



CAPE FEAR
ACADEMY

DIRECTOR OF LOWER SCHOOL

Start Date: July 2027

Cape Fear Academy

Wilmington, North Carolina | capefearacademy.org



Carney
Sandoe
& ASSOCIATES

MISSION STATEMENT

Cape Fear Academy is a learning community committed to discovering and developing individual potential, preparing each student for success in college and life.

At a Glance



1967
established



826 total enrollment
353 Lower School



17%
students of color



101
total faculty



54.3%
faculty with
advanced degrees



8:1
student-faculty ratio



OVERVIEW

Cape Fear Academy is a school built on trust in its teachers, in its students, and in the idea that children thrive when they are known well. That ethos is highly visible in the Lower School, where 353 students move from Little Explorers (PreK3) through Grade Five inside a culture faculty describe as deeply collaborative, high-morale, and genuinely fun to work in. Students take the stage each year for signature performances and in Anatomy Academy, in which they sing about the medical specialties, and Biz World, in which they design a company and pitch it to their own parents. A student-led Wednesday town hall, complete with grade-level spirit cheers, sets the tone for the week. Lower School teachers use the Responsive Classroom® approach to help students develop self-regulation skills. There is broad agreement among those who work and learn there that the division is thriving.

Cape Fear Academy is an independent, coeducational day school in Wilmington, North Carolina, serving 826 students from Little Explorers (PreK3) through Grade 12 on a 47-acre campus. The Lower School enrolls 353 students across two sections of Little Explorers and three sections each in grades K through 5, supported by 56 faculty members. Cape Fear Academy traces its roots to Cape Fear Military Academy, founded in 1868, and reopened in its present form in 1967 with 54 students in grades one through six.





The school has embraced and thrived through significant growth and change. Enrollment has increased for seven consecutive years, and the school responded by securing 11.4 acres immediately adjacent to the main campus in May 2022 and adding a Middle School Annex of eight classrooms for the 2024–25 academic year. Cape Fear Academy is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS), with a current term of accreditation running through June 30, 2030. The school is guided by its strategic plan, “Navigating Toward Tomorrow Together,” organized around five pillars: Curriculum & Programming; Faculty & Staff; Community & Connections; Campus & Facilities; and Financial Stewardship & Sustainability. A campus master planning process is already underway and includes a new Lower School Building in Phase 2.

The Director of Lower School is responsible for supervising, coordinating, and implementing Lower School programs and personnel. Reporting to the Head of School and serving as a member of the school's Leadership Team and Crisis Management Team, the Director leads, supervises, observes, and evaluates the division's faculty; develops the master schedule; oversees Lower School admissions in collaboration with the Admissions Office; manages the division's budget in collaboration with the Director of Finance and Business; and directly supervises the Assistant Director of Lower School, Lower School teachers, teaching assistants, the Lower School counselor, reading and math specialists, and the Lower School administrative assistant/registrar. The Director of Lower School oversees all Lower School programs, including the Little Explorers preschool.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Director of Lower School will inherit a division with much to build upon and will be asked to preserve its strengths while helping its systems and structures evolve to keep pace with the school's growth.

- **Champion an exceptional and deeply invested faculty.** Behind academics and community, Cape Fear Academy's faculty and staff are the school's clearest strength. Lower School teachers describe a culture of high morale, deep collaboration, and mutual trust, in which they are given professional autonomy and held to real standards of excellence. The next Director must be a visible advocate for the division and a genuine champion for its teachers — present in classrooms, fair and consistent, honest when the truth needs telling, and generous with encouragement. Sustaining that trust, more than anything else, will define the role's early success.
- **Build a faculty pipeline for the years ahead.** The current faculty is a genuine strength, but as at many independent schools, school leaders expect some turnover in the coming years in a teacher hiring market that isn't getting easier. The next Director should start now on what comes next: mentoring pathways for teaching assistants ready to grow into lead roles, developing relationships with regional pipelines of strong public-school teachers, and creating a deliberate plan for institutional knowledge transfer as veteran faculty retire.
- **Preserve a distinctive academic program through a live curriculum transition.** The Lower School's curriculum is strong and well-aligned, refreshed on a rotating cycle by content area. This year's focus is math, and the division is already weighing a new curriculum for the early grades. Signature strengths include a public speaking curriculum that begins in Little Explorers and runs through fifth grade, a preschool program that prepares students so well for Kindergarten that 34 of last year's 36 Little Explorers graduates enrolled there directly, and specials—Future Minds (MakerSpace, robotics, and Legos), Spanish, art, music, and PE—woven through the division. A refreshed daily schedule ensures every class has 90 minutes focused on literacy, and teachers are trained in Orton-Gillingham, with K–2 teachers receiving deeper training.



- **Sustain a high-support model for a broadening range of learners.** The school admits students at ages three and four and serves a broad range of learners typical in many independent schools. Also like many independent schools, CFA is seeing more bright students arrive with learning differences that need dedicated support, and specialist staffing and teacher training will need to keep pace with that shift and with enrollment growth more broadly. The Director should keep foundational math and literacy rigor central even as enrichment programming flourishes, and should watch for early signs that rigor at the top end of the range receives the same intentionality the school provides students who struggle.
- **Strengthen the House System and cross-divisional connection.** Cape Fear Academy operates a school-wide House System with eight houses, each named in Latin for one of the school's core values and each competing for a House Cup awarded at year's end; all students and staff belong to a House. The program's leader is a fourth-grade teacher, placing the Lower School at the center of a whole-school community-building tradition. Leadership colleagues see the Lower School as the natural home for the school's future of community and belonging, and hope to see cross-divisional programming expand and deepen from here.
- **Protect and extend a genuine commitment to diversity.** The Lower School has led the campus in diversifying its student body and staff, an effort faculty describe as an intentional, hard-won gain they hope the next Director will protect and bolster. Continuing to build a community that reflects a growing and thriving Wilmington is a stated aspiration across every constituent group.
- **Partner in the school's growth and facilities future.** The Lower School currently operates in a building the community acknowledges is near the end of its functional life; faculty and staff have shown real flexibility and creativity in making the current space work and can do so for the foreseeable future. With a campus master plan underway and the Head of School's stated goal of closing the gap between the quality of the school's program and its facilities, the next Director has the opportunity to help shape — and potentially help design — a future Lower School home, while continuing the division's track record of thoughtful stewardship of resources.



\$966,189

financial aid
awarded



11%

students receiving
aid



\$8.9M

endowment



\$19.8M

annual operating
budget



47 acres

campus size

QUALIFICATIONS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Cape Fear Academy seeks an experienced, student-centered early childhood and elementary leader who will honor and build upon the strengths of a thriving Lower School.



Professional Qualifications

- A Bachelor's and Master's degree.
- A minimum of seven years teaching at the lower school level and five years of administrative or strong leadership experience in a lower school (directly related experience or a combination of related education and experience may be considered).
- Command of early childhood pedagogy and of social and emotional development.
- The ability to lead, supervise, observe, and evaluate faculty in developing and implementing curriculum, pedagogy, and academic programs.
- Demonstrated experience developing and managing schedules, budgets, and programmatic records.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and the vision and desire to lead a strong academic community.



Personal Attributes

- A teacher at heart who authentically connects with children and a genuine love for working with young children and their families.
- A visible, day-to-day presence in the building and in classrooms.
- A strong advocate for the Lower School and a champion for its teachers — one who listens to and supports faculty without always simply siding with them.
- A leader who ensures fairness and consistency with both students and staff, who offers encouragement and acknowledgment, and who possesses skill and comfort in building strong relationships with parents through proactive, personal communication.
- A collaborative team player who partners well with the Head of School and Leadership Team, not solely an advocate for one division.
- A partner committed to modeling the school's core values of respect, integrity, resilience, and accountability.



LEARN MORE

- [School Website](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Lower School](#)
- [About Wilmington, North Carolina](#)





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 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:

JAMIE ESTES

Consultant

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**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES