



Catskill Montessori School

HEAD OF SCHOOL

Start Date: July 2027

Catskill Montessori School

Catskill, New York | catskillmontessori.org



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

MISSION

Catskill Montessori School's mission is to fan the flames of all children's inherent brilliance, nourish our community's bodies, minds, and spirits, observe and interact with the natural world, and become aware of how we can positively effect change that benefits all beings.

OVERVIEW

First impressions: an adult visitor to Catskill Montessori School (CMS) found himself thinking

1. "I wish I could be a student in this school."
2. "How can a school this young have such well-developed facilities and programs?"
3. "These kids, even the youngest ones, are totally engaged."
4. "If you set out to create an ideal Montessori learning environment, this is what you'd do."



In only its 7th year of existence, Catskill Montessori School serves about 100 students from toddlers through 6th grade. For such a young school, it is exceptionally well-developed in the clarity of its unique mission and in its 63-acre physical campus and facilities, thoughtfully designed around an integrated educational and permaculture landscape that supports its Montessori program. The rural beauty of the Hudson Valley is intoxicating, and yet only a two hour train ride from the middle of New York City. The faculty and staff are deeply committed to the unique blending of Montessori pedagogy, Montessori values, whole-child personal and social development, co-curriculars, connections to the land and permaculture, social justice and progressive ethos, and working collaboratively with each other. Indeed, while the setting and campus itself are jaw-dropping-amazing, it is what happens within that environment that is most exciting about CMS. (See "Strengths of the School" below.)

It is time for the school to build on its foundation, and evolve into a school that retains all the best aspects of its current culture while putting in place policies, procedures, communications and orderly operations that everyone expects from a sustainable school. They envision a school that has moved beyond the startup phase and into a well-run, student-centered, established organization structured for long term success. With the recent departure of the founding head, a new board is eager to partner with an inspiring, visionary and operationally-savvy new leader to start in July of 2027 (or sooner if mutually agreeable) to take the next steps in CMS' journey of greatness.

STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

A key differentiator of CMS is the land on which it sits. The 63 acre campus has buildings, pastures, a food forest and gardens, nature-based play spaces, woods with hiking trails, a high tunnel, homes for the chickens and goats and seemingly limitless potential. Sandwiched between a nature preserve and the Hudson River, not only is the campus beautiful, but also integral to the program of the school. Students learn about the history including the indigenous people that were there long ago. They spend, by some estimates, 60% - 70% of their time outdoors, even in winter. They learn farming, caring for animals, food production and more. When asked about the key features of the school, everyone mentions “the land.” The student program instills in students a lifelong passion and reverence for the land and nature. Earth Stewards, programming that connects with the land, is an essential part of CMS.

Other key strengths of the school include:

- Within the buildings, some of which are several hundred years old, are spacious, purpose-built Montessori learning spaces. They are bright, using lots of natural wood and other materials. There is space for children to work in groups or individually.
- The faculty, most of whom are Montessori trained and certified, fully embrace the opportunities to connect with the land in their programming and in engaging children physically with the outdoors. Everyone knows everyone and children feel safe and cared for by their teachers. Most teachers, like many of the student families, are transplants from elsewhere, including big cities. Therefore, everyone at CMS intentionally WANTS to be there, to embrace the rural lifestyle, the permaculture and more.





- The school operates on a year-round agrarian calendar. They call it “balanced” and it follows the cycles of farming. There are six six-week sessions during the year, each separated by a one-week session break. There are six weeks off in the summer stretching from late July into September. The school provides on-campus enrichment programming during the session breaks. There are also the usual late-December and mid-spring breaks.
- The Farm and Facilities staff support the school's permaculture practices, landscape and garden maintenance, and animal care, giving students opportunities to engage with food production and the broader relationships between land, food, and stewardship.
- Social justice is a key part of the ethos and education in the school. CMS proactively welcomes all kinds of diversity, inclusive of gender identity, family structures, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and learning styles. As an ABAR (Anti-Bias Anti-Racist) school, CMS engages intentionally in this work, through professional development and reflection, parent education, the classroom curriculum, and how the educational environment is constructed.
- There is an active Parent Circle with a structure including class reps, all of whom support the school in many ways. In particular, everyone appreciates the growing menu of parent education programs geared to Montessori and parenting topics.
- While the school has naturally gone through some growing pains, everyone agrees that the student experience is excellent. Recent graduates are academically prepared and have strength of character that serves them well wherever they go after CMS.
- A newly-constituted Board of Trustees is wise, dedicated and committed to a best-practices relationship with the school administration. While the school does not yet have a well-developed fundraising program, the Board has been successful in generating the funds necessary to operate the school with little debt.
- As a small, young school, there is not a large administrative team. All leaders, especially the two interim co-heads, wear many hats. The school has had accreditation conversations with the International Montessori Council, possibly in conjunction with a Middle States accreditation.
- Most of all, CMS is a joyful place. Happiness abounds, community is prioritized, mission is clear and embraced, and most of all, children love the place. When a group of Upper Elementary students (grades 4 – 6 in a multi-age classroom) were asked what they hoped could be different in their school, they asked for it to continue into middle and high school. They don't want to leave!

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Bearing the looseness typical of startups, Catskill Montessori School now wants/needs more structure – i.e. policies, SOPs, procedures, communications protocols etc. that are the hallmark of a stable successful school. Clarity of expectations and accountability will serve the school well. Enhanced budget and financial management will be important. As a new Head brings that “professionalism” into the school, the challenge will be to do so without losing the magic of the informal atmosphere, the spontaneous warmth that is everywhere, the flexibility of Montessori to allow each child to seek their passions, and the innovation and creativity that are made possible by the unique campus and unique culture of the school.

In addition,

- Some say the biggest opportunity is to leverage the ample unused physical spaces to expand CMS’s unique programming.
- Enrollment growth is both possible and necessary to have the critical mass of students needed to implement and fund the full potential of the school. Greater retention from early childhood into lower and upper elementary.



- While generous donors have provided funding to date, the school would benefit from a more structured approach to fundraising and the instilling of a culture of philanthropy typical of most independent schools. The school has a desire for non-tuition revenue sources, and has had success getting grants, for example.
- The school would benefit from greater connections to both the broader educational community as well as the local Catskill and adjacent Hudson Valley communities. There are learning opportunities from such connections, and greater visibility locally will aid enrollment growth.
- Communication can be improved. Parents in particular want more regular updates about what is happening in the classroom. Communications that re-energize parental word-of-mouth will be an important factor in growing enrollment. Inspiring current and prospective families with a compelling vision of the future of the school and their child's place in it, will offset some of the prior communications gaps typical of startups.
- Proactive pursuit of a diverse student body is ongoing work. As in many schools, a notable segment of the student body needs learning support which the school provides as part of its commitment to meet each child wherever they are.
- The School had a middle school in the past. While the decision to focus now on Early Childhood, Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary was wise at the time; there are aspirations to expand the grade levels in the future when enrollment demand makes it viable.



QUALIFICATIONS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

As noted above, the key for the next head will be the ability to professionalize school operations while fully embracing and becoming an inspiring evangelist for the unique mission of Catskill Montessori School. Additionally, the candidate will have the unique ability to balance the long-term vision of CMS, the pedagogy thereof, and the daily practical management required for growth.

An understanding of and interest in Montessori philosophy and pedagogy, with Montessori training and/or prior leadership experience in a Montessori school is preferred. Candidates with experience in progressive education that aligns with the values of Catskill Montessori School and Montessori principles, with a willingness to obtain Montessori leadership training, are also encouraged to apply.

Other important qualities include:



- Demonstrated experience leading an organization through growth, transition, or organizational change, with the emotional intelligence to honor institutional history while confidently establishing new systems, practices, and leadership structures.
- A personal commitment to progressive values and ideals including social justice, anti-bias, love and reverence for the land and nature, welcoming of all; combined with experience building these values into the program and ethos of the school.
- An organized systems thinker, experienced in effective school operations. Ability to be both an efficient manager and visionary leader.
- Experience establishing and maintaining strong systems for regulatory compliance, student and employee safety, risk management, personnel practices, documentation, and organizational recordkeeping.
- An experienced people leader who can build a healthy, professional staff culture through clear expectations, consistent communication, thoughtful supervision, constructive feedback, and accountability. Able to navigate conflict directly and compassionately, make difficult personnel decisions when necessary, and create structures in which employees understand their roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority.
- An authentic, approachable leader able to establish an environment of trust, collaboration and respect among and between all constituencies of the school. Highly visible in the daily life of the school, eager to know and connect with everyone.



- An excellent, clear and compelling communicator who builds trust through transparency, consistency, responsiveness, and thoughtful communication, and who can inspire both internal and external audiences with a compelling, child-centered articulation of CMS's mission, story, and vision for the future.
- A marketing mindset with experience building enrollment through both increased retention and external outreach.
- "Collaborative Backbone:" inclusive and collaborative whenever possible, but also able to make decisions, including tough-but-necessary ones. Able to set high expectations and hold everyone accountable. Able to assure a rigorous student program, consistent from classroom to classroom and across all grade levels.
- A confident, low-ego leader who builds strong teams, delegates effectively, respects the expertise and responsibilities of colleagues, and establishes clear lines of authority and decision-making while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability.
- Experienced fundraiser able to establish a culture of philanthropy in the school, a structured fundraising function, and make personal asks as appropriate.
- A personal desire to make the rural, agrarian communities of the Hudson Valley their family home.
- Financial literacy sufficient to maximize the use of financial resources and be a leader/partner with the Board and the new Business and Finance Manager.
- Relationship builder across all stakeholders in the community; the board, administration, staff, parents, and students through cohesive leadership.

LEARN MORE

- [School Website](#)
- [About Catskill Montessori](#)
- [Programs](#)
- [About Catskill, New York](#)





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 **two-part statement** of experience with Montessori or progressive education; along with a description of operational experience with non-academic functions;
- 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

The full-time salary range for this position is \$150,000 - \$185,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors which include years of experience, educational background, and expertise.



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES