



BENCHMARK SCHOOL

**MEDIA, PENNSYLVANIA
HEAD OF SCHOOL**

START DATE: JULY 1, 2020

WWW.BENCHMARKSCHOOL.ORG



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

BenchmarkSCHOOL

Mission

Benchmark School is committed to helping bright students who learn differently, or have yet to reach their academic potential, develop the confidence, strategies, and knowledge to become lifelong learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers.

Fast Facts

School Type: Coeducational, day school for students in grades 1-8
Established: 1970
Enrollment: 182
Faculty Members: 50
Faculty/Student Ratio: 1:4
Students Receiving Financial Aid: 36%
Campus Size: 23 acres

OVERVIEW

Benchmark School is an independent, coeducational school for bright children in grades 1-8 who have been identified as having dyslexia, ADD/ADHD, auditory processing, or other language-based learning differences. For five decades, Benchmark has been helping students who have yet to reach their academic potential become confident and strategic thinkers, learners, and problem solvers who meet with success in school and life.

From rigorous academics to a rich array of music, theater, outdoor recreation, competitive athletics, and extracurricular activities, Benchmark offers a comprehensive curriculum tailored to the way each student learns best. All of this happens in a supportive, family-focused community that is deeply committed to helping each and every student succeed. The results of the program are evident in the lives and careers of successful Benchmark alumni around the world. Graduates make the successful transition to high school and virtually all continue on to higher education, many attending some of the nation's most prestigious colleges, universities and graduate programs.

Benchmark seeks a head of school who will join the community in July 2020. Ralph Wales has been named as Benchmark's interim Head of School for the 2019-20 academic year, beginning July 2019. He has worked as an educator, administrator, and head of school since 1980. Ralph is currently interim Head of School at St. George's Episcopal School in New Orleans and served for 24 years as Head of School at the Gordon School in Rhode Island.

The board of trustees is now working to identify a long-term head of school who will guide Benchmark in fulfilling its founding values with an eye toward the future. Propelled by the support and pride of the community, and guided by the principles of the school's mission, the board is seeking someone who will help to further define and execute Benchmark's mission so that it can continue making the bold moves necessary to propel it forward and secure its strong future.





SCHOOL HISTORY

Benchmark School was founded in 1970 by Irene W. Gaskins, Ed.D., as a small, part-time program with borrowed classroom space. Under her guidance, it grew into a full-time, independent school, situated on a wooded 23-acre campus in Media, Pennsylvania, complete with a 20,000 volume children's library, 35,000 volume curriculum library, modern classrooms, science labs, music and art rooms, and a gymnasium. In 2003, Benchmark dedicated two state-of-the-art buildings: the A. Palmer West Performing Arts Center and the Dorrance Hill Hamilton Middle School Building, and in 2018, Benchmark opened its state-of-the-art Innovation Lab, complete with 3D printers and laser cutters. The Innovation Lab has a full-time director who focuses students on a design thinking process that integrates learning across the curriculum into problem solving activities and hands-on experimentation.

Since its founding, the school has been committed to continuing its emphasis on research-based, individualized instruction. This tradition remains a fundamental component of a Benchmark education. Administrators and faculty are frequent presenters at local, state, and international conferences on best teaching practices. Benchmark also is proud to frequently host visitors from schools around the world who are interested in learning about the school's research-based approach to teaching children who learn differently.



THE SCHOOL

Today, Benchmark School enrolls 182 full-time students from the five-county Philadelphia region, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware. In addition, a five-week Summer Camp serves more than 260 children who benefit from reading and writing instruction beyond the regular school year in a recreational day camp experience. Students' challenges in learning are related to how they process language and/or a mismatch of their learning styles and the instruction they have received. Benchmark develops a detailed understanding of each student's particular strengths and challenges and uses this profile as a basis for individualized instruction. The goal is to meet students where they are, so that they will experience success and develop the confidence that will enable them to take full advantage of the instruction that will help them become successful learners and citizens of the world.

Benchmark is an internationally-recognized leader in effective, research-based education, and its gifted teachers are at the core of the school's transformative education. Their unparalleled level of expertise in teaching students who learn differently is a reflection of their deep commitment to excellence and innovation. Benchmark faculty and staff work with renowned experts in cognition, language, psychology, and education to hone their skills and translate the latest research into cutting edge practice. They attend seminars, publish articles, present at national conferences, and collaborate with other teachers in the U.S. and around the world.

Throughout its history, Benchmark has hosted educators from all over the globe who are interested in seeing the school in action in order to learn its methodologies, including the Benchmark Word Identification Program. In addition, the school is privileged to work with dozens of outstanding professionals and researchers from fields such as reading education, psychology, diversity education, math, design thinking, and science who routinely collaborate with staff and faculty and share their expertise.



The Benchmark School Center for Empowered Learning is dedicated to serving as a vibrant hub for discussions of innovative ideas and research-based practices that inspire, support, and empower success in school and life. The Center addresses this mission by providing presentations, forums, workshops, and resources by thought-leaders in education, technology, counseling, and creativity. Past events have included authors Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver as part of their national book tour for the release of their new book, “Here’s Hank: Everybody is Somebody;” “The ABCs of ADHD & Executive Functioning: Empowering Kids for Success in School and in Life” presented by Sharon Saline, Psy.D.; and “How to Talk (and Listen) to Kids About the News” with Television Journalist Linda Ellerbee.

Benchmark is accredited by the Pennsylvania Association of Independent School (PAIS), which is a member in good standing of the National Association of Independent School’s (NAIS) Commission on Accreditation. The school holds memberships with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools (PAIS), International Dyslexia Association (IDA), Pennsylvania Branch of The International Dyslexia Association (PBIDA), and Association of Delaware Valley Independent Schools (ADVIS).

ACADEMICS

From the day students begin at Benchmark, faculty help them grow as learners by scaffolding their instruction—providing as much support as is needed but no more than is necessary—as they move toward independence. In-depth assessments determine individual strengths and challenges and a comprehensive academic program is created and tailored to the way each student learns best. In a dynamic learning community, faculty lead students through a full range of learning opportunities with [The Seven Pillars of Benchmark Instruction](#) providing the overarching framework for all that they do.



The development of executive function processes and 21st-century skills are the hallmark of the Benchmark experience. When students graduate, they have developed the critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills that make them confident self-advocates and efficient and effective learners who can take ownership of their academic, social, and emotional success. Benchmark graduates emerge exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education and their lives. At Benchmark, learning is an interactive process of analyzing, questioning, and discussing what extends beyond the school walls. In recent years, students had the opportunity to continue learning beyond the classroom during field trips to Tyler Arboretum, Valley Forge National Park, Washington, D.C., New York City, Gettysburg, Fort Mifflin, the National Civil War Museum, the National Museum of American Jewish History, and more.

Technology is thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum across all grade levels through a range of tools based on Benchmark's Technology Integration Framework. SMART Board technology is in all Lower School, Middle School, math, and science classrooms; 1:1 iPads are used in all Lower School classrooms; 1:1 Chromebooks are used in grades 3-5; and grades 6-8 utilize a 1:1 MacBook program.

Lower School (Grades 1-5)

In the Lower School, teachers provide dynamic instruction within a caring environment in order to reestablish students' confidence, rekindle their joy for learning, and nurture their growth as mindful individuals who are prepared to recognize possibilities, overcome obstacles, and generate solutions to the challenges of not only today but tomorrow. Teachers help students begin to develop an understanding of who they are as learners while building a foundation of tools, strategies, knowledge, and personal characteristics that will enable them to take charge of their own learning and meet with success.



The curriculum includes instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, music, art, health, and physical education. Tied into the core curriculum is the metacognitive instruction students receive about their approach to learning. At the primary level for grades 1-3 this focuses on helping students begin to build and awareness of how their thoughts and feelings can impact their ability to engage and complete hard tasks. At the intermediate level for grades 4-5, the emphasis shifts to encompass more strategies for taking charge of one's focus and engagement.

Middle School (Grades 6-8)

The goal of Benchmark's Middle School is to help students grow as self-advocates who regulate their learning by knowing what they do well, what they need help to do, and where to get that help. All instruction includes opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and to increase their awareness and understanding of their approach to learning.

Each student in Middle School becomes part of a small group of fellow students and adult teacher-mentors who meet daily to assess student progress, set goals, and focus on the development of essential study and organizational skills. Mentors meet with their students for 41 minutes each day and typically work with the same student during their entire Middle School experience.

At this level, the curriculum includes language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and health. The affective curriculum focuses on recognizing personal responsibility within a larger community. Instruction is designed to build upon what has been learned in class and and culminates in a student's personal plan for learning that is documented in a final portfolio that demonstrates the student's growth in four areas: social, emotional, academic, and physical.

College Placement

The following is a sampling of institutions of higher education attended by Benchmark alumni:

American University
Arizona State University
Bates College
Boston University
Brown University
Case Western Reserve University
Columbia University
Cornell University
Dartmouth College
Duke University
Elon University
Fordham University
Franklin & Marshall College
Georgetown University
Harvard University
Howard University
James Madison University
Kenyon College
King's College
Lafayette College
Michigan State University
Middlebury College
New York University
Northwestern University
Pennsylvania State University
Princeton University
Rollins College
Skidmore College
Stanford University
Trinity College
Tufts University
Union College
University of Chicago
University of Notre Dame
University of Oxford
University of Richmond
University of South Carolina
University of Vermont
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin
Vassar College
Wake Forest University
Washington University
Wellesley College



Transition Program

Benchmark's educational model is designed to facilitate the successful transition to a high school environment that matches the student's needs for support and challenge. The school's intentional first- to eighth-grade experience develops students into confident and strategic thinkers, learners, and problem solvers equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for success. Graduates attend outstanding schools immediately after graduation and are consistently acknowledged by teachers and administrators of high schools as exceptionally well-prepared, articulate, and confident self-advocates. Virtually all of Benchmark graduates go on to higher education as well, many attending some of the nation's top colleges, universities, and graduate schools.

STUDENT LIFE

From the arts, clubs, and athletics, there is a great deal of extra to the extracurricular activities offered at Benchmark. Everyone has the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities—from clubs such as Art Club, Better Builders Club, Innovation Club, Junior Soccer Club, Spanish Conversation Club, and Super Scientist Club, to the much-anticipated Middle School musical theater production. Additional co-ed sports teams include basketball, JV soccer, and varsity soccer.



Special events and traditions such as Family STEAM Night, Family Gym Night, the All-School Fall Picnic, and Grandparents and Special Guest Morning keep the community close and strengthen the bonds between students, teachers, and families.

Focused on nurturing every aspect of a child's development, Benchmark provides professional guidance in helping children address the social and emotional issues that often accompany difficulties in school. A staff of six counseling professionals who have different perspectives in approach partner with teachers and parents to provide a dynamic continuum of communication and care to help them address each student's needs.

Members of the Child & Family Support Services Team are assigned classrooms to consult regularly with each child's support team, run class meetings, meet weekly with teachers, host student lunch groups, meet individually with children (recommended by teachers or parents), problem solve with students, and attend parent conferences. They also serve as a resource for things going on at home, lead after-school clubs, educate on learning profiles, and offer parenting programs. This team also leads House Community events and activities, created as a way to bridge younger and older students and build community together.

In 2017, three House Communities were launched as a way to strengthen bonds across the Benchmark community. This initiative mixes students from each grade level into three distinct Houses in order to provide more intentional opportunities for older and younger students to interact, more structured leadership opportunities for older students, and more ways for everyone to serve others. Throughout the school year, House Community events are held featuring various themes and including activities that focus on "soft skills." All the events include activities such as discussions, games, reading books together, and leading community service projects.



CAMPUS

Benchmark School's 23-acre wooded campus provides a beautiful, natural setting for students to learn, play, develop talents, and build the foundation for successful futures.

In the fall of 2018, the school opened a state-of-the-art Innovation Lab. Equipped with 3D printers, a laser cutter, and iMacs, this space creates opportunities for students to develop the skills and mindsets needed to understand how the world works and how to contribute in a meaningful, empathic way. Students are free to choose their own unique approach to learning, gravitating towards their interests and strengths while collaborating with their peers in a design thinking process.

Other campus highlights include a 20,000-volume library, curriculum library, the 420-seat A. Palmer West Family Performing Arts Center, music and art rooms, science labs, gymnasium, heated outdoor pool, playing fields, playground, and outdoor confidence course and zip wire course.

MEDIA AND PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

With the motto "Everybody's Hometown," Media is a quaint but lively suburb of Philadelphia with a population of around 5,400. With streets lined with tall trees and stunning buildings, Media offers residents an urban feel in a small-town environment. In Media there are numerous restaurants, boutiques, coffee shops, and parks that add to its idyllic image.



Media is proud to play host to a series of diverse and exciting events throughout the year. The season begins with the Chinese New Year Celebration and culminates with the New Year's Eve Celebration & Ball Drop. Long-running events like America's Music Festival Series (American Roots Ramble in April, Blues Stroll in June, and Jazz By Night Celebration in November) continue to grow in popularity. Throughout the year, residents and visitors enjoy favorites such as the Food & Craft Festival, Dining Under the Stars, and Santa's Arrival.

Only 13 miles from Philadelphia, many Media residents commute to the city for work and recreation. There are few locations in the United States with a more storied history and dynamic presence than Philadelphia. Founded by English Quaker William Penn in 1682, the city has served an instrumental role in the American Revolution and is the site of the signing of both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Over the years, the city has been home to many U.S. firsts, including the first library, hospital, medical school, national capital, and stock exchange.

Today, the Philadelphia metropolitan area is the eighth largest in the United States. As a thriving eco-nomic center, it is home to some major U.S. corporations, including Comcast, Cigna Insurance, Sunoco, Aramark Food Service, GlaxoSmithKilne, Urban Outfitters, and others. The city is also growing as a center for biotechnology and information technology. Of course, Philadelphia's historic and cultural sites make it one of the nation's major tourist destinations.

On the cultural front, Philadelphia is home to Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed and the U.S. Constitution adopted. Museums include the Franklin Institute, the Museum of the American Revolution, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Philadelphia Museum of Art (with the now-famous Rocky steps), and the impressive Barnes Foundation, which promotes the advancement of education and appreciation for the fine arts. With its historic neighborhoods, parklands, and remarkable building murals, Philadelphia is a wonderful



city for walking. It's also a great city for dining out, with 300-plus bring-your-own-bottle (BYOB) restaurants and lots of sidewalk seating reminiscent of European cities.

In education, the city is home to some of the oldest independent schools in the country and has the nation's third largest concentration of college students — including at the University of Pennsylvania, Saint Joseph's University, Temple University, and Drexel University.

STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

Among many strengths at Benchmark, the next head will find:

- An international reputation for leadership in researched-based approaches for students who learn differently.
- A parent community that speaks with passion and enthusiasm that their children are truly “known” and “valued” for who they are.
- A deeply committed and talented faculty who take a highly individualized approach in meeting the needs of each student.
- A student body that expresses universal appreciation for the support of the faculty and are enthusiastic about the commitment the school makes to them. In the words of one fifth-grade student, “Benchmark is a dream come true.”
- A well-maintained and attractive campus which includes a Head of School house.
- A fiscally sound school with balanced budgets, no debt, and a solid endowment.
- A growing alumni association that supports and communicates the school's mission and successes and is active in school events.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The school will be served by an interim head for the 2019-2020 school year who will, to varying degrees, address some the more pressing issues. Following are some of the challenges for 2020:

- The school will need to make an intentional transition from the tradition of a founding family's leadership to a more traditional model of independent school leadership.
- A review of the school's instructional program is needed to confirm it continues to reflect best practices for researched-based learning differences education.
- The school would benefit from a more clearly articulated scope and sequence of the curriculum.
- There is a perception among the faculty that due to the enrollment challenges all independent schools have faced over the last decade, the profile of Benchmark students is changing and a that there is need for greater clarity about whom the school can best serve and a need for training and resources to help best serve those students.
- The school will need to balance continuing to provide exceptional student support services with holding students accountable, particularly as it relates to discipline issues.
- With many long-term faculty moving toward retirement, the school has a critical need to address a more competitive compensation and benefits package to attract and retain a new generation of Benchmark teachers.
- Review of the school's extra-curricular and athletic program is needed to ensure there are sufficient options available and gender equity.
- The new Innovation Lab should continue to be more fully integrated into the school-wide academic program with particular emphasis on STEAM initiatives.
- Increased competition from a recently established school for students with learning differences and from traditional independent schools offering expanded support services has created a

challenging enrollment landscape for Benchmark. The school will need to further clarify what differentiates Benchmark from that increased competition.

- There should be continued and increased efforts to have greater representation of all dimensions of diverse backgrounds among faculty, staff, and trustees.

DESIRED QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

- A warm, approachable, and highly visible presence that is affirming and demonstrates a deep understanding of the journey of the families and students who have learning differences.
- Knowledge of and/or experience with instructional programs or schools that address learning differences is preferred.
- A clear love of children and an infectious passion for the mission and work of the school.
- The ability to personally reflect Benchmark's values and its culture of care and acceptance, passionately articulate its vision, and dynamically inspire and motivate all constituencies.
- A collaborative leadership style that can "listen and learn" but be appropriately decisive in a timely, open manner.
- Excellent communication skills with teachers, parents, community members, and the Board of Trustees, and the ability to keep these groups appropriately informed of the school's successes, potential issues, and/or its needs.
- Financial literacy and familiarity with the intersection of tuition/financial aid/faculty compensation policies as key drivers of the school's budget.
- Understanding of and enthusiastic commitment to strategic external affairs, including admissions, fundraising, marketing, and broader community involvement.

TO APPLY

Interested and qualified candidates should submit electronically in one email and as separate documents (preferably PDFs) the following materials:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A one-page statement of educational philosophy and practice;
- A list of five professional references with name, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

Peter O'Neill

Senior Consultant

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