

# HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

## INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Bellevue, Washington

ifschool.org

Start Date: July 2025

INTERNATIONAL  
FRIENDS SCHOOL

国际友谊学校



Carney  
Sandoe  
& ASSOCIATES

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# Mission Statement

To prepare students to embrace the challenges of today, so they may seize the opportunities of tomorrow.

## Position Overview

International Friends School (IFS) located in Bellevue Washington, a vibrant Seattle suburb, is one of a kind in so many ways. It is only 6 years old and definitely has some aspects typical of startup schools; but in other ways, it is far ahead of what one might expect for a school only six years old. More important than where they are now, is the tremendous potential the school holds for the future.

The founding Head of School (HoS) has created something from scratch and built not only a student-centered school providing excellent education; she has also created a community of like-minded, passionate, caring and, frankly, delightful, faculty, staff, parents and students. Walking onto the campus at morning drop-off, you hear happy music from the loudspeaker, children and their parents mingling and smiling. The intangible “feel” of the school is one of joy, inclusion, and people just happy to be there. As the only Quaker school in the state, and possibly the only Quaker Chinese-immersion school globally, the school has a set of values underlying their culture and the social-emotional-learning of the children, that is strong and compelling, but not “religious.” (see section on “IFS as a Quaker school”, below).

The founder has spent most of her life overseas and feels a personal calling to do one more thing with her life in service to others, overseas. After a great deal of thought, she has decided to step down at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. She is proud of her team of school leaders; she is proud of her excellent board; she is proud of the Chinese immersion education the children receive; she is proud of the financial stability of the school. With about 2/3 of the 100 students in the early-childhood grades (and the rest in K-4) children are picking up language acquisition at the ages where it is relatively easy. IFS just plain gets it done!

The foundation is in place, including a campus with tons of outdoor space, in a location that any school would be thrilled to have. The school seeks a new head to begin in the summer of 2025 to build on the current foundation, to help move the school from startup to institutional sustainability and to partner with the board and school community to chart the path for the future and embark on that path. The next head should be conversant in Mandarin and, while not needing to be a Quaker themselves, eager to embrace the school’s Quaker values and experiential approach to education.

## About The Greater Seattle Area

Bellevue is a thriving city located in the Seattle metropolitan area, situated on the eastern shore of Lake Washington. Known for its robust economy, thriving tech industry, great schools, premier health care facilities, and excellent quality of life, Bellevue ranks on multiple “best places to live” lists. Amazon, T-Mobile, and Meta have significant employment bases in the city.



The entire area, especially the Bellevue suburb, has enjoyed an explosion of technology enterprises. Microsoft and Amazon were founded there and remain headquartered there. The same is true for Starbucks, REI, Boeing, Nordstrom and yes, even Cinnabon! Meta and Google have huge employment bases in the area. The University of Washington was just rated as one of the top ten universities *in the world!* The world's largest non-profit foundation, the Gates Foundation, is in Seattle. There is a large and vibrant health-sciences community. The population demographics and those Asian linkages provide a natural and growing pool of families interested in Mandarin language immersion for their children.

Of equal importance for the school, the area has a large and diverse quilt of independent schools. School heads cite the unusual and supportive collegiality of the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) which provides not only accreditation and a rich menu of professional development options, but also a ready-made community of mutually supportive school heads, eager to connect with their peers. IFS is on a path to its initial accreditation by NWAIS.

## IFS As A Quaker School

Many experienced independent school educators will know of and hold in high regard, the traditions of excellence in both academics and character-building of the Quaker schools in the East. In a groundbreaking format - IFS is the only Quaker school in the entire state of Washington. It is also the first Quaker school in the world to adopt a bilingual and biliterate model for English/Mandarin. IFS is a school focused on providing experiential learning in a nature-based environment.

When asked why they chose IFS for their child(ren), parents universally refer to the dual language English/Chinese immersion program. Few have much prior knowledge of Quakers or Quaker education.

What parents discover at IFS, however, is that while all schools have some kind of social-emotional-learning curriculum, the Quaker values of IFS provide a specific set of compelling values, or testimonies, that are put into action on campus:

- Simplicity
- Peace
- Integrity
- Community
- Equality
- Stewardship



These Six Testimonies are the Quaker values central to the culture of the school. Most will be very familiar and compatible with the philosophies of many contemporary educators.

These underlie the character development of students at the school. A Quaker education does not seek to instill a specific doctrine or set of beliefs, rather it seeks to encourage a certain personhood and their way of being in the world.

For example, IFS enjoys a campus that has remarkable outdoor facilities and spaces. This is frequently cited as a unique strength of the school. While outdoor education and play are inherently desirable in any school program, the program at IFS links to one of the six Quaker testimonies: Stewardship. That value is expanded to say:

- “I walk lightly upon the earth”
- “I care for all resources”
- “I care for plants and animals.”

Additionally, there is a sign that reminds all visitors that IFS is a plastic free campus.

IFS students and families love the Quaker values and confirm that IFS does not at all feel like a religious school. The intention of the program is not to favor one religion over another, but to look broadly at all world religions. Candidly, the school can do a better job of not only dispelling any misimpressions that this Quaker school is a religious school; but should actually tout the positive impact that Quaker values have on the growth and development of 21st century students. It is a distinguishing strength of the school. The six testimonies placards are proudly displayed throughout the school.



While the next Head of School need not be a Quaker themselves, they must be able to be an enthusiastic advocate for how the Quaker Testimonies of IFS enhance the full development of each child.

## Strengths of the School

Among many strengths, the new head will find:

- A community that is passionate about experiential and play-based early childhood education; passionate about Mandarin language immersion; passionate about instillation of values in young children that equip them to be self-confident, contributing, members of society.
- Many parents report that the combination of project-based-learning, outdoor play and learning about nature, and Reggio Emilia principles combine to create a wonderful learning experience for their children. A focus on the Arts and many school events are often cited as special strengths of the school.
- A remarkable campus, literally in the woods, less than a half a mile from one of the busiest freeways in the area and many high-rise office buildings. Children can be and are outside in nature all the time. And no, it doesn't "always rain in Seattle." In fact, the greater Seattle area has fewer inches of rain annually than New York City!
- Faculty and staff who care for each child, small class sizes, individualized approaches.
- A partnership with a local organization that provides on-campus support for neurodiverse children who can benefit from a variety of therapy services.
- While too young to have developed financial reserves, the school has a financial foundation stronger than one would find in most six-year-old startup schools due to continued fiscal discipline.
- The Board of Trustees has evolved from a typical founding board working shoulder to shoulder with the Head, to a more best-practices board concerned with oversight, long-term vision. The board has developed a healthy committee structure and is committed to self-education and development.



## Challenges and Opportunities

IFS has been successful and accomplished much more than most schools that are only six years old. Still, the potential for the school is far greater. The new Head of school will have a foundation to build upon. Areas that will benefit from particular attention of the new head include:

- There are multiple possible paths for the future of the school. The new Head will join with the Board and the rest of the IFS community to chart that future. Some things to consider might include:
  - » Grade ranges and long-term size of the school.
  - » Continual refinement of curricular and extra-curricular activities to meet the needs of multiple family demographics within the school community.
  - » Pedagogical approaches based on emerging research and thought leadership in teaching philosophies that are experiential and student-centered such as Reggio Emilia.
  - » Future facilities based on a clear vision of school size and grade ranges.
  - » Development of clear and compelling marketing messages that capitalize on IFS' unique strengths in order to be able to compete successfully for mission-appropriate students.
- It is continual work to professionalize the HR processes and policies and approaches to hiring and retention of qualified faculty and staff.
- While the Mandarin language program of the school is exemplary, there is a desire to be sure that English language instruction, as well as math and humanities are on a par in terms of academic quality and rigor.
- While the Early Childhood program is healthy and growing, it is necessary and will take thought and intentionality to continue to grow the elementary grades. Areas of opportunity might include retaining more EC families into the elementary grades; and finding ways to recruit new students into the elementary school who do not already have the same language fluency as those coming from IFS' own preschool.
- As the school moves out of start-up stage, it will benefit from greater clarity of who does what in an efficient administrative structure. Likewise, there is a desire for continued development and communication of policies and procedures throughout the school.
- Development of a culture of philanthropy and a systematic approach to annual fundraising will benefit all aspects of the school.
- The school community would appreciate greater clarity and inclusivity in decision making and better communication of changes.



## Desired Personal Skills and Attributes

A school the size of IFS requires a Head who is both a strategic visionary, able to capture the hearts of members of the school community; as well as a capable manager who can assure that school operations and communications are timely, efficient and effective. Among specific qualities and skills desired are:

- A hands-on leader, visible in the daily life of the school.
- A skilled educator, in the classrooms, providing leadership and support for faculty and staff.
- Familiarity with bi-lingual education and, ideally, language immersion, is highly desirable. Understanding of child development stages of language-acquisition is very helpful.
- Familiarity with early childhood and elementary education including pedagogical approaches such as Reggio Emilia, PBL, etc. A student of child development and emerging educational thought leadership.
- Ideally, fluent in Mandarin Language. If not fluent, an understanding of Chinese culture is an important attribute.
- Multicultural and international perspective is preferred.
- Excellent, clear and inspiring communicator both orally and in writing.
- Financial literacy sufficient to partner with the Board and the business office to develop budgets and drive operations to meet budget targets.
- Experience with and eagerness for fundraising, as well as understanding of a professionally operating development function.
- A committed, values-driven leader especially committed to the values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship.

# Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about International Friends School.

[School Website](#)

[IFS At a Glance](#)

[Quaker Education](#)



## 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 statement of familiarity with:
  - » Dual-language and/or language immersion education;
  - » Chinese culture;
  - » Early-childhood and elementary education.
- 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

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*The full-time equivalent salary range for this position is \$150,000 - \$175,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.*