

Cate School

Head of Finance and Operations

Position Profile

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The Opportunity

[Cate](#) School seeks a visionary Head of Finance and Operations (HFO) to steward the distinctive boarding school community through its next chapter of growth and transformation. This pivotal leadership role offers the rare opportunity to shape the financial and operational foundation of a distinguished four-year college preparatory institution serving 300 students in the idyllic setting near Santa Barbara, California. With operating expenses of \$35M and an endowment of \$135M, the school requires an innovative financial steward who combines meticulous attention to detail with the creative vision to rethink significant cost structures and operational systems. The ideal candidate will be a thoughtful listener and collaborative partner who thrives on investing in school communities, bringing both analytical rigor and imaginative problem-solving to drive sustainable excellence. As a key member of the strategic leadership team reporting directly to the Head of School, the HFO will oversee the Business Office, Facilities & Plant Operations, People Operations, Technology, Food Services, and the School Store while supporting critical board committees in shaping Cate's future.

About Cate



Cate is a four-year college preparatory boarding school with a low 5:1 student-to-faculty ratio, average class sizes of 12, and inviting residential spaces. Cate's inquiry-based program is designed to challenge, inspire, and support boarding and day students whose interests, abilities, characters, and aspirations make them individually and collectively exceptional.

A Cate education uniquely leverages strong academic and residential curricula to transform students' lives by preparing them as independent thinkers, informing their societal roles as global

citizens of influence, and encouraging them to build authentic and meaningful relationships. Cate students engage enthusiastically in myriad non-academic pursuits and traditions which, complemented by academic rigor, constitute the foundation of a truly whole education. Cate supports 21 varsity teams.

History

Curtis Wolsey Cate, a graduate of Roxbury Latin School and Harvard University, crossed the country in 1910 to start a boarding school that combined the academic excellence of the best East Coast prep schools with the can-do, adventurous spirit of the West. The School opened by enrolling twelve boys in grades 7 to 12. Over time, Cate became a coeducational high school and grew to its current enrollment of 300 young students from 25 states and 16 countries. Today's campus with its science and computer labs, art and music studios, extensive athletic facilities, and advanced technologies is a far cry from the school's early days without electricity, heat, or hot water. Cate turned 115 years old, but beneath the physical changes, it is still very much the same place in vision and spirit.

Throughout its curriculum and residential life, Cate remains true to Mr. Cate's ideal of a supportive community with outstanding faculty where, in his words, students know "something of the pleasure of work and the joy of accomplishment." It is a place where character building, as one faculty member puts it, "happens organically," through hard work, service to others, and time spent outdoors.

Mission Statement

Through commitment, scholarship, companionship, and service, each member of the Cate community contributes to what our founder called *"...the spirit of this place... all compounded of beauty and virtue, quiet study, vigorous play, and hard work."*

Vision

Under the leadership of Head of School Alexandra Lockett, appointed in 2023, the school set a vision to be the ***healthiest place to live, learn, and work.***

Live Well: Culture of Connection

Grounded in the belief that the most vibrant learning communities are built upon a foundation of living well together, the school prioritizes strong relationships among a richly diverse adult and student community.

Learn Well: Culture of Inquiry

Cate's inquiry-based curriculum challenges students to first notice, then linger in a state of wonder before moving to infer by asserting with evidence. Whether around a Harkness Table, in the Physics Lab, or on a service trip, students learn to ask and develop useful questions, take ownership of their pursuit of understanding, share their knowledge as well as their process, and articulate what matters to them.

Work Well: Service as Leadership

In the spirit of Servons – our school motto – Cate students engage regularly in service activities on and off the Mesa, developing a skill set that empowers them to become agents of positive change.

Students apply those attitudes and values of service and leadership in a number of roles, formal and informal, especially in their senior year when they step into authentic and genuine partnership with the faculty to lead and serve the school community.

The Campus

Perched on a hill overlooking the Southern California coast in Carpinteria, a quintessential California beach town on the Pacific Coast, Cate School's setting is one of unparalleled beauty and natural inspiration. It is less than three miles from the beach, just minutes from the vibrant culture



of Santa Barbara and only 90 minutes from the energy of downtown Los Angeles. The Mesa, as we call it with its juxtaposition of close spaces and vast vistas, its blending of human architecture and natural splendor, history and potential, is itself a critical touchstone for this community.

The main campus sits on 150 acres with 54 buildings and 300,000 square feet of space including dormitories, classrooms, athletic facilities, a dining hall, a library, and faculty housing. Currently, the School is building an updated wastewater treatment plant. Following up on an extensive deferred maintenance study the school is in the initial stages of operationalizing the implementation of a comprehensive deferred maintenance plan.

Link to facilities: <https://www.cate.org/about/campus-facilities/>

Head of School

Alexandra Lockett, the ninth Head of School and first female in the role, began her tenure in July 2023. Known for her highly relational style, innovative, strategic thinking, and values driven approach, Alex has quickly established herself within the Cate community. Her own educational journey began as a student at the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., graduated from Brown University with a BA in Biology, and later earned an MBA from Mills College with a focus on Educational Leadership.



During her fifteen years at San Francisco University High School, she taught, served as Dean of Students, and gained national recognition for the innovative mentoring program she developed. In 2019, she became Head of Upper School at Crystal Springs Uplands School in Hillsborough and led the expansion and evolution of the high school program and curriculum.

As a parent of two elementary school-aged boys, Alex is fully invested in the integrated experience of living, working, and leading among her colleagues, their families, and, of course, the students.

Link to Head of School Page:

<https://www.cate.org/about/head-of-school/>

The Finances

Cate finished FY 2024 with \$204M in net assets which represented an increase of \$11M in net assets as compared with FY 2023. Cate ended FY 2024 with an unrestricted operating surplus of \$0.3M; it had unrestricted operating revenues of \$31.9M compared with unrestricted operating expenditures of \$31.6M. Cate has an endowment of \$135M. The school has a \$22M loan from a local bank. The loan is at a fixed rate of 2.35% for 30 years.

The school's tuition rate in fall 2025 is \$83,580 for boarding students and \$67,290 for day students. The school provides financial assistance to 25% of its students spending \$5.3M on aid. Cate admitted 17% of its applicants last year.

The Position

The Head of Finance and Operations will report directly to the Head of School and will be a key member of the school's leadership team. This is a new position whose portfolio may evolve somewhat over time but below are the key responsibilities currently envisioned for the position.

Responsibilities

Management

- Oversee all business office functions including all financial reporting to the Head of School, Board of Trustees, and various committees.
- Lead the School's budget development process and manage the budget throughout the year.
- Serve as primary school liaison to several Board committees such as Finance & Investment, Infrastructure & Master Planning, Audit & Risk, and Advancement.

- Oversee School operations including HR, IT, Facilities, Health Center and Early Childhood Learning Center as well as outsourced operations such as dining services and security.
- Oversee risk management and manage insurance programs including property, casualty, medical, workers' compensation and D&O.

Strategic Leadership

- Provide strategic leadership, analysis, and management of finances, facilities, human resources and technology.
- Establish financial and capital strategies that are consistent with strategic priorities and long-term financial sustainability.
- Build and/or maintain the school's short- and long-term strategic financial model and be adept at modeling various financial strategies.

Strategic Partnerships

- Serve on the Head of School's Strategic Leadership Team and lead, co-lead, or participate in committees such as People Operations and Campus Operations.
- Oversee the administration of the school's endowment in partnership with the Chair of the Finance and Investment Committee.
- Maintain strong relationships with banks and lenders to ensure that funding is secured for the needs of the school and compliance with loan terms.
- Oversee the financial audit and ensure compliance with all local and state reporting requirements.
- Collaborate effectively with Advancement, Admissions & Enrollment Management to ensure sustainable financial modeling.

Opportunities and Challenges

- The school has a cap of 300 students plus employee children; develop robust financial models to ensure financial sustainability with this enrollment.
- Streamline budget categories and tracking among various departments and ensure that they interact with each other to be able to provide accurate and timely reports.
- Establish efficient back-office protocols that ensure accurate and timely operations.
- Review health and property insurance plans with the goal to identify innovative approaches to maximize impact while minimizing cost.
- Review all departments and processes to ensure that the school is operating in the most efficient and cost-effective manner while remaining aligned with its mission.
- Review and model various revenue-producing opportunities and ensure that revenues from auxiliaries are maximized.
- Examine the health center to ensure that it is operating as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Qualifications

- Minimum of 10 years of financial and operational experience with increasing breadth and leadership responsibilities required.
- Experience in an independent school, nonprofit or higher education setting strongly preferred.
- Experience on senior administrative teams.
- Experience working with non-profit Boards.
- Experience with IT, Facilities and HR highly desirable.
- Bachelor's degree required. CPA, MBA or other master's degree desirable.

Key Strengths

- Ability to manage multiple priorities and projects simultaneously, with strong project management capabilities.
- Consistent demonstration of an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Superb communication skills; excellent written, verbal, and presentation skills.
- Demonstrated ability to understand complex subjects, distill, and communicate to varied audiences.
- Skilled at negotiating and initiating contracts with external vendors
- Demonstrated experience in the development of analysis for strategic decision-making, such as KPIs, key cost drivers, competitive analysis, market analysis, organizational strengths, and weaknesses, etc.
- Ability to think and plan strategically and creatively and develop various scenarios for alternate solutions.
- Ability to supervise, manage, and delegate multiple functions and activities.
- Ability to remain calm, flexible, and work effectively under pressure.
- Aptitude for high customer-service standards.
- High personal integrity, discretion and a commitment to transparency and accountability.
- Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in both practice and philosophy.
- Desire to be a part of a vibrant living and learning community.

Nomination and Application Process

Nominations and applications are invited for this position. Review of applications will begin immediately, and candidate material received by August 15, 2025, will be assured full consideration, although recruitment will continue until an appointment is announced. Applications (including a cover letter and resume) must be uploaded to:

<http://lapovsky.hiringthing.com>. Compensation includes a salary between \$275,000 and \$350,000 depending on qualifications as well as a generous fringe benefit package.

Lapovsky Consulting is assisting Cate in this search. For nominations, questions, or additional information, please contact:

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