

**SITE DIRECTOR (PRINCIPAL): AVESON SCHOOL FOR LEADERS (ASL) TK – GRADE 5**

**SITE DIRECTOR (PRINCIPAL): AVESON GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (AGLA) GRADES 6 - 12**

**AVESON SCHOOLS**  
Altadena, California  
aveson.org

Start Date: Both positions begin July 2024



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# Mission Statement

Aveson Schools inspire students to reach for their personal best, to uncover their unique potential, and to become successful, independent learners who are ready to engage as global citizens.

## Overview

The Aveson Schools defy any stereotypes. Yes, it is a public charter school; yes, it is one school with two campuses about a mile apart - an elementary school campus TK-5 and a middle/high school campus 6-12. But like the proverbial onion, the more layers you peel back, the more you discover. And.... it is all really wonderful and intriguing. There are a multitude of unique student-centered programs under the Aveson umbrella including:

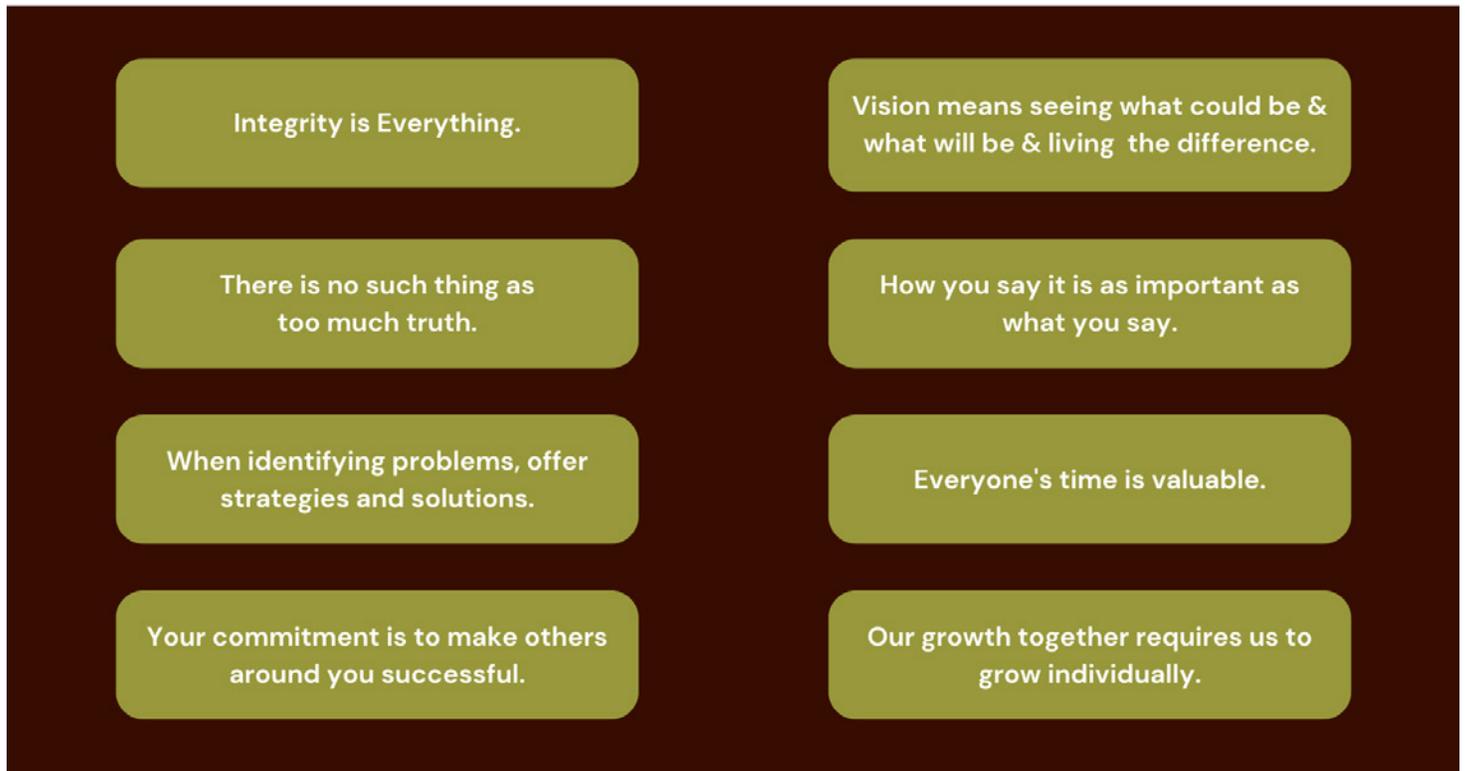
- ROP: Rites of Passage trips. These are trips to various locales, including international travel at the high school.
- COL: Celebration of Learning: similar to a science fair or art exhibition model where students share their passions and their own learning experiences they developed over a semester.
- ASL: Aveson School of Leaders Elementary (TK – 5th grade)
- AGLA: Aveson Global Leadership Academy--High School (Grades 6 – 12)
- AISA (Elementary) Aveson Independent Study Academy— A hybrid home-school program where students come to school two days a week and study at home the rest of the time.
- AISA (Middle High) Aveson International Sports Academy --this is our basketball Program, akin to a sports academy model.
- Externship Program: High School study off campus for students, every Friday.

There are many other sub-programs (for example ESL for students learning English). There are the kinds of enrichment activities one rarely finds outside of high-end independent private schools. (for example, the above-mentioned study-travel trips for students from both campuses) Innovation is encouraged and creativity is welcomed.

The glue that ties all the parts of Aveson together is its commitment to whole-child nurturing of leadership skills through emphasis on social-emotional aspects of a child's development. Under a school-wide commitment to PML (Personalized Mastery Learning) students are encouraged and supported as they discover and pursue their passions. From its founding, the schools have been committed to being educationally progressive, social-justice environments. For more detail you can read Aveson's Charters (recently renewed) documents at: <https://www.aveson.org/policies-and-compliance>. The essence of the charter and the schools' missions are found in the first 20 pages of each charter document.

Defying any notion of prescriptive curricula and cookie-cutter measurements of success, faculty (called "advisors" in the parlance of Aveson) are encouraged to meet each student where they are and have the autonomy and freedom to help students learn in whatever way is best for each. It is the development of self-confidence and self-advocacy skills from an early age that provides the foundation for future Leadership that is a key outcome of an Aveson education.

# AVESON GUIDING PRINCIPLES



One of the most frequently-mentioned words when members of the Aveson community are asked to describe their school, is “safe.” Unconditional welcoming and acceptance of every measure of diversity is a hallmark of the school. There are a number of students with IEP’s or 504 plans; there are accelerated learners; there are racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economically diverse students and faculty. There are few rules and self-expression is welcomed as long as it is behaviorally compatible with norms of civility. Students who might have had trouble fitting into traditional schools, thrive at Aveson because they can be who they really are.

The governance structure of Aveson has a Superintendent/Executive Director who reports to a self-perpetuating board of Directors. He has operational directors reporting to him. Chief among those are the Site Directors (Principals) of Aveson School of Leaders (TK-5 about 320 students) and Aveson Global Leadership Academy (6-12) with about 220 students. For unrelated reasons, both of those Site Director positions are vacant at the present time. They are the educational and operating leaders for the work on their respective campuses while the Executive Director supports them and attends to strategic visioning, fiscal and marketing and similar endeavors. Since both positions are vacant now, there is flexibility about the start date for each new Site Director..... but it is hoped that both will be in place for the 2024-2025 school year.

Below is information that applies to both locations and both Site Director positions. That is followed by additional information that may be specific to each site. Candidates are invited to apply for one or the other or both positions. Application information is found on the last page of this document.



In many ways, The Aveson Schools feel more like successful independent private schools than public charter schools. Progressive educational approaches and progressive cultural attitudes make Aveson an exciting community of wonderful and committed people. Everyone in the Aveson community is there because they WANT to be there.

## Strengths of the Schools

While on two campuses (about a mile apart) and serving different age groups, there are a number of strengths that are apparent in both schools, including:

- Students frequently mention their Advisors (teachers). They feel known, they feel supported, and they love that their teachers are accessible and genuinely care about them as individuals. They feel that they can go to a teacher with any problem, academic or personal, and will receive the sympathetic ear and wise advice they need.
- The advisors treasure their freedom to customize how they reach each child, freed from rigid parameters found in many public schools.
- Students repeatedly mention that they have a voice at Aveson.... They are seen and heard. Often these are students who felt “invisible” in other schools.
- The school is committed as an inclusion school. Both neurotypical and neurodiverse students learn acceptance, caring, understanding and their individual responsibilities to one another. Two of the schools’ Core Principles are:
  - » “Your commitment is to make others around you successful” ; and
  - » “Our growth together requires us to grow individually.”
- The school has significant resources committed to serving their neurodiverse students. There are therapists, aides, counselors and more. Both campuses embrace a number of students with IEP’s or 504 plans. Even though those students are definitely a minority among the total school population, they get the support they need. The school has a BCBA specialist which is quite unusual, for example.
- A highlight of both schools is creativity and innovation. Candidly, one of the challenges is the appetite for innovation can at times exceed the capacity of the organization to “do it all.” That is not the worst problem a school can have!



- A combination of true progressive education and the deeply ingrained mission of developing individual responsibility and leadership abilities in students, results in a school happily unstructured in terms of “rules and regulations.” In turn the students report that compared to what they hear from their friends in larger public schools, interpersonal conflicts are far fewer at Aveson. And when conflicts do emerge, the school’s approach is to work individually with the parties for true resolution, rather than throwing rules at them and taking punitive action. Someone summed it up by saying that adults have “non-coercive, consent-based relationships with children.”
- Because the schools are relatively small, “everyone knows everybody” is more reality than just aspiration. It is an outgrowth of the Personalized Mastery Learning approach, that each child is truly valued and treated as an individual, and not just a number. Likewise, being a smaller school, class size is also smaller which allows for greater individualized approaches and better acquaintance between adults and students.
- The unique combination of progressive views of education and a child-centered passion for social justice leads a number of advisors, especially in the Aveson School for Leaders (ASL, TK-5) to stay at Aveson for a long time, loving the work they do and the colleagues with whom they do it.
- Learning extends off campus as well as on-campus. The home-school program students are on campus only two days a week. Students in both schools travel....for example this year the ASL students are visiting Catalina Island, the 8th/9th graders are exploring the Navajo Nation and the AGLA juniors and seniors will go to the Galapagos Islands.
- Aveson is located in Altadena/Pasadena, an upscale region of the LA Basin. While there are certainly parents and students who live lives of privilege, there is actually more socio-economic and cultural diversity in the student body than one might imagine, especially at the high school.
- The school runs its own food-service program. It is compliant with the National School Lunch Program. The food is good..... so much so that in addition to serving the Aveson community, they also provide food service for another, unaffiliated charter school in the area. It might be odd that food is seen as a strength, but in interviews with students, complaints about food were conspicuously absent compared to almost any other school.



### **Unique Strengths of Aveson School for Leaders (ASL, TK-5)**

- The ASL campus literally cascades down the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains. Each classroom has lots of natural light, green space visible and adjacent. There are two yurts on campus. On a clear day, you can actually see the ocean 30 miles away. While on the side of a hill, the campus nevertheless has several expansive level playing field spaces.
- As noted above, a number of the ASL faculty and staff have long tenures at the school. The advisors (teachers) have a cadre of Instructional Assistants (IA's) to support their classrooms. Given the centrality of inclusion, those IA's can be very helpful in giving more individual attention to some students who need it.
- While admittedly not what all parents in the general population might be looking for, ASL introduces thoughtful conversations, in age-appropriate ways, at an early age on matters of social justice, gender identity, DEIJ and more. Aveson is very clear about who it is and what it does and families who send their children there, embrace the social justice aspects of the whole-child Aveson approaches.

### **Unique Strengths of Aveson Global Leadership Academy (AGLA, 6– 12)**

- The College/career counseling function is strong and supportive. For example, the school organizes "Campus Crawl" where students will travel as a group to a geographic region (for example the Bay Area) and together visit multiple college campuses.
- AGLA has performing arts programs not commonly found in smaller schools. Drama and Music have dedicated facilities across the street from the main campus.
- There is a track record of AGLA graduates attending a wide variety of higher education options, including admission to some of the country's most selective universities. The self-confidence and self-agency students develop at AGLA serve them very well wherever they go for higher education.



## Challenges and Opportunities

Following are among the challenges and opportunities that await both new Site Directors:

- Each Site Director, first and foremost, must have the experience in curriculum and people-management to assemble and lead the instructional leadership team of each school.
- Aveson Schools are located in a highly competitive school environment. It is estimated that somewhere between a third and 50% of all school-age children attend private schools in the area. As a result, Aveson is slightly below target enrollment levels and would benefit from stepped-up marketing. Site Directors have an important role to “sell” their schools and programs to prospective parents who are considering multiple options.
- Because the school does such a good job serving neurodiverse learners, there is a mistaken external impression that it is a Special Education school. The vast majority of students are neurotypical. It is ongoing work to explain and market the reality of what Aveson is and whom it serves.
- As with all TK-12 schools, transition of 5th graders into the 6th grade on the other campus, is an inflection point. Both Site Directors can have a positive impact on increasing retention rates through that transition point.
- Excellent faculty are crucial to the optimal accomplishment of Aveson’s mission. Recruiting, evaluation, retention and providing professional development for faculty require ongoing efforts.
- As noted above, a strength of Aveson is its insatiable appetite for innovation. As a result, there has been a history of starting so many new initiatives that it is hard to finish them. There is a desire in the future to undertake fewer new things, and to devote full time and energy and resources to successfully completing whatever is undertaken.
- In any school, communication is a challenge. Because of the multiple moving parts and a fluid and flexible approach to everything, it takes special effort to make sure that everyone in the school communities has the information they need, when they need it.
- Each new Site Director will have the opportunity to reconsider their school’s organizational structure, policies, procedures and systems in order to accomplish what is needed in a timely and efficient manner, but without hamstringing everyone with too many required procedures and hoops that must be jumped through.



- The Aveson culture is unique and the individualized approach to each student is unique. As with all charter schools, admissions are by lottery. Progressive educational and social norms of the school are what attract most parents to apply to Aveson for their children. There is general concern that new senior leaders on both campuses might come in and change that which has been the reason the families chose Aveson. Accordingly, new Site Directors will be expected to initially devote their time and energies to understanding what is already there, to understanding what is really important and unique, and refrain from changing too much too soon. At the same time, there is also recognition that an attitude of continuous improvement mandates that some changes SHOULD happen. So the new leaders must be very much in tune with what are the “unshakeable beliefs” that must not change, before moving things forward in what hopefully will be collaborative and transparent ways.
- The school has an unequivocal commitment to DEI but lacks a unified approach across all grades and campuses. One person said, “We have DEI initiatives developed but with the turnover in Site Directors, they are not being implemented.” For whatever reason, there is less diversity among the parents at ASL than at AGLA.

### **Aveson School of Leaders (TK-5) Unique Challenges and Opportunities**

Among those things the ASL Site Director will be expected to address are:

- The ASL campus, while beautiful, could use a bit of a visual face-lift.
- The youngest children are those who were deprived of a typical pre-school experience because of the pandemic. Accordingly, the socialization and learning of behavior expectations that would usually precede entering early elementary grades, did not happen. As a result, there is a temporary need to help some of those students “catch up” in terms of behavior, interpersonal interactions and civility.
- Parents of elementary school students tend to be more anxious and require more attention, more clarity of boundaries, and more support for the concerns they have for their children.



## **Aveson Global Leadership Academy (6-12) Unique Challenges and Opportunities**

- Many describe AGLA as a “younger school” than ASL. Across the board, the faculty and staff tend to be younger and shorter in tenure. Turnover is higher and must be reduced and managed. In addition, millennials and Gen Z young teachers sometimes lack the traditional “work ethic” of prior generations and require more supervision and more clarity of expectations of them as employees.
- At AGLA there is a need to increase academic rigor while continuing to support the full range of social-emotional needs of students.
- Just as the grades 5-6 transition is an inflection point, AGLA has to work hard to retain students at the 8th – 9th grade transition point.
- For a variety of circumstantial reasons, there has been frequent turnover in the AGLA Site Director role. That lack of stability and continuity plus the tail end of the pandemic disruption, beg for a new leader to come in and help the AGLA community re-establish its historic warmth and closeness of community across all stakeholders.

## **Qualifications and Personal Attributes**

These positions are both academic/SEL/co-curricular leadership roles and personnel supervision/evaluation/ management roles. While candidates for either position should have prior experience working with and loving students in the respective school’s age range, most of the other desired personal characteristics are the same for both schools. These include:

- Someone who just loves kids. Eager to connect with them one to one, to get to know them and their particular personalities.
- A hands-on leader. Visible in the daily life of the school from drop-off and pick-up, to frequent presence in classrooms, to visibility in after-school and weekend activities. Eager to get to know everyone by name: students, parents etc.; and to develop a personal interest in each student and family that goes beyond the surface. Someone who realizes that these are not 9 – 5 jobs but is committed to be wherever and whenever their presence adds emphasis, leadership and appreciation to school activities.



- As with students and families, each Site Director must take genuine interest in each faculty and staff member both as educators as well as individuals. Someone who clearly communicates appreciation for and reinforces the value to the school of faculty and staff contributions.
- Actual quotation from a 4th grader. Really!!

*“ I heard that the principal in the past yelled at a parent. We need someone who will take in the information, assess it; and not be so reactionary. Someone who will think outside the box and be creative in tough situations where there is not an obvious answer: think outside the box.”*

- At ASL, The mid-year departure of the former ASL Site Director was unsettling. Frequent turnover in the Site Director Position at AGLA has likewise been unsettling. It will be important for both new Site Directors to be particularly adept at reassuring faculty, restoring positive faculty-administration trust, and projecting an aura of stability and continuity.
- As the Academic leader for each campus, each Site Director must be knowledgeable of curricula for their respective age groups.
- While not required, a state-issued principal certification (most of which have reciprocal recognition with the State of California) would be a helpful qualification.
- It is both a subtle nuance and extremely important to have Site Directors who recognize that what some might pejoratively call “political correctness,” at Aveson is expression of the essential nature of a place that values everyone and encourages everyone to be who they really are, in a place that is safe and non-judgmental.
- Prior experience hiring, evaluating, providing professional development for, coaching and supporting faculty and staff while also setting high expectations and holding them accountable to those expectations. Ability to mentor younger faculty and staff while taking full advantage of the wisdom and experience of longer-tenured faculty and staff.
- Likewise, each site director must be experienced in organizing, assembling and leading effective teams to work collaboratively to make decisions, address issues, consider opportunities etc.
- The schools are implementing PBIS – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. While not required, familiarity with that system would be desirable.
- An organized individual able to keep many balls in the air at once, to multi-task with aplomb, to pivot effortlessly between the visionary/leadership level and the operational/management level. The analogy of a “player coach” is apt: someone who can be working on the ground as part of the team, and also set the game plan, call the plays and develop other team members.



- A servant leader who thinks of themselves more as a colleague than a boss but can still hold people accountable and make tough decisions when necessary.
- An exceptional listener who seeks out collaborative information in any situation before making decisions.
- An individual with a personal passion for and understanding of progressive education and the importance of social-emotional learning. A personal commitment to and experience with social-justice and DEI work in schools.
- Prior experience with differentiated and individualized education, not only for neurodiverse students, but for neurotypical students as well. An understanding of the value of inclusion in all aspects of school programming and school life. Familiarity with the landscape of IEP's and 504 Plans is a plus.
- A charismatic and compelling communicator both in writing and orally. The ability to get people excited about what is happening at Aveson with high energy that is contagious.
- A calming, stable influence, especially in the inevitable times of institutional stresses.

#### **Personal Characteristics Unique to the ASL (TK- 5) Position**

- Behavioral issues are more prevalent at ASL. It would be ideal if the next Site Director had a behavioral background and can coach Instructional assistants and advisors alike, on behavioral management.

#### **Personal Characteristics Unique to AGLA (6 – 12)**

- Someone with the skills and disposition to reach out and connect, one-to-one, with each 5th grader family at ASL to persuade them to enroll for 6th grade at AGLA. Likewise for 8th graders considering high school options.

# Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Aveson Schools.

[School Website](#)

[Aveson School of Leaders](#)

[Aveson Global Leadership Academy](#)

[Aveson Promise](#)

[About Altadena, California](#)



## To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultant in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A current résumé;
- A cover letter indicating whether you are applying for the Aveson School of Leaders (ASL -TK-5) or Aveson Global Leadership Academy (AGLA 6 – 12) or both; and expressing your interest in the position and your qualifications vis a vis the criteria in this Position Description;
- A statement of your familiarity with progressive education, with public charter schools (if any), and how your personal educational philosophy relates to the progressive, differentiated, SEL-intensive program of the Aveson Schools;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

### **Skip Kotkins**

Senior Consultant

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*The full-time equivalent salary range for this position is \$125,000 - \$145,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.*