



1689
William Penn
Charter
School

Director of Upper
School

William Penn Charter School (Penn Charter) invites nominations and applications for the position of Director of Upper School (Director) to begin July 1, 2026.

ABOUT WILLIAM PENN CHARTER SCHOOL

Established in 1689 by William Penn and members of the Religious Society of Friends, William Penn Charter School is a community guided by [Quaker values](#) and the central belief that there is "that of God" in every person. Today, Penn Charter is a leading, all-gender, independent day school offering a vigorous PreK-12 program in academics, arts, and athletics, all within the context of the Quaker values that have guided the school for more than three centuries.



Penn Charter is the fifth-oldest school in America and the oldest Quaker school in the world. The curriculum embraces a plurality of cultures and celebrates an array of voices, instilling in students a deeper understanding and empathy for individuals in this community and the world.

The Penn Charter educational program exposes students to a breadth of content and ideas as well as opportunities for deep exploration in the pursuit of personal passion. Guided by research and best practices, faculty collaborate across divisions and disciplines to design and deliver engaging and relevant learning experiences. Penn Charter provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a complex and changing world.

Penn Charter believes that people have the capacity for growth, and the school is committed to the patient pursuit and continuous revelation of truth. Rooted in the importance of silent reflection, weekly Meeting for Worship is central to the life of the school.

Leadership

Dr. Karen Warren Coleman became the eighth Head of School in the modern era on July 1, 2023. She is the first woman to lead Penn Charter. A distinguished educational leader with 25 years of experience in elementary, secondary, and higher education, Coleman was most recently the Head of the Hockaday School, a college preparatory school for girls in Dallas, Texas. Before transitioning to PreK-12 independent school education, she served in higher education for more than two decades, including as vice president at The University of Chicago, associate dean at the University of California, Berkeley, and other leadership roles at George Washington University and Hobart and William Smith Colleges. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, her master's degree from the University of Vermont, and her doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include diversity and inclusion, free expression, student activism, leadership, and governance.



In partnership with the Head of School, Penn Charter is governed by a [Board of Trustees](#). Composed of current and past parents, alumni (known as OPCs), and community leaders, the Board ensures that Penn Charter continues to live out its mission through its strategic planning efforts and stewardship of the school's financial resources.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Penn Charter is a community that honors difference; that seeks to be a place where diversity is understood, represented, and valued. As such, the school seeks to build a community that represents diversity in race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, sexual orientation, learning style,

opinion, and hometown. When walking through Penn Charter's red doors, there is a reason the formal-looking school suddenly feels down-to-earth: the people. Penn Charter was founded not for some people but for all people. That is as true today as it was in 1689. Penn Charter was one of the first schools to open to children of all religions and races, among the first to educate girls and to offer financial aid. Penn Charter's [diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging \(DEIB\) work](#) is ongoing, unfinished.



Upper School

Students are provided with the hallmarks of a liberal arts education with an emphasis on reflection, collaboration, and grappling with complexity, as they prepare to engage, shape, and contribute to an ever-changing world. Effective learning environments are highly relational. The cornerstone of everything Penn Charter does in the Upper School is built upon the foundation of the student-teacher relationship. In addition to being experts in their fields, the faculty understand and appreciate the wonder and tensions of adolescence, and teachers strike the appropriate balance of challenge and support.

As members of classes, advisories, teams, ensembles, clubs, and other community activities, Penn Charter students are presented with hundreds of opportunities to develop their skills, to expand their horizons, and to pursue their passions. Every student can charter their own unique Upper School academic path. Building on the Quaker testimony of community, the Upper School promotes global exposure and outreach that begins in the classroom, encompasses its city, and expands beyond physical, linguistic, and cultural borders.

Curricular Highlights

- **Interdisciplinary coursework.** Many Upper School classes are designed to break down barriers and foster collaborative pursuits between disciplines.
- **Learning beyond the classroom.** Upper School students have frequent opportunities to leave campus to engage with and learn from others—in the surrounding neighborhood, in our city, and through innovative courses. As Penn Charter has moved [beyond the AP](#), Advanced Studies courses integrate project-based learning, using the city as the extended classroom, and collaborations with Penn Charter’s Center for Public Purpose. Additionally, Penn Charter’s [Certificate Program](#) enables students to integrate different aspects of the Upper School program around a particular focus and passion in their junior and senior years.
- **Independent Study program.** In partnership with teachers and advisors, and with support from their families, students can [design their own courses](#).
- **Senior Comprehensive Project.** During their final semester, seniors complete [a project of their own design](#), with a focus on public purpose and in collaboration with a local organization.



ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR OF UPPER SCHOOL

Reporting to the Head of School, the Director of Upper School takes leadership responsibility and accountability for implementing Penn Charter’s mission within the Upper School, grades 9-12. The Director also serves as a member of the School's Leadership Team and works in close collaboration with the Associate Head of School, Assistant Head of School, and Lower and Middle School Directors. Overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Upper School, the director serves as the educational leader for approximately 460 students and 80 faculty and staff members within a rigorous, college-preparatory

curriculum. The Director will use the [Portrait of a Penn Charter Learner](#) as a guidepost to nurture students as they become Courageous Learners, Compassionate Friends, Constructive Communicators, and Change Cultivators while fostering a positive, inclusive environment and collaborating with educators to uphold the School's mission and values. The Director of Upper School will be an instrumental, strategic partner in fostering a healthy, high-quality student experience, as well as in curriculum development, faculty support, enrollment and retention, and parent and caregiver engagement.



Overall Responsibilities

- Inspire and lead a dynamic Upper School faculty, culture, and academically ambitious program grounded in Penn Charter's mission, Quaker values, and Friends practices.
- Serve as the chief steward of student learning and community, ensuring that intellectual rigor, creativity, well-being, and belonging are central to the Upper School experience.
- Articulate and advance a clear, compelling vision for the Upper School that engages students, faculty, and families and strengthens its identity within the PreK–12 school.
- Be a visible, trusted, and relational leader, present throughout the life of the Upper School and adept at navigating both everyday operations and complex challenges.
- Champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, embedding these commitments authentically into divisional culture, policy, and practice.
- Ensure excellence and integrity in student systems, including accurate, timely records, transcripts, and academic reporting. Lead and integrate student support services, providing thoughtful

oversight of counseling, health, and learning support to meet the needs of every student in the division.

- Align vision with execution, ensuring that all Upper School programs and decisions reflect Penn Charter’s mission and values.
- Partner closely with the Head of School and Associate Head of School, communicating proactively and strategically about programs, priorities, and emerging issues.
- Collaborate across divisions to advance coherence, continuity, and shared purpose, reinforcing Penn Charter as one unified school.
- Partner strategically with the Chief Financial Officer and Head of School to steward, monitor, and align the Upper School’s operating budget in support of divisional priorities and institutional goals.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Director of Upper School will embrace the following opportunities and challenges:

Strategic Leadership and Institutional Vision

In close partnership with the Head of School, faculty, staff, fellow school leaders, and key constituents across the community, the Director of Upper School will play a central leadership role in shaping and advancing Penn Charter’s next Strategic Plan. This work will require deep listening, collaborative visioning, and the confidence to lead decisively while remaining firmly grounded in mission and values.

The Director will help articulate and advance a shared vision that sustains Penn Charter’s position as a leading Quaker school and a national model of mission-driven excellence. As the school navigates an increasingly complex educational and societal landscape, the Director will contribute meaningfully to defining priorities, aligning resources, and ensuring that Penn Charter remains a school of choice for values-aligned families, exceptional faculty, and purpose-driven students—guided by Quaker practices of reflection, dialogue, and discernment.



Strengthening Cross-Divisional Collaboration and Coherence

Working in close partnership with the Lower and Middle School Directors, the Director of Upper School will help strengthen cohesion across Penn Charter’s PreK–12 program. This includes supporting smooth student transitions, aligning curricular and pedagogical priorities where appropriate, and fostering a shared sense of purpose across divisions.

This work calls for a leader who is deeply relational and community-minded—one who values teamwork, communicates with clarity and generosity, and appreciates both the continuity of the PreK-12 experience and the distinct developmental needs of Upper School students.

Inspiring Leadership

The Director of Upper School will lead with clarity, integrity, and deep alignment with Penn Charter’s Quaker values, building on the division’s strengths while guiding it through a period of reflection, growth, and transition. As a visible and steady presence, the Director will foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and belonging among students, families, faculty, and staff. With a genuine love for working with adolescents and a leadership style marked by warmth, optimism, and joy, the Director will strengthen

coherence across the division, support open and inclusive decision-making, and champion equity and inclusion as central to the Upper School's identity and daily life. This leader will unite the community around shared purpose and guide the division forward with care, confidence, and clarity.



Relational Leadership

At Penn Charter, effective Upper School leadership is fundamentally relational. The Director must be a leader who understands that strong relationships—built on trust, presence, humility, and care—are the foundation of a thriving Upper School community. This leader will work collaboratively, seek out diverse perspectives, and actively invite and respond to feedback from students, faculty, staff, and families. They will be approachable, emotionally intelligent, and attentive to the daily rhythms and realities of Upper School life.

In an environment shaped by adolescent development and corresponding complexity, high expectations, and meaningful challenge, the Director will lead with empathy, clarity, and joy—modeling curiosity, resilience, and openness. By investing deeply in relationships and communicating with honesty and warmth, the Director will cultivate a culture where adults and students feel seen, supported, and inspired to do their best work together.

Academic and Student Experience

The Director will lead efforts to ensure that the Upper School experience balances academic excellence and student well-being, attending to both with equal seriousness and intention. In partnership with

faculty, the Director will support a dynamic, challenging, and sustainable curriculum; promote instructional excellence; and thoughtfully integrate innovation to enhance teaching and learning.

In close partnership with colleagues across the school, the Director will prioritize student well-being and foster a healthy, inclusive, and supportive culture—one that attends intentionally to students' social, emotional, and intellectual growth and reflects Penn Charter's commitment to educating the whole child.



QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate brings a deep understanding of contemporary education, including research-informed instructional practice, and a nuanced appreciation of the adolescent learner. They demonstrate curiosity, adaptability, and a genuine openness to evolving pedagogical practices, emerging technologies, and new models of teaching and learning. They will have expertise in secondary-level curriculum development and instruction, demonstrated success as a school leader and lifelong learner, and a desire to work in a Quaker School that guides students to live lives that make a difference.

This role calls for a sophisticated, creative educational leader with seasoned administrative experience—someone with a strong sense of emotional intelligence; confidence, competence, and skill in both management and leadership; and an attunement to the subtleties of motivating and guiding a diverse group of individuals.

Above all, the Director models and advances educational excellence, with an uncompromising commitment to high academic standards, rigorous instruction, and a culture of intellectual curiosity. They will lead a dynamic Upper School learning community where students are encouraged to explore broadly, reflect deeply, and grow both in intellect and character.

Central to this role is the ability to build and maintain strong, inclusive relationships with parents and caregivers, faculty and staff, students, and colleagues across the leadership team. The Director must embody cultural competence and a deep commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, integrating these values into their leadership, decision-making, and interactions across the school community.



Desired

- Commitment to Penn Charter's mission, Quaker values, and goals
- Proven educational leader adept at navigating complex situations, as well as balancing multiple and sometimes competing demands with clarity, empathy, and purpose
- High level of cultural competence and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, both in their approach to the work and in building relationships with students, faculty, families, and other community members
- Confident and competent team-builder, with strong skills in management and leadership; one who understands the subtleties of motivating and directing a diverse group of personalities with different work styles
- Experienced practitioner in the area of social-emotional learning and an appreciation for health and wellness as a part of the student experience
- An effective listener, who, in addition to seeking to process and understand, is comfortable receiving input from many sources

- Proactive, hands-on leader and problem solver who is an initiator, with a high energy level; a “doer” and collaborator
- Ability to work with the administrative team, division and department leaders, and the larger community in a manner consistent with the school's values
- Genuine passion for working with adolescents; demonstrates knowledge and awareness of the challenges and trends facing students and educators
- Demonstrates personal and professional commitment to ongoing learning and professional development
- A healthy sense of humor
- Approaches barriers and crises with resiliency, creativity, and flexibility
- Self-reflective, and the ability to appreciate and learn from past missteps or missed opportunities
- Powerful and inspirational communication skills
- Excellent managerial and organizational abilities
- Exercises discretion in handling highly sensitive information

Preferred

- Familiarity with Quaker Education and/or the Religious Society of Friends
- Previous experience working with adolescents in an Upper School environment

Required

- Master's degree

APPLICATION PROCESS

The search committee for Penn Charter's next Director of Upper School will begin accepting nominations and reviewing applications immediately. Requested application materials include a letter of interest, current resume, statement of educational philosophy or leadership, and a list of three to five professional references, including contact information. References will not be called without explicit permission from the applicant.

William Penn Charter School is being assisted in this search by Isaacson, Miller. For additional information and to apply, please visit:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/william-penn-charter-school/director-upper-school>

Katie Rockman, Partner | Tiffany Weber, Managing Associate | Mia Carpiello, Senior Associate

For more information about William Penn Charter School, please visit <https://www.penncharter.com/>.

William Penn Charter School provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment and prohibits discrimination and harassment of any type without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability status, genetics, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local laws.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the William Penn Charter School. 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 the William Penn Charter School would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

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APPENDIX

Academics

Penn Charter offers a [fully integrated curriculum](#), designed to develop a student's mind, body, heart, and spirit. This curriculum is the map we use from one grade to the next, guiding students as they gain knowledge and master skills, step by step, with ever-increasing depth and sophistication. The core of these essential skills includes analytical reading and clear writing: the use and understanding of mathematical concepts; the ability to use the tools of observation, inference, and logic; and the development of creativity and physical potential. Penn Charter urges students to engage in the challenges of their education with pride in their intellect, persistence, commitment, and a sense of wonder.



Lower School - A program of cognitive and character development rooted in a rich knowledge of how young children learn best. Children learn best when ideas are connected. Children learn by doing and by working together. So, the curriculum emphasizes interdisciplinary, collaborative, hands-on learning. The Lower School students ask questions, think critically, write effectively, listen carefully, and put all those pieces together.

Middle School – Fostering intellectual, physical, and emotional growth through an age-appropriate curriculum and a facility designed to support learners. The curriculum, taught by a faculty devoted to teaching ages 11-14, reflects a department-based program enhanced by cross-cultural themes and

projects with true intellectual weight. Students begin immediately to undertake tasks calling for more personal organization, study skills, critical thinking, and independent and group work.

Upper School - What would it mean to work at the edge of what you already know? To step out beyond the safe answers and the talents that have always come naturally? To pursue ideas with real depth? Penn Charter's vigorous college preparatory program is rooted in the breadth of the arts and sciences as well as new fields of inquiry and skills such as environmental issues, global awareness, commitment to community, and technology.

Teaching & Learning Center



Penn Charter's [Teaching & Learning Center \(TLC\)](#) was created to provide the professional development needed to reach the goals in the school's Strategic Vision, which encourages faculty to teach for the future: to embrace creativity, collaboration, global partnerships, and innovative curriculum and technologies, and ultimately, to guide students to "live lives that make a difference." The TLC provides teachers with easy access to learning, recognizing that time and access to professional development are major challenges for faculty whose days are already more than full with teaching, coaching, advising, and extracurriculars. The center recognizes that faculty have varied needs as learners, so it is structured to allow them to learn what they want, when they want, and how they want. Faculty can choose to learn about topics of their choice through one-to-one mentoring sessions, workshops, classroom/school visits, Critical Friends Groups, and online learning. The center draws on the innumerable talents of the Penn Charter community,

as well as on outside resources, to provide these learning opportunities. Over the years, the TLC has grown to include programming for and with parents and students, as well as a partnership with Jefferson University.

The TLC has a physical presence on the second floor of the Gummere Library and an online presence on the Teaching and Learning website. Faculty are encouraged to both teach and learn at the Teaching and Learning Center to promote their professional growth and become creative teachers and collaborators ready to meet educators' needs in the 21st century.

The Campus

Penn Charter rests on a sprawling, green 47-acre [campus](#) in the East Falls section of Philadelphia, the nation's sixth-largest city and hub of the northeast corridor. The city offers a diverse population, vibrant cultural life, top-notch entertainment, major league sports, rich history, and abundant opportunities for Penn Charter students and faculty to explore.

Penn Charter's campus continues to grow and evolve in line with the Strategic Vision and the campus transformation that vision inspired, which is organizing around an athletics corridor and the concept of a new Academic Village.



The opening of the new Lower School in 2025 marked the completion of the Academic Village, uniting the Upper, Middle, and Lower School divisions, which operate in their own buildings, each of which is designed to meet students' academic and developmental needs. The [David L. Kurtz Center for the Performing Arts](#),

which opened in 2010, is a LEED-certified building with a green roof and features a 650-seat theater, hydraulic orchestra pit lift, sprung dance floor, choral room, performance studio, instrumental room with four individual practice rooms, recording studio, scene shop, and costume room.

[The athletics corridor](#) provides student athletes with access to resources that match their talents. With a total of four buildings designated for sports, Penn Charter offers athletes six grass playing fields, three synthetic turf fields, one all-weather track, seven tennis courts, ten squash courts, four basketball courts, one climbing wall, and one swimming pool. Penn Charter opened the new, 87,000-square-foot William A. Graham IV OPC '58 Athletics & Wellness Center in September 2021, elevating both athletics and wellness and providing an important new community hub that was quickly embraced by students and adults in the community.



