

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

Traverse City, Michigan
Position starts July 1, 2024

**“A School Without
Hallways,
An Education
Without Limits.”**





MISSION The Pathfinder School’s mission is to ensure each student builds a foundation of intellectual facility and self-assurance through immersion in vigorous learning environments that require creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, initiative, and responsibility.

Statement of Philosophy

The Pathfinder School is a cooperative community of motivated students, committed parents, and diligent educators. The Pathfinder School is dedicated to educating the whole child and recognizing that each student learns at their own pace, and in their own time. The Pathfinder School offers a stimulating curriculum that features a teaching environment in which experiential learning, in all its forms, is an integral part of academic excellence. The Pathfinder School embraces the concept of multiple learning styles and developmentally appropriate expectations. A Pathfinder student is a steward of their own educational process and shares responsibility for their own learning.



Core Values

The Pathfinder School values individuality, experiential learning, integration of the arts, utilization of the outdoors, and an overall shared spirit of community, continuously championing cooperation over competition. Pathfinder students develop an enthusiasm for learning through a broad and adaptive curriculum with the flexibility to pursue their individual social, personal, and academic interests in a safe, caring, and respectful environment.

“ I think Pathfinder is a safe warm hug. A place I can’t stay forever, but I can always return to. What I’m saying is that I’m deeply connected to Pathfinder. ”
-Student



An Idyllic Setting for Children

Pathfinder enjoys a 22-acre wooded campus brimming with learning opportunities nestled on the shores of both Cedar Lake and Grand Traverse Bay. This extraordinary outdoor classroom provides a natural habitat for learning, play, growth, and inspired curiosity for students of all ages. On any given day you might encounter students keeping a tally of the changes in the forest or mapping the campus. The littlest ones may be collecting acorns or creating a “river” in the sand by the water. Young children learn by doing, which is a core tenant of why play and experimentation are at the core of the Pathfinder experience.



A Unique Learning Community for All

The Pathfinder School's philosophy is based upon two foundational principles — traditional academic studies and experiential STEAM assignments that involve creativity, problem-solving, and ‘play.’ Pathfinder’s academic curriculum is interconnected throughout the grades and emphasizes literacy, numeracy, scientific inquiry, physical education, and the arts. In addition to academics, the arts, and athletics, through a school-wide social-emotional emphasis, Pathfinder endeavors to provide students with a broad and stimulating program that allows each child to be exposed to and engage with all aspects of intellectual, artistic, and ethical considerations.





AT A GLANCE

- Founded in 1972
- 130 students, PreK-grade 8
- A child-centered, nature-loving, art-rich, playful, learning environment
- A campus encompassing 22 wooded and lake acres
- Forest preschool program
- Progressive, constructivist approach to teaching and learning
- \$2.2M budget, no debt
- Over \$250,000 in financial aid; 40% of families receive tuition assistance
- Accredited by ISACS and a member of NAIS, ISACS

Developing Stewards of the Earth

The Pathfinder School's focus on environmental stewardship across campus is a natural way to build community partnerships. Grand Traverse Conservation District has supported students in bird house building and installation on city property. Island Seas Education Center has provided School experiences that help students gain knowledge of our watershed and the health of our Great Lakes. Grand Traverse Stewardship Initiative provided on-site Place Based Stewardship Training for staff. Other partnerships include Bay Area Recycling, MSU Extension, Leelanau Conservancy, local environmental artists, farmers, authors, and other land use experts.



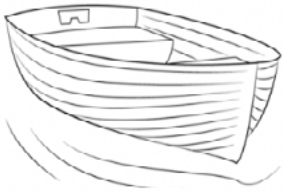
Traverse City: An Outdoor Oasis for All Seasons

Once known almost exclusively as the “Cherry Capital” of the World, Traverse City is quickly becoming a destination recognized for its incredible wine and garners awards from regional, national, and international competitions. Ready to get outdoors? You can enjoy four amazing seasons rich with outdoor activities including skiing, kayaking, hiking, fishing, and biking. Looking for the arts? Traverse City is home to The Traverse Symphony Orchestra — often performing in the beautifully restored City Opera House — is easily on par with orchestras from large metropolitan areas. The renowned Interlochen Center for the Arts attracts internationally acclaimed artists and the National Writers Series hosts award-winning and NYT best selling authors. The ever-changing exhibits at the Dennis Museum Center feature historical and contemporary work, and its permanent display of artwork by the Inuit people of the Canadian arctic is one of the largest and most complete in the world. And, the city does indeed host the National Cherry Festival!

A Child's Journey at Pathfinder

Early Childhood

Entering an early childhood classroom, one is immersed in wonder, creativity, and nature. Within rustic, cabin-like structures, students have authentic experiences, and embrace the joy of childhood. Fostering independence, self-confidence, a connection to nature, and a lifelong love of learning are the cornerstones of the program.

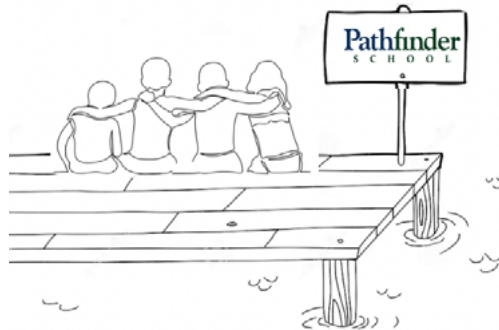


Kindergarten

At The Pathfinder School, kindergarten is the stepping stone that connects the world of early childhood and play-based learning with the world of academics and a more structured learning environment. The classroom's daily schedule is set up to include developmentally appropriate academic learning and ensure children are given "brain breaks" as well as free choice time.

Elementary

Through both unstructured and guided play, as well as more traditional academic projects, children develop the nascent intellectual and social skills that lead to academic success in later grades. Small classes allow children to experience emerging literacy and numeracy in a stimulating environment that supports individual challenges. Enriched by foreign language, music, visual art, library, and physical education instruction, Pathfinder students are exposed to a broad range of experiences that promote intellectual and social growth.



Middle School

Designed to meet the changing needs of early adolescents, Pathfinder's experiential, project-based opportunities anchor and enrich the traditional curriculum. Teachers develop rapport with students and seize opportunities to diverge from a standard curriculum to explore other relevant topics. A guiding principle in middle school is creating supportive and trusting relationships with students so they feel comfortable asking probing questions about their own emerging passions and concerns.

CHARTING OUR COURSE

Developed in 2022 through a community-wide effort, the Strategic Plan is grounded in The Pathfinder School's Guiding Principles:

1: Education Identity / Programming

Ensure Pathfinder educates and supports students on their path of developing intellectual facility, self-assurance and emotional capacity via immersion in multiple rigorous learning environments

2: Facilities

Develop facilities to ensure a safe, inspiring and cohesive set of learning environments on campus

3: Marketing & Communications

Develop a comprehensive and refined set of messages that accurately reflect the Pathfinder experience to multiple audiences

4: Financial Stability

Manage the school's resources to ensure financial stability

5: Uniquely Different

Create physical and cultural spaces that enable each child to learn beyond the classroom





What in the World is a MIAD?

A MIAD (multiple intelligence arts domain) is an elective that allows middle school students to explore unique topics such as comparative religion, crochet, magic, eco-literacy, or chess. MIADs not only expand the core academic program but give students agency and independence in directing their learning.

A Whole Lot of Fun Going On!

Annual Pathfinder events such as the Fall Festival, Leelanau Outdoor Center trip, Winter Concert, Forest Festival, Middle School Multi-Age Unit, MLK Day of Service, Global Studies, Science Expo, and Tapestry bring students of all ages together for multi-disciplinary, cross-curricular experiences.

Do You Speak Orff?

Aligned with a commitment to experiential learning and play-centered skill building, the Pathfinder music program is rooted in the Orff approach, which embraces active music making for students of all ages. Children learn by beginning with what they instinctively do already: play. Upon this, musicianship is built using music, movement, speech, and drama. Children learn to improvise, choreograph, and create musical settings, as well as enjoy performances in the greater community such as the Interlochen Arts Academy, Dennon Museum concert series, Traverse City Men's Chorus, and more.

“ At Pathfinder everyone assumed we would think big and deep. Pathfinder encouraged us to push our comfort zones, to think independently and critically.”
- Alumni

EXPLORE PATHFINDER!

[Early Childhood](#)

[Young 5s and Kindergarten](#)

[Elementary](#)

[Middle School](#)

[The Green Club](#)

[The Learning Garden](#)

[Campus Master Plan](#)





Looking Ahead: The Next Leader

The Pathfinder Board of Trustees seeks a leader who enthusiastically embraces and champions the school's commitment to educating the whole child through experience-based learning that prepares students for a successful academic journey at Pathfinder and beyond. The next Head of School will be a visionary leader and passionate educator—and, of course, love children! An inspiring communicator who is warm and approachable, and brings enthusiasm, integrity, flexibility, and innovative thinking will thrive and experience success in the Pathfinder community. They will also bring the skills, initiative, and enthusiasm to help realize a compelling and sustainable vision for the future.

The Pathfinder School is conducting a national search guided by Tracy Bennett of Educators Collaborative. In collaboration with The Pathfinder School community, she has identified the following strengths, challenges and opportunities, and desired qualities and skills of Pathfinder's next leader.

Strengths of The Pathfinder School

- A child-driven and learner-responsive approach focuses on the aptitudes and interests of each child. Students engage daily in joyful learning in ways that meet their unique needs while fostering curiosity and confidence.
- Skilled, committed faculty provide experience-based instruction that supports the success of every learner. At Pathfinder, every student feels known, seen, and loved.
- Deeply embedded core values center childhood and community, fostering a learning environment where children can take risks, navigate challenges, and celebrate success.
- A collaborative team culture nurtures professional growth and innovation in faculty and staff. Adults model the creativity, flexibility, and enthusiasm for learning that Pathfinder seeks to inspire in children.
- A highly engaged and supportive Board of Trustees demonstrating a “can-do, shirtsleeves rolled-up” attitude is focused on the strategic development and long-term success of The Pathfinder School
- A bucolic campus, considered an essential part of the Pathfinder experience, which provides a real “home” for students to learn and grow.
- A warm and welcoming community that values close relationships and active engagement in the life of the school.



Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Leader

- The academic program straddles the delicate balance between respect for faculty autonomy and recognition that the articulation of a cohesive program with vertical alignment and assessments of student learning is important. Continued reflection on how Pathfinder's understanding of experiential learning and multiple intelligences shapes the curriculum while ensuring relevance in today's world will offer an important opportunity for faculty conversation and collaboration.
- Fluctuating enrollment coupled with its position as the only independent school in the area provides the opportunity and imperative to craft a compelling case for the school's mission and independent school education. Continuing to enroll and retain mission-aligned families that are actively engaged in supporting the school will be a priority.
- In partnership with the Board, developing a sustainable long-term financial plan, including realistic enrollment, tuition, staffing, and fundraising projections that support faculty/staff retention, a strong academic program, socio-economic diversity, and building reserves is key to the school's future.
- The Head of School should continue to examine how The Pathfinder School can best meet the needs of children and families, while grounding the educational experience in the community's enduring core values and progressive, constructivist approach to learning.
- Teachers are the heart of every school. Continuing to invest in faculty recruitment, retention, and professional development in support of the experience-based, child-centered pedagogical approach will ensure the school continues to thrive and delivers on its mission.
- In support of Pathfinder's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, clarifying the profile of learners that will thrive in its unique program will be beneficial. This will lead to instructional strategies and professional development resources that ensure effective program delivery and learning outcomes.



Desired Skills and Attributes of the Next Head of School

- Experience working and leading in an independent school setting and a pedagogical understanding of the unique constructivist, experience-based approach at The Pathfinder School.
- An outgoing and warm personality with a genuine desire to engage in the school community at every level.
- The skills to nurture a professional community that shares a commitment to progressive education, continued professional growth, and collaboration.
- The capacity to speak with passion and authenticity about the mission of Pathfinder in support of enrollment and fundraising efforts.
- The ability to listen deeply, facilitate inclusive dialogue, have courageous conversations, inspire others, and build trust.
- A proficient understanding of strategic financial sustainability, budget development, student and faculty recruitment and retention, and enrollment management.
- The visionary skills to think strategically in partnership with a hard-working, capable Board of Trustees and capably execute plans, while managing community expectations and the impact of change.
- A deep love for children, an earnest belief in joyful learning, and unbridled enthusiasm for Pathfinder's compelling mission of fostering creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, initiative, and responsibility.
- An unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice coupled with the capacity to support others in this work.

My colleagues are inspiring and motivating. I love being part of a team where our strengths matter and we hold each other up as we grow in tandem with our students.

-Faculty member



