



Search for the Chief Financial Officer

Marin Academy

San Rafael, California

THE SEARCH

Marin Academy (MA) stands at a threshold. Over the past seven years, MA's disciplined endowment strategy has doubled the school's financial foundation from \$15 million to \$31 million. Vision 2030 and 2050's transformative campus plans move forward—a new aquatic center opens, housing for Penn Fellows takes shape, and conversations about the next phase pulse through leadership. The [MA Promise](#) has rewritten the school's commitment to access: free tuition for any admitted student whose family earns under \$100,000 annually. After three decades of steady financial leadership that built this platform, MA prepares for its next chapter—not because something broke, but because everything MA has built now positions it to imagine more boldly.

The next Chief Financial Officer will join Head of School Travis Brownley and MA's senior team as a creative partner in answering the question: *What can this school become?* In a moment when independent schools face demographic shifts, tuition pressures, and questions about value, MA's financial leader must be more than a steward. They must architect sustainable innovation, translate between vision and resources, and see financial strategy not as a constraint but as the language of possibility.

This exceptional opportunity seeks a financial leader who wants to work at the intersection of mission and money, where every budget reflects values and every projection shapes what students will experience. MA's finances stand on solid ground—an annual operating budget of \$34 million, facilities in excellent condition, and a track record of meeting ambitious goals. The incoming CFO inherits strength and stability. What they create next is the interesting part.

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

THE PLACE

Marin Academy

Founded in 1971 by educators and individuals with a forward-thinking vision, MA is a co-educational, independent, college preparatory day school in San Rafael, California. The school enrolls 450 students in grades 9-12 drawn from throughout the Bay Area—73 percent from Marin County, 19 percent from San Francisco, 7 percent from the East Bay, and 2 percent from Sonoma.

Mission

Marin Academy asks every individual to think, question, and create in an environment of encouragement and compassion, and challenges each person to accept the responsibilities posed by education in a democratic society.

Competencies

The curriculum focuses on problems, projects, and questions that cultivate an intentional set of skills: Demonstrated Empathy, Imaginative Curiosity, Intellectual Flexibility, Compelling Expression, and Strategic Boldness. These aren't just student competencies—they describe how the entire community approaches its work.

Community

Thirty-six percent students of color, 21 percent students on tuition assistance, 32 percent students from public schools, 38 percent employees of color. MA is committed to creating more equitable support structures for students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at independent schools through initiatives like Belonging@MA and student-led Identity & Equity (IDEQ) leadership.

Innovation

MA pioneered competency-based education and transdisciplinary learning. MA moved fully away from AP courses by 2016 to focus on transferable and enduring skills. Signature programs include the Transdisciplinary Leadership Program (TLP), where seniors pursue year-long research and action projects with community partners; the Marin Academy Research Collaborative (MARC), pairing students with professional scientists; and the BlendEd Consortium, offering courses across six Bay Area independent schools. The school was selected as the only West Coast partner in the University of Pennsylvania's Independent School Teaching Residency fellowship.

Environmental Commitment

The Science & Innovation Center earned LEED Platinum certification—the highest level of sustainable design. The school has systematically integrated environmental stewardship into its curriculum and operations, with significant progress in solar power, water, and energy conservation.

Campus

Situated on a ten-acre campus that was once a military school, MA's facilities include a library, science and innovation center, theater, visual arts center, music and dance building, two gymnasiums, a new

competition swimming pool, and an all-weather synthetic field. Vision 2050 continues to reimagine these spaces as places that enable new ways of learning and gathering.

San Rafael

Located in the heart of Marin County, San Rafael offers urban vitality and natural beauty. The oldest, largest, and most culturally diverse city in the county, San Rafael features Victorian architecture, a thriving downtown, a weekly farmer's market, and recognition as one of 14 California Cultural Districts. The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Marin County Civic Center serves as a national historical landmark. Hikers, bikers, and kayakers find abundant open space. The Pacific Ocean lies minutes away.

Leadership

Travis Brownley has served as Head of School since 2008, bringing more than thirty years of educational leadership to MA. An English teacher by training, she holds a B.A. with distinction from the University of Virginia and an M.A.L.S. from Dartmouth College. She taught at Groton, Winsor, and San Francisco University High School before serving as Head of Upper School at The Wheeler School and arriving at MA as Head of School. She coached basketball and field hockey, taught poetry, and once wrote an article titled "Off the Ball Play: What Teaching Poetry and Coaching Basketball Have in Common." She believes in the bravery of curiosity, the necessity of integrity, and the power of education to serve democracy.

THE QUESTIONS

The person who thrives in this role will lean into creative tensions rather than away from them. These aren't problems to solve, but the dynamic space where MA does its best thinking:

How do we remain both accessible and sustainable?

Eighty-eight percent of MA's operating budget comes from tuition, currently \$64,750 with an average annual increase of 5 percent, while ten percent flows from annual giving, and 2 percent from auxiliary revenue. The MA Promise represents a moral commitment—and a significant financial one. The endowment pause that fueled recent growth ends soon, and the Board will look to the CFO as an essential thought partner in shaping what comes next. How do we honor the founders' democratic vision while navigating the realities of independent school finance? How do we expand access without compromising the program's excellence? These questions don't have easy answers. They have creative ones.

How do we compete in a shifting landscape?

Marin County demographics evolve. Families weigh independent school value against strong public options and rising costs. Birth rates decline. Competition intensifies. Yet MA's applicant pool remains strong—110 seats drawn from 500 applicants—and the school's identity as a leader in progressive, experiential education has never been clearer. The CFO must help MA articulate and demonstrate its value, not defensively but confidently. What story do the numbers tell? What investments in people, program, and place will ensure MA doesn't just survive but leads?

How do we build while we sustain?

Vision 2050 reimagines the campus as a series of vibrant gathering spaces that enable new ways of learning and community building. The Science & Innovation Center earned LEED Platinum. The Aquatic Center opens possibilities for water sports, wellness, and community partnership. Future projects beckon. But building requires resources that could go elsewhere—to faculty salaries, financial aid, program innovation. How do we balance place with people? How do we think about capital projects not as additions but as investments in the educational experience? The CFO will partner closely with the Director of Operations and senior leadership to navigate these choices with both vision and discipline.

How do we innovate without abandoning what works?

MA pioneered transdisciplinary learning, competency-based assessment, and experiential education. It embraces AI through a values-driven, human-centered approach. It houses Penn Fellows as part of its commitment to faculty development. Innovation threads through everything—yet innovation also carries risk and cost. How do we resource bold experiments while protecting core programs? How do we fail forward when new approaches don't work? How do we make financial decisions that honor both tradition and transformation? The CFO must hold this tension with grace.

To learn more about Marin Academy, please see the Appendix at the end of this document.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Travis Brownley has led Marin Academy since 2008—seventeen years of steady, visionary leadership that transformed the school while honoring its founding principles. Under her guidance, MA launched the BlendEd Consortium, completed the Science & Innovation Center, secured the Penn Fellows partnership, and championed the MA Promise. She thinks in poetry and leads with both warmth and real talk. She asks hard questions. She believes consistency is not the same as conformity, that evolution is not a criticism of the past, and that the north star is always what's best for students.

The CFO will serve as her thought partner and member of a six-person senior leadership team that operates collaboratively, openly, and with intellectual rigor. This isn't a hierarchical structure where the CFO receives directives and executes them. This team wrestles with questions together, where finance shapes strategy and strategy demands financial creativity. The CFO reports directly to Travis, but the relationship must be one of genuine partnership—challenging each other's thinking, bringing different expertise to shared problems, and building the trust that makes difficult decisions possible.

The Board of Trustees, particularly the finance, audit, and investment committees, will look to the CFO for sophisticated analysis, transparent communication, and strategic counsel. They'll expect modeling that illuminates choices, projections that account for multiple scenarios, and advice that balances aspiration with prudence. The CFO must inspire confidence without pretending certainty, acknowledge risk without succumbing to it, and help the Board see not just where the school stands but where it might go.

THE PRACTICE

This is what the work actually looks like:

Strategic Financial Leadership

Develop sophisticated modeling and long-range projections that enable leadership to identify risk factors, document potential consequences, assess alternatives, and make data-informed decisions. Manage the \$34 million annual operating budget with an eye toward both immediate needs and future possibilities. Anticipate challenges before they arrive. Create robust scenarios and contingencies. Present complex financial information with clarity to audiences ranging from faculty budget managers to Board investment committee members. Connect every financial choice to educational impact.

Investment and Endowment Stewardship

Partner with the Board's finance and investment committees to oversee the \$31 million endowment. As the endowment pause concludes, help shape the next phase of investment strategy—balancing long-term growth with strategic deployment of resources. Manage all cash accounts and financial resources in accordance with Board policies, sound fiscal practice, and donor restrictions. Make recommendations that account for both market conditions and institutional priorities.

Systems Innovation and Operations

Lead ongoing evaluation of financial systems, procedures, and business processes. Leverage technology—including MA's thoughtful approach to artificial intelligence—to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness. Work with the "AI Humanist" and others to explore how emerging tools can enhance rather than replace human judgment in financial operations. Ensure departments across the school share financial information seamlessly. Analyze and optimize consistency without demanding conformity.

Risk Management and Compliance

Identify, assess, mitigate, and monitor financial and operational risks. Protect students, staff, and institutional assets. Manage insurance, claims, and procedures to prevent harm, loss, and reputational damage. Maintain absolute integrity in all financial practices. Create the conditions where people can take smart risks because the foundation is secure.

Team Leadership and Development

Lead five direct reports: the Controller, Director of Operations and Safety, Director of Human Resources, Accounts Receivable/Payable Assistant, and Business Office Manager. This team has the lowest turnover rate at MA—a testament to their commitment and the quality of the work environment. Cultivate a culture where staff at all levels engage in decision-making, where transparency builds trust, and where people grow in their roles. Serve as a connector between the Business Office and key partners in Marketing and Communications, Admissions, and Advancement.

Advancement and Enrollment Partnership

Work closely with Advancement and Enrollment teams on initiatives that have direct financial implications. Plan for enrollment-driven scenarios. Help strategically deploy philanthropic resources. Support campaign planning and execution—the Science & Innovation Center campaign raised \$18 million; our *Going Beyond* campaign raised \$32 million. Future campaigns will require the CFO's partnership from conception through completion. Understand that fundraising and financial management aren't separate functions but two aspects of the same question: How do we resource our mission?

Faculty and Staff Support

Champion competitive compensation and benefits that enable MA to attract and retain exceptional talent. The school commits to keeping faculty and staff salaries at the 80th percentile within its peer group—a significant investment that the CFO must sustain and explain. Support initiatives like bridge toll reimbursement for commuters. Partner with Human Resources on recruitment, retention, and professional development strategies. Provide training and education for budget managers across the school. Help faculty and staff understand how financial decisions connect to their work with students.

Community Presence

Show up. Be visible, accessible, and genuinely engaged with the rhythms of school life. Attend the Conference on Democracy. Stop by the Advanced Bands' performances. Join conversations about transdisciplinary courses. Sit in the stands at games. Eat lunch with students and teachers. Financial leadership at MA isn't a back-office function—it's woven into the community. The CFO must understand the school from the inside, which means being present for the moments that make MA what it is.

THE PERSON

The following represents the range of experience and qualities important for success. No candidate embodies every attribute—but the person who thrives here will bring many of these:

Technical Foundation

Bachelor's degree in Finance, Accounting, Business Administration, or related field; MBA or CPA preferred. Seven to ten years of progressive financial management experience, ideally including independent school or nonprofit work. Solid command of accounting and controls, financial reporting, planning, analysis, forecasting, and compliance. Familiarity with endowment oversight, investment management, and capital project finance. Knowledge of tax-exempt independent school contexts and regulatory requirements.

Strategic Capacity

Demonstrated success in strategic planning that delivers measurable outcomes while funding key priorities. Ability to think both tactically and conceptually—to move between the details of accounts

payable and the big questions about institutional direction. Track record of using financial strategy to enable organizational evolution. Experience working effectively with boards and finance committees. Comfort with ambiguity and complexity.

Communication Excellence

Exceptional ability to translate financial information for varied audiences—from trustees fluent in investment terminology to teachers who teach poetry. Skill in presenting complex data clearly, without jargon or condescension. Strong written and verbal communication. Active listening that builds understanding. Patience in explaining and re-explaining. Talent for helping people see what the numbers mean for students.

Leadership Presence

Success in hiring, developing, and guiding strong teams. Capacity to lead through influence and collaboration rather than authority alone. Ability to inspire trust across constituencies—colleagues who need different things from you will all believe you're on their side. Judgment and confidence to make difficult decisions and implement them with compassion. Willingness to be accountable, to say "I don't know," "I was sorry," "I need help," and "I was wrong."

Values Alignment

Deep commitment to independent school values and educational excellence. Understanding that financial decisions are educational decisions. Demonstrated ability to create and sustain diverse, welcoming, inclusive, and equitable environments where everyone belongs. Unwavering commitment to ethical practices and institutional integrity. Belief that curiosity conquers fear, that real belonging dismantles loneliness, that education serves democracy.

Personal Qualities

Nimble, flexible, and adaptable working style that thrives in dynamic environments. Ability to lead multiple projects simultaneously without losing sight of any of them. Rigorous work ethic balanced with warmth, humor, and approachability. Genuine appreciation for adolescents and the adults who teach them. Intellectual flexibility and imaginative curiosity. Strategic boldness tempered with fiscal prudence. Compelling expression in writing and speaking. Demonstrated empathy.

Research shows that people from structurally marginalized groups often apply only when they meet 100 percent of qualifications. As no one ever meets 100 percent of qualifications, we encourage you to apply if most of these reflect your experience and expertise.

COMPENSATION AND APPLICATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is between \$250,000 and \$350,000 annually, commensurate with the successful candidate's experience. MA offers competitive benefits, including health insurance, retirement contributions, and professional development support. Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Please submit inquiries, nominations, and applications—including CV and cover letter—in confidence to:

Katie Rockman, Berkley Braden, Arianna Williams, Maria Connor
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/marin-academy/chief-financial-officer>

Marin Academy creates a community where everyone belongs and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. We encourage candidates from all backgrounds to apply and bring their full selves to this work.

APPENDIX: MORE ABOUT MARIN ACADEMY

Philosophy

Marin Academy believes educational excellence should push the boundaries of both what and how students learn to prepare them to lead and thrive in a rapidly changing world. The high school years mark a critically important time when students discover who they are, what they value, what they enjoy, and where they're headed. MA wants students to develop skills and knowledge that serve them well now and in the future.

MA commits to experiential education. The school provides students with a solid foundation in traditional academic subjects within a college-preparatory program, and believes that healthy, challenging experiences both inside and outside the classroom prove essential for taking adolescents to and beyond intellectual and theoretical knowledge. Throughout, the school promotes critical thinking—informed, independent, collaborative, and creative—as the hallmark of the MA experience.

The MA Experience

Marin Academy encourages students to break out of academic silos and explore new ways of seeing the world. Using models like [competency-based](#) education and transdisciplinary learning, MA transforms education to better reflect how its students will engage in the world beyond high school. MA is a founding member of the Bay Area BlendEd Consortium and the Mastery Transcript Consortium.

Transdisciplinary Leadership Program (TLP)

The Transdisciplinary Leadership Program offers an innovative research- and action-based program for seniors. The heart of TLP is a year-long course with a supporting practicum, fulfilling semester credits in

English and either history or science. Students explore the nuances and perspectives of a societal issue and then respond to it in partnership with community organizations, including institutions of higher learning, non-profit organizations, local government officials or agencies, and local companies.

Marin Academy Research Collaborative (MARC)

The MARC program empowers students to ask questions and push the boundaries of scientific knowledge. Participants receive robust curricular support as they work to make meaningful, publishable contributions to real-world scientific investigation in partnership with professional scientists. MARC: Applied Genetics Research track offers a structured, one-year research experience where students work as a team on the same project with Stanford University scientists. MARC: Independent STEM Research track provides a student-driven, two-year experience where each student designs and pursues an independent research project in partnership with a scientist working in the relevant research area.

BlendEd Consortium

Founded in 2013 by Marin Academy and four other Bay Area Independent Schools (BAIS), the BlendEd consortium now includes six schools and combines face-to-face and online instruction to bring a new dimension of engaging curriculum to students. Classes are taught by full-time faculty at one of the consortium schools. BlendEd allows MA students to connect with students and teachers from across the Bay Area and offers access to an even wider variety of elective courses.

Advanced Bands A/B

Advanced Bands represents the culmination of the music program at MA, charging students to craft and perform a set of live music in small ensembles. While developing their own musical voice, students collaborate with others to arrange songs in original and artistic ways. Student autonomy and band leadership are emphasized, and students use the foundations of digital music production throughout their work. A two-concert series showcasing a variety of student bands appears at the end of each semester.

Conference on Democracy

Embodying a key tenet of the school's mission that "challenges each person to accept the responsibilities posed by education in a democratic society," the annual Conference on Democracy features speakers, panelists, workshops, and programming that examine a wide array of perspectives and issues related to democratic systems. Now in its 20th year, the Conference on Democracy is a fully student-led program that has featured notable figures including Angela Davis, Roman Mars, Dolores Huerta, and Chesa Boudin.

Identity & Equity (IDEQ) Leaders

Marin Academy has long modeled student-led diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts. To become an Identity and Equity Leader, students apply and interview. IDEQ leaders receive training in leadership and facilitation skills, enabling them to design and implement a comprehensive program of

student-led affinity spaces and open community dialogues that center the experiences and stories of minoritized community members.

Outings

The Marin Academy Outings Program offers wilderness, rural, and urban adventures large and small, and has been central to the school's identity from its founding. MA students are grounded in place, acquire and apply ecological and cultural knowledge, develop a sense of self through nature, and become responsible stewards of the human and non-human environment.

Balance plays a critical role in the teenage learning process. With the block schedule, classes meet every other day, giving students the time they need in class to truly dig into their coursework while still providing ample time for community activities, including assemblies, class meetings, and advisory group meetings.

Admission to MA

Admission is highly selective; a class of 110 is typically drawn from approximately 500 applicants. Students are admitted based on previous academic work, recommendations, extracurricular involvement and interests, and personal interviews. Since 2021-2022, the admission process at MA has been test-free.

Strategic Plan

MA's Strategic Plan (2017-2026) reaffirms commitment to the founders' vision and builds on the school's strengths to chart an ambitious future. In 2016, a 25-person committee of trustees, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators began a thoughtful and thorough strategic planning process, gathering input from more than 90 faculty and staff, as well as more than 75 parents. The plan's five goals include: transform education, expand diversity, excellence without exception, inspire generosity, and attract and sustain. To learn more about progress to date and what's next for each goal, visit <https://www.ma.org/about/strategic-plan>.

A new strategic planning process is currently underway, focusing on five interconnected goals: people, program, permanence, place, and promise. These ensure MA's continued excellence and leadership in progressive education.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Marin Academy. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Marin Academy would supersede any conflicting information in this document.