

**Leadership Opportunity**  
July 2009

**HEAD OF  
SCHOOL**

**Sidwell Friends School**

Washington, D.C.

Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade

1,097 students

[www.sidwell.edu](http://www.sidwell.edu)

Carney, Sandoe  Associates

▼ [www.carneysandoe.com](http://www.carneysandoe.com)

• *The Search Group*

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## THE SCHOOL

The Board of Trustees of Sidwell Friends School is seeking a new Head of School, starting on July 1, 2009. Bruce B. Stewart, the eighth Head, will retire in June 2009, after eleven years of inestimable service.

The Board is assisted in this search by a 10-member Search Committee, comprised of past Board Chairs, past and current trustees, and a member of the faculty, as well as a 16-person Advisory Committee representing key elements of the School community.

Sidwell Friends is a Friends school, teaching PK-12 students within the achievement-oriented environment of the nation's capital. The Board, administration, faculty, alumni, parents and students share a common view of the School's values and strengths. Sidwell Friends has four core commitments: to Quaker values and process, to uncommon excellence in teaching and learning, to diversity, broadly defined, and to environmental stewardship. As it celebrates its 125th anniversary, the School has never been stronger. We have smart, curious and talented students, a gifted and dedicated faculty, committed and expert administrators, and a campus that is undergoing \$115 million in new construction and renovation, including the first LEED K-12 school building in the country. As part of Bruce Stewart's legacy, the School will mark the successful completion of a \$56 million campaign, with an endowment that stands at more than \$50 million. Interest in the School, as reflected in applications for admissions, acceptance ratios, and retention, has never been healthier. A diverse student body and faculty reflect the world in which our graduates will take their place. The opportunities that a Sidwell Friends education make possible for them attest to their academic preparation, leadership, and personal character.

Inevitably, however, these strengths come with challenges. We describe further below the aspects of the School that we cherish, as well as the issues and difficult choices that face us.

## THE QUAKER CHARACTER

As a Friends school, Sidwell's Quaker character is expressed in: the acknowledgment of "That of God in everyone," weekly meetings for worship, practices inspired by the Religious Society of Friends, Sidwell's *Testimonies*, and the search for meaning and moral guidance through the use of reflective silence. This Quaker character is essential to the identity, reputation and future of Sidwell Friends School.

Sidwell Friends is a member of the Friends Council on Education and is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the Association of Independent Maryland Schools. Although the School is not under the oversight of a Friends meeting, a majority of the Board of Trustees are Quakers. As is true of the larger community, there are few Quakers in the student body (6 percent) or faculty (5 percent), and, not



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surprisingly, there is sometimes misunderstanding within our community about the meaning of acting “in the manner of Friends.” The School desires greater clarity about Quaker practice, and has a continuing need for Quaker leadership.

### **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

The School attracts talented students by any number of definitions. They are bright, curious, and knowledgeable about the wider world. Teaching them is (usually) a pleasure. The outstanding faculty has deep experience (average tenure of 21 years) and strong credentials (63 percent hold advanced degrees). Faculty and students in all grades create and sustain exceptional teaching and learning, through an uncompromising commitment to academic excellence, as expressed in the School’s *Philosophy* statement (attached). The School attracts excellent teachers because it celebrates independent thinking, encourages considerable classroom freedom, supports professional development (33 teachers will receive Venture Grants to support their ongoing intellectual exploration in 2008), and honors great teachers. The School strives to reflect the Quaker belief that truth is continuously revealed by supporting curricular innovation, emphasizing critical thinking skills, and taking a developmental approach to children and learning. Academic excellence and coherence, like Quaker character, are essential to the identity, reputation and future of Sidwell Friends.

Academic rigor and a wide offering of extracurricular activities mean that our students, particularly in the Upper School, often experience considerable stress. The Head must ensure care for the emotional well-being of our students as well as their academic achievement. Similarly, the depth of faculty experience means that over the next five to seven years, there will be many teacher retirements. The challenge is to hire comparably gifted successors and nurture the current generation of younger teachers for future leadership positions while preserving the tenured faculty’s passion for classroom teaching and appreciation for the School’s Quaker character.

The relative autonomy that our teachers enjoy in the classrooms also presents challenges. The new Head will need to lead the three divisions of the School in reviewing and renewing the curriculum to ensure that all students learn and acquire the knowledge and skills for thoughtful, intellectual and ethical leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It may be helpful for the new Head to lead the faculty in considering current research in neuroscience and child development that bears on the teaching approaches to different forms of expression and learning styles.

### **DIVERSITY**

An emphatic commitment to diversity in many forms flows from the Quaker values of the School. A Sidwell Friends education is premised on the belief that different perspectives

– of race, religion, nationality, politics, economic status, and learning styles – are necessary for robust academic and moral development.

Although statistics do not capture the breadth of the effort to be inclusive, they reflect the importance the School attaches to a diverse community. Forty percent of the student body are persons of color; 24 percent, of the faculty and staff. To support economic diversity, the School commits 14 percent of tuition revenue to financial aid, and this year granted its first George Fox Scholarship, a program for students of very low income. There is an all-school coordinator for matters touching diversity, as well as faculty members and parent committees in each division charged with supporting diversity initiatives. In 2005, the National Association of Independent Schools awarded its Leading Edge Award for Equity and Justice to Sidwell Friends.

The School is proud of its Chinese Studies program, the oldest such secondary school program in the country. For more than 25 years, that program has brought two Chinese students to Sidwell Friends, and now approximately 70 Sidwell students each year study abroad through such programs as School Year Abroad, summer trips to Japan and China, and international service trips.

These commitments to a diverse student body – and the array of programs necessary to prepare our future graduates – come at a considerable financial cost. The price of a Sidwell Friends education is already well beyond the means of many middle income families, and the prospect of continuing tuition increases threatens to make the School exclusive, rather than inclusive. The new Head will be called upon to secure and enhance the School’s commitment to diversity while being sensitive to the tradeoffs that such values necessarily entail.

## COMMUNITY

Community is the soul of our school. Within a generally competitive and achievement-oriented environment, Sidwell Friends strives to embody the Quaker belief that “there is That of God in everyone” and that all individuals and contributions are valued and respected, including those of our talented students and faculty, very involved parents, increasingly engaged alumni, and generous donors.

One crucial objective is to nurture in students from an early age an eagerness and an understanding of the responsibility to help others -- especially those from less familiar and secure circumstances. Community service programs are woven into the fabric of the School and new initiatives are flourishing. Our hope is that through service our students will open their hearts and minds to the social and economic obstacles facing our neighbors and make social justice a lifelong passion.

The current Head of School search comes at a time when the School has begun to look beyond the sufficiency of the facilities and campus to the sufficiency of the endowment and also to the relevance and vitality of the academic program. The new Head will confront sensitive issues of curriculum coordination, with classroom autonomy (so valued by the faculty) often viewed as in conflict with the need for coordination across divisions; of the appropriate balance among academics, arts, and athletics; and of the requirements for admission at each level. While building the endowment remains a major challenge, in this final year of a successful capital campaign the community is hoping for a focus on the internal, educational life of the School and a renewal of the sense that we are “one school” rather than three divisions.

### **THE QUALITIES IN A HEAD OF SCHOOL**

It is impossible to provide a precise formula or checklist for the desirable characteristics of a new Head of School, nor would we want to foreclose unconventional candidates. It is nevertheless possible to identify certain essential qualities that a new leader of the School should possess.

The first is a dedication to articulating and representing the Quaker values of Sidwell Friends. Although the new Head is not required to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends, it is important that he or she understand Sidwell’s *Testimonies* and Quaker practice, and that his or her life “speak” those values. Substantial and successful experience in a Quaker educational institution would be a distinct asset. The new Head should be the spiritual leader of the School, able to define, express, and carry out the essential educational mission of the School in a manner consistent with Quaker belief.

It is obvious, but inescapable, that the new Head must be a leader. Our current Head is fond of saying, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” Leadership not only requires fully grasping the practicalities of running a great school today, but also having the foresight and imagination to conceive what a great school will look like ten or more years into the future. At Sidwell Friends that means the ability to envision that future in light of what it means to be a Quaker school. Success will depend on both the ability to inspire and chart a course as well as the capacity to involve others within the faculty, administration, and community in the development and realization of any plan.

A new Head of School should be concerned that students master traditional academic disciplines and understand new technologies as well, so that these may be used humanely and wisely. This joint concern means that the new Head will have to be comfortable with change and able to ingrain in the academic life of the School what is important in the “new” while preserving and protecting what is of enduring value in the “old.”

The new Head must love the life of the mind and the spirited exchange of ideas. He or she must value learning, not as a means to achieving admission to a prestigious college or acquiring wealth, but because it nourishes our understanding of one another and our humanity. With that love, he or she will earn and enjoy the respect of the faculty and students. It would be an advantage if the new Head had experience in the classroom.

The new Head will have to be a person of considerable administrative experience. Prior leadership of a school is highly desirable, since the complexity of leading an institution like Sidwell Friends does not allow for “on the job” training. If a candidate has not headed a school, then significant managerial experience is important. Of course the Head is not expected to navigate alone; there is already in place a large and strong administrative team to offer support. Necessarily, over time, the job will require attracting equally talented and dedicated personnel who can effectively carry out delegated responsibilities.

The new Head should be a prudent fiscal manager, who has a thorough and intuitive knowledge of the trade-offs the School constantly confronts. Financial management requires a disciplined and balanced approach. The School is committed to economic diversity, outstanding educational programs, and a faculty salary scale that will attract top talent and recognize what it costs to live in our community. These are all important goals of the School, they are all expensive, and they require the Head of School to be an enthusiastic and effective fundraiser. The best way for the Head to mobilize financial support for the School, of course, is to be an articulate and passionate spokesman about the School and its core values.

The new Head must be personally secure. The demands of the job are great, and the new Head must be quietly centered, possessing a solid core of values and a knowledge of who he or she is ... and is not. The ability to listen is critically important, as is a genuine respect for other viewpoints in the achievement of consensus. The new Head must be patient, combining collegial skills with a guiding hand. Sidwell Friends is not a place for autocratic or “top down” management. In the culture of the School, it sometimes takes longer to accomplish things than it might in other settings. Yet ultimately, the Head must have the confidence to lead the decision-making process, and the judgment and will to act as “way opens.”

## HOW TO APPLY

Candidates should submit, electronically:

- a cover letter expressing interest;
- a current resume;
- a statement of educational philosophy;
- and the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of five references to:

Earl Ball  
Senior Search Consultant  
[earl.ball@carneysandoe.com](mailto:earl.ball@carneysandoe.com)

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