



Assistant
Head of School
August 2024

The Massachusetts School of
Science, Creativity and Leadership

www.aceraschool.org



THE SCHOOL

Acera, The Massachusetts School of Science, Creativity and Leadership, is all about possibility. It's a school that brings imagination to life for gifted students—a place where children are challenged and inspired by a program that meets them where they are and their intrinsic curiosity about the world. With a dynamic team of educators and growing institutional momentum, Acera is seeking an Assistant Head of School to lead an uncommonly innovative and expansive program for gifted students in kindergarten through ninth grade.

MISSION

Acera enables students to have a runway that fits their potential, developing the next generation of scientists, innovators, and leaders for our world.

ABOUT ACERA

Acera's story began in 2009 when, in response to the dearth of programming for gifted students in Massachusetts public schools, founding head Courtney Dickinson conceived of a school that would serve the unique needs of high-achieving students. Courtney spent a year presenting to eager audiences in local libraries and, by the winter of 2010, she received over 65 applications to a school that did not yet exist. Acera opened with 37 students in three multiage classrooms in its first year. Enrollment grew steadily over the years, and today Acera serves 123 gifted students who hail from 27 communities in greater Boston and southern New Hampshire.

To accommodate Acera's growth in enrollment and programming, the school changed locations twice before settling into its permanent home at 5 Lowell Avenue—a facility the school was able to purchase through strong fiscal discipline and enrollment stability. Last year, Acera received a \$3 million gift to purchase an adjacent building that will house new specialty zones in the 2024-2025 school year.

[Acera's program](#) focuses on inquiry, creativity, and complex thinking, fostering a joyful environment in which gifted students engage in meaningful, authentic learning. Where traditional educational models are aimed at covering age-based curricular standards, Acera's teachers construct individualized plans for their students in which learning is grounded in interest and ability rather than age. A project-based and team-oriented approach leads students to develop critical thinking skills and grow in their understanding of the world's complexities.

Some standout elements of Acera's dynamic approach include:

- Small, multiage math groupings that address each student's level of skill and ability, including substantially accelerated options
- Robust STEAM programming in the Maker Space, Tech Hub, and Life Sciences Lab with additional new specialty zones to come online in the fall of 2024
- Year-long, whole-class interdisciplinary themes with students exploring essential questions such as "How do civilizations form?" and "What is the impact of humans upon the world around them?"
- Choice-based Creativity Stations led by specialist teachers in areas such as Woodcraft, Generative AI, and Theater & Performing Arts
- Middle school students engaging in interest-driven Inquiry, Making, and Passion Projects (IMPP), which yield real-world outcomes such as the design and construction of a classroom loft and the creation of a programmable plant watering system using Arduino, a frequently employed microcontroller platform
- The leadership of "teacherpreneurs" who are empowered to design real-time experiences that are engaging and relevant to their students
- Hands-on after school enrichment programs in science, the arts, and technology with offerings such as Stop Motion Animation and Junior Engineering Design Challenges
- An approach to social-emotional growth focused on the development of competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and managing relationships

Acera's impact resonates well beyond its walls, fostering educational partnerships with like-minded organizations such as the Lieberman Lab at MIT to make STEAM-oriented learning responsive to today's current innovations. Acera's unique public outreach initiative, the [Acera Education Innovation](#) (AceraEI), partners with school districts and leaders locally and globally to support new curriculum and whole school change which engage students in new ways.



THE POSITION

Acera's Assistant Head of School will partner with the head of school and team of divisional and academic coordinators to lead all programming and manage school operations. The Assistant Head of School's responsibilities include:

- Leading and growing a program uniquely attuned to the capacities of gifted and highly gifted students, with individualized learning pathways, early and deep exposure to STEAM topics, and the celebration of excellence across a wide array of talent areas
- Supporting teacher training and programming which safeguards students' spirits, including their mental health and well-being
- Fostering programming and dialogue which promotes diversity of thought among different ideologies and viewpoints
- Galvanizing constituents around Acera's mission and values
- Hiring and supporting teachers and empowering their entrepreneurial efforts to design experiences that generate joy and initiative for students
- Organizing the work of faculty and staff with clarity and constancy in structure balanced with a flexibility to evolve in the moment and with each situation
- Fostering a culture of freedom in which creative and capable students and staff can actualize their talents and be their best selves
- Building enduring relationships with parents: addressing their concerns appropriately, hearing their feedback, and guiding their growth in understanding the pedagogy and the journey of gifted children
- Managing school operations beyond teaching and learning and actively seeking to grow in critical functions such as fundraising and finance
- Supporting Acera's core program to be a pilot test site which catalyzes evidence based pedagogy, contributing to equity in education through AceraEI public school outreach efforts



QUALITIES & QUALIFICATIONS

Acera seeks an Assistant Head of School who:

- Believes in young people and their innate capacity to learn beyond walls and ceilings and inculcates a culture of freedom
- Understands what it means to be gifted and embraces the academic and social-emotional needs of uniquely talented and capable students
- Commits to developing and refining a program that fosters each student's intellect, ignites their passions, and nurtures their well-being
- Demonstrates a high degree of emotional intelligence and is intrinsically approachable and warm
- Thinks strategically and has the ability to hold a system's view when diagnosing and addressing programmatic and operational challenges
- Believes in accountability and holds students and colleagues to high but reasonable expectations
- Has a proven ability to manage and lead with both humility and confidence
- Is a collaborative decision maker who values and integrates the opinions and ideas of others
- Champions teachers and publicly demonstrates appreciation for their work
- Possesses outstanding organization and communication skills in both writing and speaking

JOB REQUIREMENTS

- Bachelor's degree, preferably in the humanities, sciences, or arts
- Significant professional experience in positions of leadership and management
- Experience with gifted education, special education, and progressive learning is highly desirable



SEARCH PROCESS

Acera's Assistant Head of School will begin in August 2024. The school has engaged a national executive search firm, Educational Directions, to lead the search.

Please direct all inquiries, applications, and nominations as soon as possible to:

Jay Underwood at jay.underwood@edudx.com

Candidates will be expected to submit:

- A letter addressed to Courtney Dickinson, Head of School, explaining their interest in becoming the Assistant Head of Acera School
- A current resume detailing current and previous roles and accomplishments
- A statement detailing their educational philosophy and professional journey
- The names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of three references, with additional references required for finalists

References will not be contacted without the prior agreement of the candidate.

Electronic submission of credentials is required and candidates are encouraged to begin the application process as soon as possible.

Acera is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, pregnancy, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital/civil union status, ancestry, place of birth, age, citizenship status, veteran status, political affiliation, or disability as defined and required by state and federal laws.

