

# The Avery Coonley School

## Head of School Search





# Their bright can't wait

The Avery Coonley School (ACS) is a dynamic and diverse independent day school for academically bright and gifted students in Downers Grove, IL, and serves children from ages 3 to grade 8. Founded in 1906 by an educational innovator, specializing in gifted education, providing an invigorating experience for children who want to be challenged, offering an accelerated and enriched curriculum, and encouraging discovery through exploration.

At ACS experienced teachers who understand the needs of gifted and high-achieving children build the bonds that enable them to develop an individualized approach for each child. No matter how it is tailored and on what platform it is delivered, an ACS education helps students thrive through intellectual challenge as well as an essential focus on the arts and creative expression, physical health, character and social and emotional growth.



ACS students together create a unique collaborative culture where the drive to learn transcends all other differences. Deeply involved parents and highly committed faculty support this community of children, who learn together and by doing, and who welcome, include, and support each other in their diversity.

# Fast Facts



**320  
STUDENTS**

from 40+  
different communities



All students  
work at least  
**1 YEAR ABOVE**  
their current  
grade level



**AGE 3 THROUGH  
GRADE 8**

learning through  
exploration



**30% OF RECENT  
GRADUATES**

named National  
Merit Finalists or  
Semi-Finalists



**GIFTED  
EDUCATION**

for all children,  
all day, beginning  
in kindergarten



A financial aid  
award can be  
**UP TO 90%**  
of tuition costs



**Student/Teacher Ratio: 9:1**

**Faculty and Staff: 69**

**Faculty with Advanced Degrees: 72%**

**Students of Color: 54%**

# ACS History

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**1906** - Seeking to expand the educational opportunities for her four-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, Queene Ferry Coonley established The Cottage School following Froebel's kindergarten principles and the progressive education movement.

**1912** - Frank Lloyd Wright finished the now-famous Coonley Playhouse to accommodate the growth of The Cottage School. Mrs. Coonley helped establish kindergartens in other Chicago suburbs, including the Kindergarten Extension Association School in Downers Grove.

**1929** - Mrs. Coonley purchased an 11-acre tract of land next to a forest preserve for a new school creating an open, flexible, comfortable learning environment that is in harmony with its natural setting. The school was renamed The Avery Coonley School in honor of her late husband, and over 100 students attended opening day, September 30, 1929.

**1960** - John Malach took on the role of headmaster and led the school's transition to gifted education.

**1980** - Recognizing the central role that drama, music, and the visual arts have always played in the school's curriculum, a wing dedicated primarily to the fine arts was added. With the additional space, Avery Coonley was able to add an Early Childhood program for three year olds.

**2018** - After an 18-month collaborative process. The Avery Coonley School launched a comprehensive strategic plan to ensure that Avery Coonley will continue to be the best possible choice for gifted children now and into the future. The four main goals include: "deepen our commitment to our gifted mission and program; strengthen our identity as a diverse, inclusive, and multicultural school community; expand our platform of programs, partnerships, and expertise; and enhance our long-term sustainability."

**Today** - The Avery Coonley School continues to guide children onward and upward by encouraging intellectual curiosity, fostering individual talents, and providing a strong foundation to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

# Let's go! Then, let's keep going.

## Mission

The Avery Coonley School is an independent school whose mission is to provide a learning environment that is appropriate both for academically bright and gifted children who are motivated to learn and have demonstrated the potential for the scholastic achievement necessary to succeed in a challenging academic program, in order that they may become positive, productive, and respectful members of society.

## Philosophy

We believe that the joy and excitement of learning must begin early in life. We place a high premium on developing the desire in our students to become critical thinkers and independent, life-long learners.

We assist our students in realizing their intellectual, emotional, social, creative, and physical potential by promoting academic achievement, character development, self-reliance, self-confidence, independent thought, and personal fitness.

We recognize and are sensitive to the unique needs of gifted children. Within a traditional structure, we provide acceleration and enrichment, and foster a supportive atmosphere that provides opportunities for creativity, problem-solving, and risk-taking.

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

We believe that diversity is the foundation for a strong, competent, and compassionate community.

We strive to build a community that encourages understanding and mutual respect and nurtures appreciation of the individual, civility, gratitude, honesty, kindness and consideration, responsibility, and volunteerism.

The ACS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council guides us in new initiatives and advocacy.





## SERVING GIFTED AND HIGH ACHIEVING STUDENTS

# More than one thing. Everything

Avery Coonley believes that a bright, highly capable child will go farther in academics, career and life because of the rigor and depth of a specialized curriculum combined with an experiential, student-led approach to learning, close relationships with faculty who understand the social and emotional as well as intellectual needs of gifted and high achieving students, and a motivated community of peers who strengthen and inspire each other through a true collaborative spirit.

From community, geography, and history to French language, music, and literature, themes of study connect multiple subjects throughout grades for deeper learning based in real-world problem solving. Science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics are integrated into a flexible, highly experiential curriculum influenced by student interests. They engage deeply and with vigor. They are thrilled by the challenge. They are eager to learn, energized by the creative process and their peers, and open to new experiences.



# Eager minds together make us all better.

Imagine spending everyday with children who are excited about school. Excited about everything. They are happy. They learn more. They love it.

ACS students together create a unique collaborative culture where the drive to learn transcends all differences. Deeply involved and supportive parents and highly committed faculty support this community of motivated, high-ability children.



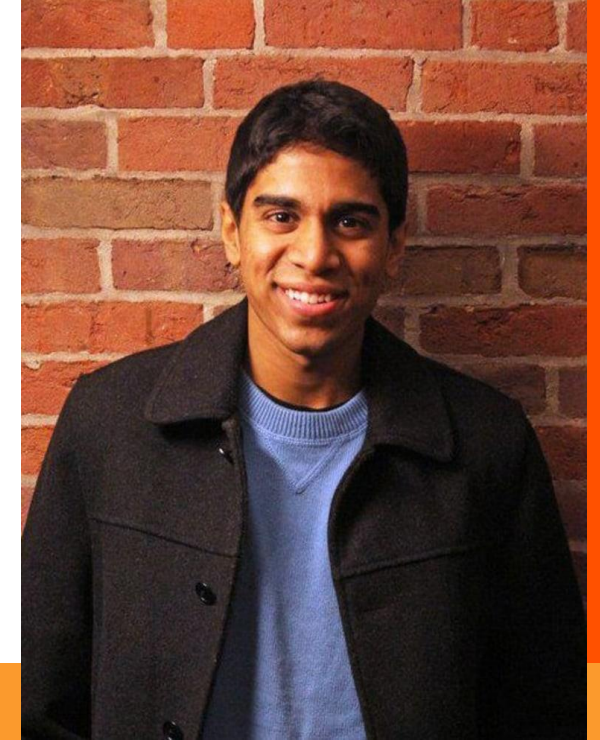


## OUTCOMES

# The best way is onward and upward.

Our graduates are creative, curious critical thinkers and independent, lifelong learners who never settle for “good enough.” They bring their full potential to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future. They shine and lead in high school, college, and life.

ACS graduates go on to attend boarding school, public high school, and selective enrollment schools. ACS alumni go on to attend a range of colleges, including the best universities throughout the United States. Learn more about the outstanding, diverse, and accomplished educational experiences of ACS Alumni by clicking here <https://www.averycoonley.org/why-acs/outcomes>.



***Avery Coonley is the most transformative, most challenging, and most rewarding school I've ever attended. And it's the purest, the kindest, the most like the world I would like to live in."***

**Vinay Nayak '06, After ACS, Vinay went on to Hinsdale Central, Yale University, Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and currently works as Associate Staff Secretary in the White House.**



# Student Life & Extracurriculars

## Clubs

Students have a wide variety of Clubs and Extracurriculars to choose from including Art Club; Choir and Treble Makers; Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Orchestra; Tech Club; Drama Club; the Variety Show, an award-winning Student Council, Poetry Club, MathCounts, STEAM, Debate Team, and Chess Club.

## Middle School Athletics

ACS teams compete in basketball, soccer, track and field, and volleyball. More than 50% of middle schoolers participate in a team sport.

## Home and School

Our active and supportive parent run Home and School Association sponsors a variety of activities for our students and families throughout the year including the ACS Fun Run, Fall Book Fair, Holiday House, and Heritage Festival.





# Discover Downers Grove

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While families from all over the Chicagoland area are attending ACS, the school has been a part of the Downers Grove Community for over 90 years. Located 25 miles from Chicago in the western suburbs, this picturesque, family-friendly town has a deep and strong sense of community. Parks, local shops, museums, surrounding suburbs, restaurants, and more, create a special, fun, and welcoming environment for people of all ages.

In addition to its beautiful landscape and incredible location, the town is also just a short drive away from downtown Chicago and amazing areas like southern Wisconsin and Michigan.

The people, places, and nature surrounding this town make it stand out. [Learn more about Downers Grove here.](#)



# ACS Head of School

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## The Role

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the Head of School serves as Avery Coonley's chief executive officer, overseeing all aspects of leading and managing the School. Reporting to the Head is a strong administrative team, members of which oversee academics, admissions, finances, athletics, development and alumni relations, technology, wellness, counselling, and facilities.

## Priorities

In addition to the day-to-day responsibilities of managing the School, the next Head will be expected to focus on the following long-term and strategic opportunities and challenges:

### Fostering Academic Excellence

- Promote the nurturing of academically bright and gifted students, enriching young minds and developing lifelong learners;
- Ensure the delivery of an innovative and rigorous academic program that challenges each student;
- Recruit and retain exceptional faculty and staff; and
- Develop expertise and support qualifications in gifted education among the faculty.

### Building Community

- Attract an exceptional and diverse community of curious and high-achieving students whose families are committed to its mission;
- Communicate the school's distinctive mission, story, and shared vision to external audiences; and
- Facilitate frequent and open communications with stakeholders to enhance community engagement.

### Expanding Programs, Partnerships, and Expertise

- Advance the School's role in the world of gifted education, expand the ACS brand, and serve as an innovation lab; and
- Engage experts to provide guidance on best practices in gifted education based on current research.

### Overseeing Long-Term Sustainability

- Thoughtfully increase enrollment while maintaining an optimal student-teacher ratio;
- Develop a long-term, comprehensive, and policy-driven financial plan; and
- Enhance operational efficiency.

# Qualifications

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Candidates are expected to hold strong academic credentials, including an advanced degree. In addition, noteworthy candidates would be expected to demonstrate excellence in most of the following areas:

## Academic

- Understanding of unique academic, social, and emotional needs of motivated children who have demonstrated the potential for scholastic achievement;
- Pedagogical expertise and classroom experience, ideally in independent schools;
- Genuine interest in students from early childhood to eighth grade; and
- Inspirational role leader with an infectious passion for teaching and learning.

## Leadership

- Strategic and visionary leader who is willing to take calculated risks;
- Commitment to enhancing a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion and demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of social justice issues
- Motivational mentor to faculty, staff, and students who promotes a growth mindset;
- Consultative decision maker who builds consensus and unifies to set and achieve goals; and
- Impeccable moral and ethical standards to serve as a role model;

## Communication

- Approachable, visible, and empathic leader who enthusiastically engages with all members of the community;
- Stellar communication skills including writing, public speaking, and listening; and
- Penchant for engaging with all constituents, internally and externally.

## Financial

- Experience managing an organization of similar size and complexity, including knowledge of budgeting and financial management; and
- Strong fundraising track record or personal traits that would suggest high potential to become a successful fundraiser



## Contact

Nominations, inquiries, and expressions of interest should be sent to [AveryCoonley@russellreynolds.com](mailto:AveryCoonley@russellreynolds.com).

*Avery Coonley School values racial, religious, economic, and cultural diversity in our student body, faculty, and staff. The ACS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council guides us in new initiatives and advocacy.*