

Cold Spring School



DIRECTOR SEARCH

New Haven, Connecticut
Position Starts July 1, 2025



EDUCATORS COLLABORATIVE

EXPERTS IN SEARCH, TRANSITION & STRATEGY



Overview

Cold Spring School is deeply rooted in a philosophy of active, experiential learning, drawing inspiration from John Dewey and the Progressive Movement. This child-centered approach emphasizes giving students a voice in their education through integrated teaching methods that prioritize inquiry, problem-solving, and critical thinking. The school's mixed-grade classrooms (except for sixth grade) foster long-term relationships between students and teachers, and create opportunities for leadership, peer collaboration, and individualized instruction. Academic extension and support are seamlessly integrated into the curriculum, ensuring that each child's needs are met while adhering to clearly defined benchmarks for grade-level progress.

The small, tight-knit community at Cold Spring School is a defining feature, allowing for strong relationships between students, teachers, and families. The school's deep commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is notable and permeates the everyday life of this community in very authentic ways. Every child is known by staff and peers alike, promoting a sense of belonging and safety. The school's structure, while progressive, is deeply intentional, offering students choices within clear parameters to foster self-expression and personalized learning. Assessment is an ongoing and dynamic process, with academic and social/emotional growth evaluated through observations, formal assessments, and collaborative goal-setting. This holistic approach encourages reflection, self-awareness, and personal development, preparing students to thrive both academically and emotionally.

New Haven, Connecticut

Cold Spring School is located in New Haven, Connecticut, a city of 140,000 that offers a rich blend of historical, cultural, and academic significance, as well as many opportunities for outdoor activity and innovative thought. One of the oldest cities in the country, New Haven is also known for its [iconic pizza](#) and Italian restaurants and offers other culinary delights of all kinds. The area around the school is particularly attractive for someone interested in leading a progressive, ethically- and justice-driven institution like Cold Spring School.

The area around Cold Spring School provides a unique mix of urban culture, academic influence, and progressive values that will be highly attractive to the school's next Director. The opportunity to lead in a city that embodies the principles of justice, diversity, and civic engagement aligns perfectly with the school's mission, providing a supportive and stimulating environment for innovation in education.

Proximity to Yale University

New Haven is home to Yale University, one of the world's most prestigious academic institutions. This proximity offers numerous opportunities for educational partnerships, access to cutting-edge research, and potential collaborations in areas like social justice, civic engagement, and progressive education. Yale has recently made [all its museums free to the public](#). The school can benefit from intellectual resources, guest speakers, and other enrichment opportunities that Yale provides, making it a fertile ground for innovative leadership.

Strong Educational Ecosystem

Beyond Yale, New Haven has a network of public and private schools, as well as nonprofit organizations focused on education and social justice. It is also the home of Southern Connecticut State University, with Quinnipiac University and the University of New Haven in bordering towns. This creates opportunities for collaboration, idea exchange, and shared initiatives focused on educational reform, social justice, and community engagement. The area is rich in educational resources and networks that a new Director could leverage for growth and impact.



At A Glance

Founded: 1982

Location: 263 Chapel Street, New Haven, CT

Enrollment & Attrition

- 150 students
- Coed, PK-6
- 17 faculty/staff children
- 42% students of color
- 44% students receiving financial aid
- 11% Attrition (3 year average)

Tuition

- Preschool: \$17.9 K
- K - 6: \$28.5 K

Philosophy

- Progressive
- Mixed-Aged classrooms
- Intentionally small
- Justice minded
- Community first
- Joyful learning

Faculty and Staff

- 34 staff
- 2 full-time teachers in each classroom

Annual Fund: \$60 - \$80 K

Endowment: \$1.5 MM

Board of Trustees: 16 Trustees



Diverse and Culturally Rich Community

New Haven is known for its cultural diversity, with a vibrant mix of ethnic communities, art scenes, and culinary experiences. This diversity aligns well with the values of a progressive, justice-oriented school like Cold Spring, which prioritizes inclusion, equity, and community engagement. The city's demographic variety allows for rich, real-world learning opportunities for students focused on social justice and civic responsibility.

New Haven boasts a wealth of cultural institutions, including museums, theaters, and music venues. These offer rich opportunities for partnerships and field experiences, which align with a school that seeks to integrate arts, culture, and civic engagement into its curriculum. The city also hosts the two-week [International Festival of Arts and Ideas](#) every June, and there is no lack of other cultural activities throughout the year, including a number of plays, musicals, concerts, and festivals.

Commitment to Progressive Values

New Haven's political and social atmosphere tends to lean progressive, with a focus on equity, social justice, and inclusion in local policy-making and community projects. This environment is ideal for a leader who is committed to embedding these same values into the school's philosophy and practice. The city's commitment to civic participation and progressive reform mirrors the mission of Cold Spring School, making it a fertile ground for a leader who seeks to drive meaningful change.

New Haven has a long history of activism and civic engagement. The city has been home to various social justice movements, from labor rights to civil rights. For a school focused on justice and civic-driven education, the local environment offers a living laboratory for students and staff to engage with real-world issues, community organizing, and social change initiatives.

Urban and Natural Environment

Cold Spring School is situated near both the urban center of New Haven and beautiful natural spaces like East Rock Park and the Long Island Sound. This combination allows for experiential learning opportunities that connect urban life and environmental awareness. The ability to explore nature while engaging in a dynamic city environment is a strong attraction for educators focused on holistic, progressive education.

Within an hour's drive, you can be at the beach (in minutes, really); walking or biking along the [Farmington Canal Heritage Trail](#); hiking in beautiful, wooded [state parks](#); or shopping and dining in quintessential New England villages along [the shoreline](#).

Accessible Location

New Haven is easily accessible from major urban centers like New York City and Boston, while still maintaining its own distinct character. This location offers opportunities for regional partnerships, networking, and recruitment of talented faculty and staff, while providing access to major cultural and professional hubs.

The city of New Haven sits on New Haven Harbor, on Long Island Sound, approximately two hours (by train or car) from New York City and three hours from Boston. It has a train station that affords residents to travel north, south and east, and a small airport with non-stop flights all along the east coast. Bradley International Airport, just north of Hartford, is about an hour away. By car, Vermont is about a two-hour drive and the Berkshires about the same.





History of Cold Spring School

Cold Spring School was founded in 1982 by a group of parents who wanted the philosophy they admired at a much-loved childcare program to continue through their children's elementary school years. When Cold Spring School moved to its current location in 1987, a fitness teacher was hired to join the classroom teachers. Within several years art, music, and Spanish were added to the curriculum and special area teachers joined the faculty. The selection of Spanish was a way for students to foster a multicultural perspective and connect to the largely Latino neighborhood through language. In the fall of 2015, Cold Spring opened its Tinkering Lab for engineering, design, science, and math. Over Cold Spring's history, the campus grew from the main red brick building to include the Studio that houses the Specials' classrooms and the Community Building for school gatherings, fitness, and more.

Arati Pandit has been the Director for the past twelve years. Among her many accomplishments are the addition of the Tinkering Lab (now the Science Tinkering Lab), the first of its kind for young children in New Haven; a climbing wall dedicated to her predecessor Jeff Jonathan; the opening of the Community Building; the building and opening of the preschool; and a significant increase in the diversity of families and employees at the school. Outdoor spaces have been upgraded recently and will be a continuing focus for the next Director. Cold Spring has built relationships with the community that include Peels on Wheels, a composting project; Seedlings, a summer professional development program for area public and private school teachers; and the Integrated Refugee and Immigration Services (IRIS). Some of the school's community relationships necessarily faltered through COVID, and efforts are being made to rebuild these and new opportunities for the school in order to integrate more fully with the community.

MISSION

Cold Spring School challenges children to become self-reliant, curious, and resourceful problem solvers with the academic and social skills to engage constructively and ethically in our diverse, changing world.

Core Founding Principles

Central to the mission of Cold Spring School are:

- Creating a sense of belonging for our diverse, inclusive community that welcomes children and families that represent different backgrounds, races, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, neighborhoods, and more.
- Empowering children to speak for themselves is important, and we do so by creating classroom environments where teachers value and encourage students to voice their questions and wonderings as integral partners in our research-based, project-centered curriculum.
- Preserving discovery, joy, and wonder in learning with an emphasis on building grade-specific skills and the integration of disciplines.
- Teaching social justice and environmental initiatives so children can experience the power and impact of their work.
- Cultivating teachers as learners, researchers, and collaborators as they carefully observe and document each child's individual learning path and create classroom experiences that support, challenge, and enhance this development.
- Purposeful and intentional teaching through which children learn to bounce back from setbacks in learning, develop courage, and adopt a problem-solving, growth mindset.
- Using a mixed-grade model to provide every child the opportunity to contribute to the learning process as the youngest and the oldest on the learning spectrum in any given year.



Progressive Education at Cold Spring

Cold Spring School follows a philosophy of active, experiential learning rooted in the ideas of John Dewey and the Progressive Movement, emphasizing student voice, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning. Students are encouraged to explore and solve problems, focusing on their thought processes rather than simply arriving at the correct answer. The results of this approach are visible in the student-led instruction, emergent curricula, and student leadership in weekly school meetings.

Classroom Structure

The school features mixed-grade classrooms (except for sixth grade) with two full-time teachers, allowing students to remain with the same teachers for two years. This fosters stronger relationships and greater opportunities for academic and social growth. Differentiated instruction, guided by grade-level benchmarks, ensures each child receives personalized learning tailored to their needs.





Small, Close-Knit Community

Cold Spring School's intentionally small size creates a close-knit community where every child is known by all staff members. This sense of familiarity and security strengthens partnerships between home and school, enhancing the overall learning environment.

Balanced Structure

Contrary to misconceptions about progressive schools, Cold Spring has a deep, structured approach to both its physical environment and curriculum. While students are given choices, learning occurs within clear parameters, allowing for creativity and critical thinking within a structured framework.

Dynamic Assessment

Assessment at Cold Spring is continuous, combining classroom observations, anecdotal notes, formal assessments, and student participation in setting academic and social-emotional goals. This process encourages reflection, self-awareness, and personal growth, preparing students for lifelong learning.

Thematic and Special Area Studies

Thematic Studies, which span the entire school year, integrate subjects and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. These long-term projects enable students to engage deeply with topics such as marine sciences, personal histories, and sustainable societies, culminating in research presentations through writing, model-building, or public speaking.

Special Area Classes

Cold Spring has a strong commitment to the importance of Special Area Classes - Art, Music, Spanish (starting in Preschool!), Science Tinkering, and Fitness. Students in Grades K-6 engage in each one of these classes at least once a week; Preschool has its own program in the classroom.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning is central to the Cold Spring experience, supported by dedicated staff and the CASEL framework. The curriculum fosters empathy, resilience, and community-building, helping students develop emotional intelligence alongside their academic growth.



Commitment to Inclusion & Belonging

Cold Spring School is deeply committed to inclusion, encouraging diversity in its community across cultures, identities, and backgrounds. The school's mission is to develop ethical, self-reliant problem solvers who thrive in a diverse, ever-changing world. Diversity is central to the school's values, creating a learning environment where differences are embraced as opportunities for growth and understanding. This approach to progressive education ensures that Cold Spring School nurtures both academic achievement and social responsibility, preparing students to engage constructively and ethically in the world.

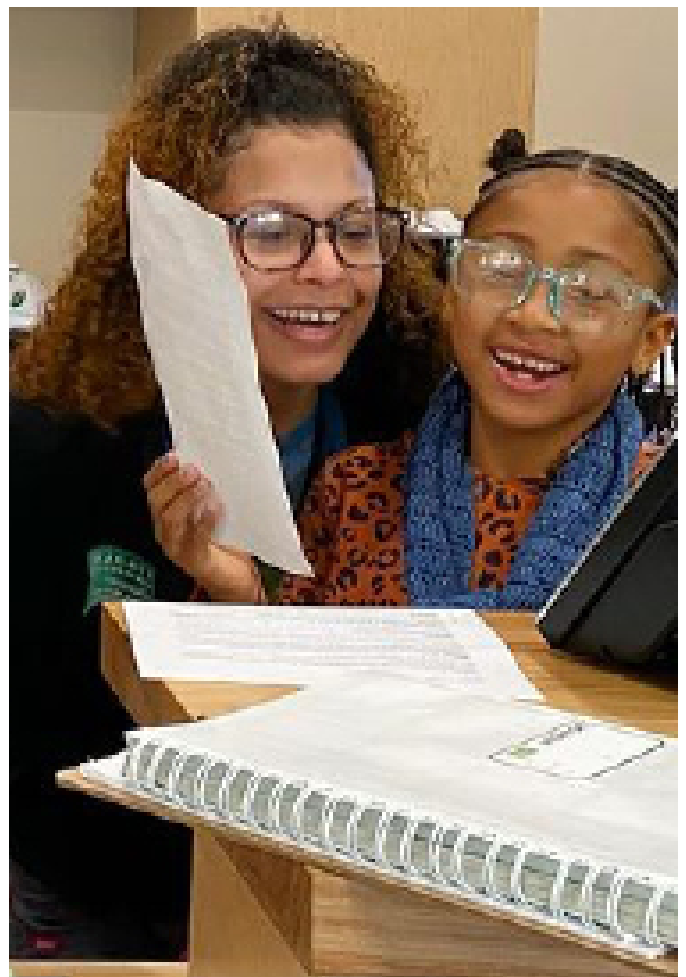
Co-Curricular Programs

Cold Spring offers a wide range of co-curricular programs for students to explore interests beyond academics and develop leadership, teamwork, and other important life skills. Ancillary programs include AfterSchool / Extended Day, Vacation Care, and Summer Program.

Faculty and Staff

There are eight head teachers and eight associate teachers, one each in every classroom K-6. Preschool is contained in a single classroom with four teachers. There is one teacher in each of the "special areas" of Art, Music, Science Tinkering, and Spanish; there are two Fitness teachers. A literacy and learning specialist and a school counselor also interact regularly with the teachers and children in order to support learning and social-emotional health. In recent years, more students with mild learning differences have been enrolled, a change that feels aligned with the school's goals for enrollment and its commitment to diversity.

The faculty and staff are empowered to drive key initiatives of the school, with small committees created to move shared vision forward. For example, there is an Equity Committee working on the continuing effort to balance the many aspects of diversity represented at Cold Spring at both the student and adult levels.





Enrollment & Tuition

The Admissions Office is staffed by the Director of Admissions and one assistant. Given the size of classrooms and other school spaces, ideal enrollment feels right at about 150 students, with 3-year enrollment trends fluctuating between 150 to 156 students. The richness of student diversity has expanded over recent years, including an increasing number of those identifying as non-binary.

Tuition for 2024-2025—including all fees, classroom supplies, and the cost of field trips—is \$17,900 for Preschool and \$28,500 for Grades K-6. Cold Spring's tuition is in line with that of other independent schools in the area. However, Cold Spring is fervently committed to making its education accessible to families across the Greater New Haven community. A higher percentage of the operating budget, when compared to the national average of peer schools, is spent on tuition assistance; approximately 44% of the student body receives some level of financial support. Tuition remission for faculty/staff children is 80% for the first child and 50% for any other child.

Development & Finances

Cold Spring's Annual Fund raises approximately \$60-80,000 a year to contribute to the operating budget; capital funds have been raised to benefit particular projects such as the recent upgrades to the Pear Tree Yard (a play yard for the children).

The school's (approximately) \$2million endowment benefits from a reinvestment of the interest earned year after year, rather than losing the more traditional 4-5% draw to the operating budget. Similarly, the Board has committed to putting \$50,000/year into a PPRRSM account. NBOA's forecasting models have been used in recent years to keep an eye on the school's sustainable financial health.



Facilities

Cold Spring's facilities are in excellent shape with no discernable deferred maintenance. Recent improvements include a new roof and air conditioning in the Main Building. The Pear Tree Yard is located behind school buildings and is where the children have newly-upgraded play space on campus. Children in grades K-6 also share the public park across the street with community members. This park allows for a very large space in which to run and play along with access to two play structures. There are three buildings on the school's campus:

The Main Building houses all core curriculum classrooms and many offices. With its four stories, students go up a level as they grow older, eventually landing in the 6th grade classroom on the 4th floor. Preschool, K and Grade 1 are appropriately on the first floor.

The Studio is where all the Special Area Classes may be found, as well as a flex-space that can be used for meetings and/or for an office as needed.

The Community Building is the newest at Cold Spring and is where community meetings are held. Parents are invited to be a part of the weekly meeting when all adults and children come together for singing, announcements, presentations, and more. Many of the Fitness classes also take place here, taking advantage of the open indoor space and climbing wall.





The Board of Trustees

There are sixteen members of the Board of Trustees, plus the Director who sits as an ex officio member. Trustees come from parent, past parent, and alumni constituencies. Standing committees include the Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Development Committee, and Committee on Trustees. Other committees or task forces are assigned as needed.

In 2021 the Board and administrators engaged in a strategic planning exercise and determined four goals:

- Strengthen financial sustainability
- Augment facilities and campus
- Support and empower faculty and staff
- Strengthen community partnerships and (internal and external) communication

This year the Board has begun analyzing the existing strategic plan, with an eye toward assessing past accomplishments and also identifying new goals for the future. They look forward to partnering with the new Director in refining and implementing what emerges.

Administration

The administration has expanded over the last two years and currently includes:

- Director of Admissions and Lower School (K-3) Program Coordinator
- Upper School (4-6) Program Coordinator
- Director of Finance and Operations
- Director of Events and Enrichment Programs
- Office Manager
- Assistant Office Manager
- School Counselor
- Literacy and Learning Specialist
- Administrative and Enrichment Programs Coordinator



Leadership Opportunity Statement

The next Director of Cold Spring School (CSS) will replace Arati Pandit, who will be heading to a new adventure at the end of what will be twelve years as Director. A dedicated advocate of Cold Spring, Arati is eager to support the transition into new leadership of the school she has cared for so thoughtfully.

Carol Santos and Sally Mixsell of Educators Collaborative, LLC are assisting the Board in this search. Based on a community-wide survey and a two-day visit designed to learn about the school via interviews with key stakeholders, the descriptors below represent community-wide sentiments about Cold Spring's strengths, the challenges and opportunities lying ahead, and the skills and attributes desired in the next Director.

CSS Strengths

Strong Academic Foundation: The school has a solid academic reputation, with a focus on individualized student learning in a mixed-grade setting and a commitment to maintaining high educational standards.

Dedicated Faculty and Staff: The school is supported by a team of passionate and experienced educators who are deeply committed to student success and professional development. Ensuring that teachers feel valued and supported is critical, especially if there are concerns about workload, professional development opportunities, or compensation.

Supportive Community: There is a strong sense of community, with active involvement from parents, families, and local organizations. This engagement helps create a collaborative environment that supports both students and staff.

Commitment to Progressive Education: With multi-grade classrooms and a focus on helping students develop into their authentic selves, each student's growth and development are honored in spectacular ways.

Diverse Student Body: The school serves a culturally and socioeconomically diverse student population, which contributes to a rich, inclusive learning environment that fosters global awareness and respect for different perspectives.

Extracurricular Opportunities: A wide range of extracurricular activities is available, providing students with opportunities to explore interests beyond academics and develop leadership, teamwork, and other important life skills.

Student-Centered Approach: The school prioritizes the needs and well-being of its students, focusing on personal development, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility alongside academics.

Strong Tradition and Values: The school has a longstanding history and culture that emphasizes respect, integrity, and community values, which are deeply embedded in the school's ethos.

Opportunities / Challenges

Managing Growth and Change: The next leader will need to preserve the school's core values while managing inevitable changes in curriculum, technology, or even facilities, albeit the celebrated success of the upgrades resulting from the 2021 strategic plan. Additionally, there is interest in re-envisioning programs and structures to provide discrete lower and upper school experiences and improve the extended day program's offerings and oversight.

Enrollment and Retention: As an intentionally small and diverse school, CSS faces the challenge of balancing enrollment numbers with net tuition revenue and the various aspects of diversity that are valued by the school - a balancing act the Admissions Department is constantly working to achieve in collaboration with the Director and other school leaders. Developing strategies to strengthen retention in the upper grades deserves attention.

Addressing Diverse Student Needs: With a diverse student body, there are challenges in meeting the academic, emotional, and social needs of students from various backgrounds. The next leader will need to ensure equity in resources, support, and opportunities.

Maintaining Academic Excellence: As the school strives to maintain its high academic standards, the new leader must find ways to continue improving student outcomes and ensure the faculty is supported in delivering top-tier instruction. To this end, systematic evaluation of teachers and curriculum, especially science, is a priority as well as on-going professional development on current research and practices in progressive, mixed-age education.

Re-calibrating Progressive Practices to 21c Pedagogy: The school has a strong sense of past practices that have worked, but there is also a need for innovation in teaching methods, technology integration, and overall school management. The next leader will need to strike the right balance between honoring the school's legacy and embracing necessary innovation.

Financial Sustainability: Like many educational institutions, the school likely faces financial pressures ahead. The next leader will need to manage the budget effectively, identify new revenue streams, and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently. To this end, the recruitment and hire of a new Development Director as well as the staffing strategy for the administrative leadership team and Associate Teachers will be crucial.



Adapting to External Changes: The educational landscape is constantly evolving, with new policies, technologies, and societal expectations. The next leader must be adaptable and proactive in responding to these external changes, while also preparing students for the future.

Administrative Leadership Team: As with many small schools, Cold Spring has expanded its organizational leadership structure to meet the increasing demands on the director to manage the complexity of school needs. A strategic approach to re-shaping the administrative leadership team, with consideration given to filling the DEIB Coordinator and Director of Development positions, will be a priority for the new Director.

Director Attributes and Qualifications

The above challenges call for a leader with strong vision, adaptability, and the ability to unite the school community toward common goals. The following qualities and qualifications are necessary for leading the school effectively, fostering a positive learning environment, and guiding the school toward continued success and innovation.

Key Attributes

Visionary Leadership: The next leader should have a clear, forward-thinking vision for the school's future. They must be able to set long-term goals that address both academic excellence and the holistic development of students.

Collaborative and Approachable: The leader must excel in building strong relationships with students, staff, parents, and the wider community. They should be approachable, accessible, and skilled in fostering a culture of trust and collaboration.



Culturally Competent: Given the diversity of the school community, the leader needs to have a deep understanding of cultural awareness and inclusion. They should actively promote equity and inclusivity across all aspects of the school's environment.

Strong Decision-Making Skills: The next leader must be decisive and capable of making informed, fair decisions while considering the input of various stakeholders. They should be skilled and creative in problem-solving, especially when it comes to balancing different priorities.

Resilient and Adaptable: The school requires a leader who can handle challenges with resilience, whether they involve managing financial constraints, navigating institutional change, or dealing with external pressures. They must be adaptable to evolving trends in education.

Emotionally Intelligent: A high level of emotional intelligence is critical. The leader should be empathetic, able to connect with and motivate staff and students, and adept at managing conflicts and creating a positive, supportive culture.

Innovative Thought Leader: The school seeks someone who is current in education leadership and progressive, mixed-aged pedagogy who will partner with the Board in refining and acting on the school's next strategic vision.

Key Qualifications

Proven Leadership/Management Experience: The candidate should have a strong background in educational leadership, preferably as a principal or in a similar senior role. The next leader shall be highly effective at managing people as well as the academic and operational aspects of a school.

Educational Background: The ideal leader should have an advanced degree in education, administration, or a related field, with a thorough understanding of curriculum development, student engagement, and educational best practices.

Financial and Operational Acumen: Competency in managing budgets, allocating resources efficiently, and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the school is crucial. Experience in fundraising or developing new revenue streams would be advantageous.

Track Record of Academic Success: A history of improving student performance and academic outcomes is important, with a clear understanding of how to support faculty in delivering high-quality progressive education.

Commitment to Professional Development: The leader should have a focus on continuous improvement, both for themselves and for their team. Encouraging professional growth among staff and staying updated on educational trends is essential.



TO APPLY

Inquiries

We encourage candidates to reach out for a preliminary conversation, if desired, before submitting their materials. Please address inquiries to Educators Collaborative Partners:

Carol Santos, csantos@educatorscollaborative.com
and/or

Sally Mixsell, smixsell@educatorscollaborative.com

Application Deadline

Applications are due by **December 1, 2024**.

Application Documents

Candidates are asked to submit the following materials in a single merged PDF document in the order listed below by email to Carol Santos and/or Sally Mixsell:

1. [EC Candidate Summary Sheet](#)
2. Letter of Interest, addressed to the Cold Spring School Search Committee
3. Current résumé
4. Statement of Educational Leadership
5. A list of five or more references with contact information (including phone numbers and email addresses)
6. [EC Disclosure Form](#)

Equal Opportunity Statement

Cold Spring School is firmly committed to Equal Employment and advancement opportunities for all present employees as well as for applicants in all phases of the employment process (recruitment, hiring, assignment, conditions of employment, compensation, benefits, training, promotion, transfer, discipline and termination). Therefore, except in cases of bona fide occupational qualification or need, the School will act without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and/or expressions, socioeconomic status, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, citizenship, marital status, sexual orientation, genetic information, past/present history of mental health disorder, physical or learning disability, veteran status, or any other characteristics protected by law, (unless it is shown by supervisory personnel that a disability prevents performance of the work involved or may result in undue hardship) in all aspects of the employment process and relationship.

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