



Chief Advancement Officer
The Taft School
Watertown, Connecticut

THE SEARCH

The Taft School (Taft), one of the nation's premier college-preparatory boarding and day schools, seeks a proven and strategic Chief Advancement Officer (CAO) to provide the vision, leadership, and direction for all constituent relations and fundraising activities. This is a compelling opportunity for a seasoned professional to lead a comprehensive advancement program staffed by exceptional, experienced staff during an exciting time of growth and momentum as the School prepares to embark on a historic comprehensive campaign that will further Taft's mission, values, and culture: its insistence on excellence, passion for community and belonging, commitment to improvement and to service, and pride in school spirit. This is a rare opportunity to partner with an ambitious board, head of school, and leadership team and to play a central role in leading the distinguished institution to even greater prominence within American high schools.

The Taft School was founded in 1890 by Horace D. Taft who believed that character, above all else, determines success in life. Nearly 135 years later, Taft students, or Tafties as they are colloquially known, continue to live out the School's motto of "Not to be served, but to serve" both in and out of the classroom. Collectively, Taft students and alumni seek to better the world around them on a local, national, and international scale through engagement in the Watertown community and contributions to global inquiry. Taft's 583 students enjoy a beautiful Collegiate Gothic campus, exceptional faculty, a rigorous academic curriculum, and art and athletic programs that compete on a national scale. After Taft, they are admitted to the nation's most prestigious institutions.

Taft's appeal is strong, as evidenced by its 1,650 annual applications and 16 percent acceptance rate. The campus attracts a mix of boarding and day students and prioritizes enrolling diverse classes: 42 percent of students identify as students of color; 19 percent are international students, hailing from 54 different countries; and 35 percent of the student body receives financial aid. As of February 28, 2025, Taft boasts an endowment of \$343 million, one of the top 15 boarding school endowments in the nation. Taft maintains an operating budget of approximately \$54 million. The School's strong tradition of alumni giving, with 34 percent of alumni donating annually, ensures its ability to sustain excellence for the coming generations. Additionally, more than 90 percent of Taft's current parents contribute annually to the Parents' Fund.

Reporting to the Head of School, Peter Becker '95, and serving as a key member of his Senior Administrative Team, the CAO provides astute leadership and strategic vision to all aspects of the School's constituent relations and fundraising activities. In addition, the CAO serves as the liaison to the Board of Trustees and its Committee on Trustees and Institutional Advancement Committee. This individual will establish priorities, objectives, and aspirations for a nearly 20-member comprehensive alumni and development team across major, endowed, leadership, and planned giving; the Taft Fund and the Parents' Fund; reunion and class campaigns; advancement services and operations; development and campaign communications; and constituent relations and special events. The CAO will build upon a culture of high achievement, accountability, and professionalism to ensure that the School's more than 10,000 alumni, current and former parents, trustees, and friends are actively engaged in the life of the institution.

Critical to success will be the CAO's ability to maintain a big-picture, strategic perspective while also effectively managing the details and building the necessary infrastructure to support sustainable long-term philanthropic success. With a depth of knowledge in all key areas of advancement, the ideal candidate will possess a proven track record of creating highly efficient and effective advancement programs and experience leading an advancement operation to heightened levels of achievement. Further, as Taft is nearing the completion of the first phase of strategic planning and is a third of the way through a comprehensive campus planning process, the successful candidate will bring a demonstrated ability to plan, manage, and successfully close a multi-million-dollar comprehensive campaign informed by institutional strategic priorities and needs. The incoming CAO must possess a deep appreciation for the mission, history, and values of Taft, along with an authentic and enthusiastic spirit to serve as an external representative of the School to a variety of audiences.

The Taft School has retained Jack Gorman of the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to conduct this important recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE TAFT SCHOOL

[The Taft School](#) opened its doors in 1890 with a broad – yet singular – mission that was ahead of its time: to educate the whole student. Originally known as Mr. Taft's School, Taft was established by Mrs. Robert Black near the turn of the century. She fortuitously asked her friend, Horace D. Taft, a Yale-educated teacher, and brother of the future 27th U.S. President, to lead the School. He accepted the job with enthusiasm, and for 46 years, he led Taft as Head of School through several name changes, campus moves, and new waves of students.

Throughout his tenure as the School's leader, Horace Taft remained committed to the holistic education The Taft School provided its students – both through rigorous academics in the classroom and extracurricular learning in clubs, sports, hallways, and dormitories. To this day, Taft students graduate with a strong sense of self, a sense of place, and a readiness to take on the world.

Taft's 226-acre [campus](#) features historic buildings with state-of-the-art and sustainable technologies. Notable buildings include: the Lady Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center, measuring at 48,000 square feet and featuring a PCR machine for DNA replication and an aquatic biomes center; the STEM Laboratory, which houses three makerspaces, a laser cutter, CNC machine, 3D printer, and interactive smart tools; and the Hulbert Taft Jr. Library with 58,000 volumes and full text databases with access to more than 12,000 periodical articles. Additionally, the campus features multiple dance and art studios, two theaters, 16 tennis courts, two field houses, two ice rinks, and an 18-hole golf course. Serving as a community connector, Main Hall, through which every student and teachers walks multiple times each day, is a key feature of Taft's architecture and culture.

The Taft community is comprised of 583 students in grades 9-12, including a small group of post-graduate students. With 130 faculty, Taft students benefit from a five-to-one faculty ratio. While most students board (five-sixths of the student body), the remaining one-sixth commute daily from neighboring towns. Taft receives around 1,650 new student applications per year, 61 percent of which are from private schools and 34 percent from public schools.

Academics, Co-Curricular Programs, and Student Life

At the core of Taft's mission to educate the whole person lies an emphasis on high scholarship and intellectual endeavor. Taft translates that mission into a roadmap for learning that is bolstered by a broad, evolving, and innovative curriculum. This is further advanced by a robust Honor Circle, and built on a strong intellectual and academic foundation, all of which is brought to life by a dedicated and caring faculty, made up of highly educated experts in their respective fields.

Courses at Taft are spread out across six [academic departments](#): Arts, English, History and Global Studies, Mathematics, Science, and World Language. Each semester, students choose from more than 200 one-unit courses to fulfill the School's 26-unit graduation requirement. Taft also offers one of the nation's first independent study programs, which, for more than 50 years, has allowed students to pursue their passions through high-level, inquiry-based, self-directed courses of study. Taft students may choose to study away from Taft for a semester or two and/or enroll in [Global Online Academy](#) classes. Students may apply to participate in the two-year [Global Leadership Institute](#), a competitive co-curricular program linking Taft and Waterbury public schools through shared learning and leadership experiences. Students may also pursue a [Global Studies and Service Diploma](#), which pushes its students to engage locally and globally as agents of social change.

Additionally, Taft's experiential and applied learning opportunities prepare students from Grade 9 and onward to not only thrive in the 21st century, but also to lead the way as globally literate, intellectually robust, and ethically principled graduates and citizens of an increasingly interconnected world. A hallmark of Taft's academic approach is the continuous evaluation and modification of its academic program to reflect the most advanced teaching and learning methodologies, while providing students with unique opportunities to pursue their passions. As previously mentioned, students are also guided by a campus [Honor Code](#) informed by Taft's core tenet of "character, above all else, determines success in life." Every

assessment, whether daily homework or a final exam, ends with the student's written pledge: "I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment," a testament and commitment to the importance of honor and integrity.

Academically and co-curricularly, Taft students are surrounded by the [arts](#). They may pursue artistic inquiry in a wide range of disciplines, from ceramics and sculpture to design and drawing, from dance and music to theater and video arts. Academic courses in the arts support the School's mission of educating the whole person and are required to graduate. Opportunities outside of the classroom – from centers and theater to gallery exhibits and travel – not only broaden and enhance learning, but also bring energy, culture, creativity, and balance.

Taft's [athletics](#) program is also an integral component of school life. Students at Taft participate in athletics at all levels – from intramural programs to 27 competitive varsity teams. Through physical health and wellness classes, in addition to the athletic program, all students are taught the value of health and wellness, the importance of a lifelong commitment to fitness, and the enjoyment that participating in all forms of athletics can bring. Taft coaches have built one of the most successful athletic programs in New England and encourage fair play, respect for opponents, a love of the game, competitive spirit, and team loyalty. As a result, students leave Taft with an understanding of hard work and good sportsmanship, a sense of responsibility to one's team and teammates, the ability to set goals, and an overall commitment to healthy living through physical activity.

Financial and Fundraising Overview

The Taft School currently manages an endowment of approximately \$343 million as of February 28, 2025. The long-term growth of the School's endowment, net of distributions to support operations, is the result of both strong investment performance and generous donations from its loyal donor base. In Fiscal Year 2024, Taft raised more than \$21 million in philanthropic contributions, of which \$6.26 million constitutes the Taft Fund and \$3.1 million constitutes the Parents' Fund. The School's alumni participation rate holds steady at nearly 34 percent and parents have given at or above 90 percent for more than thirty years.

Leadership and Governance

On July 1, 2023, [Peter Becker '95](#) began his tenure as Taft's sixth Head of School. He received a bachelor of arts degree with distinction in religious studies from the University of Virginia and a master of arts in history from Yale University. He was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study classical history, architecture, and archeology at the American Academy in Rome, Italy. After working briefly as an investment banking analyst, Becker first worked with independent school students while on the staff of FOCUS (the Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools). He began his boarding school career in 2003 at The Lawrenceville School. In 2012, Becker was appointed Head of School at The Frederick Gunn School, where he left a legacy of school innovation, improvement, and change. Becker is also a leader in the independent school educational landscape, attending and presenting at professional conferences, and serving or having

served on the board of The Association of Board Schools, the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, The Washington Montessori School, and as a member of the Heads and Principals Association.

Taft is governed by a dedicated [Board of Trustees](#), chaired by Sarkis D. Izmirlian II '90, P'20, '22, '24. Nearly all 35 trustees are Taft alumni or parents of Taft graduates. They bring important expertise, insight, and a personal commitment to guiding Taft's future. The Board operates through a committee structure, and the Chief Advancement Officer works with the Committee on Trustees, to ensure a proactive approach to cultivating the next generation of board leadership, and Institutional Advancement Committee to oversee philanthropic engagement at Taft.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER

The Taft School seeks a strategic and accomplished leader to serve as the next Chief Advancement Officer, building on an existing foundation of success while simultaneously aspiring to new levels of philanthropic achievements for years to come. Reporting to the Head of School and serving as a key member of his Senior Administrative Team, the CAO will be a results-driven, detail-oriented advancement professional with a strong track record of success. This individual will expertly lead the Office of Advancement, consisting of nearly 20 collaborative and motivated development, engagement, and administrative professionals. Critical to success will be the CAO's ability to embrace and articulate the values, mission, and accomplishments that make Taft unique and distinct.

MAJOR FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Lead Taft's advancement staff, promoting a culture of excellence, collaboration, and professional growth.

- Further develop a diverse and high-quality development and constituent relations team that is well prepared to meet the ongoing challenges and growth opportunities of a first-rate advancement program.
- Set clear direction and establish goals for the advancement team in a collaborative manner to ensure that individuals have a sense of responsibility and ownership for the successful growth of the School.
- Serve as a resource for fundraising staff in developing effective prospect strategies, execution of moves management, securing gifts, and stewardship activities; lead by example and inspire others to action.
- Explore opportunities for continuous improvement in office systems and structures to maximize coordination and productivity, enhance communication, and promote staff collaboration and professional satisfaction. Ensure efficiency and cost-effective fundraising operations in support of maximizing net contributions to Taft.

- Support opportunities for professional growth for all advancement staff. Contribute to a work environment in which openness, transparency, candor, and mutual respect are all guiding principles.
- Ensure appropriately strong collaboration between alumni and development office with all departments across school, including with Student Life such that current Taft students develop an imagination for themselves as future members of the Taft alumni body.

Partner with the Head of School, senior leaders, and Board of Trustees as an active and contributing thought leader and central architect of Taft's advancement priorities and goals.

- Serve as architect and builder of a strategic, cohesive, and systematic advancement program to broaden fundraising, outreach, and constituent relations activities, as well as ensure the ongoing financial sustainability of the institution, in keeping with the mission, aspirations, and core values of Taft. Tactically measure the advancement enterprise's annual progress by both lead and lag measures.
- Serve as an active member of the School's Senior Administrative Team. Help advise the Head of School and contribute to discussions that guide strategies and policies shaping Taft's future, including the evolution of the strategic plan and the eventual long term campus plan.
- In conjunction with the Head of School, senior leaders, and the Institutional Advancement committee of the Board, craft clear and compelling messages around advancement that describe the strengths and aspirations of the School and its leadership. Disseminate that information, both internally and externally, in a way that excites the community about the School's key fundraising initiatives and future direction. In doing so, serve as an exemplary advocate on behalf of Taft in the local community and beyond.

Use the time and talents of the Head of School, trustees, senior administrative leaders, faculty, and advancement department staff to engage, cultivate, and solicit major donors and prospects, and lead by example through personal fundraising efforts.

- Guide and support the Head of School in his role as chief fundraiser, serving as coach, mentor, and co-strategist in cultivating and soliciting transformative gifts. Ensure that the Head of School is well-briefed and that his time spent is highly productive and rewarding. Similarly, guide and support the trustees, senior leaders, and other key volunteers in fundraising and donor engagement activities.
- Expertly manage a select portfolio of principal and major gift prospects and donors, leveraging exceptional relationship building skills to drive successful solicitations, while ensuring proactive, thoughtful, and strategic stewardship efforts.

- Ensure that advancement activities across Taft are well-coordinated and support the School's priorities. Cultivate strong working relationships with administrators, faculty, and staff across the School. Maintain the advancement office as a collaborative, responsible partner able to professionally address both opportunities and concerns.
- Provide the highest level of personal support to the Board of Trustees and volunteer leadership for their activities on behalf of Taft; ensure that their volunteer experiences are meaningful, productive, and rewarding, and that volunteers' intellectual and emotional connections to Taft and each other are strengthened.
- Assist in the identification, recruitment, and cultivation of new board members, in close collaboration with the Head of School and board leadership. Support the board's commitment to continual improvement of good governance practices as the foundation for a healthy and thriving institution.
- Provide oversight, guidance, and support to the fundraising priorities of various units and centers on campus, several of which are endowed or supported by current use restricted funds. Ensure that the advancement office serves as a strategic and effective fundraising partner for these important groups, and philanthropically engages donors in support of their respective programs and funding priorities.
- Support ongoing efforts to ensure that Taft is both financially accessible to prospective families through ambitious fundraising for financial aid and that it is a school-employer of choice for excellent boarding school educators through ambitious fundraising for faculty and staff.

Build upon the success of Taft's strategic advancement program by continuing to expand philanthropic capacity and engagement among alumni, parents, and friends.

- Develop an aspirational strategic plan for advancement with an emphasis on evaluating, strengthening, and enhancing the annual, major, and principal gift pipelines.
- Immediately contribute to the development and execution of Taft's impending comprehensive campaign, bringing expertise to optimally deploy staff and strengthen the infrastructure to ensure the School is prepared for such sustained and successful fundraising efforts amid the campaign.
- Create and maintain programming and engagement opportunities for Taft's parents, alumni, and friends in coordination with key offices and divisions across the School. Pioneer new and innovative techniques to promote engagement across generations and with a keen eye for increasing participation levels and return on investment.
- Support strategic initiatives that connect Taft alumni with current Taft students for the purposes of deepening and broadening Taft's curriculum.

- Develop and implement enhanced development communications strategies across print and electronic outlets, including social media, that provide consistent, compelling, and strategic messages to alumni and parents. Ensure that programs and initiatives, opportunities for volunteer engagement, and the School's overarching strategic goals are well known to alumni and parent constituents.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will possess many, if not most, of the following skills, qualifications, and characteristics.

- A deep appreciation for an independent school education, a keen understanding of the mission and goals of Taft, and the ability to persuasively articulate its uniqueness.
- Proven leadership and management skills in creating a team- and goal-oriented environment that empowers colleagues through open communication and delegation and that builds confidence, promotes diversity of thought, and celebrates achievements. An ability to attract and retain talented staff.
- Demonstrated success as a fundraising leader in a comparable independent school or higher education setting, or translatable leadership in arts and culture, healthcare, or other complex nonprofit institutions.
- An ability to create and lead innovative programs attuned to the changing demographics of the School's alumni and parents.
- At least 10 years of progressively responsible fundraising and managerial experience, including a depth of knowledge in all key areas of advancement and a track record of planning, managing, and executing a comprehensive campaign.
- The ability to build bridges and strong collaborative relationships with all members of the advancement operation and the diverse body of Taft's alumni, parents, and students.
- Demonstrated effectiveness as a partner to the head of school, board chair, and trustees.
- A deep understanding of a complex academic community and a proven track record of successful collaboration with leadership team colleagues, faculty, staff, and other key internal constituents.
- Demonstrated success in personally cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding gifts at major and principal levels.

- The ability to support and collaborate with Taft's marketing and communications team as a strong strategic partner, ensuring opportunities to provide an active and compelling voice around fundraising and engagement activities.
- The intellectual and communication skills required to engage effectively and foster meaningful relationships with senior leaders, trustees, and external members of the Taft community.
- A sharp eye for operational efficiency and the best use of resources, including a demonstrated understanding of budgets and the ability to manage them.
- The desire to play a meaningful role in the life of the School and its extended community.
- The flexibility to travel and work evenings and weekends as required, as well as the ability and desire to participate in occasional international travel.
- A bachelor's degree required, with an advanced degree preferred.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The target salary range for this role is \$300,000 to \$335,000 and will be commensurate with experience.

The Taft School is located in Watertown, a historic and rural town in western Connecticut with just over 20,000 residents. Its location allows easy access to the conveniences and cultural attractions of Connecticut's larger cities and towns and the beautiful hills and open spaces of northwest Connecticut and the southern Berkshires. Taft is less than an hour away from Hartford's Bradley International Airport and less than 30 minutes away from both Amtrak and Metro-North train stops. Conveniently, Taft is also located two hours from New York City and two and half hours from Boston.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website below. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/taft-school/chief-advancement-officer>

Jack Gorman, Partner
Nicole Poe, Managing Associate
Maureen Perry, Associate
Ryan Cheung, Senior Search Coordinator

The Taft School is an affirmative action-equal opportunity employer in accordance with regulations adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. It is the policy of The Taft School to

provide equal employment opportunities to all qualified individuals without regard to age, gender, race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, actual or perceived disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran's status, genetic predisposition, or any other class protected by law.