



PARTNERSHIP *for*
LEADERS *in* EDUCATION

Executive Director
Partnership for Leaders in Education
Charlottesville, VA

THE SEARCH

The University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA-PLE or PLE) seeks a strategic and mission-oriented leader to serve as its next Executive Director (ED). At this challenging and complex moment for the education field, PLE's work, rooted in advancing collective leadership capacity, is more important than ever. The incoming Executive Director will build upon the success of the current team to expand the reach and impact of PLE's cutting-edge leadership development and evidence-based educational strategies to advance system change that elevates the quality of education and life outcomes for students across the nation.

UVA-PLE is a joint venture between the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business (Darden) and the School of Education and Human Development (EHD). A truly unique enterprise, PLE's [evidence-based, evolving approach](#) combines the most innovative thinking in business and education to strengthen education leaders for the demands of leadership. Since its establishment in 2003, PLE has advanced education system transformation in over 950 schools, 200 districts, and 33 states. PLE's programming is the only research-proven effort in the country focused on establishing system conditions ripe for change and building transformative leadership capacity to achieve that change. Specifically, PLE's leadership development strategies increase the capacity of system and school teams to heighten focus and collaboration, shape their own future, and drive measurable, lasting improvements in system effectiveness and student learning.

The Executive Director is the chief strategist, team and operational builder, and the ambassador of PLE's mission. This leader integrates efforts to advance distinctive learning experiences and partner support services. As the leader of PLE, this person will ensure seamless partner development, operations, marketing, network building, and research and thought leadership on systems change. Specifically, the new ED will establish a compelling, collaborative strategic vision for PLE's next chapter; raise the profile of PLE as its public face; champion best-in-class cultural leadership to drive the PLE team toward ambitious, mission-aligned results and partner service; and serve as a savvy and entrepreneurial financial steward. The Executive Director dually reports to the Deans of UVA's Darden School of Business and the

School of Education and Human Development and coordinates constituents across the partner schools and the Darden School Foundation to ensure effective governance.

UVA-PLE has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. All applications, inquiries, and nominations, which will remain highly confidential, should be directed to Isaacson, Miller, as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP FOR LEADERS IN EDUCATION

The UVA Partnership for Leaders in Education is a joint venture between the Darden School of Business and the School of Education and Human Development. For more than two decades, PLE has partnered with school systems nationwide, equipping leaders with the skills, tools, and strategies to deliver lasting improvements in student outcomes. PLE's partnerships, including the renowned [Core Partnership](#), are designed to foster growth and engagement among leaders at all levels. PLE's Core Partnership, an evidence-based, evolving approach to leadership development, strengthens the capacity of teams to create transformational conditions in which previously underserved students achieve lasting success. PLE endeavors to be the leading national organization for advancing leadership capacity in K-12 education and to significantly raise educational outcomes at the student, school, and system levels.

PLE's capacity-building approach to school improvement has resulted in remarkable gains in student achievement across the country. Over the past two decades, PLE has partnered with 200 districts and 950 schools across 33 states. PLE's leadership and systems development approach focuses on enduring solutions. It is the only known leadership development provider with peer-reviewed evidence of success in growing student performance outcomes. Additionally, PLE partner schools receive statewide recognition for earning top gains or Title 1 Blue Ribbon status in their states. Beyond the Core Partnership, PLE has also successfully advanced its impact through numerous forward-thinking partnerships with state education agencies, national and regional forums, custom programs, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Recently, PLE's adaptive leadership development and research-based educational frameworks have informed many statewide efforts.

PLE has been recognized through feature articles in the [74 Million](#), [Education Week](#), [K12 Dive](#), [District Administration](#), and [Hechinger Report](#). The organization's revenue has grown fivefold over the last 15 years, and PLE is poised to expand its recent successes in philanthropic efforts.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director is the chief strategist, team and operational builder, and ambassador of PLE's mission. Reporting to the Deans of the Darden School of Business and the School of Education and Human Development, this leader ensures effective governance that includes the Darden School Foundation President, Chief Executive Officer of Darden Executive Education and Lifelong Learning, and the EHD Senior Associate Dean and Chief Operating Officer.

The Executive Director leads a seasoned and highly accomplished team, many of whom work remotely across the United States. The team ensures seamless coordination of services that leverage over 100 consultants and faculty members every year to deliver programming across 15+ states.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director will execute an ambitious agenda and provide robust support for internal and external efforts. They will work closely with other constituents at UVA, manage the organization on a day-to-day basis, and lead goal-oriented decision-making.

More specifically, the Executive Director (ED) will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Define and advance a compelling, collaborative strategic vision for PLE's next chapter

The incoming ED will further position PLE as a national leader in education leadership, systemic transformation, and impact. They will harness the unique strengths of Darden and EHD to advance research, thought leadership, and evidence-based resources and programming, engaging faculty from both schools alongside the team in design, delivery, practitioner-valued scholarship, and evaluation. They will survey the national landscape alongside existing PLE strategy to craft a next-level vision that builds on the organization's core competencies. This vision should be informed by the expertise of PLE staff, external partners, the Darden and EHD Deans, sector leaders, and beyond. The successful ED will recognize that PLE's work is national in scale but local in implementation, led by partners and allies who execute strategy based on their state and local political contexts, capacities, and opportunities. Moreover, the next ED will build upon ongoing philanthropic priorities to expand PLE's impact via rigorous research, thought leadership, and resources on successful school and system transformation and the expansion of state partnerships and networks of systemic impact.

Serve as an external ambassador and relationship builder to raise the profile of PLE

While PLE has high brand satisfaction, its brand awareness is low compared to other leading K-12 service organizations. The Executive Director will drive efforts to elevate PLE's stature in the field and raise awareness of its transformational work. The successful candidate will bring a track record of success as a public face and be connected enough to represent the work of PLE more broadly and in ways that transcend political lines. They will be a savvy navigator of the various priorities and stakeholders within the education sector—and within UVA—and will create an agenda that transcends siloes, along with fundraising experience or a demonstrated capacity to step into that work. With the PLE team and in partnership with an Executive Fellow at the Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning, they will build alliances with school systems, state agencies, philanthropic partners, and national networks to secure the resources needed to sustain and grow the Core Partnership and to expand PLE's reach. They will amplify the voices of those directly involved in this work and, in collaboration with key partners, develop communication and storytelling strategies to engage target audiences.

Champion best-in-class cultural leadership to drive the PLE team toward ambitious, mission-aligned results and partner service

The next leader will continue to cultivate a culture of excellence, learning, coordination, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. They will ensure that the work remains deeply grounded in improving student learning and opportunity, with a focus on underserved populations, equity, and the pursuit of extraordinary outcomes. Specifically, the ED will lead the internal functions of PLE and ensure that all staff are accountable for and moving toward short- and long-term goals, both individually and collectively. They will oversee day-to-day operations, including managing the eight talented, mission-driven senior leaders who comprise PLE's leadership team while advancing talent recruitment, selection, retention, and growth strategies across the organization. Additionally, the ED will set clarity around priorities so that staff are united around and working toward a common purpose. They will be responsible for supporting and enhancing staff culture as a prerequisite for excellent service to PLE's partners. This includes monitoring organizational initiatives, supporting resolutions, and proactively driving messages about team and staff culture. The ED will design, modify, and/or expand current systems to share information and facilitate collaboration across teams for smooth decision-making and seamless coordination.

Serve as a savvy and entrepreneurial financial steward and ensure operational excellence

PLE has maintained strong financial health under the outgoing ED, and the next leader will ensure continued excellence. The ED will oversee finances, operations, and program delivery to maintain PLE's high-quality reputation, partner service, and organizational health. This leader will also ensure prudent management of PLE's intellectual capital and overall brand. PLE has successfully generated a fee-for-service model, and the next ED will build upon that success, including expanding sponsorships and philanthropically funded partnerships. Finally, the ED will co-create scopes aligned to partner needs, negotiate and finalize contracts, oversee the budgetary process, ensure interconnected systems for development and delivery, and drive strong financial health and sound fiscal decisions.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will bring leadership experience in a K-12 education organization (school system or service provider), including experience managing a team, and will possess a terminal degree in business, education, law, or policy. While not required, experience in fundraising or sales is preferred. Finally, the successful candidate will possess many of the following characteristics:

Strategic Vision and Systems Thinker

- Foresees future possibilities and translates them into breakthrough strategies that generate measurable progress for students and systems.
- Navigates ambiguity and the challenges in the education sector with adaptability, vision, and substance, and is able to adapt strategy across diverse contexts.
- Serves as a trusted thought partner to superintendents and national education leaders by bringing both a broad field perspective and actionable insights.

Collaborative Coalition Builder

- Mobilizes people, ideas, and systems across organizational boundaries, sectors, and graduate schools to create conditions for transformational change.
- Inspires and builds coalitions, partnerships, and networks that expand PLE's reach and deepen its impact.
- Aligns the work of the team, faculty, consultants, and partners, drawing from their collective wisdom to ensure shared vision, coordinated execution, and sustained engagement.

Champion of Excellence in Service, Operations, and Learning

- Combines vision with execution: a "doer" who shapes proposals, directs projects, and ensures the highest standards of delivery.
- Champions seamless coordination across executive education, field support services, and ongoing thought partnership.
- Uses data, evaluation, and feedback to continuously improve—and ensure that operations drive not just efficiency but transformational results for students and school systems.

Mission-Driven Team Leader

- Leads with care and conviction, sustaining a highly motivated, mission-driven team and culture.
- Deeply committed to—and could serve as an advocate for—the PLE approach: advancing collective leadership practice, systems change, and research/insights to advance more equitable and excellent student outcomes.
- Capable of inheriting a strong organization and building on those assets, cultivating an environment of trust, equity, collaboration, and accountability.
- Ensures the team's daily work and culture connects clearly to the mission and improved outcomes for the community PLE serves, empowering staff to achieve impact while fostering professional growth.

Resourceful Steward & Entrepreneur

- Demonstrates success in mobilizing institutional, governmental, and philanthropic resources.
- Serves as a strong organizational steward, ensuring fiscal discipline, operational excellence, and sustainable growth.
- Champions highly purposeful and impactful partner development efforts, with entrepreneurial zest to craft partnerships that build and expand upon core assets to meet the emergent needs of the field and partners.
- Partners with UVA stakeholders and advisors to advance and expand the pillars of PLE's philanthropic strategy.

LOCATION AND TRAVEL

The PLE Executive Director must reside in the Charlottesville, VA area and will travel approximately 25 percent of the time—and likely more during the early stages of their tenure.

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: [UVA-PLE Executive Director Search](#).

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This document has been prepared based on the information provided by UVA-PLE. 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 UVA-PLE would supersede any conflicting information in this document.