

Paddington Station Preschool



Cultivate • Collaborate • Inspire

Denver, Colorado

Head of School for July 2024



Fred Rogers once said that “play is serious learning.” True to that spirit, learning through play is what Paddington Station Preschool is all about. One of the nation’s largest nonprofit independent preschools, Paddington has long been one of the most highly regarded early childhood programs in Colorado. With an extraordinary faculty, stalwartly supportive community, and a program grounded in modern educational theory, Paddington is poised to be a national leader in child-centered, play-based education.

Paddington Station Preschool’s current head is retiring in June 2024, and the school is looking for its next head to move it forward by building upon its remarkable strengths and growing momentum. Along with the introduction in the pages that follow, we invite candidates to review [Paddington Station Preschool’s website](#) and [view this video](#) from the school’s most recent auction to get a sense of Paddington’s extraordinary heart and spirit.

Introduction

Walking through the doors and into the grand foyer of the 132-year-old “little red brick schoolhouse” is a captivating experience. Amidst the laughter of children, book-lined corridors, and whimsical drawings that adorn the walls, it is dramatically clear that Paddington is a place that embraces and celebrates the wonder and joy of childhood.

Paddington Station Preschool was founded in 1993, bringing to life the vision of parents and educators who wanted their children’s first school experience to be grounded in play, nurture, and love. From the beginning, families poured their energy into Paddington and helped tirelessly with clean-up days, providing snacks, and supplying the classrooms with books and toys. Families have always been an integral part of the fabric of Paddington, and an abiding family-teacher partnership is at the school’s core to this day.

Throughout the years, Paddington has earned respect both locally and nationally as a model independent play-based preschool. As a marker of its quality, Paddington is in the midst of completing the candidacy period for accreditation by the Association of Colorado Independent Schools in 2024—the first stand-alone preschool to receive such an honor.

Paddington Station Preschool At-A-Glance (2022-2023)

267 Students

Creative Explorations (Parent and Toddler): **20**
Two-year-olds: **64**
Three-year-olds: **92**
Pre-kindergarten: **79**
BIPOC Students: **27%**

Professional Staff

Number of Employees: **44**
BIPOC staff: **13%**
Lead Teachers: **29**
Assistant Teachers: **3**
Support staff: **6**
Administrators: **6**

Finances

Operating budget: **\$3.5 million**
Annual Fund: **\$56,418**

Admission (2022-23)

Applications received: **218**
Admitted: **88%**
Enrolled: **74%**
Zip codes served: **24**

Financial aid

Need-based: **\$141,922**
Remission: **\$54,611**
Receiving assistance: **8.6%**

Tuition

\$18,755 (five full days)



Mission

Paddington Station Preschool (“Paddington”) is a welcoming and inclusive community that partners with families to celebrate childhood, embrace learning through play, and prepare confident individuals to joyfully explore the wonders of the world.

Program

Everything that happens on Paddington’s campus is based upon the belief that play is purposeful and that engaging children through play builds lifelong skills in collaboration, empathy, and connection to community. The school believes that children aren’t too young to begin to develop an awareness of their surroundings and their role in the world.

A strong foundation of educational theory supports Paddington’s philosophy and practices:

1. Children are unique and have the intrinsic desire to explore, discover, and learn about their environment.
2. Hands-on, child-directed experiential activity–“play” in its richest sense–is the essential way children make sense of the world.
3. Learning is a cumulative process.

Paddington’s integrated, experiential curriculum provides an inspiring program that nurtures each child’s natural curiosity and love of learning. Paddington’s curriculum emphasizes:

- Social and emotional growth
- Fine and gross motor physical development
- Language and literacy acquisition
- Subject-area competence in math, science, and social studies

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mission Statement

Paddington Station Preschool fosters a culture where all differences and identities among race, gender, ability, religion, ethnicity, family structure, and economic background are valued, celebrated, and recognized as an essential component of our School. We aspire to create a sense of belonging and trust where we uphold equity as we cultivate, collaborate, and inspire members of our community. We believe that celebrating each individual and the unique experiences they bring will exponentially enhance our learning.



Curriculum highlights by age level include:

2-year-olds: engaging in parallel and associative play; learning routines and transitions; practicing fine and gross motor skills; beginning literacy development by pretending to read books to their friends and teachers

3-year-olds: beginning to engage in cooperative play; practicing fine motor skills by manipulating small objects; using expressive language and pre-reading skills such as orienting books correctly; developing early math skills by understanding one-to-one correspondence

4-year-olds (pre-kindergarten): engaging in cooperative play and building imagination; establishing empathy and processing social cues; developing phonemic awareness and beginning to read environmental print; practicing numerical concepts and operations such as counting, expressing, and measuring numbers and matching quantities to numerals

Teachers begin each day with a dedicated hour of classroom preparation before children and their parents arrive. All classes are co-taught and are aligned with professionally recommended student to teacher ratios. Teachers act as facilitators who encourage free exploration by inviting children to dive in, get messy, and try new things that make them reach just outside their comfort zone. They employ prompting questions such as "I see you've built a road here, how could this road turn toward a tunnel?" Or, "I see you are painting with your fingers—what are you creating? How does the paint feel?"

Classrooms—each named for a Beatrix Potter character—provide an engaging and imaginative learning environment. Each is equipped with several choice tables and is carefully arranged to enable students to explore texture, shapes, various art mediums, and building materials.

Paddington is deeply committed to supporting children in their understanding of the complexities of identity and race. Teachers strive to integrate anti-bias practices in their teaching, engage a diverse group of families in equitable ways, and celebrate their students' differences as well as their similarities.

Please visit the [website's curriculum pages](#) to learn more about Paddington's curriculum by age group.



People

Paddington's 32 teachers are, in a word, exceptional. They are energetic, highly qualified, and passionate about Paddington's mission. Many lead teachers hold masters degrees in early childhood education, and several have been with the school for many years.

The head of school works closely with a director of preschool, whose primary responsibility is to support students and teachers. An instructional coach leads faculty professional growth programming and offers instructional support in classrooms. Completing the administrative team are the director of communication & inclusion, business manager, and director of admission. An office manager lends critical support to the school's daily operations.

Paddington serves 267 children from 252 families who hail from multiple neighborhoods in the Denver metropolitan area. The parent body is diverse and includes families from across the country and world. The parent-teacher partnership is a hallmark of Paddington's culture, and parents are actively supportive of teachers. Parents walk their children in each morning, and many are present throughout the day as volunteers. They are especially grateful for the physical and emotional safety that Paddington provides their children. Paddington takes good care of its parents as well as its students, offering them multiple books and resources and providing them with wise counsel about raising young children.

The board of trustees meets monthly and has 13 members, including current and past parents, grandparents, community members, and one faculty representative. The head of school serves in an ex-officio capacity. Board committees include finance, governance, diversity, development, and buildings & grounds.



Community Outreach

Paddington has a long tradition of service to the community built upon the theme of “Families helping families.” The school engages both children and parents in a wide range of outreach efforts each year such as:

- Selling “Acts of Kindness Kits” at the end-of-year celebration, with proceeds and donations benefiting those impacted by the war in Ukraine
- Gathering and donating diapers after the devastating Marshall fire in January 2022
- Adopting a family in need during the 2021-22 holiday season

Place

Paddington has resided in many locations over the years, from a church basement to a repurposed space at the former Lowry Air Force Base. In 2000, Paddington moved to its current home in the “little red brick schoolhouse”--a beautiful building with a rich history that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Opened in 1891 as the Montclair School, it later housed the first public Kindergarten in Denver and then the Stanley British Primary School, which sold the building to Paddington in 2011.

Classrooms are spacious and well equipped with materials that invite children to play and discover. The school’s expansive outdoor classrooms and play areas feature gardens, nature-based structures, and curated experiences designed to inspire imagination and meet the physical needs of young children.

The school recently acquired adjacent land, and the board is currently engaged in thoughtful planning for its future development and use.

Paddington is situated in the residential neighborhood of Montclair in east Denver. Denver itself stands among the nation’s most thriving cities, with a vibrant cultural scene that boasts museums, art galleries, music venues, and outdoor festivals. Its location at the foot of the Rocky Mountains offers numerous opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. The city’s economy is growing, especially in industries such as technology, healthcare, energy, and finance, and continues to be a mecca for young professionals and their families.



Priorities for the next Head of School

1) *Recruiting, retaining, and supporting excellent faculty and staff*

Paddington's teachers are outstanding early childhood educators who are passionate about and committed to play-based learning. Since the pandemic, finding and keeping great teachers in the Denver area—and across the nation—has become a growing challenge. Though progress has been made of late with increasing faculty and staff compensation, salaries are well below public school norms. The new head will need to collaborate with the board and staff to find ways to recruit and retain excellent teachers, especially teachers of color, who embrace Paddington's unique play-based model. As Paddington's approach to early childhood learning is distinctive, the expansion of professional development programming and support systems for teachers is a high priority, focusing especially on instructional practice and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

2) *Ensuring effective operational management and distributing leadership*

As a small school, the head is intimately involved in all aspects of daily operations. But the work cannot be accomplished by the head alone, so finding ways to distribute leadership and delegate responsibilities effectively is critical to the school's operational sustainability. As the new head will be increasingly involved in fundraising initiatives and financial modeling, they will need to consider refining the administrative structure with clearly defined roles. Paddington's staff has the critical responsibility of ensuring the school follows and exceeds the standards established by state and local early childhood agencies and accrediting associations; such tasks will require a well-coordinated team effort.

3) *Upholding Paddington as a model school for play-based learning*

Paddington's play-based approach is second to none, and the school has become widely respected for its philosophy and implementation of best practices. The new head will have a distinct opportunity to be an advocate for the play-based approach by developing outreach programs that will impact early childhood programs both regionally and nationally. Such programming will have resounding benefits for both Paddington and the larger community of early childhood educators and parents. In service to this opportunity, forging partnerships with local and regional colleges, universities, and educational organizations will enable Paddington to shine its light as well as create a pipeline of prospective teachers.

4) *Building community & communicating clearly*

Paddington's parents are deeply appreciative of the frequent and clear communications they receive from the school. The new head will need to build upon communications practices to ensure that the community remains well informed on a frequent and consistent basis. Parents and staff have long valued the traditions that celebrate Paddington's uniqueness, and the new head will have the opportunity to introduce traditions that build upon the school's heart and spirit. As a critical element of building community, the new head must enhance existing initiatives and introduce new strategies that support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging throughout the community, including finding meaningful ways to welcome and support families of color.

5) *Planning & Fundraising*

Paddington is in the fourth year of a strategic plan that has focused on community collaboration and diversity, retaining and supporting faculty and staff, enhancing programs, and sustaining organizational and financial stability and advancement. The new head must build upon these efforts and develop new strategies to further the school's mission and position Paddington for future success. It will be vital to work with the management team to translate long-range strategic priorities into near-term tactical actions. Paddington's development efforts have been successful but modest. The next head will actively lead fundraising and advancement efforts, including annual and capital campaigns, and will be personally involved in the cultivation and solicitation of major gifts.

Desired Candidate Attributes and Experiences

Paddington Station Preschool seeks an experienced independent school early childhood educational leader who will champion its unique model of play-based learning and embrace a community that is uncommonly loving and supportive. The new head of school will exemplify a healthy balance between “heart and head,” demonstrating both warmth and compassion and the ability and resolve to “get things done.”

The successful candidate will be:

- Passionate about and possess an understanding of the play-based approach to early childhood education
- Innately kind, compassionate, and joyful
- Able to lead with both humility and confidence
- A proven relationship builder
- Deeply committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
- Intimately familiar with independent school culture and operations
- An excellent communicator in both writing and speaking
- Able to adapt to unexpected circumstances, think on their feet, and problem solve effectively
- Able to delegate administrative responsibilities while being fully engaged in day-to-day operations
- Able to attend to detail and manage critical operational tasks
- Experienced in fundraising and have an understanding of nonprofit financial management
- Appreciative of Denver’s distinct culture and milieu

Minimum requirements:

- At least five years as an early childhood leader in an independent school
- A bachelor’s degree is required; a master’s degree in early childhood or elementary education is strongly preferred



Information on the Search Process

Paddington Station Preschool's next Head of School will begin on July 1, 2024. The Board of Trustees has appointed a search committee to conduct the search and has engaged a national executive search firm, Educational Directions, to assist the committee.

Please direct all inquiries, applications, and nominations in confidence to:

Jay Underwood at jay.underwood@edudx.com
and Jerry Larson at jerry.larson@edudx.com

Candidates should submit:

- a letter explaining their interest in Paddington Station Preschool addressed to members of the Search Committee
- a current resume
- a personal statement
- the names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of five references with their affiliation (references will not be contacted without the prior agreement of the candidate). Finalists will be expected to furnish seven additional references.

Electronic submission of credentials is required and candidates are encouraged to begin the application process as soon as possible.

Application Deadline: September 15, 2023

Compensation includes an annual salary of \$140,000 - \$150,000, health insurance, and annual school-sponsored retirement plan contributions.

Paddington Station Preschool is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer and seeks qualified candidates from a wide variety of backgrounds and identities.

Educational Directions and Paddington Station Preschool reserve the right to accelerate the search timeline for highly qualified candidates.

