



MARIN PRIMARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL

Larkspur, California

MIDDLE SCHOOL DIRECTOR

Start Date: July 2022

mpms.org



Carney
Sandoe
& ASSOCIATES

Mission Statement

At Marin Primary & Middle School we make education meaningful, while encouraging pride in self, respect for others, and enthusiasm for learning.

We treasure childhood.

We honor and enjoy children's natural curiosity, competence, and exuberance.

We teach to reach children.

Using teams of teachers and educational methods tailored to how children learn best, we connect with our students, build trusting relationships, and make learning relevant, memorable, and fun.

We teach children to reach.

Asking not "how smart is the child" but "how is the child smart," we guide our students to see their full potential, and we equip them to pursue it with passion and purpose.

We inspire children to make a difference.

We value academic excellence, personal integrity, and community action and encourage our students to become informed, engaged, and ethical global citizens.

OVERVIEW

Marin Primary & Middle School (MP&MS) is a coeducational, nondenominational, independent school for students in grades preschool through eight. Located on eight acres in Larkspur, California, a picturesque town in Marin County just north of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge, the school is an innovative learning community where integrated, experiential projects complement a strong core curriculum. Since its founding in 1975, the school has continued to grow steadily, drawing students from all over Marin County as well as San Francisco, driven by its commitment to the academic and social-emotional development of each child. MP&MS serves as a feeder school to the many excellent Bay Area secondary schools and over 90% of eighth graders succeed in attending one of their high schools of choice.

At MP&MS, it's deep connections between students, with teachers, and with ideas that help students know themselves and push through boundaries in school and in life. These connections are valued as the foundation of the best learning environment, tying together the community across academic disciplines, cultures, and stages of growth. Everyone at MP&MS is known and valued by every member of the community, and these connections are the school's greatest strength. Graduates benefit from self-confidence, self-awareness, and the courage that comes from solid connections.

Head of School Phil Gutierrez joined MP&MS in July of 2021. A seasoned Bay Area independent school leader, Phil has brought stability and a renewed sense of optimism to the school. He and the leadership team look forward to welcoming the next Middle School Director in July of 2022.



SCHOOL HISTORY

Marin Primary & Middle School was founded in 1975 as Marin Primary, an independent preschool in a Corte Madera church basement. Five years later, the school moved to the present location in the former Larkspur Corte Madera Public School. Each year, the school added a grade until the program encompassed preschool through middle school. In 1994, the school changed its name to Marin Primary & Middle School to reflect the addition of fifth through eighth grades.

At the heart of its mission lies a deep respect for the developmental stages of childhood and early adolescence, recognizing the many ways in which children learn. The school's integrated curriculum provides opportunities for children to explore their passions in many different areas and attracts dedicated teachers with a deep understanding of children and learning.

Since its founding, the school has enjoyed growth and stability, developing robust specialist classes in the performing/visual arts and physical education, adding a unique projects lab, and enhancing the school's curriculum, pedagogy, professional development, and organizational policies.

At a Glance

Founded: 1975

Total students: 297

Students of color: 62

Total faculty: 55

Faculty of color: 13

Faculty with advanced degrees: 18

Student/teacher ratio: 18:1

Financial aid awarded: \$1.2M

Students receiving aid: 46

THE SCHOOL

Today, MP&MS continues to grow and thrive, living out the mission and the vision of its founders in an ongoing commitment to creating connections, embracing growth, and honoring each child's journey from early childhood towards adolescence and independence.

From preschool through eighth grade, MP&MS is a community of individuals joined by a common love of learning and respect for all the stages of the journey from childhood through adolescence. "This is a place where kids are listened to, respected wherever they are as learners, heard, and safe," reflected one teacher. Students thrive in an environment where connections get made—between people, between disciplines, and between students and the world around them. Teachers encourage students to be curious, follow their interests, and push past personal boundaries. Every day, the school creates an educational environment that honors the courage it takes to succeed—and the courage it takes to fail and press on. "My kids are confident in their learning, willing to advocate for themselves, and comfortable connecting to their teachers," commented one parent.

The school is committed to providing a just, equitable, and safe community for all students, teachers, and families. With a longstanding commitment to sustaining an inclusive community, the school honors each child's journey, encourages authenticity, and embraces growth. To resist the limits that may be put on students, empathy is taught and practiced. The school community reflects many forms of diversity, and its culturally responsive practices provide windows and mirrors for children and adults within the community.

MP&MS received its first accreditation from the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) in 1999, and its first Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation in 1995. The school recently completed its fourth accreditation process following a seven-year term of accreditation from CAIS and WASC in 2013.

Values

We Value Courage

- Growing people of character alone is not enough; we teach courage to push through boundaries in learning and in life.

We Value Curiosity

- Active, engaged learning leads to lasting understanding and empowers growing minds.

We Value Connection

- Meaningful connections build community and spark growth and learning.



ACADEMICS

The curriculum is built around teams of teachers. The school's structure uniquely combines two full-time classroom teachers from preschool through fifth grade and a team-teaching model in sixth through eighth grades. Teachers lead core curricular areas and are supported by specialists who enrich students' academic and creative learning experience. Using best practices in education, teachers encourage and guide children to trust their natural desire to question and explore. The goal is to create dynamic and collaborative environments in which all students can excel in the acquisition of both social and academic knowledge. A focus on social-emotional learning tends to the needs of the whole child, and a low student-teacher ratio helps cultivate positive, supportive relationships, and smaller learning groups ensure that each child is well known by all faculty. Collaboration is key, and children spend much of their time learning by doing.

The preschool offers a developmental, play-based program. Guided by supportive teams of teachers, children explore and discover, learning through play, building self-confidence, gaining independence, and developing critical social skills through their interactions with teachers and other children. The primary school encompasses junior kindergarten through fourth grade. Its mission is to engage children academically in an environment that embraces childhood and the journey of learning.

Portrait of a Graduate

In middle school, students rise to the challenge of a strong academic program and become leaders, independent thinkers, self-advocates, and engaged citizens.

As graduates, MP&MS students emerge with a passion for inquiry and empathy. They are:

- **Empowered Learners** who think critically and creatively, are self-directed, and develop a personal relationship with learning.
- **Authentic Advocates** who learn with and from each other and teach the group to respect the individual. MP&MS graduates know who they are, how they learn best, and how to advocate for themselves and others.
- **Confident Contributors** who develop strong alliances with teachers and adults based on mutual respect. Our graduates communicate with ease and confidence one-on-one and in front of a group.
- **Playful Innovators** who are inspired to create, innovate, and play as they learn.
- **Empathetic Leaders** with big hearts, who are community-minded and are driven to make a difference.



The focus of the middle school for grades fifth through eighth is to understand, support, and educate enthusiastic learners as they transition from childhood to adolescence. Students are asked to think deeply and reflectively about facts, ideas, and experiences in an increasingly diverse society. A key goal is to mentor students as they grow to be confident, curious scholars and generous, compassionate global citizens. Language arts, math, social studies, science, Spanish, drama, art, music, service learning, physical education, and technology are incorporated into a positive experience for each student. Teachers work closely together to connect the subject matter in meaningful ways. Graduates leave MP&MS as confident self-advocates and enthusiastic lifelong learners, well prepared to succeed through their high school years and beyond.



ARTS, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, AND SPORTS

Marin Primary & Middle School places great emphasis on creativity and fine arts. The school's core curriculum purposely allows students to enjoy a balance between academic rigor and creative and imaginative learning, with full-time teachers dedicated to enriching the students' understanding of drama, music, and fine arts.

The physical education curriculum provides a variety of age-appropriate activities that encourage physical fitness, teamwork, and fun. Students in junior kindergarten through eighth grade participate in physical education classes four times a week. The goal is to develop a lifelong love of physical activity. The middle school physical education program also entails learning the rules and structures of many team sports and participating in cooperative activities and games.

Middle school boys and girls have the opportunity to participate in interscholastic after school sports, including flag football and cross-country in the fall, basketball in the winter, and track and field in the spring. Students practice and compete against other independent and public schools in the area.



STUDENT LIFE

MP&MS provides an extensive outdoor education program. Using its own Outdoor Education Center and garden on campus, in addition to the Bay Area's vast natural and cultural resources, this program benefits students at all grade levels with a deep sense of connection and community. The school garden is a living lab where students study math and science, and learn to be responsible garden caretakers. Field trips are important integrated elements within each grade's curriculum. Beginning in third grade, students participate in an overnight field trip, in addition to the many day-long trips that fill the calendar. At the middle school level, each grade takes a springtime five-day, four-night trip. These trips are integrated into the academic program and are culminating activities relevant to student learning. Students from various grades can also be found hiking in nearby Baltimore Canyon.

As the school's oldest students, middle school students enjoy additional special interest and leadership opportunities outside of the classroom. Students may participate in the every-other Friday afternoon elective program which includes such classes and activities as Rock Band, Chess Club, Maker Space, Culinary Techniques, Laser Cutting, Community Service, Knitting and Crafts, Sports, and more. The MP&MS Student Leadership program is open to all middle school students and is based on a committee structure which focuses on the needs of the school. Student Leadership manages middle school dances and leads fundraising efforts for causes initiated by students and teachers.

Developmentally appropriate community service projects are built into classrooms from preschool through eighth grade as students learn to care for each other, their community, and the wider world. In middle school, each grade level takes on a school need, such as collecting recycling containers in each classroom. Throughout the year, middle schoolers come together as a whole to participate in service projects. MP&MS strongly encourages middle school students to complete ten hours of service in their own time. Service learning projects for families are also available.



CAMPUS

The center of the MP&MS campus is an attractive California mission-style public school building. A long-term lease has enabled MP&MS to carefully design the campus for learning and community engagement and the school has been steadily improving the facilities over the years. The success of the school's first major capital campaign led to a transformation of the campus, including renovation of existing buildings, the addition of new playgrounds and outdoor spaces, and a new amphitheater. The campus master plan includes upgrades to improve the accessibility and environmental sustainability of the campus.

Among the outstanding facilities are the Learning Resource Center; a dedicated library space and music and art studios; and an organic learning garden, the David Heath Outdoor Education Center.



LARKSPUR, CALIFORNIA

Larkspur, a small city in Marin County, California, founded in 1908, is located just north of San Francisco and east of Mt. Tamalpais. As of the 2010 Census, the city's population was 11,926, a high percentage of whom hold college degrees.

Larkspur is divided into two distinct areas adjoining Highway 101. Its historic downtown is west of Highway 101, and an old quarry area known as Larkspur Landing is to the east of the highway along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The downtown Larkspur historic district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. This section of town has maintained a small-town feel, and includes the 1930s art deco Lark Theater, the Mission Revival Larkspur City Hall, and the Blue Rock Hotel. On the edge of historic downtown Larkspur are charming neighborhoods and gathering places.

Larkspur is the location of one of Golden Gate Transit's ferry terminals for service between Marin County and San Francisco. There is also a special direct ferry service from the Larkspur Ferry Terminal to AT&T Park for San Francisco Giants games. San Francisco also has an Amtrak train station that connects with coastal communities north and south.

Larkspur and the surrounding area offer numerous opportunities for outdoor activities. Notable places include Muir Woods, China Camp State Park, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Middle School Director joins a healthy, strong, and student-focused division committed to developmentally-appropriate programs and culture for middle school students. Students feel seen, supported, understood, and valued. One eighth grader reflected, “It was nice to come here, get the support I needed, and learn about how I learn.” The long-serving and cohesive team provides students with a positive experience that both stands on its own and provides thoughtful transition out of the primary grades and supportive transition to high school. We believe this is an exciting opportunity for a dynamic, creative, and community-oriented educator who unabashedly and joyfully identifies as a middle school educator. The key opportunities and challenges for the next Middle School Director include:

Leading the Middle School team and articulating a shared vision for the division.

Appreciating and finding the humor in middle school students exactly as they are, the next Middle School Director will continue the work of leading the faculty in creating an environment that implements best practices for middle school students, encourages continual growth and feedback for the faculty, and assesses the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum and to ensure that social-emotional learning is fully integrated into the program. The Middle School Director will clarify priorities to help the division balance the demanding work of meeting the daily needs of students with longer-term strategic goals.



Shepherding the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion with courage and skill.

The Middle School Director will meet constituents where they are on their DEI journey, manage nuanced conversations, and join with the leadership team in moving DEI work forward at MP&MS. The division head will embrace equity and inclusion work with a sense of grace, setting expectations while allowing space for learning, trepidation, missteps, and recovery, inviting people to engage in this work from a place of respect, humility, and improvement, not perfection.

Succeeding a long-serving, respected, and effective predecessor.

Dave DeMartini, who has served as Middle School Director since 2006, has worked at MP&MS in various capacities for 40 years and embodies the child-centered philosophy of the school. Dave's care and attention to the division provides a wonderful springboard for the next Middle School Director who will also need to understand that the transition to new leadership may be bittersweet for many in the community. Dave will continue to serve MP&MS as Director of Alumni Relations and High School Placement. An external appointee will need to be confident in seeking understanding and in offering new perspectives.

Caring for and supporting the faculty.

With COVID-19, racial reckoning, and the unsettled nature of the current moment, teachers need support. Acknowledging faculty service to MP&MS students, witnessing and celebrating daily work, coaching teachers, and listening authentically to all teachers, the next Middle School Director will nurture an environment that celebrates the hard work and dedication of faculty. The next Director will also be attuned to the ways in which the faculty need support and want to grow, "I've never taught such a wide range of kids," reflected one faculty member who is relatively new to MP&MS but has decades of teaching experience. "I'd like more training on how to work with such a wide range of neurodiverse learners."



Working with and educating parents with empathy and clarity.

The next Middle School Director will respond compassionately and effectively to parents, whose concerns range from questions about academic rigor and readiness for high school to preferences for greater learning support and everything in between. The next Middle School Director will need to be a compelling, calming, and clear communicator with the school's deeply invested parents.

Supporting vertical alignment.

There is a strong spirit of collaboration amongst grade level teams in the middle school. The faculty have begun to work more closely by department to also ensure vertical alignment. The next Middle School Director has the opportunity to continue to support this work and build bridges across divisions to support students' learning experiences and transitions between the primary division and middle school grade levels. The next Director should be cognizant and mindful of the preschool to eighth grade scope and committed to exploring what treasuring childhood means across that broad developmental range.

Joining a collaborative team.

Members of the leadership team share a strong work ethic, respect for a plurality of voices and experiences, a culture of honest discourse, care and respect for one another, and a desire to continually improve in order to serve MP&MS students. Members of the leadership team support each other as thought partners, mentors, sounding boards, and collaborators. The next Middle School Head will be comfortable asking questions, seeking support, and responding with equanimity to unpredictable day-to-day events while working with the leadership team on long-term strategic goals.



DESIRED QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

- Thorough and demonstrated understanding of and love for working with middle school students with great energy, warmth, and humor.
- Strength in building and maintaining connections and community between colleagues, divisions, parents, and students.
- Effective, efficient, and thoughtful communicator and listener with the willingness to engage in difficult conversations with candor and tact.
- Well-versed in and committed to equity and inclusion practices with experience in guiding students, colleagues, and parents in their growth in these spaces.
- Approachable and open to feedback with the ability to be discerning and discreet.
- Experience with managing and empowering colleagues.
- Enthusiastic community-builder and connector—highly visible and engaged around school and community events.

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.

Select candidates will be asked to respond to short writing prompts. Candidates who move forward in the process will be asked to provide five professional references.

Jennifer Wong Christensen

Senior Consultant

jennifer.christensen@carneysandoe.com

Karen Whitaker

Senior Consultant

karen.whitaker@carneysandoe.com