



HEAD OF SCHOOL
July 1, 2011
RIO GRANDE SCHOOL
Santa Fe, New Mexico

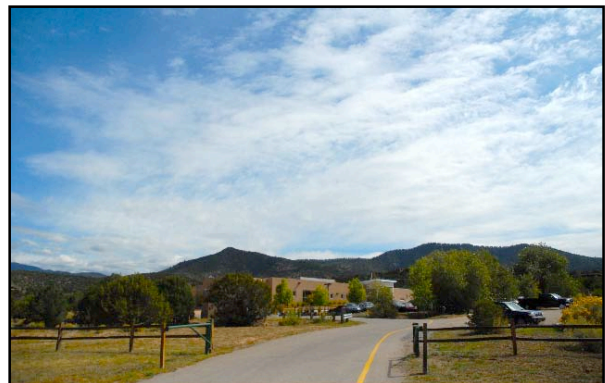
LOCATION AND CAMPUS

The City of Santa Fe has long been recognized as a cultural center of the Southwest and is one of the oldest cities in America. With architecture marked by the characteristic adobe style, the city is not only a renowned center for artists and craftsmen world-wide, but serves as the capital of the state and is home to hundreds of cultural and environmental organizations. Among these are the Santa Fe Opera, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, the Museum of International Folk Art, and the American Museum of Indian Arts. The city has deep Hispanic and Native American roots and each tradition has a deep influence on the culture of the area. Outdoor activities, such as hiking, biking, and skiing, are extremely popular and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

The city's spectacular and unique beauty makes it a destination for tourists and a home for many families who have resettled there to enjoy the favorable climate and lifestyle. Situated at 7000 feet between the Sangre de Cristo and Jemez Mountains, the city also boasts an average of nearly 300 days of sunshine annually. Sperling & Sanders' *Cities Ranked and Rated* cited Santa Fe as the number two place to live in America, giving it high marks for climate, quality of life, and arts and culture. Santa Fe is unique in that it has a relatively small population of only 70,000 but provides the amenities, advantages, and opportunities of a much larger city. The city is easily reachable and is an hour north of Albuquerque by car or modern rail service.

Rio Grande School is located about a mile from the center of Santa Fe in its historic Eastside and sits on "Academic Hill" which it shares with other institutions including St. John's College, Santa Fe Preparatory School -- a 7-12 independent day school -- and several museums. The school is set back from a quiet residential street and enjoys stunning views of the city and surrounding mountains.

RGS owns five acres that support several attractive and award-winning buildings, the latest of which was completed in 2006. The classrooms are large and bright and meet the school's needs well. There is a gymnasium/auditorium, a library/media center, and several play areas as well as an athletic field. The campus is extremely attractive and well maintained and is clearly a major asset for the school and community.



HISTORY AND MISSION

The Rio Grande School was founded in 1978 by a group of parents interested in creating an alternative to the public schools in Santa Fe. The school quickly grew to over 100 students, acquired a parcel of land next to St. John's College, and established itself as the premier elementary school in the area. Today, the school enrolls 160 students in grades PK – 6.

The mission of Rio Grande School is to challenge each child's intellect, to inspire each child's imagination, and to nurture each child's desire to learn.

Rio Grande School offers a stimulating program in a safe community which values...

- **Academic Excellence:** the foundation of thinking and communication skills, strong habits, and the authentic integration of the arts with core subjects to prepare children for success in the 21st century
- **Child-Centeredness:** the promotion of each child's strengths, interests, and learning style to foster personal and academic growth
- **Diversity and Inclusivity:** the respect for human differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, and socioeconomic background
- **Character Development:** the empowerment to serve others and the recognition that children learn best when social and emotional competencies are integrated with academic skills
- **Environmental Stewardship:** the nurturing of the sense of responsibility for the natural world that the name of the school implies
- **Global Perspective:** the confidence to navigate through international cultures to create new ideas and different ways of perceiving the world
- **Strong Relationships:** the leadership of outstanding teachers partnering with committed parents to guide children on their journey

These principles infuse the daily work of the school with their power and spirit.

COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

STUDENTS

The students at Rio Grande love to come to school. They are enthusiastic, creative, and energetic. Pre-school grades were added in 2005 and are divided into Pequeños – 3 and 4 year-olds – and Grandes – 4 and 5 year-olds. These grades feed a strong kindergarten program. There is one section per grade level with sections typically averaging 16 students in kindergarten, 18 in grades one through three and 20 in the upper grades.

Recruiting efforts have increased diversity to approximately 25 percent of families who identify as "of color", the majority of whom are of Hispanic and Native American descent. The school has recently forged a relationship with the Pojoaque Pueblo north of the city and there are currently several Pojoaque students enrolled. Approximately 20 percent of the students currently receive some form of tuition assistance, to which the Board allocates 10 percent of tuition revenues each year.

"A culture of respect and kindness pervades the entire school."
–ISAS accreditation report

The small classes and current size of RGS, which are cited as strong assets by parents and teachers, ensure that every student is known by virtually everyone in the school. The feelings of warmth, nurture, and safety that result are palpable, making RGS a very happy place in which children grow and learn.

Graduates are exceedingly well prepared for their next schools and a large majority matriculates into the seventh grade at Santa Fe Prep, just up the road. Other graduates attend Desert Academy and St. Michael's High School.



PARENTS

The school community brings together diverse families from the area and welcomes them openly and sincerely. A wide variety of professional families send children to RGS, including medical practitioners, investors, artists, scientists, tribal leaders, and entrepreneurs. A good number of parents are also educators themselves. Overall, this is a sophisticated, well educated, and socially progressive group, the majority of whom have relocated in the last ten years from large cities around the country. A growing number of international families have come to the school from Asia, Europe, and Australia.

In a recent on-line survey conducted by the school, 52 percent of the parents rated themselves as "extremely satisfied" with RGS, 41 percent were "very satisfied" and 7 percent "satisfied" with only 1 parent listed as "dissatisfied." These are very favorable ratings for any independent school.

Parents find opportunities to volunteer with hands-on classroom projects and in the school's service learning programs. There is an active Parents' Association at RGS that supports the school and its efforts. Enthusiastic volunteers, who organize both family and charitable events, ably lead the group. Notable among these events are the Annual Gathering for parents and staff, a fall family day, and the Gala Grande in the winter, an auction that raises funds to support tuition assistance. The RGS Parents' Association also provides on-going educational programs that deal with current issues affecting parents and children.

FACULTY


The faculty is the backbone of Rio Grande School, providing a good mix of strong veterans and teachers who are relatively new to the school. Parents describe the teachers as "dedicated", "creative", and "impressive." Each class has a lead teacher and associate. The upper grade associate teachers are 50 percent full-time equivalents and all associates have significant teaching responsibilities in the classrooms. In addition to the classroom teachers, specialists provide excellent work in art, music, experiential education, drama, physical education, science, Spanish, technology/media, library media and learning differences. Over 70 percent of the teachers have earned master's degrees.

The RGS faculty describe themselves as caring, hard working, professional, and highly collegial – and the RGS parents agree. They are committed to the students and to the mission of the school. Like the parents, many teachers have emigrated from other parts of the country, with a large number coming from the Northeast. In recent years, Rio Grande has boosted faculty compensation significantly and has been able to recruit teachers nationally as a result. Newcomers are welcomed quickly and easily and the school provides strong support for professional growth and development.

Under the leadership of the Associate Head, the faculty has begun the systematic evaluation of programs. The intent is to increase the degree of program continuity, to continue to account for learning style variation, and to appropriately challenge all students.

ADMINISTRATION

In addition to the Head of School, RGS employs an Associate Head who oversees faculty and curriculum development. In the past two years, she has been working on program scope and sequence, continuity, and on best practices in curricular areas. Her work has been positively received and RGS is making strong progress towards even greater alignment and integration of programs.



“Students, faculty, parents, and visitors are happy to be here, love the School, and are appreciative of being part of the community.”

-ISAS accreditation report

The Administration also includes a part-time Admissions Director who also teaches, a Director of Finance and Operations, and two Assistants in the office who act to support the faculty and administration. To date, the Head of School has also functioned as Rio Grande’s development officer. A full-time maintenance staff of three also serves the school’s cleaning needs, and they do yeoman’s work in keeping the campus safe and beautiful.

BOARD

For a small school, Rio Grande has a highly effective and well-developed Board of Trustees composed of 15 members; most are current parents. In addition, the President of United World College in Montezuma, NM, who is a former NAIS school head, serves on the board, as does the school’s attorney, who is a non-voting member. The board has engaged in strategic long range planning and has a clear sense of its governance role within the school and an excellent working relationship with the Head of School. Board members have been significantly supportive of RGS, financially and otherwise, and typify the “can do,” positive, Western spirit that pervades Santa Fe and New Mexico.

PROGRAM

The program at Rio Grande is lively and engaging and is both teacher-directed and child-centered. Each grade level between K and 6 has a theme that helps to unify material and creates a platform for integration of subjects. Project and group work and experiential and hands-on education are typical of the RGS program. The school has adopted the “Responsive Classroom” approach for attending to social and emotional learning, which fits both its current values and child-centered history.

The overall program is rich in literacy, mathematical reasoning, hands-on science, and social studies. Spanish is taught from grades Grandes – 6. In keeping with both its founding and with the culture of Santa Fe, RGS has a strong focus on the arts. Fine art, music and drama are important parts of school life and, to the extent possible, are integrated with themes in the classroom and with academic subjects. RGS has a strong technology program through its library/media center, and Smart Boards have been introduced in most of the classrooms.



RGS believes in creating environmental awareness in all members of its community and the themes that emerge from those beliefs are visible on the campus. A large collecting tank in the center of the campus gathers water that runs off the school’s roofs. Service learning projects are an important part of the experience for the students, and these have involved both environmental and social outreach.

More extensive details about the program can be found on the school’s website: www.riograndeschool.org

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The RGS community is proud of its achievements to this point in its history, but the school is not self-satisfied in the least. In fact, there is a constructive desire in the community, a desire to do more and, wherever possible, to do better. The school strives to provide the finest possible elementary education.

DIVERSITY

The commitment to diversity at RGS comes from a belief that encountering differences in history, culture, background, ideas, and lifestyle is central to a first-rate education. While RGS has made significant strides in recent years in attracting a more diverse student body, there is still work to be done. The faculty and administration do not yet reflect the ethnicity of the community or of the student body. The next head will be expected to work to create a community where adults as well as students represent a desirable mix of backgrounds, races, and ethnicities present in greater Santa Fe. As is the case in many elementary schools, the faculty is largely female; RGS needs to recruit, encourage, and develop more male teachers. An additional challenge comes in developing community buy-in for diversity initiatives and tackling the issue as not just a quantitative one but as one that attends to the qualitative experience of students.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The school is highly regarded in the Santa Fe community but is not especially visible, either literally or figuratively. Its location means that few people drive by the campus and, in the past, it had been something of an isolated enclave for wealthier families. There has been real progress in creating greater visibility in the community and these efforts need to expand and continue. Tuition assistance, active outreach, and connections to greater Santa Fe will all be part of these efforts.

FINANCES AND FUND RAISING

Rio Grande School is in excellent financial shape: The school runs a balanced budget, enrollment is solid at 160, there are some cash reserves and, via the efforts of the board and Head, an endowment has been established and has grown to 2.3 million dollars in the past few years. In 2006, the school launched a highly successful 4.1 million dollar capital campaign, which will be completed this year. Nonetheless, RGS can feel the tightening of the financial web that has affected most independent schools. Affordability and tuition control, increased need for financial aid, and the attraction of the best teachers are all issues RGS is facing. The next Head is going to need to work to find the right financial balance between tuition and expenses and will undoubtedly be involved in fundraising efforts to support that balance. Currently, the head does the heavy lifting with fundraising and works with the support of an experienced development administrator.

CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM

The next Head will need to continue the work of the current Head and Associate Head in supporting program development and integration. The on-going work around emerging literacy, the emphasis on writing, and serving the needs of the brightest students are some of the issues on which the administration is currently working.

RIO GRANDE SCHOOL FACTS

- Enrollment: 160 students, 3 year olds – Grade 6
- Founded: 1978
- Annual Budget: 2.8 million dollars
- Annual non-tuition revenue: 300,000 dollars
- No debt
- 10% of budget in financial aid
- Endowment 2.3 million dollars
- Accredited: Independent Schools Association of the Southwest
- NAIS member

THE CANDIDATE

Professional Background

The ideal candidate would possess:

- A strong background in elementary teaching and administration
- An excellent working knowledge of elementary and early childhood curriculum and practice and a strong affinity for the issues of childhood
- Evidence of successful leadership of faculty
- Experience with and/or clear potential for fundraising
- Excellent skills in working with parents
- Excellent communication abilities, both oral and written
- Experience as a head of school or equivalent leadership background
- An advanced degree
- A commitment to 21st Century ideas and practices in technology, sustainability, and global education

Personal Qualities

The strongest candidates will bring:

- A love of children
- Vision
- Empathy
- Genuine interest in and compatibility with the Santa Fe community and values including affinities for the outdoors, the culture of the Southwest, and open-mindedness
- Excellent leadership ability, a quality that inspires others to follow
- Strong listening abilities
- Diplomatic skills
- Demonstrated ability to follow through
- A strong desire to be accessible and visible
- A sense of adventure
- A wonderful sense of humor

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Interested candidates should send a cover letter, resume, and statement of educational philosophy to:

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