



Dean and Director
University of Chicago Laboratory Schools
Chicago, IL

THE SEARCH

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools (“Lab” or the “Schools”) seeks a strategic, mission-aligned, and engaged leader to serve as the next Dean and Director (Dean/Director). Founded in 1896 by John Dewey as the nation’s first laboratory school, Lab is home to the youngest members of the University’s academic community and offers a dynamic learning environment that cultivates in its students an enduring spirit of scholarship, curiosity, creativity, and confidence. Lab values learning experientially, exhibiting kindness, and honoring diversity. An integral academic unit of the University of Chicago, the Schools benefit from exceptional proximity to world-renowned scholarly resources, rich collaborative opportunities, and a culture of intellectual vitality. Through clear, strategic leadership, sustained engagement with a broad community of stakeholders, and an abiding commitment to the shared values of the Laboratory Schools and the University of Chicago, the Dean/Director will advance one of the University’s most unique institutions, building upon its remarkable foundation while ensuring its enduring strength and broad influence for future generations of students, families, and educators.

Today, Lab educates 2,200 students from age 3 through grade 12 and draws families from Chicago, the nearby suburbs, and the broader region. Lab students learn within a community distinguished by exceptional teaching, an interdisciplinary and experiential curriculum, a deeply collaborative culture, and a longstanding tradition of academic excellence. For over a century, the Laboratory Schools have fostered a legacy of—and ongoing commitment to—a lifelong love of learning. Lab’s uniquely embedded position within the University of Chicago affords community members extraordinary opportunities for intellectual rigor, open debate, and the ability to develop and express diverse views as part of and in connection with the University community.

The University seeks in its next Dean/Director a seasoned educational leader skilled in guiding complex, high-performing educational organizations and animated by a deep commitment to its enduring values. With sound judgment and exceptional relational capacity, the next Dean/Director will cultivate trust and

connection across Lab and the wider University community. Leading with clarity and integrity, this individual will embody visible student-centered leadership while stewarding this historic institution into its next chapter—honoring Lab’s progressive education roots while advancing organizational strength and a vibrant partnership with the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools have retained Isaacson, Miller, an executive search firm, to assist with this recruitment. Inquiries, nominations, and applications, in the form of a CV and cover letter, should be sent in strict confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT LAB

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools is a nursery through grade 12 institution that has stood as the pioneer and vanguard of pedagogical innovation since its founding in 1896. Professor John Dewey, considered by many to be the father of progressive education, advanced a philosophy of experiential learning that encourages students to think critically, work cooperatively, and engage fully in the learning process.

Today, as one of the nation’s finest private schools, Lab serves over 2,200 students and their families, of whom more than half are affiliated with the University of Chicago. Lab’s intellectually curious and deeply engaged students learn in an environment that questions conventional assumptions, cultivates critical thinking, and prepares them to participate thoughtfully in a dynamic democratic society. Lab students benefit from the Schools’ more than 300 outstanding teaching faculty (80 percent with advanced degrees), more than 100 staff members, approximately \$104 million annual operating budget, and connection to the academic and cultural resources of a world-class research university. Students have access to engage with distinguished University faculty and are taught to and can use the University’s vast resources, including its rich library system.

For over a century, Lab’s pillars of academic excellence have guided the Schools’ work. These four pillars include:

- Scholarship cultivates a culture of rigorous inquiry and sustained intellectual curiosity. Through scholarly engagement, students encounter diverse perspectives, interrogate assumptions, and extend the boundaries of knowledge within a vibrant academic community.
- Creativity inspires students to explore original approaches and engage thoughtfully with complex problems. In cultivating creative capacity, the Schools foster the adaptability, ingenuity, and intellectual agility essential for success in an ever-evolving academic landscape.
- Curiosity allows students to question, explore, and pursue deeper understanding. By fostering a spirit of inquiry, the Schools encourage sustained engagement with ideas and the habits of mind that support thoughtful, self-directed learning.

- Confidence enables students to boldly express themselves, pursue intellectual challenge with courage, and approach uncertainty with resilience. In cultivating this confidence, the Schools foster independence, thoughtful risk-taking, and purposeful engagement.

The University of Chicago Laboratory School is accredited by the Independent Schools Association of Central States (ISACS). For more information about Lab, please visit: <https://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/>

ROLE OF THE DEAN/DIRECTOR

Reporting to the President of the University of Chicago and serving on the University's academic leadership team, the Dean/Director of the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools is the chief academic, strategic, and administrative leader, charged with advancing the Schools' educational vision while also stewarding Lab's vital role as an integral part of the University's community. As the primary representative of the Laboratory Schools in University leadership, the Dean/Director plays a central role in strengthening alignment on values, policy, operations, and priorities, working regularly with the University's and Lab's senior academic and administrative leaders to support meaningful collaboration. Through visionary leadership, active stewardship, and an unwavering commitment to its enduring values, the Dean/Director will lead the Laboratory Schools toward sustained excellence and impact.

KEY PRIORITIES

The Laboratory Schools are entering a defining chapter in their history. Long distinguished by a progressive educational philosophy and a singular relationship as part of the University of Chicago, the Schools are poised to build upon this legacy while responding thoughtfully to the evolving landscape of N-12 education, the complexities of a unionized environment, and opportunities for deeper alignment with University structures. In this important moment—and in furtherance of its mission—the University looks to its next Dean/Director to advance the following priorities:

Advance academic excellence and innovation

The next Dean/Director will build upon a distinguished foundation of academic excellence, cultivating a culture of intellectual vitality, pedagogical innovation, consistent curriculum, and a steadfast pursuit of excellence in every learner. In recent years, the Schools have initiated a strategic planning process and completed a two-year self-study as part of ongoing accreditation work. The new Dean/Director will work in close partnership with academic and administrative leadership to advance an already exceptional academic program while thoughtfully positioning the Schools to meet the evolving opportunities and complexities of N–12 education. This effort includes a shared institutional commitment to ensuring clarity in academic expectations while articulating a clear and compelling vision and curriculum for student learning across divisions. This work also represents a meaningful opportunity to reinforce the Schools' dedication to rigorous, developmentally grounded teaching while fostering a more integrated educational experience for every student.

Steward governance and labor relations, ensuring outcomes reflect the Schools' values, commitments, and standards

The Laboratory Schools operate within a well-established governance framework shaped by independent and coordinated policies, shared decision-making, and a longstanding collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' union. Within this context, the Dean/Director partners closely with Lab and University leadership, to support effective policy implementation, steward the Schools' contractual commitments, and participate in collective bargaining processes with thoughtfulness and discernment, ensuring alignment with the Schools' values, commitments, and standards. This environment calls for a leader with strong relational capacity who communicates with clarity, fosters trust, and keeps students at the center of institutional decision-making.

Strengthen ties and deepen alignment with the University of Chicago

The relationship between the Laboratory Schools and the University has long been one of the Schools' greatest strengths. Looking ahead, there is substantial opportunity to deepen integration and alignment on policy, operations, and shared values and to engage with senior University leadership, including deans, academic departments, and administrative units, to enhance Lab's program and processes. Additionally, strengthening ties with University faculty through research collaborations, partnerships, and broader access to University resources can advance both the Schools' educational mission and the University's aspirations for meaningful engagement across its academic community. The Dean/Director will need to navigate the University landscape with fluency and help elevate the Schools as a vital partner within the larger institution.

Cultivate an aligned, inclusive, and respectful community

The Laboratory Schools have a longstanding commitment to fostering a welcoming, inclusive community where students from diverse backgrounds flourish and diverse perspectives are encouraged and respected. There is an opportunity to further affirm these principles through visible leadership, attentive partnership with students and families, and purposeful collaboration with faculty and staff. As the Schools' senior leader, the Dean/Director will embody and advance the core values of free expression, intellectual curiosity, and diversity and inclusion, that are fundamental to both Lab and the broader University community.

Clarify and elevate the Schools' public voice

As the Schools navigate an increasingly complex educational environment, the importance of a clear, compelling institutional voice—one that reflects and advances its identity and priorities—has never been greater. The Dean/Director plays a pivotal role in championing this voice, translating institutional vision into communications that resonate across the Schools and beyond. In close partnership with University and Lab leadership, the Dean/Director will elevate the Schools' mission and accomplishments while ensuring alignment with broader institutional strategy. They will guide a cohesive communications approach that expresses Lab's values and aspirations within the University's larger narrative. In doing so,

the Dean/Director serves as a visible and trusted ambassador, engaging families, faculty, alumni, board members, and partners with clarity, openness, and purpose.

Ensure strategic and sustainable financial stewardship

As a large and multi-faceted educational institution, the Laboratory Schools depend upon disciplined, forward-looking financial planning and resource allocation that balances near-term operational needs with long-term institutional health. The Dean/Director oversees a substantial financial enterprise that is one component of the University's larger budget framework. This moment presents a meaningful opportunity to align financial strategy with academic and institutional priorities, bring clarity and attention to resource allocation, and sustain investments in the people, programs, and capabilities that will define the Schools' future.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The University of Chicago seeks an accomplished and inspirational educational leader who brings a deep commitment to the values and mission of the Laboratory Schools. The successful candidate will demonstrate many of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Distinguished senior leadership experience in private or public N-12 education, higher education, or comparably complex educational institutions, with demonstrated success leading across interconnected academic and administrative environments;
- A demonstrated commitment to free expression, diversity, inclusion, and the cultivation of a school culture where students learn to engage differing perspectives with empathy, respect, and intellectual curiosity;
- The capacity to engage constructively with faculty, staff, students, families, and University leaders, fostering trust, collaboration, and shared purpose across a large and diverse community;
- Experience working within shared governance structures and engaging senior academic and administrative leaders on matters of policy, operations, curriculum, and institutional alignment;
- Knowledge of or experience with collective bargaining environments, including the ability to lead or support negotiations and ensure effective implementation of contractual obligations;
- Demonstrated success in securing philanthropic support and providing strategic donor stewardship to cultivate long-term, mission-aligned partnerships.
- Strong financial acumen, including an understanding of strategic budgeting, resource allocation, and long-term stewardship in service of academic excellence and institutional sustainability;
- Demonstrated ability to partner effectively with an engaged advisory board, building trust, fostering transparent communication, and ensuring clarity around roles, responsibilities while supporting the continued evolution of board engagement;
- Exceptional communication and listening skills, with the ability to articulate a compelling vision, represent the Schools to internal and external audiences, and develop a clear institutional voice;
- Emotional intelligence, interpersonal judgment, and relational capacity to lead with integrity, empathy, and clarity; and

- A collaborative, mission-driven approach to leadership, with the ability to inspire others, strengthen organizational cohesion, lead organizational change, and advance the Schools in alignment with University values and priorities.

LOCATION

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools are located in the heart of Hyde Park, a vibrant and historic neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. The Schools sit immediately adjacent to and interwoven with the University of Chicago campus. The Early Childhood Campus is housed at Earl Shapiro Hall. The Historic Campus, which spans two city blocks, is home to Lab's Lower, Middle, and High School. The surrounding neighborhood offers tree-lined residential streets, access to parks and the Lake Michigan lakefront, and a diverse community.

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: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-chicago-laboratory-schools/dean-and-director>.

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