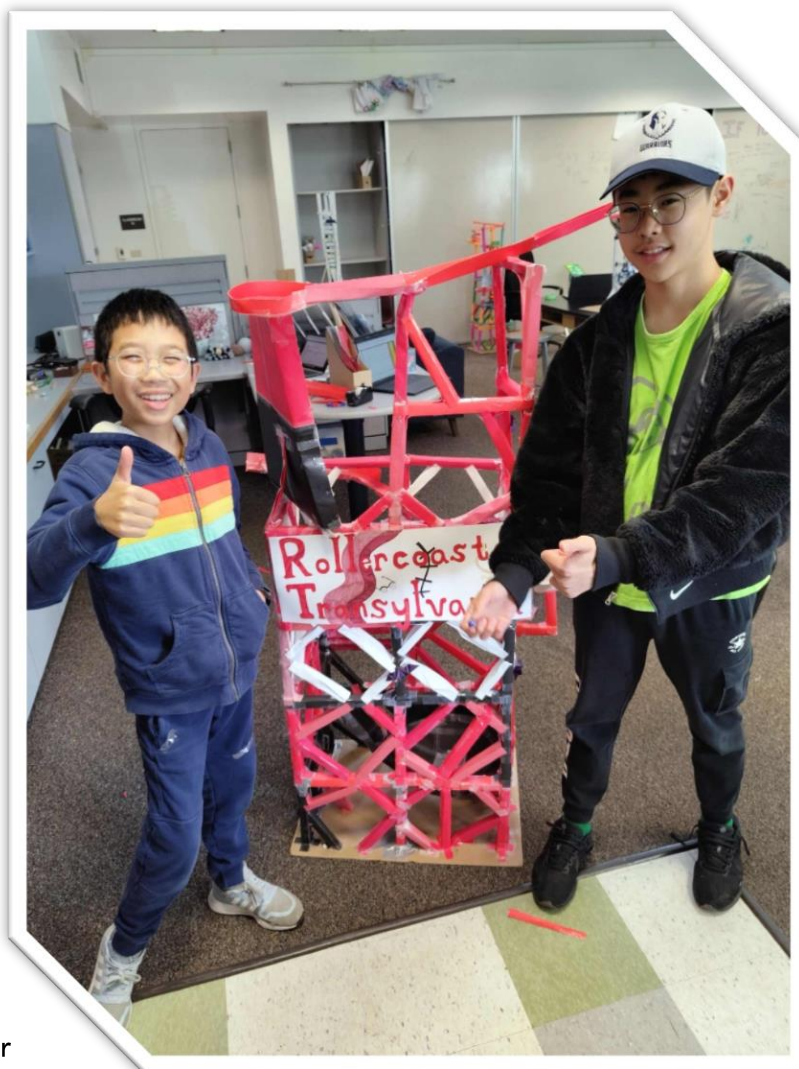




Tessellations School
Head of School
Cupertino, CA

Introduction

"Kids find their people at Tessie!" Serving gifted students and their families from Pre-K to Grade 12, Tessellations (Tessie) provides an appropriately challenging experiential education that recognizes and nurtures the individual strengths of gifted learners, empowering them to confidently express who they are and pursue a meaningful life. Often when students start at Tessie, it is the first time they feel like they're interacting with intellectual peers. Whether discussing every airplane model that was ever built since the first flight or explaining to another student the concept of infinity, students greet each other's interests with kindness and awe. Tessie teachers foster their students' curiosity and are appropriately attuned to the corresponding sensitivities that some of these learners display. Exploration, openness, and a commitment to meet the developmental needs of all its students is what you'll find at the heart of this new and still developing school.



Born out of the demand of Silicon Valley's families, Tessie opened in 2020 through a collaboration between a group of like-minded families and educators. In just four years, Tessie has grown from serving 30 gifted learners online to almost 300 on a 9.4-acre main campus, as well as an additional local nature campus that provides easy access to the outdoor exploration—a key part of the project-based program. Tessie's promise is to support gifted learners in their education and development so that these young people develop the mindset and skills to contribute to creative and innovative life-changing solutions.

Tessellations at a Glance

Mission

Tessellations provides challenging experiential education that recognizes and nurtures the individual strengths of gifted learners, empowering them to confidently express who they are and pursue a meaningful life.

Vision

We are a community of imaginative, empathetic, productive, and passionate lifelong learners who advance an equitable and sustainable world.

Values

- Wonder, curiosity, and deep learning
- Rigor, resilience, and courage
- Kindness, generosity, and integrity
- Open-mindedness and adaptability
- Acceptance of self and harmony with others
- Connection with and respect for nature

Facts and Figures

Founded: 2020

2024–25 Schoolwide Enrollment: 267

Pre-K: 34

Lower School (K–5th): 158

Middle School (6th–8th): 75

High School (9th grade only this year): 7

Student–Faculty Ratio: approximately 5:1

Employees: 80, including 73 full-time faculty

% of Faculty with Advanced Degrees: 40%

Operating Budget: \$15 million

Tuition: \$41,000 for PreK–Grade 5, \$42,500 for Grades 6–8, \$49,500 for Grades 9–12

% of Students receiving Financial Aid: 10%

Total Funds Raised, 2023–24: \$7.5 million

Parent Participation in Annual Giving: 88%

On the Web: Tessellations School (<https://tessellations.school/>)



Governance and Administration

Tessellations currently has a nine-person Board of Directors. To bring a school from an idea to a fully functional PreK-Grade 12 school (currently serving students in 9th grade only) requires the dedication and commitment of each board member, and each board member is incredibly invested in the long-term success of the school. The board is made up of a collaborative group that understands the need to now transition from supporting all of the start-up operations to a group focused on long-term fiscal sustainability and viability. The board is actively expanding to ensure that they have the full range of needed expertise as well as to make sure that they are right-sized for the much bigger school they are today. To note, they have recently added two new board members: one an experienced administrator in a gifted school and the other an experienced independent school board member and fundraiser. In all ways, the board is invested in growing their learning and capacity, including working with an outside governance expert to make sure their work is both appropriate and at the highest level.

The founding Head of School and Executive Director Grace Stanat was the right individual to build and grow Tessie at the appropriate rate for durable success. The school is now ready for the next stage of leadership. The board has placed an Acting Head of School at the helm as they look for a system-oriented and experienced Head to guide the future of the school. The goal is to evolve the school from start-up mode to a more mature, yet still innovative institution. The right policies and protocols are needed to support the vision of a fully operational four-division school, serving over 300 students from preschool to grade 12. Driven by parent generosity in support of Tessie's story, the school's first five years have been marked by consistent fundraising success. Additionally, the school's marketing and external online presence has been polished and professional, especially for a school so early in its development.



The Program

At its core, Tessie is designed to serve gifted kids well and meet their needs at a high level. Progressive education principles guide all decisions around Tessie's program. The resulting curriculum is student centered, project-based, experiential, and innovative. As the school moves into a more established mode, additional work is needed to make sure the curriculum is in equal parts appropriately challenging and sufficiently skill-building for its students at each age and stage. Tessie has done an especially good job developing strong socioemotional programming throughout the curriculum. The student body shows up as kind, curious, all-in students who exhibit humility and lack the peer-to-peer competition or one-upmanship that can be prevalent in highly academic communities.



In the preschool, the curriculum is play-based, following best practices to foster empathy, collaboration, communication skills, and a love of learning. From the Lower School upwards, project-based learning with an emphasis on social justice and outdoor education is a throughline. Notably, Tessie is designed with differentiated education, including math and literacy groupings by ability rather than grade. Top-notch music, fine arts, drama, math enrichment, and debate programs bolster the core academic areas.

Tessie's high school just opened this year and is still very much evolving. Opening a brand-new high school avoids the problems of wrestling with tradition. Thus, Tessellations High School is already being heralded nationally as a progressive school to watch. Having attracted an impressive group of founding faculty, the approach to curriculum is even more progressive than in K-8, with the school leaning fully into Competency-Based Learning, Mastery Transcripts, and the findings of ChallengeSuccess (a Stanford-based research group dedicated to improving the well-being of high school students). The inaugural 9th grade class only numbers 7 and will expand yearly until an eventual enrollment of approximately 300.



As Tessie matures, the administration will need to delicately balance teacher autonomy and empowerment while ensuring the quality control needed at a highly successful school. A positive culture of collaboration exists between faculty within grades and often divisions, yet work still remains for the same cooperation and knowledge to exist across divisions and programs to ensure alignment and appropriate progression of the curriculum.

Tessie represents a brilliant idea that still needs bolstering to actualize its promise of what is possible with its gifted and open students and its invested and dedicated parent body. The nature campus, the semiannual family camping trips, and the academic and enrichment programs need to be developed and systematized so that the nascent potential of Tessie can be realized.



Gifted students tend to have gifted parents, resulting in a community of fully invested, highly engaged caregivers, many of whom are high-achieving and highly successful in their fields. By and large, the parent body is a down-to-earth group that avoids social competitiveness and status symbols to create an environment inclusive for all. They tend to be supportive of the school and invested in its success. As the school has grown quickly, of late, there are a few more vocal concerns around greater classroom consistency, more transparent and timely communications, and greater stability with faculty and staff.

A strong admissions process that identifies, admits, and supports kids who need Tessie and whose needs Tessie can meet continues to be a hallmark of the school. One part of the admissions process involves evaluating and identifying students as gifted through a Gifted Qualitative Analysis (GQA) process based on the methods of Annemarie Roeper, a pioneer in gifted education. While incredibly effective, examining whether the full scope of the labor-intensive process is sustainable or can be streamlined remains an open question.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Head of School

Consistent with the high demand for strong progressive gifted education in Silicon Valley, the school has grown tremendously over its first five years. While growth is the first stage for long-term success of a start-up school, even more important is how a new school transitions to its next stage of development. The key transition pieces are multi-layered and the board has placed an Acting Head of School to aid in the transition. The Acting Head will start the process of setting up the systems, policies, and organizational structure needed for sustainable success. Part of this work will involve examining the 16+ directors and program leaders and ensuring that the leaders and programs are appropriately distributed and defined. Similarly, in the development stage, both parents and board members have contributed greatly to Tessie's programs and departments. The Acting Head will help with a reevaluation of appropriate roles and boundaries.



Devoting the time to determine a communications strategy will be vital, as the Head determines the appropriate cadence, transparency, and tone of the school's messaging. The Head should think about exuding professionalism, reassurance, connection, and deep knowledge of the school and programs.

The admissions process at Tessie is already highly developed and honed, and the hiring process needs similar attention. The school needs a Head who can establish rigorous and efficient hiring practices both to bring in excellent teachers—in skill and in mindset— and to establish the needed onboarding and professional development practices to support their transition and growth throughout their hopefully long tenure at the

school. Ultimately, the Head should prioritize freeing teachers from organizational and parental distractions, so that teachers can focus on the student experience, and work to grow and develop teachers to be the most effective possible.

Having gained the appropriate knowledge of Tessie's culture and history, the new Head will be able to bring the focus back to creating and systematizing a high-quality, student-centered, academically challenging school that fosters curiosity and love of learning in gifted students of all ages and stages. This will help them ensure mission and programmatic alignment across and within divisions and limit or remove siloes. The Head will then be able to provide clear messaging for role responsibilities while also fostering a universally respectful working culture.

Responsibilities

- The Head of School will primarily be responsible for establishing and collaboratively designing the school's trajectory in order to ensure the highest quality of gifted education across all four divisions. They will be responsible for setting, communicating, and upholding the school's standards and expectations while also building and maintaining a positive and vibrant student-centered culture.
- Serve as the face of the school.
- Design and lead a plan to make progress on the recommendations from the WASC Accreditation process.
- Return the focus to the day-to-day running of a school by spending time in classrooms, learning what is currently happening on campus, and establishing a widespread culture of faculty development and excellence.
- Guide and lead the school's marketing and fundraising strategy and execution.
- Solicit and consider feedback from all stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrative team, Board, and students) to build relationships and advance the school in a unified way; provide appropriate pastoral care and instill confidence in parents, teachers, and students.
- Evaluate and set/reset, uphold, communicate, and adhere to budgets.



Qualifications

Experience and Skills

- Advanced degree and at least ten years of experience in a senior administrative position in an education setting preferred.
- A student-centered and proven people manager who can empower others, make them feel safe, and hold them accountable.
- Deep experience with and commitment to progressive education.
- Understanding of the complex needs of gifted population.
- Experience and skill with a deeply invested, highly educated, and high-achieving parent community.
- Proven track record of turnaround success, building or growing a school, or experience and success navigating and improving a complex, cross-divisional, cross-program school.
- Significant classroom experience.
- WASC or other similar association accreditation experience.
- Someone who has worked at and learned multiple schools and systems.
- Successful fundraiser preferred.



Personal Characteristics

- Kind, empathetic, collaborative, and curious.
- A charismatic, open, friendly person who enjoys being with people.
- Resilient, unflappable, and skillful at calming and connecting during times of high stress or conflict.
- A flexible and adaptable relationship builder.
- Someone who loves to fix problems with strong follow-through.
- A systems thinker.



Key Competencies

Instills Trust <p>Gaining the confidence and trust of others through honesty, integrity, and authenticity.</p>	Builds Effective Team <p>Building strong teams with a strong identity that apply their diverse skills and perspectives to achieve common goals.</p>	Drives Vision & Purpose <p>Painting and building a compelling shared vision and strategy that motivates others to action.</p>
Collaborates <p>Building partnerships and working collaboratively with others to meet shared objectives.</p>	Ensures Accountability <p>Holding self and others accountable to meet commitments.</p>	Communicates Effectively <p>Developing and delivering multi-mode communications that convey a clear understanding of the unique needs of different audiences.</p>

Benefits and Compensation

The salary for this position aims to be competitive and commensurate with experience, falling within the range of \$300,000 – \$500,000 annually. Tessellations School offers a comprehensive benefits package including medical, dental, and vision insurance and a matching 403(b) retirement plan.

Application Requirements and Search Process

DRG is conducting this search on behalf of Tessellations. Interested 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
- A current resume
- A statement of leadership philosophy
- A second writing sample of your choice (newsletter, article, talk, parent email, etc.)
- A list of references (references will not be contacted until the finalist stage of the search and only with candidate permission)

Application materials should be uploaded directly on the DRG website (www.drgtalent.com) by visiting the Tessellations listing.

Anticipated Search Calendar

Application Deadline: March 3, 2025

Semifinalist Interviews (on Zoom): Week of March 31, 2025

Finalist Visits: Weeks of April 21 and April 28, 2025

Starting Date: July 1, 2026

This position description is based upon material provided by Tessellations School, an equal-opportunity employer.

To apply for this position, please click [HERE](#).

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