

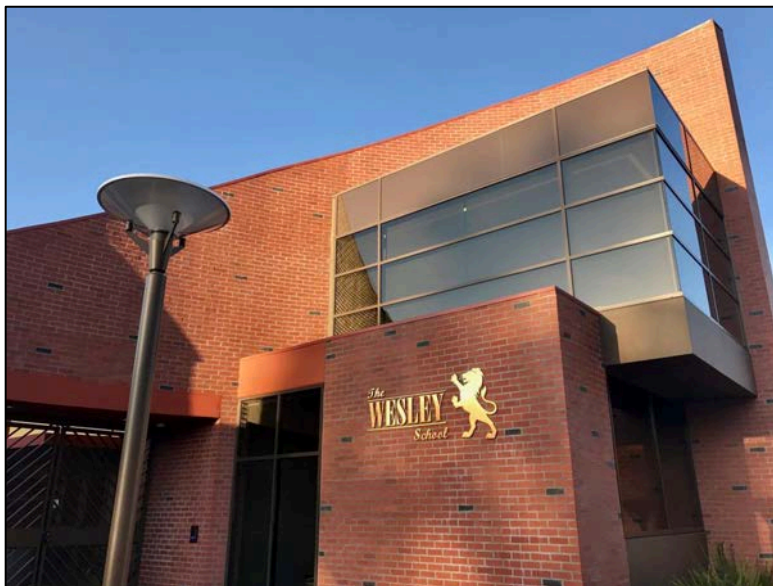


Head of School Position Statement
The Wesley School
North Hollywood, California
July 1, 2019

RG 175
Change as Opportunity

THE PLACE

On a wide, tree-lined avenue in the North Hollywood neighborhood of Los Angeles, there stands a stately, red brick church. Behind the church, also in red brick, are school buildings and courtyards like cloisters with soft vegetation and fountains, crisscrossed by walkways, tidy but brought to life by the happy voices of children. This is The Wesley School, at once a beehive of activity and an oasis of tranquility in the midst of the most vibrant of cities. With spacious facilities, well-tended play areas, and a new red brick building featuring several classrooms and housing the School's administration, Wesley is beautifully maintained and filled to its capacity of 320 students in Kindergarten through Grade Eight. It is difficult to convey in words the appeal of this campus, but it is palpable when one is there. Reminiscent of a New England college, it exudes an approach



to teaching and learning that underscores the School's mission of inspiring its students.

Initially established more than fifty years ago at St. Michael's Episcopal church in nearby Studio City, the School and church leadership parted company in the late 1990's and many faculty and students left the church campus along with the administration. In time, the

First United Methodist Church offered them its facilities, so with a nod to 18th Century history, the School renamed itself in honor of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who had himself left the Episcopal Church, and it has thrived ever since. The School has a 50-year lease on the buildings it uses and no religious affiliation with the church, with whose leadership the School enjoys excellent relations.





THE PEOPLE

Nearly all the students and families at Wesley come from across the San Fernando Valley, the east-west plain that lies to the north of the Santa Monica mountains. The communities of the Valley range from modest to upscale, and the student body at Wesley reflects the demographics of the area. With 43% of the students identifying as people of color, the School's commitment to diversity and inclusion is everywhere evident. Couple this with the non-glitz, low-key persona of the parent body and you have a place that can call itself, accurately and proudly, "the least private private school around." "It's a school that fosters growth, love, and acceptance," a current parent writes. Wesley's parents are socially progressive, inclusive in their attitudes toward race, gender and identity, but comfortable with an environment in which students wear traditional uniforms and call their teachers "Ms." or "Mr."

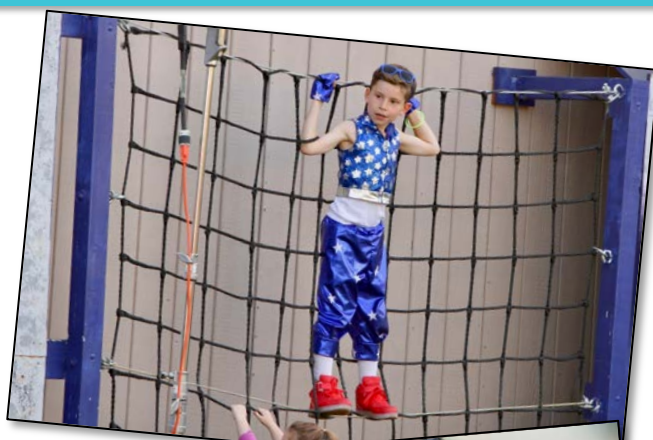
In a recent survey, one parent described the School this way: "There's a culture of empathy and inclusiveness—the moral and ethical values of a community that is without judgment of social or economic status. This is unique to Wesley. We are not the STEM school, the celebrity school or the liberal urban intelligentsia school. We are the little school with truly empathic kids...prepped and ready to explore the world as global citizens carrying their education and values of social justice."

Parents speak of Wesley as "a real community—a family, really" where honesty and transparency are honored in people's dealings with each other and with the School. The Parents' Association sponsors talks on subjects of contemporary interest: this year's

topics include Gender Differences, Learning Differences, and Differing Socio-Economic Strata. The adult atmosphere is one of honest inquiry and intelligent curiosity; these are bright, successful people who prefer the relative modesty and institutional humility that Wesley offers. As a group, the parents are happy to say “yes” when asked to participate and for the last two years there has been 100% parent (and faculty/staff) participation in Annual Giving. The absence of elitism and sense of entitlement commonly found in LA independent schools is refreshing.

Not surprisingly, there is tremendous support for the community-wide Committee of Diversity and Inclusivity, started by the Board of Trustees but subscribed to by teachers, administrators, trustees, and parents alike. Few schools can rival Wesley in its overt embrace of diversity and participation in the Committee of Diversity and Inclusion (CODI) is but one clear example.

The same sense of egalitarianism exists among the students. With a range of ability levels, learning styles, and areas of interest, students are easily engaged by an experienced and professional faculty, many of whom have been at the School for a surprisingly long time given that Wesley is only 20 years old. Students participate in the thrice-weekly Community gatherings and one recent week, the Kindergarten was in charge: getting the crowd’s attention, leading the Pledge of Allegiance, singing a song of Friendship which each member of the class then defined out loud, microphone in hand. The older students applauded and cheered; the



kindergarteners beamed. Even the coldest of hearts would have been moved. There are many such moments at Wesley. Following the Kindergarteners' performance, representatives of Middle School teams gave the results of their games or previewed upcoming contests, each of the latter concluding with, "We ready!" and echoed by the entire student body. The sense of mutual support and affection was palpable.

With an enrollment limit of 320, Wesley is of a size where every child is known, usually by every adult. Thirty-two (32) students in two sections of 16 each is the norm in Kindergarten through Grade Five with slight upward variances, while the enrollment grows a bit in Middle School to two sections of 20 each. The Middle School Student Council is made up of a diverse crew of debaters, athletes, editors, and mathematicians—all great kids. None complain about the homework load. None resent the demands on their time from multiple activities. All praise

their teachers. All are proud of their school. All would attend Wesley again if given the opportunity to go elsewhere. Unusual.

The faculty appear deserving of the students' praise. With a sound mix of long-tenured and relatively new, Wesley's teachers are solid in their subjects and their craft. As one of them says, "We look traditional but we have the freedom to create and explore." Feedback from secondary schools across Los Angeles is that Wesley students come well-prepared and many are immediately accelerated, particularly in Math. The two groups of teachers—elementary and middle school—tend to work and cluster together, but there is no real sense of silos. End-of-year pass-the-class conferences assure continuity of care, concern and attentiveness to individual students' needs, while the overall atmosphere of inclusivity and friendliness prevails among teachers as it does among the students.

It is almost *de rigueur* for teachers and administrators in independent schools these days to complain about parents; many schools wish to assure a potential Head that their parents are the most difficult imaginable, but there is none of that at Wesley—not one word. There is real affection between parents and teachers who view one another as partners in bringing up children rather than antagonists. Again, unusual. And how refreshing to hear a teacher comment that, "The faculty I work with on a daily basis are terrific teachers and people. They make coming to work and collaboration a fantastic experience."



THE PROGRAM

With academic excellence a stated part of the School's mission and a student-centered approach at its core across all grade levels, Wesley's students develop the confidence to tackle a challenging program and meet or exceed the school's learning expectations. All graduates are proficient in reading, math and social studies, and they can demonstrate skill in public speaking, problem-solving and critical-thinking. They are comfortable performing in front of others, conversing with adults, working in groups, seeking assistance when needed, and reaching out to help their fellow students when help is needed—all necessary skills for an ill-defined future employment market.

There's no falling through the cracks at Wesley. In the Lower School, classes are 16 students with a lead teacher and an associate. There are two learning specialists who provide individual support as needed for students in K through Grade Five. A coherent curriculum includes Readers' and Writers' Workshop in language arts and Everyday Math to ensure that the core subjects are well grounded.

In the lively classrooms of the Lower School, students move about freely, interact with teachers and with each other, and are encouraged to find their own voice right from the start—e.g., Kindergarten leading the Community gathering. Evidence of



student engagement and achievement is visible in the many displays that dot the campus, whether put up on walls, hung from ceilings, or posted on windows. These students do good work and are proud of it. Recent visitors found students working collaboratively in math classes across the grade levels solving problems, identifying equalities, and developing numeric fluency, a content area in which the School excels.

A constructivist approach to learning and the asking of essential questions encourages interdisciplinary work and results in a Signature Program, beginning in

Kindergarten. At all grade levels students adopt cross-curricular projects based on themes appropriate to their ages. In First Grade, for example, each student selects an animal, draws the creature, constructs its habitat, writes a poem about it, and later presents the portfolio in a Community gathering that includes parents. As the students mature, so do the themes and subjects of their projects: Native Americans in California and individuals in the American Revolution are two examples of upper level projects. In addition to the Signature Program, the core subjects are enriched by music, art, physical education, Spanish and computer science in the Lower School. Interscholastic athletic competition begins in Grade Four and outdoor education begins in Grade Three with a day-long trip and in Grades Four and Five, the students are having overnight excursions.

The Middle School (Grades 6-8) features a close-knit, collegial faculty who preside over a curriculum that is both challenging and age-appropriate. In Grade Six three core teachers coordinate a transitional program for students



coming from the Lower School or from other schools (Wesley's class sizes increase from 16 to 20 at this point). Departmentalization of the curriculum in Grades Seven and Eight both paves and eases the way to a high school course of study. Everyday Math advances the themes of critical thinking and problem-solving as it becomes increasingly differentiated with students studying algebra by Grade Eight. Achievement-level grouping assures a suitable challenge for each student and without exception parents credit the math program for their students "crushing it" in secondary schools across Los Angeles.



The English curriculum engages students and stretches them by including both young adult literature and classics in its reading program, while in writing the emphasis is on clear expression and imagination. Creativity is never far from the surface for Wesley's students and the facility with which they express themselves is refreshing. Not surprisingly, both the reading program and the social studies curriculum tend to reflect strong multi-cultural and global interests. Spanish is part of the



Worth special mention is Wesley's commitment to public speaking. All students, from K to Grade 8, are given numerous empowering opportunities to speak in public. Whether in a Community gathering or as a lawyer in Mock Trial presentations, explaining a Signature Project in the lower grades, or speaking up in Community Circle or Advisory, "students are given ample opportunities to share thoughts, knowledge and opinions in a safe environment," as one faculty member proudly notes.

emphasis on including the broader world in the course of study and science classes provide a deeper understanding of the broader world and of oneself.

Enriching the School day for all students are opportunities to participate in music, performing arts, computer, Mock Trial, and the visual arts. Wesley's athletic program is comprehensive for a school its size and includes no-cut teams in football, soccer, basketball, volleyball and a co-ed golf team! Outdoor and experiential education are key components of the educational program at Wesley and the overnight trips are closely aligned with the students' social studies and science classes to assure curricular coherence and transfer learning. There is an additional focus on team-building and leadership development on the outdoor ed trips.

Culminating their experience at Wesley and in conjunction with the Eighth Grade English curriculum, the students travel to England with their teachers in the spring of the year. Visiting Stratford-on-Avon, Bath, and London's Globe Theater makes their recent study of Shakespeare come alive for these soon-to-be graduates.



FUNDRAISING AND FINANCES

Following on the heels of a capital campaign that raised \$3.6 Million and resulted in the new classroom and administration building, it is noteworthy that Annual Giving has held its own. With 100% parent, staff and Trustee participation for two years running, Annual Giving has stayed around \$400,000 without many signs of donor fatigue. Well managed from a financial standpoint, Wesley operates in the black and is able to fund depreciation. A modest debt incurred from self-borrowing during the recent construction is being paid back on schedule. While not flush, Wesley is nonetheless on steady financial footing. There is concern that upper grade tuition will soon crest \$30,000 but even if it does, it will remain substantially below market



THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

There are 19 members of Wesley's Board; 16 current parents, one alumni parent, one outside educator, and one from the church. All are unpaid volunteers and the Board is self-perpetuating. In addition to the aforementioned Committee of Diversity and Inclusivity, there are committees on Trustees, Development, and Finance, along with subcommittees for Buildings and Grounds and Investment, as well as a Master Planning Group. The Board functions cohesively and is keenly aware of its fiduciary responsibilities. It is equally aware of its boundaries and is disinclined to meddle in the School's operations.



THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Wesley is no different from most independent schools when it comes to concerns over rising tuitions. In the School's favor, though, is the leadership's historic frugality that has led to under-market tuition pricing. Still, there are very real concerns about the School's ability to maintain its socio-economic mix in the face of ever-rising costs. As in every school—particularly those with inelastic enrollment caps—that will remain an ongoing challenge. Alternative revenue streams will need to be identified as tuition income alone will be insufficient to support the faculty and program.

Other challenges facing the next Head of School include introducing efficient processes and procedures into the Administration. What worked in a school of 160 doesn't work so well in a school of 320, yet the same structures are still in place. "Communication" is an area that nearly everyone complains about—parents, faculty, or staff. The Long Range Plan calls for the construction of a new building to house modern science labs; that will require a major fundraising effort. The campaign for the recent construction raised \$3.6 million, but the next one will likely require more. With families who come from a variety of circumstances, fundraising in a finite enrollment environment is always a challenge.

But the opportunities at Wesley abound. Maintaining the historic culture of the School will be a major priority and the next Head's major joy because this is a very special place. Keeping the mix of students and families, continuing the ethos of thrift with productivity, hiring and retaining faculty that are expert but want to know each child—these are wonderful opportunities for creative leadership. Moving the school into more STEM/STEAM-related projects and programs will be a boon to the community and fun for the students. Increasing offerings in the performing arts will have immediate impact. Learning the spectrum of secondary schools and their strengths and weaknesses will enable the next Head to continue Wesley's exemplary placement record.

Other opportunities for the next Head include upgrading the existing facilities; assessing the feasibility with the Board of a new building for science and the arts; developing a professional development program that will augment a process for faculty evaluation; and maintaining Wesley's generous-but-prudent commitment to Financial Aid.



THE NEXT HEAD OF SCHOOL WILL LIKELY

- Have extensive experience teaching and leading in a K-8 environment
- Be comfortable taking the executive reins and making decisions
- Come from a school with a high-functioning administrative team
- Seek to perpetuate Wesley's culture of modesty, inclusivity, and humility
- Enjoy the company of parents, teachers and students from a variety of backgrounds
- Be an effective and clear communicator in speech and print
- Embrace Wesley's overt commitment to diversity and inclusion and further it
- Have an open-door policy that welcomes teachers, students, and parents alike
- Want to partner with the Board of Trustees to accomplish the School's strategic goals
- Be adept in managing people and not be conflict-averse
- Exude warmth, humor, good cheer and love for the job
- Be adept at faculty evaluation

APPLICATION PROCESS

Those interested in being considered for this position should send a:

- Cover letter of interest
- Current resume, and a
- Writing sample (statement of educational philosophy or anything a search committee might find of interest)

by PDF to both Debbie Reed and Tom Hudnut as follows:

dereed2014@gmail.com
626-793-9321

and

tom@tomhudnut.com
818-512-3811



APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 15, 2019