



SYCAMORE SCHOOL
Indianapolis, Indiana

HEAD OF SCHOOL
Start Date: July 2023
sycamoreschool.org



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES



Mission

Sycamore School exists so that academically gifted children can experience the enriched, accelerated education they need to reach their potential and to lead responsible, constructive, fulfilling lives.

Core Values

- **Respect:** self, others, property, and time
- **Moral Courage:** honesty, integrity, right action, purpose, courage
- **Relationships:** appreciation, service, community, citizenship
- **Empathy:** compassion, kindness, acceptance, diversity

OVERVIEW

Sycamore School is mission-driven. The school exists because of its unique focus on a population of students who need and thrive on Sycamore's laser focus on Gifted and Talented students. From Early Childhood through 8th grade, 414 students attend a school that is dedicated to understanding their unique talents and needs.

Located on a spacious and well-equipped campus in Indianapolis, Sycamore is a place of joy, a place of warmth and welcoming, and unquestionably student-centered. Sycamore recognizes that gifted children are not all alike, and endeavors to meet each child where he or she is. They are committed to serving not only the accelerated academic needs of these children, but their social, emotional and psychological needs as well.

After many years of successful leadership, Head of School Diane Borgmann has announced her retirement effective the end of the 2022-23 school year. Sycamore seeks an inspired and inspiring new head to lead the school in the ever-evolving field of gifted education, starting July 1, 2023.



STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

Among the many strengths of Sycamore, the new Head will find:

- A school with a clear sense of mission and an unambiguous focus of the full program of the school on that mission;
- A dedicated and skilled faculty who have an enviable track record of serving Sycamore's student population. Moreover, it is apparent that they care deeply about the students and not just as academic learners;
- Faculty and staff who describe Sycamore as a fun place to work, appreciate that they are trusted to do their jobs well, and enjoy the camaraderie of their colleagues;
- A highly regarded administration and staff completely dedicated to the mission of the school;
- A relatively new, purpose-built campus that is well-suited and well-equipped for the education that happens there every day;
- A strong financial foundation resulting from a history of excellent fiscal management;
- A strong sense of community and love of the school;
- A school that is loving and caring, but also sets high standards and expectations for students and adults alike. Sycamore School was awarded a 2019 "Best Places to Work" recognition by the Indianapolis Star, an objective and highly valued recognition.



SCHOOL HISTORY

Founded in 1985, Sycamore School was pioneered by a group of parents and teachers who felt that the unique needs of their high-achieving children were not being met by existing public and private schools. With a vision to provide an exceptional learning environment for children who were academically gifted, the group sought to create a private, independent institution, and thus, Sycamore School was chartered as a not-for-profit corporation in Indiana. In the fall of 1985 the school opened its doors in a building leased from a Unitarian Church with 110 students in kindergarten through grade 5.

Enrollment expanded rapidly, and the young institution quickly outgrew the church's available space. In the fall of 1989, Sycamore School moved to a vacant public school building where it still resides today. Over the years and after several heads and improvement initiatives, Sycamore continues to advance its reputation as the nationally recognized leader in the education of gifted children. The 200,000 square foot school currently sits on 16-acres and houses state-of-the-art academic facilities: classrooms, science and computer labs, music and art studios, gymnasium, auditorium, and library. The grounds also contain athletic fields and play areas for younger children.



THE SCHOOL

Sycamore School is a place “where gifted kids thrive.” In a nurturing environment, students gain confidence in their abilities and develop a joy for life-long learning. As Indiana’s only accredited, private, independent preschool-grade 8 school for gifted students, Sycamore understands that gifted learners have special intellectual, social, and emotional needs. Because of this, the school provides a rigorous academic curriculum that offers greater complexity, more depth, and a faster pace than is typical. Here, students are exceptionally prepared with the foundation necessary to thrive in high school, college, and beyond.

The faculty and staff at Sycamore are passionate about gifted children and their education. As some of the finest educators in the country, the faculty provide unparalleled personal attention to students, differentiating instruction based on each child’s skill level and readiness in each subject area and challenging them to learn creative problem-solving techniques, master higher-level thinking skills, and become critical thinkers. All teachers are highly trained in gifted education with 73 percent holding advanced degrees. Members of the Sycamore faculty and administration share their expertise at numerous presentations at NAGC, IAG, and ISACS conventions as well as during Sycamore’s annual Gifted Education Summit.

Sycamore embodies a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion through its academic curriculum, extracurricular programs, social-emotional practices, and community. The school embraces diversity of all forms, including race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, family structure, physical abilities, socioeconomic status, and political and social values. Sycamore’s core values of respect, moral courage, relationships, and empathy prepare students for a diverse and global society.

Sycamore School is a member of ISACS, the Independent Schools Association of the Central States, an accrediting association of over 200 schools in a 15-state region reaching from Minnesota to Arkansas, and from eastern Kansas to Ohio and West Virginia. The school is also an institutional member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), and the Indiana Association for the Gifted (IAG).



ACADEMICS

The academic curriculum at Sycamore is accelerated and differentiated based on the rate and intensity that best fits each individual student. Faculty develop curriculum utilizing the latest research from prevailing scholarship experts and best education practices for gifted learners. Here, learning is both joyful and challenging. Students are immersed in an environment that values hands-on experience and fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Class sizes are small enough to allow significant individual attention, yet large enough to promote desirable intellectual and social interaction among students.

Early Childhood (Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten)

Representing the youngest age level, the Early Childhood division promotes essential foundational skills for students to develop a healthy, realistic self-concept. The curriculum is interactive and stimulating allowing students to acquire appropriate and effective interpersonal skills and establish positive attitudes toward school and learning. Preschool students read and write to the extent of their ability. Handwriting instruction begins in Prekindergarten. Formal reading and math instruction begins in Kindergarten, and children are grouped with others having similar skills. Students receive instruction from specialists in Spanish, art appreciation, music, and physical education. Each classroom is equipped with iPads, and Kindergarten students go to media class for additional instruction. The Early Childhood division encourages exploratory behavior and emotional and intellectual risk-taking, facilitates creative and productive thinking, and teaches higher level thinking skills.

Lower School (Grades 1 – 4)

In Lower School, students begin to acquire a strong knowledge base and master academic skills. The curriculum is both accelerated and enriched through flexible grouping strategies and includes reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. Instruction in music, art, Spanish, media and technology, and physical education is provided by specialists in those areas. Students in this division enjoy a significant number of field trips, guest speakers, and written and visual media. Instruction in each grade level takes place in a learning environment that promotes higher-level thinking, self-motivation, responsibility, compassion, and independence.



Middle School (Grades 5 – 8)

Students in Middle School take even more accountability in their education and further develop their increasing ability for complex thought. The Middle School curriculum is interwoven, incorporating skills and content across all disciplines, allowing students to make greater sense of the larger world as they continue to develop the ability to think critically, evaluate, communicate effectively, reason, solve problems, and value diverse viewpoints. Core curriculum includes history, language arts, mathematics, and science. Special classes meet between one to four periods per week and include art, computer technology, physical education, and Spanish and students may also choose to participate in instrumental music and/or choir. Students in this division enjoy multiple enrichment opportunities including service projects, guest speakers, and overnight trips.

Beginning in Middle School, students are assigned an advisor who works with them throughout their entire Middle School experience. Advisors meet with students individually as well as during extended, single grade group meetings, giving students opportunities to improve communication and social skills, gain self-awareness, and make friends.

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE MATRICULATION

After graduating from Sycamore, students continue their academic pursuits at some of the finest high schools and universities, including the following, among many:

High School Matriculation

Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School
Carmel High School
Cathedral High School
Choate Rosemary Hall School
Covenant Christian High School
Culver Academies
Guerin Catholic High School
International School of Dusseldorf
North Central High School
Park Tudor High School
Phillips Academy Andover
Purdue Polytechnic High School
Tenafly High School
University High School of Indiana
University of Chicago Laboratory School
Zionsville High School

College Matriculation

Baylor University
Boston University
Brown University
Carnegie Mellon University
Cornell University
DePauw University
Duke University
George Washington University
Harvard University
Marquette University
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
New York University
Northeastern University
Princeton University
Stanford University
Trinity University
University of California Berkeley
University of Notre Dame
University of Pennsylvania
Vanderbilt University



THE ARTS

The Arts play a critical role in the education at Sycamore. The school's rigorous, discipline-based program improves abilities in other subject areas, encourages higher-level thinking skills, provides opportunities for creative self-expression, accommodates all learning styles, and offers an alternative means of decoding cultural symbols. As a universal language, Sycamore understands that educating students in the Arts allows them to express themselves more fluently and have a deeper understanding of various cultures. Students in the Early Childhood division are introduced to the language and tools of artists and gain foundational skills in the visual arts. In the Lower School, students explore various methods and media and receive an introduction into art history and world cultures. The Middle School program incorporates Art within the humanities program as students dive deeper into history, culture, and begin to investigate criticism and aesthetics in depth. For some students, the visual arts may offer the most viable avenue to self-expression.



ATHLETICS

Sycamore has a long history of athletics as part of an overall educational experience. Physical Education is incorporated across all three divisions emphasizing movement, gross motor development, and cooperation skills. In Middle School, students have the opportunity to participate in one of Sycamore's 13 athletic programs where they further develop their physical abilities and sportsmanship in a team environment. The athletic program includes cross country, basketball, tennis, volleyball, soccer, golf, and track and field and has captured 12 Indianapolis Independent School League Championships.

The athletic program was boosted by the construction of a new athletics wing at Sycamore in 2005. A capital campaign provided for a new Sycamore School gymnasium, and the creation of a new athletic/theater entrance on the east side of the school. The gym includes locker room facilities, a weight and fitness area, and auxiliary baskets in addition to a regulation basketball court and scoreboards. Upgrades have included new state-of-the-art lighting installation in 2015.



STUDENT LIFE

Students at Sycamore School learn, explore, and grow in a dynamic community that prepares them to thrive in a diverse world. Outside of the classroom, the school offers after school programs, an extensive summer camp for all grades, as well as the long-running STEM Conference for Middle School Girls. Sycamore Quest, a before and after school care program, is available to Sycamore students in preschool through grade 8. The purpose of Sycamore Quest is to provide a caring environment for children during the hours before and after school. Quest provides a nutritious snack, time for guidance in homework, and a variety of fun activities. The personal character qualities of respect and responsibility are a focus of this program.

Sycamore's summer camps have been a tradition since the school's founding in 1985. Camps are offered each summer and at selected breaks during the school year and are designed to help students discover and explore new topics and interests, build confidence and creativity, and keep their academic skills sharp. The Sycamore Academy is a middle school program, providing fun and educational camps for older students. Quest Summer camps offer camps for all grades each summer, from June through July.



Middle School girls enjoy the annual STEAM Conference, designed to heighten girls' interest in STEAM careers and to help them select high school courses that will lead them to success in college. Math events and camps are also offered at various times during the school year.

Sycamore Middle School students may participate in many after-school activities and educational enrichment programs to cultivate friendships and continue to develop social and intellectual skills. Activities and programs include a full range of sports, drama, and various academic competitions as well as service projects and overnight field trips across the U.S.



INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

The 15th largest city in the nation and third largest in the Midwest, Indianapolis has a population of over 880,000. The capital of Indiana, the city has a diversified economy that includes health care, information technology, and transportation. Nicknamed the Crossroads of America, it is a well-loved place to live, and its downtown is consistently ranked among the best in the U.S. Several large private universities are based in Indianapolis, including Butler University, Marian University, the University of Indianapolis, and Martin University.

Indianapolis is proud of its rich cultural heritage, with seven Cultural Districts throughout the city. These revitalized areas are centers for tourism, commerce, and residential living. The newly constructed Cultural Trail connects the downtown Cultural Districts via an urban bike and pedestrian path and is lined with local artwork.

Indianapolis is a city of museums. The Indianapolis Children's Museum—the largest children's museum in the world—is a favorite learning destination for residents and visitors. The Indianapolis Museum of Art is a highly regarded institution that has created a 100-acre arts and nature park with a growing collection of installations, and the Eiteljorg Museum, in its exquisite downtown facility, has assembled one of the nation's finest collections of American Indian and Western and Native American art.

Local fans ardently cheer for the Colts of the NFL and the Pacers of the NBA. Each year, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway hosts the Indianapolis 500, the largest single-day sporting event in the world, as well as the Brickyard 400 and the Grand Prix of Indianapolis. In addition, the city almost always serves as a venue for the Men's and Women's NCAA basketball tournaments. Indianapolis also has a new professional soccer team, the Indy Eleven.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- It is ongoing work to be knowledgeable of and apply both proven approaches as well as new developments in education of gifted children;
- The school welcomes a range of students, including those considered twice-exceptional (2E). It is important to provide dedicated specialists for the social-emotional needs of those students, as well as providing professional development for classroom teachers who need techniques for meeting the needs of all their students;
- While Sycamore has generally been successful in providing financial assistance for most families who need it, access and affordability in the future will continue to be an important focus area;
- While attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty is ongoing work, there is also a desire for greater diversity among the adults working in the school;
- Sycamore is often described as a warm and safe place for the students. At the same time, it is important to help prepare students for life after the “Sycamore bubble” in their future education and lives beyond school;
- The school would benefit from higher visibility in the broader Indianapolis community, where it is not well known;
- While most aspects of the curriculum are strong (especially Math), there is a desire for more rigor and perhaps progressive approaches in some of the other subjects, as well as a strong technology component of the academic program of the school;
- As with most schools, ambitions of continuous improvement come with the need for additional funds.



DESIRED QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

Among the many attributes desired in the next Head of School are:

- A passion for the unique and focused mission of serving Gifted and Talented students. A commitment to keeping Sycamore in the forefront of the very best of gifted education;
- An excellent listener who seeks collaboration and inclusivity, but is also able to make tough decisions when needed;
- A commitment to and experience with the principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion;
- Ideally someone with prior classroom teaching experience;
- Both a leader who can articulate and inspire with the vision of Sycamore, as well as a manager who can lead the team, set high expectations and hold everyone accountable. A visible presence in the daily life of the school;
- While it is not required to have training in gifted education, an understanding of the uniqueness of the Sycamore student population sufficient to provide leadership and support for all in the school;
- A good sense of humor who sets a tone-at-the-top of joy and enthusiasm;
- Familiarity with both annual fundraising and capital campaigns would be beneficial.



TO APPLY

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

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A statement of experience with or familiarity with gifted education in an elementary/middle school context;
- 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

skip.kotkins@carneysandoe.com