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# EMERSON SCHOOL

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN  
HEAD OF SCHOOL  
JULY 2015

[www.emerson-school.org](http://www.emerson-school.org)

## Statement on Giftedness



“The terms *gifted* and/or *academically talented* describe children who possess one or more unusually heightened innate or demonstrated abilities: excellent academic aptitude and/or achievement; sophisticated abstract, creative, or divergent thinking; advanced use of language; an acute sense of perception, strong powers of observation, and/or a keen sense of humor; distinct emotional sensitivity and/or intensity; extraordinary memory; persistence and resilience; motivation and intellectual curiosity; and outstanding talent in the performing and visual arts.

The distinctive qualities which these students exhibit in some areas may exist in combination with average aptitude or relative weakness in others. Perhaps not surprisingly, since these students’ gifts place them so far ahead of the “norm” in significant ways, uneven (asynchronous) patterns of development tend to characterize this population, and gifted and/or academically talented children tend not to conform to any one stereotype or checklist of traits.”

## THE POSITION

Like its philosopher namesake, Emerson School, in vibrant Ann Arbor, Michigan, is committed to the concepts of individualism and intellectual freedom. While the school uses the term “gifted and academically talented” to describe the students it serves, there really is no common term in the lexicon of independent schools to accurately capture either the unique mission of Emerson or its approach to fulfilling that mission—which it does year in and year out.

Emerson’s 40 years of success are confirmed by legions of loyal alums who remain engaged and who unabashedly declare their love for the school; by devoted parents, current and past, who declare that their children simply would have been neither as happy nor as successful without Emerson; and by the many long-term faculty and staff who are genuinely passionate about the school and often declare, “This is the best job I’ve ever had. Why would I ever want to leave?”

As it enters its fifth decade and enrolls 380 boys and girls in grades K-8, Emerson School is in excellent shape. Emerson seeks an experienced Head who, beginning on July 1, 2015, will leverage and further develop the school’s considerable strengths. The new Head will collaborate with faculty and staff to implement the mission of the school; keep the school relevant and a leader in gifted and talented education; and work with the Board and parents to maximize the benefits of both groups as partners in the success of the school. In addition, he or she will serve as the “face” of the school and forge relationships with the broader Ann Arbor and independent school communities.

The new Head will need to understand and embrace the unique mission of the school as a place that serves gifted, academically talented, and, in some cases, twice-exceptional students and allows faculty the flexibility to do what is necessary to support the whole child in his or her academic, social, emotional, and physical development. The Head must be comfortable with the creativity, flexibility



and, sometimes, imprecision inherent in serving this student population with this group of dedicated faculty and staff.

The school seeks a Head with a strong academic background who can effectively manage the day-to-day operations of the school to maximize fulfillment of the mission and lead the school community to keep Emerson at the forefront of effectiveness amid evolving societal factors and a changing educational landscape.

## SCHOOL HISTORY

In 1973, Jean Navarre, an Ann Arbor mother, founded Emerson School when she realized that the needs of her academically gifted child were not being met in public school. Emerson opened in that year with two faculty and nine gifted students and was designated by the state as an educational institution for grades K-6 the following year.

The school grew quickly in size and reputation. In 1983, 160 students moved onto the current campus in Ann Arbor. Construction continued over the next three decades: in 1988, a “specials wing” for art, music, science, and computer instruction was completed, in 1991 the Middle School opened with 42 students and four new classrooms, and in 2004 space was added in the Middle School to accommodate a drama room and black box theater, a science lab with a greenhouse, and a pottery room. In 2006, Emerson completed a new K-2 wing with six classrooms. The library and media center was renovated in 2009. Just last year, Emerson kicked off its “Building STEAM” campaign to add four new Middle School classrooms and an Arts and Innovation Center. The campaign has reached over 95% of its fundraising goal.



## *The Role of Gifted Education*



“To support our mission, Emerson provides intellectually rich and appropriately challenging curricula, enlightened guidance, and an atmosphere of ongoing support and encouragement. By offering educational programs that emphasize breadth and depth of learning, we build a foundation that can lead gifted and/or academically talented children into balanced development. We recognize that gifted students, like all children, may be affected by learning differences, attention issues, or emotional difficulties which can interfere with self-expression and performance. These children can be susceptible to heightened levels of anxiety because they are often highly aware both of their gifts and of discrepancies between their strengths and weaknesses. They may expect themselves or may be expected by others to achieve perfection. Emerson’s role is to guide all of our students to make maximum use of their potential, to lead happy, engaged, meaningful lives, and to make significant contributions to society.”



## THE SCHOOL TODAY

Today, a committed group of talented, experienced teachers challenges, excites, and engages the whole child, helping students develop a lifelong love for learning. Small class sizes ensure individualized instruction, and teachers have the flexibility to craft and tweak their own curricula based on the gifts and needs of each and every student.

At Emerson, being smart is “cool,” and every student is gifted in unique ways. This welcoming, diverse community of learners explores subjects and passions together, unearthing talents that distinguish them in an atmosphere that allows them to thrive.

## ACADEMICS

Emerson’s rigorous academic curriculum challenges the whole child, teasing out interests and skills through in-depth exploration of subject matters. Students engage fully with material and learn to think, explore, and understand. The result of Emerson’s academic program is joyful learning.

Core programs impart basic instruction that follow students from the beginning of their academic journeys through Emerson graduation. Students gain in-depth instruction in language arts, math, science, social studies, and world languages, as well as specialized instruction in computers and technology, music, physical education, theatre, and visual arts. Technology is integrated into core classroom activities across multiple disciplines and devices as students are taught to select and use appro-





priate technology to assist in problem-solving, collaboration, information processing, communication, and creative expression. Students gain fundamental skills and knowledge essential for participation in a global, technology-driven world. Emerson's technology resources are abundant, including mobile and fixed video conferencing studios, a mobile podcasting studio, iMac and PC computer labs, HD projectors in every classroom, and Apple TVs in nearly every classroom. The Middle School Bring Your Own Device program allows students easy access to online tools and resources that supplement in-class learning.



Students at Emerson learn to express ideas clearly, state opinions persuasively, and discover the creative possibilities of words through Emerson's integrated language arts program. They develop communication skills through writing, reading, speaking, listening, and spelling. Emerson's library is a welcoming place with over 11,000 volumes that fosters love of reading and sharing of ideas. A rigorous math curriculum teaches students to use reasoning and apply math skills to real-world problems. Emerson's science program is designed to develop skills through the scientific method, ensure a strong knowledge base, and provide opportunities for students to learn by doing and discover new ways of looking at the world. Social studies instruction begins with investigations of neighborhoods, families, and communities in Lower School, developing into individualized units on immigration, Michigan history, regional studies, and United States and world history, as students progress through the school.

World language instruction at Emerson provides a window into disparate cultures around the globe. In kindergarten and first grade students study Spanish; in second and third grade, French; in fourth and fifth grade, Mandarin Chinese. Middle School students choose from French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, or Latin instruction to pursue a three-year course of study.

The Middle School schedule is structured to allow students to focus on five discipline-driven core classes in the morning. Students have a mid-day rotation of one trimester each of visual arts, theatre arts, and study skills (sixth)/health (seventh, eighth). Time is allotted after lunch and during recess for elective courses and interaction with advisors. Students may take up to six electives each year. Electives reflect the vast array of interests of the students and the teachers and include: band, orchestra, drama, show choir, drawing, newspaper, quilting, Steampunk, Science Olympiad, Inventors' Club, Science Ambassadors, photography, outdoor education, gardening, and more.

Each Middle School student is assigned yearly to an advisor who provides guidance and supports students as they undergo the various learning, social, physical, and emotional changes endemic to their age. Advisory groups are part of larger "houses," in an approach that unites students from all grade levels in the Middle School. Houses take part in a variety of activities and fun competitions throughout the year, and the system promotes inter-grade camaraderie.

A robust Learning Support Program is an integral part of the school's commitment to serving the needs of each child. In addition, a school counselor promotes the social and emotional development of students as they develop intellectually and academically.

## STUDENT LIFE

A host of co-curricular activities augments the rich core components of an Emerson education. Lower School students engage in "specials" several times per week, gaining exposure to computers, the library, physical education, music, art, science, and world languages. Instruction continues in these "special" subjects throughout Middle School through core courses, rotation courses, and electives.



Music instruction begins in kindergarten, as students develop a sense of rhythm and voice, as well as an enjoyment of music in a fun, friendly setting. Band is offered beginning in fourth grade, and some students begin strings in orchestra as early as second grade. Seasonal band and orchestra performances bring the community together to celebrate the arts. Visual art classes inspire students to express themselves creatively, and yearly art shows are all-school celebrations. A Middle School theatre arts elective produces a musical and a play each year. Students learn hands-on how to produce, from set design to staging and performance. Two-thirds of Middle School students participate in the musical production.

Three times a week, all students participate in physical education classes that promote healthy lifelong habits and help students develop physical skills such as coordination, speed, and vision, while also cultivating core values such as self-esteem, leadership, teamwork, and responsibility. Team sports include cross country, soccer, track, basketball, and volleyball.

The after-care program serves a significant percentage of Emerson students and works closely with the day faculty to enhance learning and co-curricular activities. Summer at Emerson supports the Emerson mission by challenging students to discover and enhance individual talents and creative abilities. Throughout summer camp, there are opportunities for each child to grow, explore, discover, create, imagine, play, and have fun. Students can choose a morning or afternoon half-day camp or both. Summer at Emerson boasts over 75% attendance of non-Emerson students.

At Emerson, students learn to share their considerable gifts with their communities as they become good global citizens. Community service and character education are critical components of the Emerson program. Students participate in activities including pancake breakfast fundraisers, visits to senior centers, an intergenerational tech class, blood drives, and video conferencing with international students.





## PHYSICAL CAMPUS

Emerson has steadily expanded and improved its 20-acre campus in Ann Arbor. The school's buildings include a recently renovated library and media center; two computer labs; four science labs and a middle school greenhouse; a pottery room; several sports fields; a nature center; a playground; a small observatory; and a garden. The newly-launched Building STEAM campaign will add four new middle school classrooms and fund the construction of an Arts and Innovation Center, which will complement Emerson's commitment to preparing students for a 21st century world.



## ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

The fifth-largest city in Michigan, Ann Arbor is a lively college town just 45 miles west of Detroit. Home to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor is distinguished by its appreciation for intellectual curiosity, innovation, and diversity. The University employs about 30,000 workers, and companies flock to the area, attracted by the University's resources and the skills of its graduates.

Known as "Tree Town," Ann Arbor includes wooded areas in its parks and residential neighborhoods; the city contains more than 50,000 trees on its streets alone. City and University parks provide ample green space for outdoor recreation and relaxation. Over 150 parks and recreation areas provide sports fields, bike paths, ice rinks, a skateboard park, swimming pools, and the University's Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum contain over 400 acres of trails, riverfront, gardens, and a tropical conservatory.

A sophisticated downtown features frequent international caliber live performances, festivals, and cultural attractions, as well as eclectic restaurants, shops, and night life. Residents adopt a sense of pride for and ownership of the University of Michigan, visiting the University's many museums and cheering on its sports teams.

Ann Arbor experiences all four seasons, and many locals enjoy outdoor activities typical of those seasons. It is an energetic, intellectually stimulating college town characterized by Midwestern values and work ethic.

## STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

Candidates will find the following key strengths at Emerson School:

- A school that knows what it is and “walks its own talk.”
- A school that is already successfully fulfilling its mission. The new Head will build on a solid foundation to keep the school strong, relevant, exciting, and a leader in education.
- An exceptionally dedicated, skilled, cohesive team, passionate about the mission of the school and totally student-centered.
- A strong financial picture that features low debt, regular operating surpluses, a tradition of fiscal prudence, and a high percentage of full-pay families.
- Highly committed and dedicated families who care about and support the school and who value the school’s strong sense of community.
- A campus, including a brand-new Arts and Innovation Center scheduled to open in the spring of 2015, which meets the needs of school programs.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Among the challenges and opportunities the new Head will encounter are:

- Continuing to fulfill the mission of the school while striking the appropriate balance between a systematic, well-articulated curriculum (*what* the school teaches) and the flexibility and faculty autonomy necessary to adapt to each student’s particular needs (*how* the school teaches).
- Assuring that academic excellence and rigor remain a hallmark of the school. At the same time, understanding that each student has unique gifts and talents and varying and, possibly, complex intellectual, social, physical, and emotional needs.
- Because of impending retirements, replacing departing faculty and staff members with highly capable new individuals who can become part of and add to the collegial culture of the school, and be effective in fulfilling the unique mission of serving Emerson’s particular student population.
- Continuing the refinement and expansion of nascent evaluation and professional development tools for both faculty and staff.
- Refining and communicating effective policies and procedures for supporting faculty and staff in need of improvement and providing appropriate ways for parents to share concerns with the school, for the school to address them, and for closing the loop with parents.
- Experience with developing, clearly articulating, and uniformly and equi-





tably enforcing school expectations, policies, and procedures.

- Continuing the diversity work of the school, including making the case for the importance of all kinds of diversity among students and adults on campus, with particular emphasis on socio-economic diversity.
- Developing additional financial aid resources to meet the school's stated goal of increasing the percentage of families receiving tuition assistance.
- Fulfilling the programmatic vision of the new Arts and Innovation Center.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITIES OF THE NEXT HEAD OF SCHOOL

The successful candidate will possess, among others, the following qualifications:

- Experienced Head of School.
- Ability to understand and embrace the unique mission of Emerson School as serving gifted and academically talented students while also addressing the developmental, emotional, physical, and social needs of the whole child.
- Comfort with the “coloring outside the lines” nature of the Emerson school mission, students, faculty, and program.
- Prior experience as a classroom teacher in a K-8 setting.
- Strong experience with curriculum development, review, mapping, and implementation.
- Demonstrated track record of success in tactfully managing, supporting, developing, hiring, inspiring, evaluating, and holding accountable the very best teachers and administrators.
- Experience with transparent, clearly articulated, and well-defined roles in an effective partnership with the Board.
- Understanding of and demonstrated ability to form effective partnerships with active, engaged parents with high expectations.
- Eagerness to participate in the advancement and development efforts of the school.
- Willingness to seek out, embrace, and use tools of modern technology.
- Financial literacy and budget experience.
- Demonstrated experience in goal setting, progress monitoring, and feedback loops as effective leadership and management tools.



# To APPLY

Interested candidates should submit the following materials confidentially as *separate* PDF attachments in one email:

- Cover letter expressing interest in the Emerson School position;
- Current resume;
- Statement of educational philosophy;
- List of five supervisory references with name, phone number, and email address of each (*references will be contacted only with the candidate's permission*).

## **SKIP KOTKINS**

Senior Search Associate

CARNEY, SANDOE & ASSOCIATES

44 Bromfield Street, Boston, MA 02108

**skip.kotkins@carneysandoe.com**

206-948-4916



**SKIP KOTKINS** is a member of the Carney, Sandoe & Associates Search and Consulting Group. A graduate of the Lakeside School, Skip went on to earn his B.A. in American Civilization from Williams College and his MBA from Harvard University Graduate School of Business. In addition to a career leading Skyway Luggage Company, Skip has served as a trustee, board chair, facilitator, conference speaker, author, and advisor to independent schools. He was a trustee and officer of both the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) and the National Association of Independent School (NAIS). Skip has chaired the board of eight different non-profit organizations, including the world's largest Rotary Club and the largest Jewish congregation in the northwestern quarter of the US.

CARNEY, SANDOE & ASSOCIATES

44 BROMFIELD STREET

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02108

WWW.CARNEYSANDOE.COM

