



Search for the Director of College Counseling
Sage Hill School
Newport Coast, California

THE OPPORTUNITY

Sage Hill School seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as its next Director of College Counseling. Since its founding in 2000, Sage Hill has experienced remarkable growth and success, rightfully earning a reputation as the leading independent school in Orange County. The next Director will succeed the 13-year-long leadership of their predecessor and will inherit a strong and stable team. The Director will also join Sage Hill at a critical and exciting moment, as the School prepares for the opening of a new Middle School in August 2026. As part of this expansion, the Director will serve as a visionary leader for Sage Hill's college counseling strategy in a 7-12 environment. Sage Hill is relatively young and nimble, and that agility extends to a college counseling office unafraid to pivot, iterate, and test new approaches on the cutting edge of college counseling. This leader must resonate with that dual approach of high quality and high innovation, and a commitment to data analysis.

Sage Hill boasts a vibrant, 28-acre campus with inviting classrooms, wide-open spaces, and state-of-the-art athletics and arts facilities. At present, Sage Hill offers a dynamic, college-preparatory curriculum to its 600 students in grades 9-12, designed to inspire independence, creativity, and critical thinking skills. An average class size of 14 enables students to challenge themselves and nurture relationships with motivated peers and an excellent, dedicated faculty. Sage Hill plans to expand this successful approach to 7th and 8th grades, with a Middle School on the main campus that will be well integrated into the wider Sage Hill community. Like the Upper School, the Middle School will encourage students to foster a sense of independence; learn to accept responsibility; develop a love of learning; and use that knowledge creatively, compassionately, and courageously throughout one's life.

As the only independent, non-denominational high school in Orange County, and soon to be the sole 7-12 independent school in the county, Sage Hill competes with well-regarded public and parochial schools, and it constantly reevaluates its value proposition and competitive advantage. Simultaneously, Sage Hill has enjoyed strong, stable leadership in its Head of School, enabling it to maintain steady enrollment numbers and a robust financial outlook. In the fall of 2023, the school launched the largest capital campaign in its history, with a goal of \$25 million, for the construction of the Middle School. Only one year into the campaign, the school had successfully raised \$18 million of that goal, evidencing the community's support of the school and its ambitious goals.

The Director of College Counseling, reporting to the Assistant Head of School for Academics, will lead the continued evolution and articulation of the college counseling program. The successful candidate must demonstrate a strong commitment to Sage Hill's mission and core values and will be a proven leader within the field of college counseling. Specifically, the incoming Director will shape and refine a college counseling strategy that includes grades 7 and 8; build strong relationships with students and families; partner with the broader Sage Hill community; serve as a voice in the national college counseling landscape; leverage the use of data analytics; and support and mentor a strong college counseling team. This leader will bring a high level of emotional intelligence, the ability to think on their feet in high-pressure situations, a problem-solving mindset, and a desire to be actively involved in the daily life of Sage Hill.

Sage Hill has retained Isaacson, Miller, an international executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the Director of College Counseling. Please direct all inquiries, nominations, and applications to the search firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

For more information about Sage Hill School, please see the Appendix, as well as www.sagehillschool.org.

THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR OF COLLEGE COUNSELING

The Director of College Counseling will join the Sage Hill community at a moment of strength. Reporting to the Assistant Head of School for Academics, the Director will carry a caseload of approximately 30-35 students and will lead the team of three Associate Directors, an Associate Director for 9-10 College Counseling, and a College Counseling Coordinator. Each of the other counselors manages a caseload of approximately 35 students.

Sage Hill offers a unique college counseling program that fulfills two purposes:

- First, the team ensures that students make the most of their time in high school by engaging in academic and co-curricular pursuits that prepare them for college.
- Second, the team offers a highly personalized, student-centered college application process focused on helping each student find the best college fit based on their academic profile, aspirations, talents, and interests.

Every year, Sage Hill students are accepted to some of the most selective colleges in the country, including Stanford, MIT, Ivy League universities, USC, and University of California campuses, as well as top liberal arts colleges like Amherst and Williams. They believe, however, that college admission is not a prize to be won but a match to be made. They measure success not just by the number of acceptances but by the appropriateness of each match.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In planning for this moment of transition, the next Director should be well prepared to address the following priorities:

Shape and refine a college counseling program that includes grades 7 and 8

The Director will play a critical role in shaping a college counseling strategy for existing students in grades 9-12 and an upcoming expansion to grades 7 and 8 in August 2026. As the development of the Middle School progresses, this leader will serve as the primary articulator of the college counseling philosophy and vision to all current, future, and prospective constituents across both divisions. Sage Hill considers college counseling an integral part of its value proposition and the overall student experience. The office's philosophy centers around the idea that, during the process of determining plans post-Sage, students learn more about themselves and their approach to substantive life decisions. This leader must consider which moments of the college journey are appropriate for various grade levels and how this approach aligns with Sage Hill's mission and values.

Build strong relationships with students and families

The Director must possess excellent communication and listening skills, including the confidence to engage students and families in dynamic group settings and dialogue. They must be adept at thinking on their feet, projecting calm and confidence in the face of anxiety, and injecting humor when appropriate. They must genuinely enjoy working with young people and building strong relationships, and they will mentor and lead their team in providing an exceptional experience for students and families. This work includes leveraging each student's unique talents and goals to help them develop a compelling college application plan and timeline. They must be politically savvy and diplomatic, with a high level of emotional intelligence, understanding the unique stressors of this process and strategically engaging families through both large-scale events and individual relationships.

Partner with the broader Sage Hill community

Sage Hill is accustomed to best-in-class service and partnership with students, families, staff, faculty, and the board, and they expect that strong partnership to continue under this next leader. To succeed, the Director must be a persuasive relationship-builder who generates trust and enthusiasm and serves as a visible presence on campus, contributing openly and genuinely to the daily life of the school in both presence and communication style. Through relationship building and innate curiosity, the Director will quickly learn Sage Hill's distinct curriculum and student experience, disseminating this information authentically to college representatives.

Serve as a voice in the national college counseling landscape

The Director will be engaged and involved at the national level with professional organizations and communities, representing Sage Hill effectively to colleges and universities as well as other independent schools. As a leader with a bold and innovative vision, they will collaborate early and often with partners in the field, both to learn from the best of the college counseling world and to share Sage Hill's successes and emerging initiatives. This leader and the broader team will maintain and strengthen relationships with college admissions officers, ensuring that Sage Hill remains a destination that colleges are enthusiastic about visiting due to high-caliber students and exceptional service. They will bring deep knowledge of admissions from universities across the country and around the world and will continue to engage with universities by attending conferences and other professional development opportunities.

Leverage the use of data analytics

The college counseling program will continue to sharpen its focus on enrollment trends through a data-informed lens and will champion a culture of data-driven decision-making in every aspect of its work. The team will leverage technology in compiling data analytics and will use this information to provide transparent and effective communication to students, families, and other stakeholders. Sage Hill students and families expect a level of sophistication and respond well to informed and educated discussions about the college admission process. The team will be able to provide quantitative evidence for families to help them better understand and be involved in every step of their college admission journey. To serve as a thought leader and partner on campus, the Director and their team must convey sound data and effectively communicate its impact on decision-making.

Support and mentor a strong college counseling team

Ultimately, this leader will set the tone for the office and instill confidence in all the constituents they serve within the school. As a cohesive unit, the college counseling team must be aligned in their approach to advising, communicating with students and families, and working with one another. They will value the wise counsel and expertise of their fellow team members, offer their own, and recognize that college counseling is at its best when the team operates as a collective and not as siloed individual contributors. They will be unafraid to try new things and will be equally unafraid to demonstrate humility and low ego to their internal and external colleagues, recognizing that the ultimate goal is serving students and families exceedingly well. The Director must attend to the growth of each team member and ensure that their responsibilities and duties align with their skillsets and developmental trajectory.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will bring a strong capacity for strategic thinking and a critical understanding of the higher education landscape. While no candidate will embody every quality, ideal candidates will bring many of the following professional and personal attributes:

Professional Qualifications:

- Experience supervising other college counselors and uniting a team, ideally as a director of college counseling;
- A nuanced understanding of admissions, financial aid, and the college counseling profession;
- An ability to analyze, summarize, and present data to various constituencies;
- A proven track record of providing exceptional service to students and families;
- Ability to work collegially and effectively in a collaborative and fast-paced community and demonstrate a high level of confidentiality;
- Confident and effective communication skills; the ability to write with insight and clarity and to speak persuasively;
- Familiarity with technological college counseling platforms;
- Active involvement within regional and national college admission counseling organizations, along with the demonstrated ability to build strong relationships with colleges and universities;
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred.

Personal Characteristics:

- A compassionate and courageous leader;
- Diplomacy, tact, and political savvy, particularly in their work with students and families;
- The ability to effectively manage details and meet deadlines;
- Critical leadership competencies, including strategic thinking, managing multiple priorities, organizational abilities, teambuilding, and clear and effective communication;
- Strong interpersonal skills that allow for effective relationships with a variety of constituencies, including trustees, parents, faculty, administrators, colleagues, and students;
- A passion for interacting with teenagers and a strong belief in the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Research shows that people often only apply to jobs if they meet 100 percent of the qualifications. As no one ever meets 100 percent of the qualifications, we encourage you to apply if you feel that most of the above qualifications reflect your experience and expertise.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated salary for this position is between \$170,000 and \$200,000 annually, commensurate with the successful candidate's experience.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Sage Hill School has retained Isaacson, Miller, an international executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications (resumes and letters of interest) should be sent in confidence to:

Berkley Braden, Managing Associate
Jonathan Sanchez, Senior Associate
Rachel Banderob, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/sage-hill-school/director-college-counseling>

Sage Hill School is an equal employment opportunity employer and makes employment decisions based on merit, qualifications and competence. The School does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's sex (including gender, gender identity, gender expression, transgender, pregnancy and breastfeeding), race (including traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles), color, national origin, ancestry, ethnicity, religious creed (including religious dress and grooming), sexual orientation (including heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality), age (40 and over), marital status, military or veteran status, genetic characteristic or genetic information, physical or mental disability, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local laws. This policy applies to all areas of employment, including recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, compensation, benefits, termination and other conditions of employment.

APPENDIX: MORE ABOUT SAGE HILL SCHOOL

Mission & History

Sage Hill offers a bright, motivated, and diverse student body a unique journey of discovery. The academically challenging, college preparatory curriculum is enriched by ample opportunities for participation in athletics, the arts, leadership, service, and a wide variety of community activities. Every facet of a Sage Hill education is shaped by its core values of courage, balance, community, service, discovery, knowledge, excellence, integrity, compassion, and creativity. The school strives to instill these values and qualities in each student, so that alumni become lifelong learners and inventive leaders,

passionate about positive change.

Sage Hill originated as the vision of a small group of dedicated parents who sought a non-profit, non-denominational, independent high school in Orange County – a relatively new educational model for the region. Their intention was to develop a school that would inspire innovative thinking, nurture creative thought, and embrace diversity. The school opened on September 7, 2000, with approximately 90 9th grade students, 30 10th grade students, and 12 full-time faculty. In the first three years, the school added 11th and 12th grades.

Sage Hill's first decade was a time of tremendous growth, with enrollment increasing to well over 400 students by 2010 and teaching faculty tripling in size. The school community experienced numerous "firsts," including its first accreditation from the California Association of Independent Schools in January 2003; achievements in arts, athletics, and service; the creation of an Honor Code; and the start of new traditions such as English Portfolio Night, Pep Rally, and use of the school gong. The first new building on campus, the Studio at Sage Hill, opened in 2009.

Sage Hill's second decade saw the completion of the Master Plan, with the addition of facilities for science, tennis, and swimming. In 2014, Sage Hill identified Six Core Competencies, also known as the Six Cs, which have become a significant part of academic and co-curricular programming: character, collaboration, community, creativity, critical thinking, and cross-cultural competency. The school is committed to infusing mastery of these core competencies throughout all school programs. During this time, Sage Hill expanded its signature programs with the introduction of the Hamoui Family Sage Center, the hub for innovative and experiential teaching and learning within and beyond the Sage Hill campus. Under the Sage Center umbrella, the Six Cs are promoted through Spring at Sage, Service Learning, the Sage Hill Internship Program, the Sage Center Speaker Series, and Designated Courses. Furthermore, the Six Cs are integrated throughout the curriculum, in the Advisory program, and through Academic Teams, and the Sage Center continues to develop tools to measure their mastery.

Sage Hill has now emerged as the leading independent high school in Orange County, California. With each graduating class, the school's legacy of pioneering an innovative and individualized approach to education continues to grow and will now continue to expand with the addition of a Middle School.

A Distinctive Education

Sage Hill prides itself on a high-quality and excellent educational experience in every sense of the word – academics, athletics, and the arts. The high school curriculum includes more than 40 Advanced Placement and Honors courses across all disciplines, with seminar-style classes that average 14 students and foster critical thinking, collaboration, and development of close relationships with teachers. The 21 interscholastic sports are competitive and teach valuable lessons in sportsmanship, integrity, discipline,

and courage, and Sage Hill is unmatched in its seven different art disciplines. Faculty have been nationally recruited for expertise in their fields, and the majority hold advanced degrees. The faculty includes working actors, musicians, dancers, and artists, and athletic coaches and instructors are themselves former college and professional athletes.

Sage Hill's current facilities, which will expand with the Middle School, match the quality of the faculty and staff. The D. Diane Anderson Family Humanities Building houses classrooms, collaboration, and independent workspaces and faculty offices; the Lisa Argyros and Family Science Center provides modern classroom, laboratory, and collaboration for interdisciplinary study; and the recently remodeled Johnson Family Library includes flexible space for teaching and learning, while also housing the Hamoui Family Sage Center for Innovative Curriculum. The 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art "Studio" includes a digital art lab; ceramics and visual arts studios; dedicated instrumental, choral, and dance rooms; ample rehearsal space; and a black box theater. Athletically, Sage Hill boasts a Mondo™ turf football, soccer, and lacrosse field; a track; a gymnasium; a baseball field; and new tennis and aquatics centers.

High School students have numerous opportunities to participate in more than 50 clubs and academic teams, and to serve as leaders in the school community and beyond. Sage Hill offers a nationally recognized, four-year Service-Learning Program that provides thousands of hours of student service and teaches social entrepreneurship. The school's unique signature programs include the much-lauded Spring at Sage year-end seminars and travel, Service Learning, and the Sage Hill Internship Program (SHIP).

Finances & Capital Campaign

Sage Hill's financial strength is excellent. The annual operating budget is approximately \$30 million, with tuition accounting for 93 percent of revenue. Other sources of revenue include gifts and grants (5 percent) and other revenues, including investment income (2 percent). Although just over 20 years old, Sage Hill has an impressive \$35 million endowment. Historically, annual giving stands at \$1.2 million, with tuition for 2023-2024 at \$51,800. 90 percent tuition remission is a benefit for all full-time employees. Financial aid is currently awarded to approximately 14 percent of the student body.

Sage Hill is a nonprofit that relies on its community of parents, trustees, friends, and alumni families to support its mission of providing a transformative educational experience. The school recently launched the largest capital campaign in its history, with a goal of \$25 million.

Governance

The [Board of Trustees](#) establishes broad policy goals and oversees the operation of Sage Hill School in keeping with its mission. It also provides fiduciary oversight and supports long-range strategic planning for the future. Members of the Board include current and past parents and alumni. The Board also includes

members of the broader community who bring expertise and passion for the mission of Sage Hill School.

Strategic Plan

In 2020, Sage Hill unveiled a new [strategic plan for 2020-2027](#), an exercise the school undertakes every five to seven years. The crafting of the strategic plan also coincided with the periodic reaccreditation process with the California Association of Independent Schools. That process included self-led surveys and discussions with all constituencies – current students and alumni, parents, trustees, trustees emeriti, faculty, staff, and others – and meetings with an outside consultant to ensure that all voices were heard.

This thorough analysis provided invaluable insight on programs, processes, and culture, distilling four main imperatives: providing a healthy and personalized student experience within a dynamic educational environment; attracting and retaining educators of uncommon excellence; elevating the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity; and maintaining financial sustainability while exploring opportunities to expand the school's impact.

Sage Hill has expanded efforts to recruit and retain a diverse community in all aspects of school life. Through the work of the Hamoui Family Sage Center, the school will implement observable and achievable cross-cultural competency standards for all employees and students.

Leadership

Sage Hill's Head of School, Ms. Patricia Merz, is a seasoned independent school administrator whose career spans more than 30 years. She joined Sage Hill as Assistant Head of School in 2007 and, based on her successful and inspirational leadership, was appointed Head of School in 2014. Among her many accomplishments at Sage Hill, she has developed and refined Sage Hill's innovative and dynamic college preparatory curriculum; introduced the Spring at Sage program; developed the vision and guided the completion of the Lisa Argyros and Family Science Center; launched Sage Connected, Sage Hill's hybrid online courses and digital library, which has received national recognition; aided Sage Hill in receiving the 2014 E.E. Ford Foundation Grant to fund the Sage Connected initiative; enhanced and expanded Summer at Sage, including credit course offerings, workshops, and camps; brought Middle School programming to Summer at Sage; expanded funding and opportunities for professional development for faculty; created new leadership opportunities for faculty; developed and secured funding for the Sage Center; and oversaw the completion of the physical plant, including the Brett Connor Jordan Family Tennis Center and Aquatics Center. Most recently, she has been instrumental in the planning, development, and fundraising for the Middle School program.

Ms. Merz has also been awarded the E. E. Ford Fellowship for aspiring school leaders from the National Association of Independent Schools. Among her many professional pursuits, Ms. Merz participated in the

S.E.E.D. (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project, dedicated to developing inclusive curricula, and has presented at educational technology conferences, CAIS, and NAIS. In June of 2021, she was selected to serve a four-year term on the CAIS Board of Directors. Ms. Merz currently is a member of the Heads Collegiate Forum and the Heads Network, both national organizations for which Patricia was nominated and elected to join.