

BRIGHAM HILL  
CONSULTANCY



ST. THOMAS SCHOOL

Medina, Washington

**Director of Admissions and Financial Aid**

**The School**

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Located in the Eastside Seattle suburb of Medina, St. Thomas School (STS) is a private, non-sectarian institution serving nearly 300 students in preschool through eighth grade. The school provides a vibrant and challenging environment designed to meet the needs of high performing, motivated learners and, as such, is a preeminent feeder school for top independent and public secondary schools in the area. St. Thomas School's innovative approach to personalized education and leadership development has earned it widespread acclaim, including recognition as a Microsoft Showcase School. STS is also a certified Washington Area Green School, an accolade that recognizes environmentally conscious organizations.

As one of the most established independent schools on the east side of Lake Washington, St. Thomas School is as grounded in tradition as it is forward thinking. STS was founded in 1951 as a parish school for the St. Thomas Episcopal Church to serve the rapidly growing Eastside community. Its first class consisted of 17 first- and second-grade students taught in a portable, wooden frame building across the street from the current campus. As enrollment grew over the years, it became apparent that larger and more permanent space was needed, and construction began on the school's present site. In 1967, the church decided that the school should be a separate entity. The following year, a Board of Trustees was formed, and St. Thomas School became incorporated as an independent nonprofit institution. Today, while operating



autonomously, the school still leases its property from the church, and the two organizations maintain a positive and cooperative relationship. The school's current space, a beautiful 55,000-square-foot, LEED® Gold certified campus, was completed in 2008 following a successful \$30 million capital campaign, which funded not only the new campus, but professional development and financial aid as well. The facility houses a technology center, media publishing lab, science lab, library/multimedia centers, gymnasium, music center, and community plazas, and features abundant natural light and state-of-the-art technology. STS

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continues to grow and recently added seventh and eighth grades, graduating its first eighth grade class in June of 2014.

St. Thomas School is a mission-driven institution that places a premium on recognizing and sustaining its core values in every aspect of its daily life. The school's vision and mission statements follow:

### ***Our Vision***

*A recognized leader in early childhood through 8th Grade, St. Thomas School provides an educational journey defined by a cognitively rigorous program with an emphasis on developing character, leadership, and a passion for learning and achievement.*

### ***Our Mission***

*The mission of St. Thomas School is to develop responsible citizens of a global society. In partnership with parents, we inspire and motivate intellectually curious students. Our small, nurturing environment supports the acquisition of a broad academic foundation with an emphasis on critical thinking, leadership skills, and the development of strong character and spiritual awareness.*

In addition to the statements above, St. Thomas School has developed an objective around diversity and its importance to the life and culture of the school. People of myriad ethnicities, faiths, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family structures are not only welcome but celebrated. Also supporting St. Thomas School's vision and mission is a core set of guiding beliefs that provides an underlying framework for decisions, policies, and academic programs at the school: curriculum with coherence, commitment to character, community of learners, and climate for learning. These four principles speak to a commonly held philosophy that clearly delineates expectations and helps shape the school as a vital community of learners. More information may be found [here](#).



St. Thomas School is accredited by the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS), and holds memberships with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS),

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the Puget Sound Independent Schools (PSIS), and the Washington Federation of Independent Schools (WFIS).

### Strategic Plan

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The school's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan outlines a transformative vision that will position St. Thomas School as a pioneer and thought leader on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The initiatives have excited current parents and students and are sure to be attractive to prospective families as well. A new Merit Scholar Program, expected to launch in fall 2017, will grant partial scholarships to new Middle School students who demonstrate academic promise and accomplishment, character, leadership, and service in the community and who represent diverse interests, learning styles, backgrounds, and experiences. The school is developing a new Center for Leadership and Innovation that will allow students to hone the skills and knowledge necessary to solve 21<sup>st</sup> century problems. St. Thomas School has already launched the Center for Personalized Learning, allowing the school to further tailor the Preschool-8 experience for each child by employing differentiated instruction, gifted and enrichment teaching models, and specialized faculty and by building upon the extensive 1:1 laptop program and leveraging technology as a learning and teaching tool.



### The Admissions Picture

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St. Thomas School enrolls students who are prepared to meet academic challenges in a comprehensive and cognitively rigorous program. The Admissions Committee uses a data-driven decision-making process while taking into account not only a child's academic potential but also his or her enthusiasm for learning, social-emotional development, respect for others, and natural curiosity. The Director of Admissions and Financial Aid works closely with the Admissions Committee—which includes division heads, language arts and math faculty members who assist in testing and assessment, and, if necessary, the learning specialist—to identify students who will be most successful at the school. The school intentionally works to attract a diverse student and faculty body; this school year, the student body consists of 36% students of color and hails from 18 zip codes. The admissions process is need-blind, and St. Thomas School has steadily increased the amount of available financial aid, resulting in 16% of students receiving nearly \$800,000 in grants during the 2015-2016 school year. STS uses an [“all inclusive”](#) tuition model, thereby bringing clarity to the cost of an independent school education and eliminating “add ons” to tuition.

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This is an exciting time of growth and opportunity at St. Thomas School. With the Middle School program now fully launched, the school hopes to increase enrollment by 50 to 60 students in the next six to seven years. The majority of this growth is expected to take place in the Middle School both through attracting new families to the school and by increasing retention from the Elementary to the Middle Division. St. Thomas School has invested in a number of new programs—including the Center for Leadership and Innovation, the Center for Personalized Learning, athletics, performing arts, and the school’s first Merit Scholars Program—that will be attractive to potential middle school families. In addition, the Seattle and Bellevue areas are growing rapidly as international businesses relocate to the area, and St. Thomas School has soft-launched an international student program in order to reach this new population. The School seeks to grow and enhance outreach to these groups and to the greater community in general, particularly in light of the competitiveness of the market that results from both the high caliber of public and private schools in the area and the fact that many independent schools have common entry points in fifth and sixth grades.

**Responsibilities**

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Reporting to Kirk Wheeler, Head of School since 2005, the Director of Admissions and Financial Aid will have overall responsibility for admissions and enrollment management efforts. He or she will be an ambassador for St. Thomas School in the broader Seattle community and thus will be dedicated to the school’s mission and well-versed in the opportunities available to students and families. The Director will supervise one full-time staff member and will be a key member of the senior administrative team, which includes the three division heads, the Director of Finance and Operations, the Director of Development, the Director of Marketing and Communications, and the Director of Information and Communication Technology. This person will work closely with the Head of School and other administrators on issues that impact both the admissions effort and the entire life of the school. Specific responsibilities include the following:

- Managing the entire admissions process, including identifying prospective applicants; managing applicant files and information; conducting and overseeing testing and interviewing; notifying families of decisions; and otherwise guiding the enrollment process.
- Developing and implementing innovative strategies to attract, enroll, and retain highly qualified students, including targeting populations that may currently be unfamiliar with St. Thomas School and improving retention in the highly competitive middle school years.
- Cultivating and sustaining a welcoming, inclusive, and compassionate atmosphere and culture in the admissions department and ensuring that all families feel valued and treated fairly regardless of the ultimate outcome of their application.
- Articulating the school’s mission, programs, and admissions policies and increasing awareness of the value of a St. Thomas School education both in the broader local

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community and among current constituents, including working closely with the Director of Marketing and Communications in promoting the school's brand in the Eastside and beyond.

- Networking with recruiters, human resources professionals, relocation experts, and educational consultants to build relationships and brand recognition of St. Thomas School in the community, particularly among families who are new to the area.
- Continually collecting and analyzing admissions data to inform enrollment management practices, and keeping the Board of Trustees, Head of School, and senior administrative team apprised of important enrollment trends.
- Working closely with the Director of Finance and Operations and the Financial Aid Committee to administer financial aid.
- Representing St. Thomas School at local and national conferences and admissions meetings.
- Coordinating the school's high school placement program, including meeting with families and students, assisting in the application process, and maintaining strong relationships with area high schools.

### **Candidate Qualities**

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In addition to inviting candidates with strong experience in independent school admissions, St. Thomas School also wishes to consider "nontraditional candidates" with transferrable experience in other fields. Accordingly, the following candidate qualities are offered as general guidelines rather than strict requirements.

#### **Leadership**

A relationship-focused "people person" with the presence, intellect, and confidence to interact successfully with a wide variety of constituents, including trustees, school administrators, staff, parents, teachers, and students.

A perceptive individual who can quickly ascertain both family needs and local market dynamics in order to articulate a persuasive case for the school, and who has the follow-through and interpersonal skills to "close the deal" with prospective families.

A proactive and creative professional who respectfully challenges the status quo, sees the "big picture," and has the organizational skills to translate strategy into action.

A positive and supportive team player who welcomes input, communicates goals clearly, and empowers others.

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Experience

Ideally, a background that includes exposure to the independent school admissions process and the design and implementation of creative enrollment and retention initiatives.

A track record of working successfully with a variety of constituents, such as parents students, faculty, staff, and board members.

Experience analyzing and, in turn, applying data trends to develop institutional strategies.

A history that includes making the case for an organization in writing, by presenting to large and small groups, and by forming meaningful personal relationships with individuals.

Preferably, familiarity with independent schools or other education-related nonprofit organizations gained either as professional or as a volunteer.

Skills and Knowledge

A capacity for evaluating existing admissions strategies, creating plans to strengthen areas of need, and building new programs as needed to increase enrollment and retention.

An understanding of families' varying needs and motivations and a corresponding ability to generate interest in a school by speaking compellingly about its unique benefits.

The ability to maximize technology and other resources for both information management and outreach and marketing.

Expertise in synthesizing large amounts of quantitative and qualitative data and utilizing that information to drive decision making and meet intuitional goals.

Skilled in promoting a vision, communicating a strategy, and seeing it through to practical execution, while handling multiple projects simultaneously and remaining flexible in response to shifting priorities.

Able to make difficult decisions and balance the sometimes-competing priorities that arise in the independent school enrollment management process.

Exceptional written and verbal communication skills and the ability to interact comfortably one-on-one and in groups.

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A general awareness of the values and personal styles typically associated with the Pacific Northwest and an ability to assimilate quickly into its unique culture.

Personal Attributes

A good listener with high emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and the ability to read people and situations accurately.

An approachable and positive individual who possesses both the confidence to lead and the collaborative skills to be an effective member of a matrix team operating in a fast-paced environment.

A patient and flexible person who is nonetheless focused and results-oriented.

A diligent and energetic individual who relishes being part of a fast-paced and innovative community.

One who will embrace and internalize St. Thomas School's mission and be an enthusiastic ambassador for the school.

Other Considerations

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Compensation: Commensurate with experience and competitive with comparable organizations in the region.

Travel: Minimal travel required.

Education: Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree a plus.

Website: [www.stthomasschool.org](http://www.stthomasschool.org)

Candidates May Now Be: A Director of Admissions or admissions staff member in an independent school.

An independent school administrator whose career has included exposure to admissions and community outreach.

An executive with a nonprofit organization, perhaps in marketing or development, whose skills and experiences can be readily transferred to the independent school world.

A leader in sales in the for-profit sector who has nonprofit experience as a volunteer and a temperament that would lead him or her to be successful in an independent school.

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