptional educators from around the world, with a highly competitive applicant pool for each position. Strong compensation and benefits promote stability and retention in a market known for high turnover.

■ **Deep Leadership Capacity**

A robust and well-structured leadership model across both campuses provides depth, continuity, and collaboration. The school's talented administrative team ensures cohesive management and strategic alignment at every level.

■ **Strong Admissions and Enrollment**

SAS maintains full enrollment and continues to attract mission-aligned families, with consistent waitlists reflecting its exceptional reputation and community demand.



Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

The next Head of School will inherit an institution with extraordinary assets: a century-long legacy, financial stability, world-class facilities, and a passionate community. Yet, like all global schools, SAS faces a complex and evolving landscape. The following opportunities and challenges will define the next chapter of leadership.

Clarifying Identity in a Shifting Demographic Landscape

With roughly 80% of students now from globally minded Chinese or Asian families and 20% from expatriate backgrounds, SAS must articulate a clear identity as an international American school in China that honors its heritage while embracing its future.

Redefining Excellence for a New Era

SAS has the opportunity to set a new standard for excellence that balances academic rigor with whole-child development—integrating intellectual challenge, well-being, and character as equal pillars of student success in a rapidly changing world.

Honoring Faculty Excellence and Professional Growth

Recruiting, developing, and retaining exceptional educators is a top priority. The next Head of School must ensure that SAS remains a destination workplace for outstanding teachers and staff worldwide, continuing to foster professional growth, collaboration, and stability within a highly competitive international market.

Building One School Across Two Campuses

Ensuring consistent standards, aligned practices, and a shared culture, while respecting each campus's distinct identity, is central to strengthening cohesion across the SAS community. The next Head of School will play a key role in reinforcing unity, collaboration, and coherence across both campuses.

Operational Effectiveness and Organizational Clarity

Continued attention to refining the school's organizational structure and decision-making processes presents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration, clarify roles, and enhance efficiency—ensuring greater alignment and consistency across both campuses as SAS advances its strategic priorities.



Governance Through Partnership

Recognizing that clear structures, disciplined practices, and strategic alignment between the Board of Trustees and school leadership are essential to sustaining institutional strength, the SAS Board honors its established governance policies and best practices, participating in annual governance training and trustee evaluation to ensure ongoing effectiveness and accountability. The next Head of School will work in close partnership with the Board to reinforce these commitments—clarifying roles, maintaining effective boundaries, and fostering a culture of trust, transparency, and collaboration. Central to this partnership will be clear, proactive communication about emerging issues and plans of action, ensuring that trustees are informed, aligned, and effectively engaged in supporting the school’s direction.

Parent Partnership

SAS benefits from an active and engaged parent community, supported by a strong PTSA. The next Head of School will build on this partnership through proactive and transparent communication, welcoming parent perspectives, addressing concerns directly, and, most importantly, taking timely and visible action in response. Changes and decisions should be communicated clearly, consistently, and with foresight, always grounded in the “why” to enhance trust and shared understanding across the community.

Navigating Regulatory, Geopolitical, and Market Dynamics

Operating a large international school in China requires diplomatic skill, cultural fluency, and strategic agility amid shifting global conditions. The next Head of School must lead confidently within this complex environment—maintaining constructive relationships with government officials while ensuring that the school’s programs and operations remain mission-centered and responsive to changing circumstances.



Qualifications, Professional Experience, and Leadership Attributes

The next Head of School at Shanghai American School will be a sophisticated and globally attuned leader who brings strategic insight, cultural fluency, and emotional intelligence to one of the most dynamic educational roles in the world. This individual will embrace the complexity and opportunity of leading a large, dual-campus institution, guiding it with vision, authenticity, and care. In partnership with the Board of Trustees, faculty, and families, the Head of School will steward the school’s people, programs, and resources with integrity—aligning SAS’s mission, operations, and aspirations to ensure the school remains globally respected, locally relevant, and educationally innovative. A skilled change leader, the next Head will balance thoughtful evolution with stability, inspiring confidence through clarity, collaboration, and courage in times of transition and growth.

Education Qualifications

- Advanced degree from an accredited institution.
- Substantial education in the United States (whether at the undergraduate or graduate level) strongly preferred.

Desired Experience and Leadership Attributes

Strategic and Institutional Leadership

- **Proven Institutional Leader**
Demonstrated success leading a large, complex international or U.S. independent, public school, or district, uniting academic excellence, operational strength, and cultural coherence under one strategic vision.
- **Strategic and Financial Steward**
Brings the strategic insight, financial discipline, and organizational skill to steward significant resources, align mission and priorities, and ensure long-term institutional sustainability.
- **Change Leader with Executive Stamina**
Experienced in leading organizational renewal, strengthening systems, elevating performance, and maintaining composure and resilience through times of complexity and change.
- **Governmental and Regulatory Navigator**
Skilled in engaging constructively with government and regulatory entities, ensuring compliance while advancing the school's mission and global reputation.

Educational and Organizational Leadership

- **Educational Vision and American Program Expertise**
Deep understanding of U.S. educational philosophy, curriculum frameworks, and university preparation, and the ability to deliver and adapt these effectively in an international context.
- **College and University Readiness Insight**
Deep understanding of the global college admissions landscape and the ability to guide students and families through highly competitive pathways with integrity and perspective.
- **Talent Builder and Organizational Aligner**
Skilled in developing high-performing teams, building effective leadership structures, and fostering collaboration and accountability across divisions and campuses.



- **Leader in High-Expectation Environments**
Brings discernment and diplomacy to lead in settings where parent aspirations are exceptionally high—balancing ambition with empathy and reinforcing a culture grounded in respect, integrity, and well-being.

Community and Cultural Leadership

- **Collaborative Partner with Board and Community**
A politically and culturally savvy leader who builds trust and alignment with trustees, faculty, parents, alumni, and local officials through transparency, clarity, and respect.
- **Culturally Fluent and Globally Inclusive**
Navigates cross-cultural contexts with humility, curiosity, and respect; fosters belonging, unity, and shared purpose across a diverse, international community.



Personal Attributes

- **Ethical and Trustworthy**
Demonstrates integrity, transparency, and follow-through in all decisions and relationships.
- **Visionary and Entrepreneurial**
Anticipates change, embraces innovation, and inspires progress through bold yet thoughtful leadership.
- **Emotionally Intelligent and Self-Aware**
Warm, humble, and grounded in empathy; brings emotional steadiness and relational insight to complex situations.
- **Culturally Fluent and Inclusive**
Leads with respect, curiosity, and openness across diverse cultures and perspectives.
- **Resilient and Decisive**
Handles complexity, challenge, and adversity with clarity, balance, and composure.
- **Inspiring and Visible**
Brings energy, optimism, and clarity of communication to every interaction; a presence that motivates confidence and unity.
- **Reflective and Adaptable**
A continuous learner who balances decisiveness with humility, flexibility, and grace.

Application Process

Compensation and Benefits

Shanghai American School offers a highly competitive compensation package commensurate with experience and qualifications. The comprehensive benefits program includes housing, medical insurance, annual travel, tuition benefits, professional development, and retirement contributions consistent with leading international schools.

Beyond financial compensation, SAS provides an environment of professional respect, personal growth, and global impact—an opportunity to lead one of the world’s great international schools at a defining moment in its history.

Search Calendar (Tentative)

Application Deadline
January 2026, rolling thereafter

**Semifinalist Interviews
(Virtual)**
February 2026

Finalist Visits to Shanghai
March 2026

Appointment Announcement
Spring 2026

Start Date
July 2027, with flexibility

How to Apply

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact Educators Collaborative to learn more about this exceptional opportunity.

Please submit the following materials in a **single, merged PDF** in the order listed:

-  [EC Candidate Summary Sheet](#) (You’ll be asked to make a copy upon opening.)
-  Letter of Interest addressed to the Search Committee
-  Current Résumé
-  Statement of Educational and Leadership Philosophy
-  List of at least five references (with email contact information and professional relationship)
-  [Disclosure Form](#) (you’ll be asked to make a copy upon opening.)

Submit applications via email to:

Mary Seppala, Partner
mseppala@educatorscollaborative.com

Lisa Lyle, Partner
llyle@educatorscollaborative.com

Carol Santos, Partner
csantos@educatorscollaborative.com