



Head of School

St. Stephen's Episcopal School – Houston
Houston, Texas



Introduction

Founded in 1971, St. Stephen's is an Episcopal parish school with a highly respected Montessori program that serves approximately 150 students from 15-months old through grade eight. In addition to its Episcopal identity and Montessori curriculum, St. Stephen's is distinguished by its relaxed, unpretentious community feel; an authentic commitment to equity and inclusion; a top-flight faculty; and a robust STEAM program.

The School's philosophy celebrates childhood, giving students the space to develop their own passions and the opportunity to build leadership skills and a strong sense of self. The American Montessori Society (AMS) curriculum fosters creativity, social graces, and foundational skills, while the Middle Years program offers an effective bridge to more traditional learning, preparing students for high school by encouraging independence, academic rigor, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

A commitment to social justice is a hallmark of a St. Stephen's education. Throughout the program, an intentional social-emotional focus is balanced with core academic classes to provide young students opportunities to explore content through real-world applications. The School prides itself on a palpable sense of community, heterogeneous and flexible learning groups, and a lively academic program.

St. Stephen's campus comprises a set of buildings on a city block in Houston's eclectic, artsy Montrose neighborhood. The School supports community engagement, and students regularly connect with the neighborhood's diverse cultural offerings. St. Stephen's is scheduled to break ground on a \$8 million building project in 2023 that will transform the campus, enhance the School's programs, and help spur the School's growth.



The next Head of St. Stephen's will champion the mission, culture, and values of the School, ensuring its commitment to Montessorian excellence, nurturing a progressive Episcopal community, and working with the Board and Church leaders to advance a shared vision of the School's future. The headship of St. Stephen's offers an excellent opportunity for an inspiring, personable, collaborative educator who is energized by the prospect of leading a small school that seeks to grow and mature as an institution while retaining its intimate, neighborhood feel.

Please visit the school's website for more information about its philosophy, history, programs, campus, and people: <https://www.ssesch.org>.

Overview

MISSION – St. Stephen's Episcopal School – Houston nurtures each child's academic, creative, and spiritual potential.

VISION – St. Stephen's sees a future where young people lead with compassion, acceptance, and a holistic view of the world. Our students are the future; they are our hope and promise for a more caring human community. To nurture that future, our faculty and staff seek to instill the core values in our students and strive to weave these values into the community.

A LEGACY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE – For more than 50 years, St. Stephen's Church and School have played a leading role in the fight for equality and social justice in Houston. The School was the first private institution in the city to admit students regardless of race, and in the early 1980s, the Church was one of



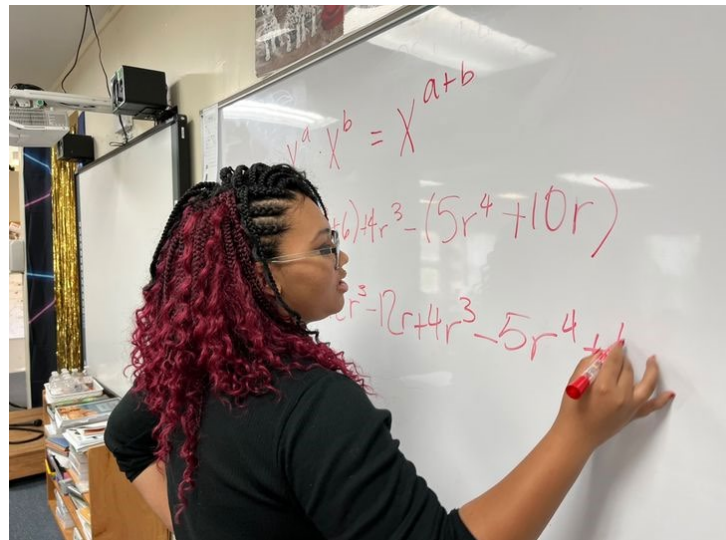
the first communities in Houston to welcome and support people affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. St. Stephen's was the first parish in the Diocese of Texas with a female rector, and it was the first Episcopal church in Houston to bless same-sex couples.

FINANCES & FUNDRAISING – St. Stephen's has enjoyed a balanced budget (averaging about \$4 million) for the past several years thanks to a healthy annual fund and smart management of its auxiliary programs (summer camps and before- and after-school offerings). The school has approximately \$1.75 million in capital reserves, and it has built an annual giving program that yields about \$125,000 per year.

TUITION & FINANCIAL AID – Annual tuition ranges from \$19,200 to \$24,200 (2022-23). In 2021-22, St. Stephen's awarded more than \$180,000 in tuition assistance (need-based and merit scholarships) to 18% of its student body.

ACCREDITATION & MEMBERSHIPS – Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools; American Montessori Society; No Place for Hate® (*Anti-Defamation League*); Welcoming Schools (*The Human Rights Campaign Foundation*)

FACULTY – St. Stephen's employs more than 30 full-time classroom teachers and assistants, over half of whom hold advanced degrees. All Lead Teachers in the Montessori program are certified by the American Montessori Society, and the School benefits from close ties to the Houston Montessori Center (a leading organization in Montessori training). St. Stephen's frequently welcomes trainees and observers from across the country and around the world. Beloved by parents and students alike, the St. Stephen's faculty represents a mix of seasoned veterans and enthusiastic newcomers. Many families consider the teachers a signature strength of the school, highlighting their ability to bring out the best in every child. Intimate class sizes allow faculty to provide tailored support and individual attention to every student.



Administration & Governance

The Head of School has seven direct reports: the Principal, Director of Admissions, Director of Communications, Business Director, Director of Student Affairs, Director of Technology, and an Administrative Assistant. The Principal oversees classroom faculty and all special teachers (da Vinci Lab, Spanish, Physical Education, and four arts specialists). A handful of employees, including the

School Chaplain, Director of Development, and Director of Communications work for both the School and the Church.

The School Board has 16 members, and The Church requires that a majority of the School's trustees be parishioners of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The Church Rector, Rev. Lisa Hunt, is the standing chair of the School Board. The trustees are a diverse and dedicated group who have proven generous with their time and talent in support of the School. They meet monthly during the school year and have active committees dedicated to development, finance, head



support and evaluation, strategic planning, buildings and grounds, and trustees/governance.

The Church is governed by a Vestry of 12 members elected by the congregation. One member of the Vestry is always appointed to serve on the School Board, and the School Board and Vestry are empowered to

create joint committees. The Head of School collaborates with the Vestry when the needs and interests of the School and the Church intersect, most frequently in matters related to finances and facilities.

Location & Campus

St. Stephen's is located in the historic Montrose neighborhood of Houston, a vibrant, diverse, community just west of the city center. Montrose is one of Houston's main cultural districts, featuring an eclectic mix of bars and restaurants, world-class museums, vintage stores, architectural landmarks, and several educational institutions. Montrose is one of the most inviting and walkable neighborhoods in Houston, featuring tree-lined streets with well-kept bungalows and renovated mansions from the early 20th century. In the 1980s, Montrose played a historic role in the evolution of Houston's gay community, and it remains an important center of LGBTQ+ life in the city.



Though Houston is perhaps best known for its leading roles in space exploration and the energy sector, the nation's fourth-largest city is also home to the world's largest medical center and nationally competitive universities (including Baylor College of Medicine, Rice University, Texas Southern University, and University of Houston) that boast Nobel laureates and draw faculty and

students from all over the world. Home to the nation's largest port and 24 of the world's Fortune 500 companies, the oil and gas industry dominates the city's economy, but Houston has a strong presence in the biotech, healthcare, and aerospace industries as well. The overall cost of living in Houston is slightly lower than the national average and dramatically lower compared to cities of



comparable size and influence – New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles.

St. Stephen's combined Church and School campus occupies most of a city block – plus two non-contiguous properties – and is nicely woven into the fabric of the Montrose neighborhood. The campus includes 11 separate buildings. Most of the structures, constructed between 1920 and 1960,

were not designed for education, but have been adapted for the School's use. The Montessori Houses and the Community House are former residential properties that have been converted into classrooms. The Church and School share several spaces, including the da Vinci Lab in the Havens Center. Many students love the variety of spaces the campus offers, and families appreciate the independence their children develop as they navigate between buildings, their physical explorations dovetailing with their intellectual and emotional journeys.

Episcopal Identity

St. Stephen's School has a close relationship with its eponymous Church, and the philosophy and values of the Episcopal faith enrich the education of every student at the School. The open, inclusive spirit of the Church community is reflected in the school, which welcomes families from all beliefs and backgrounds – Christians, non-Christians, and people with no religious affiliation.

St. Stephen's combines religious education and worship during weekly, age-appropriate Chapel led by the School's part-time Chaplain. Chapel for the youngest students lasts 15 minutes and may include candle lighting and bell ringing, prayers for family, and celebration of birthdays. Older students attend 30-minute Chapel ceremonies; Primary and Lower Elementary students enjoy music and basic lessons rooted in Episcopal rituals and beliefs; Chapel for students in Upper Elementary and Middle Years may include student poetry and scripture readings, and is focused on moral development with an eye toward social justice and current events.





The Academic Program

St. Stephen's embraces a continuum of education where each developmental stage of the child is considered. The School's excellent teachers and challenging curriculum inspire creativity, curiosity, and independence in all young learners. The School also supports the social-emotional growth of its students, encouraging spiritual growth, a global awareness, and a framework for responsible citizenship. Many schools claim to provide an individualized experience for each student, but few schools deliver the way St. Stephen's does. The size of the school and the superior training of the faculty allow for authentically student leadership, collaboration, and self-directed learning where struggle and independence are celebrated more than outcomes.

St. Stephen's academic program embraces collaborative project learning, integrated subject matter, student reflection, and high levels of student engagement. St. Stephen's alumni are generally seen as kind, hardworking, mature students and have enrolled at some of the best schools in Houston, including Episcopal High School, Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA), The Post Oak School, The Kinkaid School, DeBakey High School for Health Professions, The Awty International School, The Emery/Weiner School, St. John's School, and Carnegie Vanguard High School.

Recognizing the optimal three-year cycles coinciding with the planes of development identified by Maria Montessori, the St. Stephen's program is made up of five divisions:

The Orientation Program (a full- or half-day program serving children ages 15 months to 3 years) provides a calm, nurturing, and highly ordered environment in which the youngest students begin to explore their world, refine motor skills, increase language skills, learn about social relationships, and move toward independence.

The Primary Program (serving children ages 3 to 6) offers a core curriculum of well-planned lessons presented in a carefully prepared educational environment filled with specifically designed, age-appropriate materials. In mixed-age classrooms, children work independently and together

throughout the morning. In the afternoon, children in their third year pursue greater academic work, special activities, and group projects.

The Elementary Program is divided into two levels: Lower Elementary (grades 1-3) and Upper Elementary (grades 4-6). The curriculum is academically demanding, creative, and interdisciplinary, with a focus on connections across areas of study rather than the presentation of isolated facts. Project work guides children as they make the shift from the concrete to the abstract, and the mixed-age classroom environment encourages students to collaborate, contribute, cooperate, and compromise.



The Middle Years Program (serving students in grades 7-8) provides a transitional experience that prepares students for success in traditional college-preparatory high school settings, including rotating classes, a grading scale, and an increased workload. The program is rigorous and supports students individually as it pushes each of them to take increasing responsibility for their learning and work in their “stretch zone.” Students choose their own elective courses in the visual and performing arts, and eighth-graders can earn high school credit in math and Spanish and/or take an honors physics and chemistry course (thanks to a fully-equipped wet lab).



Writing is emphasized across the curriculum, ensuring graduates have a strong grasp of argument and composition when they enter high school. St. Stephen's has begun folding some advanced Upper Elementary students into Middle Years classes to help students learn at their own pace, support faculty skills and interests, and

provide leadership opportunities for the School's most mature students.

For more details regarding the academic program at St. Stephen's, please visit the “Academics” page on the School's website [here](#).

Arts

St. Stephen's has developed a signature arts program that is noteworthy for both its range – spanning music, film, photography, sculpture, drawing, dance, etc. – and its seamless integration with the School's classroom teaching. Arts faculty collaborate regularly with classroom teachers to reinforce and expand on ideas across disciplines, from history and math to literature and science. All students study art history in the art room and experience it firsthand through visits to museums and visits with guest artists.

Music learning starts in the Orientation Program and expands to include music history and theory as students grow into performers with the School's highly regarded choral ensemble. Middle Years students can enroll in film courses that cover film history, storyboarding, production, editing, acting, sound, location scouting, and casting. Students present their films at the School's annual Film Festival, held at the historic River Oaks Theater, just minutes from St. Stephen's campus. They also enter their works into local and statewide film festivals.

Overall, the arts program offers students a chance to develop technical and aesthetic skills, but it also helps develop non-arts skills such as public speaking, collaboration, project management, empathy, and the ability to work with constructive feedback.



STEAM

As a complement to its strong arts program, St. Stephen's has built an impressive STEAM program centered on The da Vinci Lab for Creative Arts and Sciences. The da Vinci Lab is both a program and a place, led by a dedicated, full-time faculty member. Every student in grades one through eight spends at least an hour every week in the lab. The youngest students learn core computer skills like typing, internet safety, and basic coding. In later grades, the lab offers St. Stephen's students the resources and opportunities to explore creative solutions to complex, hands-on problems. Most recently, the school has developed a popular, multifaceted robotics program that integrates mechanics, sensors, electronics, and programming.



Occupying a stand-alone building, the da Vinci Lab is equipped with everything from sewing machines and 3-D printers to woodworking tools and laser cutters. The lab also includes a gallery space and mounts several exhibitions every year, allowing students to share their creative and technical work. The lab serves as an after-school makerspace for local students in grades 4-9, generating some additional revenue for St. Stephen's and connecting the school to its neighbors.

The Opportunity

In the spring of 2022, St. Stephen's long-serving principal, Nahla Nasser, stepped into the role of Interim Head of School after the previous Head of School stepped away for medical reasons. Ms. Nasser is a highly respected member of the St. Stephen's community, and her appointment was universally welcomed. A trusted, effective leader, Ms. Nasser is well positioned to help St. Stephen's make steady progress toward its goals of becoming a more efficient and organized institution, raising its profile in Houston, and continuing to deliver a singular educational experience for every child at the School. A celebrated Montessorian who loves the classroom and working closely with students and teachers, Ms. Nasser will also be a great asset in onboarding the appointee.



The next Head of School will benefit from Ms. Nasser's efforts this year, particularly in the areas of fundraising, admissions, facilities, and curriculum development, especially in the Middle Years program. Upon arrival, the next Head of St. Stephen's will enjoy the support of an energetic administrative team that includes several veteran employees and a handful of newcomers. There will be many opportunities, however, for the incoming Head to extend the School's run of success and have a significant impact on the School's future. St. Stephen's most pressing challenges are likely to be in the areas of:

SCHOOL CULTURE – As St. Stephen's continues to evolve as an institution, the School hopes to maintain the closely knit community feel that has been a hallmark of the School since its founding. The next Head of School will need to cultivate a strong network of trusting relationships among all stakeholders – parents, trustees, faculty, students, and administrators – and rally the community around a shared vision to ensure that they balance competing agendas and manage the School's evolution on all fronts: physically, philosophically, academically, and financially.

To care for its staff and meet the high expectations of its families, St. Stephen's will



need to manage the tension – quite common in small schools that serve a range of learners – between institutional priorities and the needs of individual students. Finding ways to help teachers feel successful and find time to recharge while harnessing the care and enthusiasm of the parent body will be an exciting and nuanced challenge for the next Head of St. Stephen's.

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT – There is healthy market for independent schools in Houston, presenting an opportunity and a challenge for St. Stephen's as it seeks to stabilize and grow its enrollment. The School has become more competitive in recent years, in part by assembling a strong communications team that has refreshed its brand and used new media and creative



campaigns to raise the School's profile across the city. The school's messaging is both inspirational and mindful, synthesizing stories of people, programs, and place. The team's efforts have paid off handsomely, and St. Stephen's has managed to stabilize its enrollment around 150 students.

Recruiting new families and retaining students through eighth grade will be a singular priority for the next Head of School. The School's current facilities can accommodate nearly 250

students, though St. Stephen's will be positioned to enroll up to 300 students after the construction of its new building. Positioning the school for steady growth over the coming decade will require rethinking some key operational aspects of the current recruiting program and working with the communications team to integrate the School's many strengths – Montessori, arts, STEAM, Episcopal values, diversity, location, etc. – into a concise, compelling brand identity, and to further refine the value proposition of a St. Stephen's experience.

Internal marketing will also be crucial to retention efforts at the School. Reminding families of all that St. Stephen's has to offer is essential as students approach natural attrition points in the Upper Elementary grades, and especially as they transition from a Montessori program in grade six to a more traditional curriculum in grade seven. A lynchpin of the school's growth will be marketing the Middle Years program, which is currently under-enrolled but blessed with an outstanding faculty, an engaging curriculum, and dynamic students (most of whom test above grade level). Planning to build on the many strengths of its Middle Years program, St. Stephen's is looking for an innovative, visionary Head who can work with all constituent groups – including the Board – to make the Middle Years a compelling capstone experience that will attract and retain families in a competitive market.

FACILITIES – The cluster of buildings that make up the St. Stephen’s campus is central to its warmth and charm. Many of the facilities have benefited from recent upgrades, and the School has creatively repurposed various spaces to take advantage of the resources at hand. Still, parts of the campus are in urgent need of renovation, and the School is about to embark on a major capital building project.

In 2016, St. Stephen’s mapped out an ambitious, 25-year campus master plan that will be completed in three phases. The following year, the church and the school launched a joint capital campaign, Daring to Grow, to fund phase one of the plan: major renovations of existing spaces and construction of a new facility that will support students and faculty at every grade level, and especially those in the Orientation and Middle Years programs. St. Stephen’s is currently finalizing the designs with their architect, and construction of the new project is currently projected to begin in 2023.



Delivering the new building on time and on budget will be a challenge for the new Head of School, but they will have a singular opportunity to realize a long-held dream of the community and remake the core of the St. Stephen’s campus. Given the size of the School, the new building should be a potent catalyst for enrollment growth, community building (including closer ties with the Church), new programs, and/or future fundraising efforts.

FUNDRAISING – St. Stephen’s has raised more than \$6 million toward the \$8 million goal of the Daring to Grow campaign. The St. Stephen’s community needs to complete the campaign to ensure the long-term financial stability of the school, so the Board will expect the new Head to engage in wise financial planning and sustained, focused fundraising work.

First and foremost, the School’s leader must be an articulate and persuasive advocate for St. Stephen’s mission and importance in the broader community. The new Head will need to educate families about the philanthropic expectations associated with nonprofit education, building on strong annual fund participation rates to cultivate a robust philanthropic energy at the School. As they seek to attract more investment in the School, the



incoming Head will be able to rely on a strong communications team, a core group of trustees with fundraising experience, and the School's ongoing relationships with local foundations (a somewhat unique feature of fundraising in Houston).

Who Should Apply

St. Stephen's seeks an authentic, energetic educational leader whose skills and talents will resonate with the mission and culture of the School. The appointee will be visionary and inspiring, yet unafraid to roll up their sleeves and solve small problems or iron out operational details. St. Stephen's will be well served by a creative, resilient Head of School with an entrepreneurial mindset and a passion for external affairs – admissions, fundraising, exmissions, and managing capital projects.

The community has expressed a desire for a highly relational leader with superior communication skills, a deft political touch, and an inclusive management style.

A Head of School who knows how to build a strong culture of trust and collaboration among all constituents will be well positioned to unlock St. Stephen's full potential and have an immediate effect on the School's trajectory.



The Head of School should be an experienced teacher and administrator who will wholeheartedly endorse the aims and methods embodied in the Montessori philosophy. The School has been successfully led by both Montessori-trained and non-Montessori-trained Heads of School, and the



Board is eager to consider well-qualified applicants with or without Montessori experience.

The Head of St. Stephen's does not need to be an Episcopalian, but they should be a Christian who is prepared to strongly affirm the rituals and beliefs of the Episcopal Church. Their final appointment will be subject to the written consent of the Bishop of the Diocese of Texas, and they will be expected to abide by the Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese, meeting the Standards set forth by the Diocese's Commission on Schools.

St. Stephen's welcomes applications from anyone who can confidently demonstrate the skills and potential to address the School's most pressing leadership needs (see above). The ideal candidate will have most or all of the following:

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

- Substantial experience in independent school administration and teaching.
- An understanding and appreciation for the work of educating children from early childhood through grade eight.
- Familiarity and ease with financial statements and processes.
- Exceptional communication skills, including speaking, writing, and listening.
- The willingness and ability to play a major role in School advancement efforts, including marketing, admissions, and fundraising.
- A solid of best practices in governance, coupled with a willingness to work collaboratively with the School Board and Church Vestry.

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND LEADERSHIP STYLE

- A warm, welcoming personal style.
- A confident leader who is effective working with an engaged parent body that has high expectations for the School.
- A proactive, forward-thinking leader who shares the community's commitment to equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.
- A charismatic advocate for the mission and quality of St. Stephen's within the Church and School communities, as well as the greater Houston area.
- A firm and fair leader who is comfortable with conflict management, collaboration, and consensus-building, but fully capable of decisive action when appropriate.
- A deeply ethical and moral leader who inspires trust, loyalty, commitment, and a spirit of common purpose among all constituencies.
- Outstanding administrative skills, including the ability to multitask and to delegate appropriately, balancing accountability and autonomy.
- A polished, professional, and diplomatic manner.



Search Overview

Butler/White Strategies is partnering with St. Stephen's and its School Board to lead the recruitment and selection process for this opportunity. Jo Butler and Zachary White are serving as the lead consultants.

To nominate a potential candidate, please email admin@butlerwhite.com. To express a personal interest in this opportunity, prospective candidates should contact Butler/White Strategies via the email above and include a current résumé with their message. All inquiries and nominations are confidential.

To formalize their application and ensure full consideration, candidates should also submit via email:

- a letter of interest,
- a statement of educational philosophy, and
- a list of five professional references. *(References should be submitted as a separate document, not included on the résumé. References will not be contacted without the applicant's permission.)*

Applicants are also welcome to submit additional materials that might help the committee better understand relevant aspects of their candidacy and potential fit with St. Stephen's.

All candidates – particularly those who have not worked with Butler/White before – are encouraged to initiate the application process well before the deadline.

Search Calendar

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|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Application Deadline | October 10 |
| Virtual Semifinalist Interviews | October 29-30 |
| Finalist Interviews | November |
| Appointment | Early December |

This calendar is subject to change based on the dynamics of the search and the best interests of St. Stephen's. Butler/White will update all applicants of their status as the search unfolds.



**Butler/White
Strategies**

*This document was developed by Butler/White Strategies
based on data, images, and text provided by the School.*