



Mid-Peninsula High School

Inspired learning.



**Position Statement for  
Head of School  
Mid-Peninsula High School  
Menlo Park, CA  
July 2022**



## THE OPPORTUNITY

A warm and joyous community, Mid-Peninsula High School is passionately mission-aligned and proud of its long record of being a “small school with big benefits.” This academic, college preparatory high school welcomes a range of learners, encourages their growth, and provides a broad array of opportunities for student engagement and activity. At Mid-Pen process trumps product, the student is the focus, and the aim is to leverage strengths. For 42 years, Mid-Pen has successfully inspired students along their individual paths and emphasized love of learning. A strong and thriving Mid-Pen community of learners seeks its next Head of School, commencing in July of 2022.



## MISSION

Mid-Pen’s mission and core values are clear, powerful and fully embraced by all members of the school community:

*“Dedicated to the belief that all students belong with expert and compassionate teachers, Mid-Pen empowers students with the knowledge and purpose to impact a complex world.”*

*Four ideals serve as the building blocks of our learning community: Respect, Kindness, Acceptance, and Responsibility. We believe these core values are vital for a supportive and productive educational environment.*

*Respect is fundamental to a community. Above all, we must regard each other with a measure of consideration and understanding.*

*Kindness comes from respect for one another. We can look at each other with understanding and gentleness when we have already developed a mutual appreciation.*

*Acceptance of ourselves and others stems from mutual respect and kindness. Acceptance is more than the acknowledgment of our commonality and differences. It is the belief that in recognizing each other as individuals, our greatest strength lies in our ability to learn together.*

*Finally, because we create and foster respect, kindness, and acceptance for each other, we have developed the very essence of community: responsibility, not just for ourselves, but for one another.*



## HISTORY AND LOCATION

Founded in 1979, public high school teachers Phil Bliss and Herman Ohme saw the need for a supportive, flexible school environment especially designed for students who had struggled in public schools. Typical of a Silicon Valley start-up, Mid-Pen originated in the living room of Ohme's Palo Alto home. In response to Prop 13, which caused many public school districts to abandon their summer school programs, Mid-Pen created a summer program which became the catalyst for its school-year enrollment. Steady enrollment

growth resulted in a number of moves before the school undertook its first successful capital campaign, raising \$2 million in a matter of months and enabling the purchase and renovation of a warehouse in Menlo Park which became the school's permanent home. Perched atop the Hetch Hetchy water conduit (underneath the leased parking lot and field) and bounded by the expansive Facebook campus, a light-filled school building feels spacious; there are outdoor gathering spaces, and land that will soon house an additional school building.

## THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

### Students

There are currently 138 students at Mid-Pen and *each and every* one is known fully by *each and every* member of the community—teachers, fellow students, and staff. Mutual respect, affection and delight in the close relationships formed at Mid-Pen is voiced by everyone in the community as a key strength of this joyous and purposeful school. Difference is honored and celebrated, and built into the ethos and pedagogy of the school. Some students hail from large and impersonal schools, some are

graduates of special programs attending to their learning and emotional needs, and “neurotypical” students simply seek a warm and enveloping school community in which they can explore, enjoy the “no cuts” athletic program, join an instrumental ensemble, and leap into meaningful intellectual pursuits with kind and supportive teachers. In conversations, students openly discuss how they learn and appreciate the help received from adults. One student said, “At Mid-Pen, I thrive. School doesn’t have to hurt anymore.”



### Faculty

Faculty members also hail from a variety of backgrounds, and whether they discovered the educational oasis at Mid-Pen forty or four years ago, all embrace the mission and core values of the school. It is challenging work differentiating as much as Mid-Pen teachers are asked to do, but, as one teacher reflected “Ethically, if we are taking students who need support, we need to *support* them!” Indeed, said another member of the adult community, “We empower teachers to empower students.”



Many traditions at the school were designed as casual, inclusive celebrations; teachers look forward to those community-building events (barbecues, beach retreats, Thanksgiving gatherings) to be restored after the pandemic. The humor that fuels daily interactions (“we built a tall chain-link fence which is covered with ivy so we’re definitely ‘Ivy-League’ now!”) fuels the camaraderie among the faculty. In this intimate environment the adult community is used to collaborative decision-making and a team approach to problem-solving.



### **Governance**

There are currently 18 trustees of the school, and this volunteer Board is skilled, strategic and deeply committed to Mid-Pen. Most are **not** currently parents at the school; some are parents of graduates, some are community members, and many were simply recruited for their particular skill set and community-mindedness. Together, they have an impressive record of assessing the needs of the school, attending to thoughtful governance practices, and keeping their sights focussed on the future needs of this singular community of learners. In short, this is a high-functioning Board that supports the Head of School and leaves the daily life to the expertise of the administration and faculty.

### **FACILITIES AND FINANCES**

The Mid-Pen building is an impressive refurbishment of a warehouse which has been converted into a creative and functional learning space. With classrooms, gymnasium, music room, study spaces, offices, and open interconnections as well as ample parking, outdoor learning and dining areas, the school is a welcoming and comfortable home to students, teachers, administrators, and staff. There are nooks outfitted with benches, hallways displaying student artwork, and abundant evidence of the school mascot: a bright red dragon!

The school currently enjoys a strong financial position; the result of good management by the administration and wise counsel from the Board's

finance committee. There is about 800K left on the mortgage on their classroom building, which is now worth over 10 million. An excellent benefits package supplements salaries that are now reaching for the 75th percentile in comparable NAIS schools. Plans for a new 6,400-square-foot building are shaping up, and a campaign for \$5M is well underway and will enable the new building project as well as refurbishments on their 20-year-old core building. Continued strong reserves support the school in such challenges as the Covid-19 pandemic. All in all, the school is financially well-positioned, and all agree that a modest increase in enrollment, which is widely regarded as “do-able” will create further ease and allow for the school to keep addressing some of the cost-of-living challenges—most notably housing—in the area.



## THE PROGRAM

The most significant feature of the Mid-Pen academic program is the high degree of individualization that it supports. The academic program is essentially mainstream, with the proviso that a student who needs extra support will receive it and move forward. Students complete four years of English along with the requisite number of courses in math, science, history, language and the arts. American Sign Language is offered at a high level, and students can gain significant proficiency. The visual and performing arts electives are strong, with a music program that supports countless ensembles, as well as high level theatrical productions. The athletic program encourages students by a no-cuts policy, and the result is that over 65% of the students play a team sport. Most students complete the University of California A-G requirements for admissions to the UC and Cal State systems. The pedagogy is progressive, with cross-disciplinary projects, cross-graded classes and experiential learning leading to deeper understanding and stable building blocks scaffolding learning. Equity is linked to learning at Mid-Pen, and the newly hired Director of Teaching, Learning, and Equity is committed to working with the faculty to assure that the program is both accessible and relevant. Creative and engaging extensions captivate students' interest; one student related how her science class had visited a forensics laboratory, tackled an unsolved murder case, and came to understand the science used in pathology reports and forensic research. In an immersive travel experience in Greece, students learned the music of ancient instruments, visited amphitheatres and read Greek plays.



The Core program is the school's comprehensive and impressive advising program. Coordinated by the school counselor, Core groups often stay together for the four years of high school and build deep bonds. Essentially, a faculty member becomes, "an expert," in his Core student's learning and living. Student-led conferences with parents are a hallmark of the school, and while Core teachers coordinate communication about each one of their students (facilitated by frequent "kid" meetings where teachers can share updates and perspectives) the students themselves gain self-knowledge through this process, and graduate as advocates for their own learning and growth.

Newly instituted DragonWeek allows students to take immersive and cross-disciplinary "mini-courses" and is widely hailed as a highlight of the year for the eclectic array of courses offered and the friendships formed in the multi-grade experiences.



## STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES

Mid-Pen embraces its mission. Teachers delight in working with students, and students express their appreciation and affection for teachers; there is warmth and kindness deeply embedded in the learning culture at the school. Trustees at Mid-Pen understand governance and are strategic in their focus. There is remarkable stability at the school, with enrollment challenges addressed in recent years and low turnover of faculty. The challenges and opportunities that will face the next head of school include:

**Administrative structure:** At Mid-Pen, everyone pitches in and assumes a range of seemingly disparate duties. This sense of shared responsibility also has resulted in the need for greater clarity in the lines of responsibility and the need for the next head to assess the administrative structure at the school, to clarify roles, and develop a collaborative and communicative team.

**Continued Commitment to Diversity:** Mid-Pen has a long-held and heartfelt commitment to being an inclusive and welcoming community, particularly of neuro-diverse learners. Sustaining this close-knit community in which students, teachers, staff and parents experience a profound sense of belonging and are able to “be ourselves” is central to the school’s identity. Of great importance to this environment is strengthening the racial, socio-economic and religious diversity in the school community.

**Strategic Initiatives:** With strong and stable enrollment and low turnover among a talented and committed teaching faculty and staff, the Strategic Plan of the school looks to the future and seeks to sustain current momentum. The next head will work with the Board and administration to review, update and implement the Strategic Plan, complete the \$5 Million dollar capital campaign—The Mid-Pen Promise—and initiate and oversee the construction of a new building and renovation of current facilities.



**Attention to Student Support:** A hallmark of Mid-Pen is academic, social and emotional support for students. Programmatic and structural review, better coordination of services, improved training, and more effective communication will re-energize and clarify learning support and affirm the critical importance of serving individual students while nurturing relationships among students, faculty and families. The daily Core (advising) program is a strength of the school that requires further coordination with learning support and counseling, and careful oversight for equity and inclusion. College and career counseling has also been identified as an area for growth and improvement.

**Technology:** Central to Mid-Pen is providing personal attention to students and tending to the relationships that are at the heart of this school's culture. With growth in enrollment and the pandemic, the time has come for attention to be given to how a more robust technological infrastructure could support the academic needs and administrative functions.

**Program:** By capitalizing on the faculty's strengths, versatility and talents, Mid-Pen offers a remarkable array of courses and activities for its students. In the next part of the school's journey, Mid-Pen hopes to capitalize on student interests and leverage

its location in the heart of Silicon Valley. Continual refinement of the school's program that will help Mid-Pen meet its mission to *"empower students with the knowledge and purpose to impact a complex world."*

**Cost of living:** Many—perhaps most—teachers, staff and administrators commute significant distances to get to the school. While there is likely no short-term solution to the problem, the rising cost and quality of living on the peninsula deserves attention and strategic planning, especially as some of the long-term employees of the school retire.



## PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The school seeks a leader who understands and embraces the distinct mission and purpose of the school and will leverage its many strengths for continued growth and development. A visible leader, who brings humor and community spirit will find a warm, delight-filled home at Mid-Pen. A Head of School who appreciates all the dimensions of diversity, most especially around all the individual learning profiles evident in the students at Mid-Pen, will be the best and most articulate advocate for its great strengths as an institution. The school seeks a leader who is a great listener and has an open-door and “out and about” leadership style. As one teacher commented, “We need a person with a high EQ - a calm, psychologically astute and sophisticated educator.” Lastly, Mid-Pen seeks a head of school who is an excellent communicator and has a record of simultaneously inward-looking and outward-looking community building and strategic planning.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Candidates interested in applying to become Mid-Pen’s next Head of School may apply online at: <https://rg175/candidate/signup>.

The application includes:

- Letter of interest
- Resume
- Writing sample (can be an article, educational philosophy, or personal statement)
- List of five references

Please contact Catherine Hunter ([cshunter33@gmail.com](mailto:cshunter33@gmail.com)) and/or Debbie Reed ([dereed2014@gmail.com](mailto:dereed2014@gmail.com)) with questions.

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **August 1, 2021**.

