



La Jolla Country Day School

Head of Upper School

La Jolla, CA



Background



Founded in 1926, La Jolla Country Day School (LJCDS) is San Diego's only independent, coeducational school serving students from age three through grade twelve on a single campus. This PreK–12 continuum is a defining strength, allowing students to grow together in a community where leadership, empathy, and self-awareness are learned alongside rigorous academics. LJCDS is guided by a mission to prepare

individuals for a lifetime of intellectual exploration, personal growth, and social responsibility and by a core commitment to dignity: the belief that every person has inherent worth and value.

Today, LJCDS serves an engaged and high-achieving student body drawn from across the region. The school enrolls approximately 1,169 students, including up to 500 in the Upper School, and is supported by a deeply committed faculty with an average tenure of ten years. With strong resources and an ambitious program that integrates academics, athletics, arts, service, and global engagement, LJCDS offers students an education that is both demanding and deeply human.

A signature initiative shaping the school's future is The Hub for Human Impact, a new 20,000 square-foot human-centered learning commons opening in fall 2026. Designed to bring students together across disciplines and age groups, The Hub will support design thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship, global collaboration, and experiential learning. It reflects LJCDS's commitment to preparing students not simply for college, but for leadership and impact in an increasingly complex world.



LJCDS School at a Glance

Facts and Figures

Founded: 1926

2025-26 Schoolwide Enrollment:

Total (Age 3, Tiny Torreys—Grade 12): 1156

Early Childhood: 70, Lower School: 283

Middle School: 346, Upper School: 457

Self-Identified Students of Color: 47%

Full-Time Employees: 238

Average Tenure of Faculty: 10 years

Location: La Jolla, CA

Endowment: \$48 million

Operating Budget: \$47.2 million

2025-26 Tuition: \$20,720–\$46,500

Financial Assistance: \$5.9 million to 17% of students

Total Funds Raised, 2024-25: \$4.1 million

Parent Participation in Annual Giving: 68%

Accreditation: Western Association of Schools and Colleges, California Association of Independent Schools; member, National Association of Independent Schools

On the Web: <https://100.ljcds.org/head-of-upper-school-position>



LJCDS Upper School

The Upper School is a vibrant, intellectually ambitious community serving students in grades 9 through 12. Students are known for their curiosity, work ethic, and willingness to engage deeply in academic and co-curricular life, supported by faculty who care profoundly about both excellence and student wellbeing.

Academically, the Upper School is in an important moment of evolution. Building on a long tradition of rigor, LJCDS is transitioning from a traditional Advanced Placement model to a more flexible, inquiry-driven advanced studies framework. Faculty are largely aligned with this direction, and the work ahead centers on ensuring coherence, consistency, and clarity, particularly in how academic pathways and outcomes are communicated to students and families.



Beyond the classroom, Upper School life is rich and integrated. Nearly all students participate in athletics, often across multiple seasons. The arts, experiential education, service learning, global programs, and wellness initiatives are central to the student experience and reinforce dignity, civic responsibility, and leadership with purpose.

The opening of The Hub for Human Impact will further elevate the Upper School program. Upper School students will be the primary users of this space, and its integration will influence curriculum design, interdisciplinary learning, scheduling, and community partnerships. The Hub offers powerful opportunities for students to connect knowledge with purpose through real-world problem solving and collaboration.



At the same time, the Upper School is navigating a period of meaningful leadership transition. Department chairs are stepping into more formalized leadership roles, administrative responsibilities are being clarified, and the division is strengthening structures for collaboration and accountability. Faculty are talented and deeply invested in students, yet the complexity of the overall program and evolving professional expectations call for leadership that is relational, clear, and student-centered.

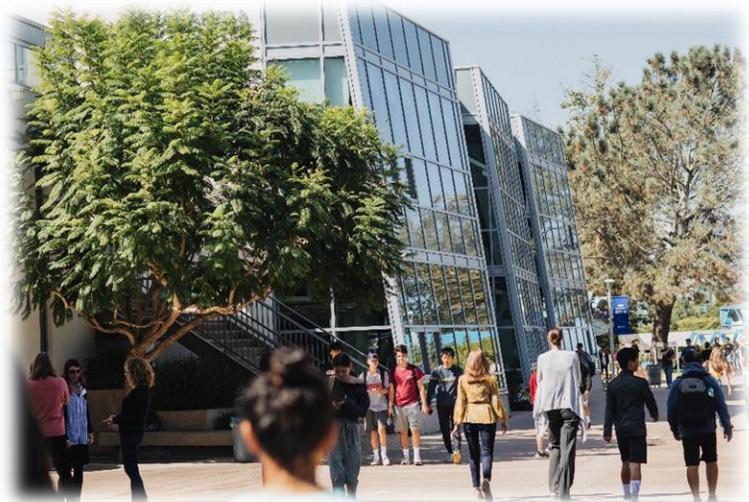
Culturally, the Upper School reflects both the strengths and challenges of a highly engaged community. Students and families care deeply about academic pathways, college counseling, and outcomes. The division must balance high-touch relationships with firm expectations, all while navigating questions of belonging, identity, and community within a diverse and intellectually active environment.



Taken together, the Upper School stands at an important moment. Strong foundations are in place, and significant initiatives are underway. The opportunity ahead is to stabilize leadership, strengthen culture and accountability, and translate vision into daily practice.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Head of Upper School role presents a compelling leadership opportunity that blends continuity with change. The division is grounded in a strong academic culture, committed faculty, and capable, engaged students while also navigating strategic, cultural, and structural shifts that call for clarity, steadiness, and thoughtful execution.



A central opportunity lies in advancing the Upper School's evolving academic vision. The advanced studies framework reflects a commitment to deeper learning and long-term student success. The next Head of Upper School will steward this work and articulate its value clearly to students, families, and faculty.

Another significant opportunity is strengthening leadership structures and accountability. With an administrative team in transition and department chairs assuming greater responsibility, the incoming Head will have the ability to clarify roles, build a healthy leadership model, and establish consistent expectations that support both growth and excellence.

Culturally, the role offers the opportunity to center decision-making on students while building trust among adults. Balancing empathy with clarity and warmth with accountability will be essential.

The role also includes close partnership with a highly engaged parent community. College counseling in particular is a visible and important area of focus, requiring thoughtful communication and alignment between academic pathways and postsecondary outcomes. Strengthening confidence in the Upper School experience, especially in collaboration with Middle School leadership, will be key to retention and enrollment stability.

Finally, the Head of Upper School will play a central role in integrating The Hub for Human Impact into the academic and co-curricular life of the Upper School, ensuring that its promise translates into meaningful student learning and community engagement.



The Position

The Head of Upper School is the senior leader responsible for the academic, cultural, and operational vitality of grades 9 through 12. Reporting to the Head of School and working closely with the Associate Head of School and fellow division leaders, the Head provides vision, leadership, and daily oversight for a complex and engaged Upper School community.

Responsibilities

- **Leading the overall Upper School student experience;** setting the tone for a culture rooted in dignity, belonging, and high expectations; and ensuring that students feel known, supported, challenged, and valued.
- **Partnering closely with student life and wellness leadership** to foster a healthy, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate environment while upholding consistent standards for behavior, engagement, and community life.
- **Serving as the division's primary academic leader;** stewarding curricular coherence and the continued evolution of the advanced studies framework; and supporting instructional excellence, innovation, and interdisciplinary learning.
- **Communicating the academic program clearly and confidently** to students, families, faculty, and trustees, ensuring shared understanding of academic pathways, expectations, and outcomes.

- **Recruiting, evaluating, coaching, and retaining Upper School faculty and staff**, with a strong commitment to professional growth, reflective practice, and continuous improvement.
- **Building and leading a healthy administrative team**, clarifying roles and responsibilities, strengthening collaboration, and establishing consistent structures for accountability and decision-making.
- **Supporting and developing department chairs** as instructional and managerial leaders and strengthening systems for faculty feedback, supervision, and evaluation.
- **Partnering closely with the college counseling team** to align academic pathways with postsecondary planning, strengthen communication with families, and reinforce a student-centered philosophy of college preparation.
- **Serving as a visible and steady presence for families**, particularly during moments of celebration, challenge, or uncertainty, and fostering strong, trust-based partnerships.
- **Supporting admissions and enrollment management for the Upper School** in collaboration with school leadership and contributing to retention strategies and long-term enrollment stability.
- **Ensuring effective coordination of schedules, programs, staffing, and resources**, balancing day-to-day operational excellence with long-range strategic priorities.
- **Playing a central role in integrating The Hub for Human Impact** into the Upper School academic and co-curricular experience, helping translate its vision into meaningful student learning and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Participating actively in the life of the school**, including attendance at athletic events, performances, experiential programs, and community gatherings.
- **Collaborating closely with Middle School and Lower School leadership** to ensure continuity, alignment, and smooth transitions across divisions.
- **Modeling the school's mission and values** and helping shape a compelling, forward-looking vision for the future of the Upper School.



Desired Qualifications and Qualities

Education, Experience, and Skills

- Significant leadership experience in an Upper School setting, preferably within an independent school
- Academic credibility and the ability to engage meaningfully with faculty around curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional quality
- Experience leading or supporting curricular evolution or strategic academic initiatives
- Proven ability to hire, evaluate, and coach faculty and staff
- Experience building and managing leadership teams, including department chairs and deans
- Experience partnering with a highly engaged parent community around academic pathways and student outcomes
- Strong understanding of adolescent development and student wellness
- A clear, confident communicator with strong organizational and operational skills



Personal Characteristics

- Deeply student-centered, with decisions grounded in what best serves students
- Warm, visible, and relational, with the ability to hold adults accountable
- Academically confident and intellectually curious
- Emotionally intelligent and self-aware, able to navigate complexity with steadiness
- Comfortable leading through change and ambiguity
- Thoughtful, fair, and direct in addressing challenges
- Inclusive and values-driven, committed to dignity and belonging
- Optimistic and forward-looking, with a practical, grounded approach
- Strong work ethic for both task completion and complex problem solving
- Energetic and present, with a genuine enjoyment of and engagement in school life



Key Competencies

Builds Effective Team	Manages Conflict	Instills Trust
<p>Building strong teams with a strong identity that apply their diverse skills and perspectives to achieve common goals.</p>	<p>Handling conflict situations effectively, with a minimum of noise.</p>	<p>Gaining the confidence and trust of others through honesty, integrity, and authenticity.</p>
Communicates Effectively	Action-Oriented	Manages Complexity
<p>Developing and delivering multi-mode communications that convey a clear understanding of the unique needs of different audiences.</p>	<p>Taking on new opportunities and tough challenges with a sense of urgency, high energy, and enthusiasm.</p>	<p>Making sense of complex, high-quantity, and sometimes contradictory information to solve problems effectively.</p>

Benefits and Compensation

The Head of Upper School position offers a salary range of \$200,000–\$230,000. LJCDs offers a [comprehensive benefits package](#) that includes medical, dental, vision, and life insurance and a matching 403b retirement plan.

Application Requirements and Search Process

DRG is conducting this search on behalf of LJCDs. 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 one- to two-page PDF writing sample of your choice (newsletter, parent or faculty communication, talk, etc.)
- The names, email addresses, and telephone numbers of five references, as well as the relationship of each reference to the candidate (references will be contacted only at the finalist stage and with the candidate's permission)

Application Status: Presenting candidates as soon as possible
Start Date: July 1, 2026

This position description is based upon material provided by La Jolla Country Day School, an equal-opportunity employer.

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

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