

PRESIDENT SEARCH

SCHOOL YEAR ABROAD

North Andover, Massachusetts

sya.org

Start Date: July 2026



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

CARNEYSANDOE.COM

Mission Statement

School Year Abroad (SYA) is committed to promoting intercultural understanding and appreciation through the immersive adventure of fully engaging with different languages and peoples. SYA guides its students through a challenging curriculum focused on developing skills and cultural competencies for an increasingly interdependent world.

At a Glance



Established
1964



Total enrollment
205



Total faculty
27



Student-teacher ratio
7:1



Students of color
40%



Financial aid awarded
\$3M



Faculty with advanced degrees
80%

Students receiving aid: 41%
Endowment: \$34M

Annual operating budget: \$9.4M

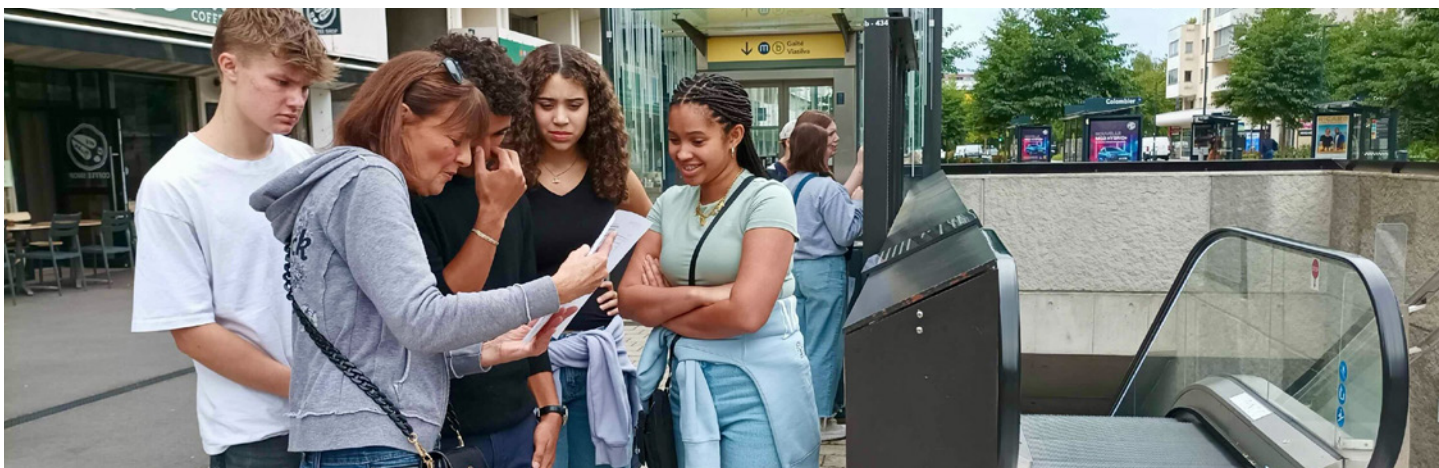


Overview

SYA is a complex organization with modest roots and a unique architecture: a domestic fully staffed headquarters in the U.S. with three separate autonomous international campuses. Founded in the fall of 1964, the original eleven students came from nine U.S. high schools to Barcelona where they lived with host families, attended classes, and navigated the streets and culture of the city. Over time, SYA has operated in France, Germany, China, Italy, India, Vietnam and Japan.

Today, there are three firmly established campuses—Rennes (France), Viterbo (Italy), and Zaragoza (Spain)—each serving 40–60 students in grades 10 through 12. Boasting 9,000 alumni, SYA has evolved into an independent, fully accredited school that attracts students from many types of schools throughout the U.S. Through the years, SYA has continued to innovate even as it has consistently hewed to its mission: “Promoting intercultural understanding and appreciation through the immersive adventure of fully engaging with different languages and peoples. SYA guides its students through a challenging curriculum focused on developing skills and cultural competencies for an increasingly interdependent world.”

SYA remains steadfast in its mission and continues to execute it with remarkable success, even as it navigates the inherent complexities of operating across four countries and three campuses, with an enrollment that resets each year. The President must manage over time and miles; coordinate policy with the Resident Directors; communicate with diverse stakeholders; understand three different campuses with unique cultures, laws and practices; be readily available and accessible across time zones; and manage crisis in real time and from afar.



There are many encouraging signs. Leadership at both the presidential and board levels is visionary and highly effective. The home office is staffed by dedicated, skilled administrators, and the faculty across all three campuses are knowledgeable educators who challenge and care deeply for their students. The institutional balance sheet is sound: sustainable annual giving, prudent budgeting, and a robust endowment. In a recent survey, 97% of alumni strongly agreed or agreed that SYA was “a great school for [them],” and 98% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that they “trusted school leadership to operate in the best interest of students.” Alumni have great affinity for their experience, and currently, in celebration of its 60th year, SYA has launched a \$6 million *Kaleidoscope Campaign*—this following the successful 2021 *Campaign for SYA* which saw \$18 million in gifts. In 2024, SYA completed its 10-year re-accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The NEASC commission commended the clarity and durability of SYA’s mission, the quality of institutional leadership, the culture conducive to learning, and the passion of the adult community, noting, “It is hard to imagine a school with as many challenges and complexities as School Year Abroad... And yet the Visiting Committee witnessed an extraordinarily successful school, each of the three campuses thriving.”

SYA’s commitment to its mission of cultural and language competency gained through immersion guides everything in its three international campuses. Living with a host family, students have unique opportunities to know first-hand local traditions, cuisine, and practices. Led by three inspiring Resident Directors, the faculty are passionate, caring and professional. At school, students take a rigorous academic program, with all but two classes in the target language, and are asked to engage in critical and creative thinking, develop intercultural competence, increase language command, and work independently and collaboratively. Vitally, students are also required to engage meaningfully in the local community where they partner with local organizations and pursue their own passions. Further, students are given the chance to travel extensively and independently: a weekend might include a taxi ride to a train station for a trip to Rome for a day of sightseeing at the Colosseum. And so, SYA’s program is total and holistic, academic and experiential. The impact is profound: students are transformed. SYA alumni leave with more than language fluency—they develop cultural agility, independence, and a lifelong capacity to lead across borders. These skills are increasingly vital in today’s interconnected and often divided world.

The past ten years have seen remarkable growth in SYA. Curricular innovations like the capstone project were initiated, offering students the opportunity to engage more deeply in immersive, place-based learning. These projects meaningfully connect students with the local culture, history, and community, encouraging meaningful exploration beyond the classroom and fostering a richer understanding of their host country.



While COVID closed the campuses in 2020, SYA seized the opportunity to enact several strategic initiatives, and the school emerged even stronger. Enrollment challenges were met by offering a semester option. The successful capital campaign significantly increased the endowment. A new campus position, the Student Life Coordinator charged to enhance student support, was created. An independent mental health counseling service for Americans living abroad was contracted to meet student needs. In short, at strategic as well as operational levels, SYA is in a very strong position, with a tradition of excellent executive leadership, a compelling and relevant mission embraced by all, a passionate and effective Board of Trustees, sound fiscal foundation, and committed and caring faculty, administrators and staff.

Opportunities and Challenges

Leading SYA requires an experienced, visionary executive capable of navigating the complexities inherent in a globally dispersed educational institution. SYA's complexity reflects its ambition: to prepare young people not just for college, but for leadership in a global society. As alumni (and their parents) have attested, the experience can be transformational—the SYA community is eager to usher SYA into the next chapter and continue to support this organization that has changed their lives for the better. They need a leader to inspire confidence in SYA's future despite the current challenges.

With an annually refreshed student body, the President must embrace the unique opportunity to shape each year's experience anew—requiring agile leadership and dynamic storytelling to attract the next cohort. The market is competitive, unpredictable and shaped by external factors; applications for the academic year 2025-2026 are lower than previous years. Further, supporting students, a priority in all secondary schools, is even more complex when students are living far from home, in unfamiliar settings, and often with anxious parents. Issues over which SYA has no control—exchange rates, visa procurement, American foreign policy, parental attitudes on travel, affordability, competing programs, etc.—also can create unexpected challenges which require prompt and often creative problem-solving. Ensuring the professional growth of the faculty on different campuses requires special skills. And finally, overseeing three campuses means problems come up continually and unexpectedly.



Qualities and Personal Attributes

Professional Qualifications

- A leader who instinctively and genuinely brings a global lens, and ideally second language fluency, to all areas of school life—someone with genuine passion for international education in general and SYA specifically;
- A strong executive—someone who is an experienced leader who has shown the ability to manage all facets of a complex organization and will be able to run a school with its unique four-nation footprint;
- A leader who will engage and inspire the Board—someone with a strong understanding of Board governance and best practices;
- A culture creator—someone who is passionate about understanding the complexities of school culture on three campuses and will be committed to ensuring all members feel safe, valued, respected and included;
- A principled fiduciary—someone with capacity for partnering with the Board of Trustees and Chief Financial Officer in prudently stewarding the school's finances;
- A communicator-in-chief—someone who is a powerful and persuasive communicator, in speech and print, and who can effectively articulate the unique SYA experience;
- A practical visionary—someone who can articulate long term strategic priorities while also identifying and managing needed operational systems and practices;
- An educational leader—someone who values teaching and learning, and who may come from a background in international schools, higher education, or other educationally aligned settings.;
- A global citizen – experience living or working internationally—or managing international teams—is highly desirable;
- A fundraiser—someone with the skills and passion to develop donor relations and inspire annual and capital giving; and
- A crisis manager and problem solver—someone who brings calm, humor, perseverance, creativity to small and large problems.

Leadership Style

School Year Abroad seeks a leader who will:

- listen well to others and encourage input;
- thrive in cross-cultural navigation and communication;
- foster trust, collaboration and transparency;
- possess the ability to understand complex problems;
- show the courage to make the difficult decisions;
- lead change and improvement even as they value traditions and history;
- inspire others.



Personal Qualities

SYA is seeking a leader who will:

- have the gravitas, credibility and experience to foster respect from all community members—someone who will inspire unity around a vision;
- manage all aspects of a complex organization with a large international footprint—someone who will be an effective chief executive;
- connect empathically and develop meaningful relationships with diverse community members—someone with strong interpersonal skills, genuine warmth, deep curiosity, and high EQ;
- bring empathy and curiosity to all interactions—someone who listens well, is eager to learn, and loves crossing cultural bridges;
- inspire the community to turn to during difficult times and find in that person calm and competence—someone with resilience, perseverance, and judgement in the face of crisis and challenge;
- possess a tireless work ethic, positive energy, and willingness to support others—someone who will be accessible and available, especially to the three Resident Directors;
- combine confidence and humility—someone strong enough to make hard decisions, curious enough to seek input from others, and open enough to consider views different from their own; and
- partner effectively with the Board of Trustees—someone with command over governance best practices.

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about School Year Abroad.

[School Website](#)

[College Matriculation](#)

[School History](#)

[About North Andover, Massachusetts](#)

[School Focus and Approach](#)

Who Should Apply

SYA welcomes candidates from across the U.S. and around the world, including but not limited to:

- Leaders in U.S. and international schools or global university programs;
- Executives in mission-driven nonprofits or international NGOs;
- Visionary educators from innovative charter, public, or hybrid models;
- Professionals in diplomacy, cultural exchange, or international business with a passion for education.

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 cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- 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:

Beth Dietz

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William MacMullen

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Todd Bland

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The full-time equivalent salary range for this position is \$350,000-\$425,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.