



University of Chicago
Laboratory Schools
Early Childhood Principal
Chicago, IL

The renowned University of Chicago Laboratory Schools seek an adept, experienced, and strategic education professional, and supportive community leader to serve as Principal of the Early Childhood division (Nursery–3 through Grade 2), effective summer 2024. Founded by John Dewey and the origin point of groundbreaking developments in teaching and learning including progressive education and Chicago Math, today the Laboratory Schools (Lab) are home to the youngest scholars at the University of Chicago. As such, Lab provides a world-class education to over 2200 students from Nursery–3 through 12th Grade.

The Early Childhood division takes a whole-child, play-based approach to the growth and learning of 690 bright, enthusiastic, diverse students. Children arrive at Lab's doorstep eager to get involved. Teachers respond with programs that support their drive for understanding, autonomy, and competence. Nursery and Kindergarten teachers, motivated by their deep belief in children's capacity to figure out the world and represent their ideas, prepare an environment filled with possibilities and encourage choice, initiative, exploration, and collaboration. As children move into Grades 1 and 2, teachers help them transition to an environment in which curriculum guides their learning down specific paths. New skills and challenges are added in developmentally appropriate ways, and learning is structured to support purposeful freedom and provide each child with opportunities to move about, investigate, inquire, experiment, and exchange ideas. Children at Lab are immersed in language and its many uses, and their days are filled with mathematical thinking embedded in real-life questions about how many days they've been in school or how to follow a recipe. Projects linking language, science, and art media—paint, clay, music, movement—add depth and breadth to their developing minds. Starting in Grade 1, children leave the classroom for formal art instruction, and computer classes are added in Grade 2. The Early Childhood division boasts a dynamic teaching team of 94 classroom teachers, assistant teachers, and learning and counseling educators, 65% of whom hold advanced degrees, as well as a dedicated staff.



The Early Childhood division is located at Lab's exemplary Earl Shapiro Hall campus. Earl Shapiro Hall was designed specifically to support our innovative program and magical experiences for young children. This light-filled building is designed to maximize the independence a child feels during the school day and to seamlessly connect indoor and outdoor learning. It includes 35 classrooms, an early childhood library, outdoor play spaces, and a gymnasium.

The unifying features of the Lab community, enshrined in our mission, are our commitments to scholarship, exhibiting kindness, and honoring diversity. Lab's theory of action, linking learning with diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as social-emotional growth, is embraced in Early Childhood as well as in Lower, Middle, and High School. Lab is invested in providing support and resources for neurodiverse students. Our team of educators strive to provide an experience of inclusion and belonging for teens who identify with historically marginalized characteristics and backgrounds.

Discovery Findings

Visiting Lab in our discovery process, we first marveled at Earl Shapiro Hall. Its spacious multipurpose classrooms are brilliantly designed by teachers for student exploration. Its five playgrounds and proximity to Jackson Park across the street bring activity and the outdoors into student lives every day (you will note the organized rows of mud boots in the hallways). The library and its gathering space spark student imagination and curiosity as they participate in the division's rich oral storytelling tradition. There are spacious hallways and natural light throughout the building.

Respondents to our Early Childhood community survey mentioned many strengths in the division. Those most cited include:

- The skill and caring of the Early Childhood faculty
- The administrative presence in the building
- Educational approach and resources: Play-based, Deweyesque, the DEI focus, the library, the use of the outdoors
- The design and physical space of Earl Shapiro Hall
- A sense of community

The richness of the University of Chicago community is a constant benefit for the school. In addition, the world-renowned Museum of Science and Industry and the soon-to-be-completed Obama Presidential Library are both nearby.

The chief concern cited by respondents is administrative instability in the division. The Early Childhood Division community desires a new Principal who will make a mark through a tenure lasting more than just a few years. We often heard questions about why frequent administrative turnover exists in the division – the division seems to be focused on it.

Other concerns weren't mentioned as frequently, but they include:

- The need for stronger communication about the value of play-based learning and how it prepares children for more curricular learning in literacy and numeracy over time.
- The autonomy of teachers in the division, when over-expressed, sends children to their next learning experiences with differing preparation. This was a worry expressed by both parents and faculty members.



Job Description

The Principal — supported by an Assistant Principal, a Dean of Students, a Dean of Teaching and Learning, and administrative support professionals, and in partnership with faculty, special area and grade team leaders — is responsible for the strategic direction, leadership, and daily oversight of the Early Childhood Division, support of a talented faculty to further the development of their craft, and partnership with an engaged parent community. Reporting to the Associate Director of Schools (Lab's seniormost program officer), the Principal holds a senior administrative leadership position at Lab and actively partners with the 16-member leadership team to develop and provide broad strategic guidance for the Schools. The Principal is responsible for day-to-day operations, students' academic and social progress, professional growth of educators, and positive community relations. The Principal will ensure the recruitment, hiring, evaluation, professional development, and retention of an excellent, diverse team of educators. They will oversee program development in accordance with schoolwide strategic priorities. They will actively pursue Lab's mission priority of honoring diversity. Based on strong relationships with students, families, faculty, and staff, a positive attitude and outlook, and a commitment to mission and collaborative problem-solving, the Principal will nurture the Early Childhood division's sense of community.

The successful candidate for Principal will bring a robust teaching background, proven experience in educational administration, demonstrated success in fostering a climate of

inclusion and belonging, and a strong history of putting theory into practice in early childhood education.

This is a full-time, year-round administrative appointment, beginning July 1, 2024.

Responsibilities



- The Principal is responsible for all day-to-day activities in Earl Shapiro Hall, from the implementation of daily schedules and events to oversight of student conduct and health.
- The Principal provides supportive, collaborative leadership in a dynamic teaching and learning environment where a diverse team of faculty

and staff are committed to the continuous improvement of program and curriculum. They oversee ongoing professional development of faculty and provide coaching and mentorship to individual teachers in relationships based on collaboration and partnership. They maintain a healthy and productive relationship with members of Lab's Faculty Association through consistent, responsible administration of the collective bargaining agreement.

- In furtherance of Lab's mission imperative of honoring diversity, the Principal is charged with advancing our aspiration of becoming an anti-bias, antiracist school, and works closely with Lab's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Director of Student Services, and Director of Equal Opportunity Services.
- The Principal serves on the schoolwide Academic Leadership Team and collaborates closely with the Lower School, Middle School, and High School Principals and other senior program officers. They also serve on the schoolwide Senior Leadership Team, ensuring the appropriate communication of Early Childhood successes and challenges to colleagues across all divisions and departments, adapting divisional work as appropriate to efforts in other parts of the school, and contributing to institutional decision making, leadership, and transparent communications.

- Through regular, direct communications with families, students, faculty, and staff, appropriate events and programs, and the cultivation of both strong relationships and appropriate boundaries, the Principal fosters a healthy, positive community across the division.
- The Principal develops and implements the Early Childhood annual budget, provides sound oversight to ensure that finances support strategic priorities, and partners with various administrative colleagues on issues such as planning, programming, budgeting, and operational infrastructure.

Preferred Qualifications

Education

- Master's degree in education or related field.

Experience

- At least ten years of teaching experience, preferably in early childhood education;
- Direct experience working with children aged 3–8;
- At least five years of successful senior administrative experience, preferably in independent schools;
- Significant experience in creating, implementing, managing, and assessing educational programs;
- Demonstrable success promoting and supporting diversity, developing a culture of inclusion and belonging, and assessing and maintaining equitable systems and processes;
- Successful record of support for children and adults with diverse identities and backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, learning abilities, socio-economic status, language, and national origin;
- A broad understanding of early childhood development and learning;
- An abiding commitment to student health and wellness;
- Experience working in or with a unionized faculty covered by a collective bargaining agreement is preferred.

Technical Knowledge or Skills

- Ability to use standard productivity software (Microsoft Office, calendar/scheduling software, etc.);
- Ability to move in and around the classroom/building to interact with students, faculty, staff, parents, and other members of the community.

When questioned about important experiences and skills the Early Childhood Community frequently cited alignment with and understanding of Lab's mission, teaching and educational administrative experience, and instructional leadership with knowledge of the research on early childhood reading and mathematics instruction. When asked about personal qualities, the community seeks a Principal who is an effective communicator, with a student-based philosophy and personality, the ability to work with students from a variety of backgrounds, and someone able to balance the needs and opinions of varying constituencies.

Preferred Competencies

- Outstanding leadership and organizational skills;
- Robust, up-to-date understanding of best practices in early childhood teaching and learning;
- A commitment to open discourse among faculty, staff, parents, and guardians, and laying the foundation for developmentally-appropriate free expression among children;
- Strong supervision, mentorship, and support skills to effectuate a productive, collegial, and efficient teaching and learning environment, oriented toward professional growth among divisional faculty and staff;
- Ongoing commitment to learning and growth in skills, issues, and competencies relevant to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging;
- Proven experience in developing inclusiveness, a culture of belonging, and a structure of equitable practices in classrooms and communities;
- Skill at building and sustaining excellent relationships at multiple levels with varied constituencies;
- Proven experience growing, sustaining, and supporting the diversity of a program or enterprise;
- Facility with data-informed decision making;
- A student-centered approach to education administration;
- A proven record of establishing trust and respect within a community;
- A sense of humor and joy in working with teens, their families, their teachers, and a school community;
- Agility, flexibility, creativity, and patience;
- A commitment to exhibiting kindness in all circumstances and to encouraging and eliciting kindness in others;
- Confidence and resilience;
- Ability to navigate in complex environments, forge partnerships across constituencies, and develop productive working partnerships;

- Strong analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills;
- Outstanding verbal and written communication skills;
- Robust empathy and emotional intelligence paired with outstanding interpersonal, diplomatic, and community-building skills;
- Ability to handle sensitive, confidential situations and information with absolute discretion;
- Skill with change management;
- Ability to develop strong relationships while also maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and encourage the same in others;
- Capacity to manage and navigate the expectations of invested and aspirational students and families with grace, compassion, appropriate boundaries, and self-care;
- Creativity, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a strategic mindset.

Complementing and narrowing this list, the Search Committee participated in an exercise that identified six key competencies needed for success in the position:



Questions about these competencies will form a portion of the candidate interview process.

Working Conditions

- Standard office environment

Anticipated Search Timeline

Application deadline: Friday, January 5

Semifinalist Interviews: Week of January 29

Finalist visits: February 5, 6, 8

DRG Talent Advisory Group is conducting this search on behalf of Lab. To discuss this opportunity in more detail, contact our consultants:

Andrew Watson
Senior Search Consultant
awatson@drgtalent.com

Jennifer Fleischer
Senior Search Consultant
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Candidates should submit, as soon as possible, materials including the following:

- A cover letter indicating why they are particularly interested in and qualified for the position (required).
- A current resume (required).
- Example of a recent communication (required)
- The names, email addresses, and telephone numbers of five references, to include the relationship with the references. (We will obtain permission from candidates, at the finalist stage, before contacting references.)
- Optional: other supporting material (additional articles, speeches, videos, or letters of recommendation) that would be useful to the Search Committee.

Candidates should upload materials directly on the DRG website by visiting the [University of Chicago Laboratory Schools Early Childhood listing](#).

Non-Discrimination Statement

In keeping with its long-standing traditions and policies, the University of Chicago considers students, employees, applicants for admission or employment, and those seeking access to University programs on the basis of individual merit. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic

origin, age, status as an individual with a disability, protected veteran status, genetic information, or other protected classes under the law. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX, which provides that: No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

About the Unit

At the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, students in Nursery through Grade 12 experience a world-class educational journey. Founded in 1896 by John Dewey as a place for educators to develop and explore novel approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, Lab



continues to provide excitement and imagination in learning to this day. Academic rigor, experiential learning, and intellectual discourse are hallmarks of a Lab education. Lab educators are recognized for excellence in teaching and pride themselves on innovation in the classroom. Students in every grade have access to unparalleled resources, and all

members of the Lab community benefit by partnerships and connections with the University of Chicago. Families who choose Lab care deeply about curiosity, inquiry, and creativity.

No less than scholarship, Lab's mission prioritizes honoring diversity and exhibiting kindness. We are committed to building and supporting a teaching and learning community where young people see aspects of their backgrounds and identities reflected around them, where they feel a deep sense of belonging, and where they discover and use their voices to full effect. Today, 53–59 percent of Lab's student body are students of color. Families report speaking nearly 40 different languages in their homes. Approximately 60 percent of Lab families are also affiliated with the University of Chicago. Half of our families live in Hyde Park, and the rest come from across Chicago, the suburbs, and northwestern Indiana. Inclusion is a fundamental value at Lab, such that we celebrate every facet of community members' identities, and even where we disagree, we emphasize respect, civility, and

maintaining a spirit of community.

Lab seeks the finest employees to join our vibrant learning community. We employ people with a wide range of skills and training in many different disciplines, who have in common a love of learning and the wish to inspire that same love of learning in young people. We seek candidates for employment who thrive in an educational environment. We provide a great professional home for those committed to collaboration, ongoing personal and professional growth, and



cultivating positive relationships. We strongly encourage applications from candidates of color, LGBTQ+ identified candidates, candidates from historically marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds, and candidates with a demonstrated commitment to a deepening diversity, equity, and inclusion practice. In turn, we strive to ensure that Lab is a joyful, welcoming, and inspiring place to work. Through our connection to the University, faculty, staff, and administrators enjoy benefits and opportunities that would be nearly impossible to match in any other environment.

