

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

TAHOE EXPEDITION ACADEMY

Truckee, California

tahoeexpeditionacademy.org

Start Date: July 2026



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

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Overview

On a sunny summer field ringed with majestic pines, Upper Schoolers (grades 6-12) form a human tunnel through which 5-year-olds gleefully run, headed off to their six-mile hike, symbolic of their graduation into kindergarten. Not your standard start to a school day in a typical school. But, like most things at Tahoe Expedition Academy (TEA), the hike set the students on a challenging learning adventure fortified with the support of their community.

Combining character education, expeditionary learning, and academics, Tahoe Expedition Academy, founded in 2011, serves approximately 200-230 students from PK to grade 12. The Tahoe Basin, the Sierra Nevada range, and places beyond provide an expansive learning environment where students practice what TEA calls Constructive Adversity. Educators will recognize elements of Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Angela Duckworth's Grit, and Kurt Hahn's experiential learning embedded in Constructive Adversity. When students stretch and take risks in a thoughtfully designed and supportive environment, they come to appreciate the value of struggle, perseverance, collaboration, and creativity, and develop an invaluable sense of their own agency. Through fieldwork and expeditionary learning, integrated with well-designed academics in the classroom, TEA students adapt to thrive in changing and challenging environments.

TEA seeks a new Head of School for July of 2026. Still a young school, TEA has recently transitioned from its founding phase to its adolescence. David Maher, the current Head of School, has built a strong sense of community, developed an administrative team, added processes and systems, and taken the school through the CAIS accreditation process, resulting in a seven-year accreditation. The new head of school will help the school move into its next phase of maturity.



Strengths of the School

Among many strengths, the new head will find:

- Dedicated faculty. Teachers must not only teach their subjects, but they must exemplify, buy into, and love the character-building aspects of the experiential learning program of the school. Students feel known and cared about by not only their own teachers, but the entire faculty, creating a remarkable sense of CommuniTEA (yes, that's how they spell the word). The school walks the talk of “meeting each child where they are.”
- A bright and dedicated administrative team.
- Field Work. In addition to local hikes and daily outdoor activities, the school has a well-developed program of farther-afield trips. Whether learning about civics in Washington DC or rainforest management in Central America, students are challenged to go outside their comfort zones, discover their strengths and develop leadership skills. Indeed, students and parents report that TEA can take even the most reluctant entering student and give them confidence, agency and comfort with new things.
- An engaged and collegial parent community, eager to support the school in numerous ways. More than a few parents reported relocating their families to the area specifically to have their children attend TEA.
- Alumni who are successful in the broad variety of higher education options.



Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities and challenges include:

- **Developing a multi-year enrollment management plan** – Like many independent schools, especially in desirable resort communities, TEA experienced an enrollment bump during COVID and is now facing some enrollment and retention challenges. The next head will professionalize enrollment management, including hiring an enrollment management expert, developing outreach to mission-aligned families, tracking demographic data, and strengthening retention.
- **Strengthening academic rigor and program alignment** – While the expeditionary and adventure aspects are what sets TEA apart, there is a desire for greater academic rigor across the board. Faced with growing and strong competition, TEA must differentiate itself in the quality of its academic program as well as its fieldwork and Constructive Adversity. The current leadership team continues to make progress systematizing and documenting and evaluating how TEA delivers on its promise to combine academic, character, and adventure programs. Articulating learning outcomes, assessing how those outcomes will be measured, and sharing student progress across a clearly defined PK-12 scope and sequence are high priorities for the next school leader.
- **Continuing to strengthen differentiation** – A strength of TEA is its commitment to serve a broad range of students. It does this well in most respects, and it will be important to develop more ways to provide challenge for the most advanced students, as well as individualized attention for those who need additional support. However, TEA cannot be everything to everyone and will need to clearly define where it can and can't differentiate.
- **Implementing a sustainable financial model** – As a young school, TEA benefited from the generosity of a handful of donors, and the school community has been consistently philanthropic. That said, new leadership and the Board will need to develop a financial model less dependent on annual giving and more focused on budgetary realities that balance revenues and expenses, adjust for fluctuations in enrollment, and create fiscal reserves.



- **Sharing TEA's successes** – TEA graduated its first senior class in 2017 and has the opportunity now to tell a compelling story of how its unique approach to education prepares students for their next set of challenges. Prospective parents as well as current TEA parents in the younger grades need a clearer understanding of how and why the school's three pillars of character, adventure, and academics shape graduates who thrive intellectually, emotionally, and physically in diverse environments. TEA has a great story to tell but needs marketing messages and methods to significantly expand the perceptions of the school among external and even internal audiences, created for effectiveness in a sound-byte world.
- **Improving processes, procedures and systems** – Typical of a school transitioning from adolescence to sustainable maturity, the school will benefit from a new head who is both an inspiring visionary AND experienced manager. As noted by the CAIS/WASC visiting team report, the school needs to develop more data-driven decision-making as well as efficient systems and communications in support of the student-facing program.

Qualifications and Personal Attributes

Typical for a school of this size, the Head of School must have tremendous bandwidth to be adept at a myriad of responsibilities. They must pivot easily among and between -visionary and strategic responsibilities and hands-on management tasks. Among the most frequently mentioned desirable characteristics are:

- Strong leadership skills with proven experience and ability to set high standards for students and adults alike and assure faithful accountability to those expectations.



- Adept communicator who can be decisive and as transparent as possible to keep the community apprised of important decisions, milestones, and celebrations.
- A relational leader who knows and values everyone. As comfortable with a high potential donor as on the ground with a first grader reading a book. Highly visible in the daily life of the school.
- Personal and professional commitment to inclusion and belonging work and the requisite skills to support critical conversations in the design of ever more inclusive culture, curriculum, and programs.
- Business savvy, particularly in the areas of financial management, marketing and communications as the school continues to mature.
- The ability to attract and retain excellent faculty and staff. Likewise, the new head must set clear and high expectations and hold faculty and staff accountable to those expectations.
- Board management. The board of trustees is, itself, in a maturation process and moving toward best practices. The new head must be sufficiently experienced with boards and board-administration relationships to support the board in their work.
- Professional commitment to maintaining a welcoming culture that supports a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Tahoe Expedition Academy.

[School Website](#)

[College Profile](#)

[Strategic Plan](#)

[About Truckee, California](#)

[Belonging at TEA](#)



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 and philosophy of non-traditional expeditionary educational programs and practices;
- 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

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Karen Whitaker

Senior Consultant

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The salary range for this position is \$225,000 – 300,000 The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.