

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

ODYSSEY SCHOOL OF DENVER APRIL 23, 2024

SELECTION PROCESS

The Odyssey School of Denver Board of Education has retained the services of HYA to assist with hiring of the new Executive Director. The consultant will screen applications and recommend candidates to the board for interviews and further consideration. Any questions regarding the application process, selection process, and/or this Leadership Profile Report should be directed to: Mike Richie at mikerichie@hyasearch.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) during the month April of 2024 for the new Executive Director of Odyssey. The data contained herein was obtained from input the HYA consultant received when he met with individuals and groups in either interviews or focus group settings. The interviews and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new Executive Director. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the organization and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years. It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor does it necessarily represent the majority opinion of each respective group.

Nine of the fourteen current Odyssey School of Denver Board Members were interviewed by the HYA Associate. In addition, HYA conducted 13 focus groups, including students. Stakeholders also had the opportunity to participate in an online survey between the dates of April 3 - 19, 2024. The online survey responses are included at the bottom of this report.

The same questions were asked during each interview, focus group, and email response. They are as follows:

1. What are the strengths of Odyssey School of Denver that the next Executive Director can build upon?
2. What are the challenges facing Odyssey School of Denver that the next Executive Director should be aware of, or you would like to see be addressed?
3. What characteristics or traits are you looking for in your new Executive Director?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with us or that we should know about Odyssey School of Denver?

Through the information gathered, common themes were generated by the respondents. In this summary report, common themes are identified by the following groups: parents, board, staff and students.

Process

The structure of the individual meetings, forums, and focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. All of those involved in providing input in the selection of the next Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director were asked to respond to the questions above.

Participation

The total number of individuals participating within an interview/focus group/email response or completing the online survey was 163. The HYA consultants held six (9) interviews with Board of Education members and hosted 13 focus groups.

Interviews / Focus Group
1. Leadership Team
2. Any Odyssey School Employee
3. Any Odyssey School Employee (Zoom)
4. Parent/Community Members and Odyssey School Stakeholder (Zoom)
5. Parents after Drop-off
6. 5th grade Students
7. 6th grade Students
8. 6th grade Students
9. 4th grade Students
10. 8th grade Students
11. Parents before Pick-up
12. Any Odyssey School Employee
13. Family Council

Description of the District

The Odyssey School of Denver is seeking an Executive Director beginning on July 1, 2024. The Odyssey School of Denver is an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, age, disability, national or ethnic origin, military status, citizenship, or other protected characteristic.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Odyssey School of Denver is a public, K-8, Expeditionary Learning (EL) charter school located in the Park Hill community of Denver and authorized by Denver Public Schools. Odyssey has 318 students in grades K-8 with a student-teacher ratio of 20:1 in K-5 and 26:1 in middle school. The school prioritizes enrollment of a diverse student body and attracts students from across the city. The school partners with EL Education, a national nonprofit that seeks to transform diverse K-12 public schools into hubs of opportunity where all students are equitably supported to achieve excellent outcomes across multiple dimensions of achievement. As an EL school, the students are engaged in project-based learning units, or expeditions, that support in-depth study and comprehension across all disciplines: reading, writing, mathematics, humanities, and science. Students apply their learning to create high-quality work that reflects high levels of authenticity, craftsmanship, and complexity. An additional key focus is the development of core “Habits of a Learner”, which transform students into active stewards of their own learning. Odyssey School of Denver is relentlessly student-centered:

1. How students learn is as important as what they learn;

2. Odyssey insists on high expectations for learners; and
3. Odyssey lives by its commitment to “crew” and community (i.e., we are crew, not passengers).

The Executive Director advances the vision and mission of the school by fostering an inclusive school culture that demonstrates integrity, accountability, and value for diversity, risk-taking, and high academic achievement for all.

MISSION STATEMENT

Odyssey School of Denver is a diverse, public, K-8 Expeditionary Learning school. We teach students how to learn through a focus on academic achievement, critical thinking, and social responsibility, preparing them for high school and beyond.

VISION STATEMENT

Odyssey School of Denver students will:

- Take risks and innovate;
- Lead with integrity and compassion;
- Be civically and socially engaged;
- Push themselves to exceed expectations; and
- Embrace learning as a life-long adventure.

By design, Odyssey benefits from the leadership of its staff, its families, and its board.

- The Board of Directors is responsible for establishing policies, supporting strategic priorities, and serving as the school's fiscal agent. Our board is composed of representatives from our broader community, Staff Council, and Family Council, and the board works in collaboration with the Executive Director to establish annual goals to meet the strategic priorities.
- The Staff Council selects two representatives to serve on the board and implements policies so that they are successful in the classroom.
- The Family Council elects three representatives to serve on the board and plays a supportive role in guiding these decisions and strategic priorities.
- The Executive Director handles the school's day-to-day decision-making responsibilities and management.

We highly encourage all applicants to watch [this video](#) to become familiar with Odyssey's history, school model, and culture. Applicants may also visit the Odyssey School of Denver website for more information: odysseydenver.org.

POSITION OVERVIEW

This is an amazing opportunity for a dynamic, high-energy, hard-working leader. Odyssey is seeking a leader who can immediately manage all aspects of the current school's operations, finances, and academic program. The Executive Director must demonstrate a blend of inspirational leadership and management skills with a strong passion for Expeditionary Learning, the backbone of the school's academic program. The Executive Director will bring extensive past experience and a proven leadership style that authentically and empathetically engages a broad spectrum of stakeholders – teachers, staff, students, parents/caregivers, the board, etc. to collaboratively, yet, decisively, make and implement decisions.

The Executive Director will also demonstrate a deep capacity with their organizational and management skills; effective communication and conflict management skills; and strong setting of priorities combined with the use of implementation metrics. The Executive Director will also be a highly visible leader both internally with staff, students, and families, and externally with DPS and the EL community.

See full job responsibilities [here](#).

QUALIFICATIONS

Requirements:

- Has at least 5 years of experience in education, including curriculum or program development, implementation of accountability measures, and professional development in support of high-quality instruction.
- Must have in-classroom experience in a K-12 grade.
- Demonstrated experience and competence in working with operations, finance, budgets, and financial planning.
- Demonstrated leadership experience.
- Demonstrated record of developing talent in teams.
- Proven track record of driving high student achievement and growth.

Preferred:

- Previous experience leading an elementary or middle school.
- Previous working experience with Expeditionary Learning.
- Experience with a board of trustees or similar governance models.
- Previous experience working in partnership with a large oversight agency such as a school district.

Identified by the Board of Directors - Strengths of Odyssey School of Denver Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. There is a strong sense of community throughout the Odyssey environment. A very tight community with a lot of support, the students and staff are a strength. The staff is committed to the mission of the school and the parents are vested in the school.
2. Odyssey meets the needs of Expeditionary Learning, is very unique and a great draw for families. The students get many experiences with EL and the Outdoor Adventure program. A strength of Odyssey is exposing students to challenges and risks, and getting students out of their comfort zone.
3. The longevity of Odyssey's success and proven track record in the community and the Denver Public Schools. Odyssey is a high performing school.
4. Odyssey is an inclusive school and plays to the strength of the students.
5. Great dedicated staff.

Identified by the Board - Challenges of Odyssey School of Denver
Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. The Board of Directors needs to be fully engaged. It appears that some board members do not attend board meetings or miss meetings on a regular basis. Communication within the board and community could improve.
2. Odyssey is a charter school. With Denver Public Schools' declining enrollment, what will this mean for any of the DPS charter schools? What will the financial picture look like moving forward? This seems to be on the mind of many.
3. Odyssey needs growth with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). How to put DEI into practice? The intention is there but it needs to be implemented, this can be an ongoing struggle. It was recognized that there should be more diversity within Odyssey staff.
4. There may be a bit of a disconnect with the current mission. Odyssey has lofty ideals but are hard to actualize. There needs to be systems and structures in place for K-8 behavior.
5. The area of math needs attention. The math curriculum should be revamped to match the EL model. More support is needed for students in math and to be mindful of the achievement gaps across the grade levels.

BOARD MEMBERS - Desired Characteristics of the Next Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director		
Collaborative	Organizational framework	Forward thinking, growth mindset
Instructionally strong	Strong EL background	How do we continue to make it better
Willing to do all things	Must love the outdoors	Connects with parents, committee and the board
Inclusion needs to stay	Inspiring and energizing leader	Someone that will go out on adventures
Lead with empathy	Get best outcomes for students	Maintaining and identifying high caliber talent
Open minded	Used to shared leadership	EL and or charter experience
Confident leader	Committed to EL	Don't need a turnaround person
Collaborative	DEI (support BIPOC families)	Committed to Expeditionary Learning
Enthusiastic	Strong conflict resolution	Diplomatic leadership and shared decision making
Experience and understanding of EL, wilderness programming and urban experiences		
Need to talk more about vision and direction with the Executive Director and the board		
Character and convincing leadership with a warm undertone		

Identified by the Parents - Strengths of Odyssey School of Denver

Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. Teachers are dedicated, passionate and focus on the needs of the family and really care about the students, not just the students at their grade level but all students. Strong sense of community throughout Odyssey. Everybody knows everyone and looks after each other.
2. The Expeditionary Learning model is great and the focus on the individual student, “be who you are” is a common theme across Odyssey. The expeditions and trips are amazing and that's what makes Odyssey so special.
3. Families are encouraged to be involved, there are many opportunities for parents to be involved in the school.
4. Intentionally diverse community and culturally diverse as well. The students see a real value in diversity.
5. Focus on self responsibility developing the whole child, education is so much more than just test scores.

Identified by Parents - Challenges of Odyssey School of Denver

Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. Odyssey needs to improve communication, especially with the information that is sent home. What is the best way to communicate with families? The website needs attention. It could be more appealing, with detailed information regarding Odyssey and highlighting the many wonderful things happening at the school and on the expeditions. Odyssey needs to improve showcasing the school's amazing things that happen on a daily basis also. As an example, communicate with families before a speaker comes into the school so parents are aware of what is going on and can have a conversation with their child about the activity. Onboarding of new families needs to be looked at and improved also.
2. Students tend to leave Odyssey after fifth grade and this is a concern. The middle school structure needs attention. The middle school feels more like an extended elementary school versus a middle school. The elementary school expansion/class size initiative will be a concern at the middle school level. There were 26 students in each elementary grade which has grown to two sections of 20 at each grade, (for a total of 40 students in each elementary grade). There were 26 spots for sixth grade at the start of the 2024-2025 school year. What happens if more than 26 of the 40 students stay at Odyssey? There needs to be a plan.
3. Odyssey struggles on where they fall, a positive learning environment for every student versus identifying the challenges of others. This is disrupting the learning environment of some with a lack of resources to deal with the situation. There is a need to gather more hard data, gaps continue to grow, there is a need for more focus.
4. Math needs to be improved. This was mentioned in most of the focus groups. Attention is needed with math curriculum, instructional delivery and math support.
5. The after school care is a nice option for families. However, it is expensive and how can it be more attractive to families that can't afford it? Develop possible alternatives or funding to help families in need.

PARENTS - Desired Characteristics of the Next Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director

Engaged	Community oriented	Someone that can have those hard conversations
Visible	Diverse candidate if qualified	Extrovert that loves children and loves to engage
Fight for the right things	Involved in the students' lives	Strong communicator, spokesperson for entire school
Someone that is joyful	Outdoorsy and adventurous	Be ready to work with supportive parents
Present	Building trust with teachers	Take on identity of Odyssey with pride
Committed to academic growth	Knows students by name	Background in Expeditionary Learning
Energetic, someone that really shows up		Effective leader must wear many different hats
Leader not living in fear of DPS Board, always doing the right thing for kids regardless of charter contract		
Come back to what Odyssey really is, what makes Odyssey so special, internal audit to look at policies and procedures		
Listen to teachers, what's working and what needs to be addressed		
Someone committed to being here and what Odyssey is all about		
Push to grow, not a 'we have always done it this way' attitude		
Manages political side of leading a school, strong executive presence, a strong leader		
Someone who does not shy away from hard topics or difficult conversations		
Knows the Odyssey Community and Denver, or willing to get to know		

**Identified by Staff - Strengths of Odyssey School of Denver
Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

1. Small community (size of school) allows students to develop deep relationships with staff, they really get to know the students and their learning styles. This allows for staff to make great connections with families.
2. Odyssey is about learning beyond the classroom with adventures, expeditions, Crew, and experts. Education revolves around the world and outdoors, not just classrooms.
3. Odyssey does a nice job with the celebration of diversity and celebrating student learning and successes. Students' needs are being met at Odyssey that may not be met in the traditional school setting. There are many opportunities for the students to take charge of their own learning.
4. Odyssey does Expeditionary Learning really well. It is a very popular choice for families as there is a long standing wait list for students to attend Odyssey.
5. Odyssey nurtures students to be active and successful in society by cultivating character in the students. The importance of social and emotional learning is stressed at Odyssey. How students learn is as important as what they learn, Odyssey grows good humans.

Identified by Staff -Challenges of the Odyssey School of Denver
Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. Teacher turnover, retention and recruitment must be addressed. A lot is expected of staff, it seems the responsibility of tasks seems to fall with individuals and not specific roles. Professional development must be relevant. It was identified that there needs some work around staff cultures as there appears to be some silos.
2. Communication needs to be improved, this was mentioned in most of the focus groups. There is a need for families to read and understand the parent handbook (code of conduct). How to manage buildout with the classes, a plan should be developed.
3. Middle school curriculum/literacy is starting to make some nice improvements but there is a need to get all staff on the same page. There is not enough support for struggling math students like there is for reading/literacy. There is a need to improve systems for using data.
4. Lacking behavioral support. With many new students coming into middle school every year they struggle at times, behavior needs some attention. A concern about middle school students not being engaged was mentioned. Need to give middle school students more of a middle school feel versus an extension of elementary feel.
5. How to manage buildout with the classes, this needs a plan. Lack of space throughout the building is an issue.

STAFF - Desired Characteristics of the Next Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director

Supportive and open	Has worked with diverse students	Dig in with behavior, students must be held accountable
Has the staff's back	Relationship builder, outgoing	Charisma with families but can hold the hard line
Integrity	Visionary, move Odyssey forward	Someone that knows/understands EL
Good listener	Must be able to wear a lot of hats	Be engaged, be in classrooms to see instruction going on
Calm	Caring and nurturing	Must understand EL and the roots/history of EL
Stamina	Systems oriented	Need to be a dynamic leader, visionary
Creativity	Don't micromanage	Must be able to navigate all families
Ability to de-escalate	Strong character background	High expectations an high level of supports
Good fundraiser	Lean on and learn from staff	Knows what is going on in the classroom in 2024
Fun and energetic	Know what battles to pick with DPS	Unlearn bad habits from other schools
Diplomatic	Someone that wants input of staff	Empowers staff and gives staff liberty
Motivates staff	Implement change for a purpose	Be in classrooms, visible
Clear vision	Flexible and does not micromanage	Leader with knowledge in K-8

Trust the teachers	Standing up for the values	Somebody that wants to be here
Bring in new ideas	Prioritize and lift up staff	Someone that will create partnerships
Approachable	Get to know the students	Provides environment for teachers to thrive
Political savvy	Understands diversity	Physically present, do not hide in the office
Need to build cohesion between elementary and middle school, there needs to be a plan		
Student focused and strong relationships with all K-8 students		
Understands CREW, everyone is important, welcoming, lead with the heart, compassionate		
Does not need to have EL experience but must be the right fit as a leader and embrace the EL model/adventure		
Respectful of teachers and professionals, respect everyone's time		

Identified by Students - Strengths of the Odyssey School of Denver
Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. Students stressed the community of Odyssey and that the school feels like a big family and is very welcoming. Students feel safe at school, everyone knows everyone.
2. Great teachers and they are very supportive. Crew is a strength and the students love the adventures/trips. Easy for students to connect with staff.
3. The older students like that they can interact with younger students.
4. The students like the club opportunities they have at Odyssey. They specifically mentioned: climbing, cooking, reading, knitting, soccer, arts, and board games. Students also like the special classes such as: art, music and PE. The library was also mentioned as a strength by the students.
5. The students like the exhibition nights where they get to showcase their work to parents and the community.

Identified by Students - Challenges of the Odyssey School of Denver
Based on the Data Analysis Collected

1. Students don't like the scaled down version of the adventure program and stated they would like longer, more extended trips. They would also like to see more local field trips as they see educational value and learning in the community. The students would also like to see more speakers/experts come into school or visit places to listen to speakers (museum).
2. Most of the student groups mentioned that the discipline system can be improved. They stated that the staff/administration needs to enforce more rules and be consistent as they feel many students get away with a lot of things.
3. The middle school students would like more freedom and to not be treated like elementary students. They also feel the middle school students need to be better prepared for high school. Students like the learning style at Odyssey and teachers are very nice but the middle school students don't believe they are being pushed hard enough.
4. Students would like to see more student activities like a talent show, and/or a school dance. They also want to see the Student Council more involved (no meetings or very few meetings) and it was mentioned that the Student Council needs to be more organized. The

students would like to have more of a voice in Odyssey.

5. A few building operations and facility improvements were mentioned that students would like to see addressed:
 - Better water fountains (water seems to be hot)
 - Lunch can be improved, better quality
 - Look at lunchroom schedule, more separation between elementary school and middle school lunch period
 - Bathrooms can be improved/cleaned, sinks don't work well
 - Better basketball hoops outside
 - Blacktop/court need to be improved (cracks)
 - The recent lockdown was scary, ensure that all students know what to do and reassure them that they are safe

STUDENTS - Desired Characteristics of the Next Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director		
Must understand people	Nice and friendly, likes kids	Help when students and staff need help
Visible	Hold people accountable	Compassionate and likes to help people
Sense of humor, funny	Always there for students	Strict when they need to be
Down to earth	Gets involved with students	Understands Expeditionary Learning education
Supportive	Makes the school better	Value diversity and student voices, equity
Kind and friendly	Smart and well rounded	Keep the clubs and have more variety
Optimistic	Helpful and supportive	Someone that really wants to do a good job
Caring, empathetic	Open to other opinions	Go on adventures with students
Connect with all students	Open to fund raising ideas	Have separate adult adventures
Open minded, flexible	Keep staff rewards	Take more hands on approach
Give reasonable consequences	Keep the Dragon award	Someone that sees the big picture
Don't come in and change everything but ask staff and students how they feel about any changes		

DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEXT ODYSSEY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Many of the discussions pertaining to strengths and challenges for the Odyssey School of Denver flow into the expectations and characteristics of the next Executive Director. Several of the characteristics that are present in the profile for the Executive Director build on the current strengths of the organization in addition to addressing the challenges ahead. The search team will seek an Executive Director who will understand issues facing the school. It will be important for the new leader to constantly foster positive energy and build and improve relationships. The new Executive Director must be a good listener, be genuine, be trusted, have integrity, and build relationships that will be the driving force to all of the work at the Odyssey School of Denver.

The new leader will be one that is balanced and can advocate for Odyssey School of Denver in a challenging climate. The person will be able to articulate a systemic communication plan that is transparent, open, and builds trust through respectful and collaborative relationships within the school and across the community. The Executive Director will also need to be a great board facilitator, have board governance skills, keep the board informed through regular ongoing communication and feedback. The new Executive Director will need to be able to make difficult decisions and must be able to put things in simple terms when explaining things.

The desired ideal candidate will have educational experiences in the following areas:

- Classroom teaching experience.
- Have exemplary, executive-level K-12 educational leadership experience.
- Be a strong instructional leader.
- Be a people person and outgoing.
- Experiences with expeditionary learning and/or charter schools.
- MUST understand the Expeditionary Learning model.
- Have a track record of authentic leadership.
- Be a team player and in the trenches with staff, lead by example.
- Have an awareness and understanding of federal, state and local policy.

Odyssey School of Denver Executive Director Desired Candidate Profile

Odyssey School of Denver seeks an Executive Director who in collaboration with the Board of Directors, staff, students, parents and community will focus the school on shared goals and vision. After seeking input from board members, staff, students, and parents via individual and group interviews and focus groups, Odyssey School of Denver seeks a strong, visionary Executive Director who possesses the following characteristics.

A visionary, inspirational leader who:

- Builds strong relationships with all stakeholders.
- Builds strong school board and Executive Director relationships with a clear understanding of governance and the development of governance skills.
- Develops and implements a collaborative vision with the board, community, staff and students.
- Inspires, motivates, supports, and empowers the staff/Crew to lead change with transparency.
- Attracts, leads, evaluates and retains an effective team.
- Places the students at the center of every decision.
- Collaborates by seeking input prior to making decisions and communicates the rationale behind each decision.
- Fosters an open and safe environment that is focused on student and staff well being.
- Promotes a vision of excellence, innovation, and equity to the students, staff, board, parents and community.
- Understands and is skilled in a continuous improvement model.

An exceptional communicator and consensus builder who:

- Communicates regularly, clearly and concisely in a way that engages and values stakeholders.
- Seeks and sustains professional and collaborative relationships with board members based upon commonly agreed goals.
- Demonstrates courage in the face of challenges and the ability to navigate complex situations with confidence and empathy.
- Is visible throughout the school and community and is actively engaged in building and sustaining positive relationships with all students, staff and stakeholders.
- Is able to create a positive and collaborative working relationship with the staff, city, businesses, non-profit organizations, and Denver Public Schools.
- Fosters trust and respect among the board, staff, and community by listening, being decisive and courageous.
- Has the ability to resolve conflict effectively.
- Is open and honest, dedicated, visible and energetic.
- Possesses public relations skills and is collaborative.
- Able to recruit students and families to attend Odyssey School of Denver by developing a strategy and marketing plan.

An experienced educational leader who:

- Is laser focused on student success.
- Can successfully enhance Odyssey's reputation for excellence in Expeditionary Learning.
- Is a talented facilitator who can motivate and engage all stakeholders.
- Is fiscally responsible, has knowledge of school finance and aligns budgets, long-range plans and operational procedures with the organization's vision, mission, and goals.
- Is able to lead all fundraising efforts of Odyssey School of Denver.
- Effectively plans and manages the long-term financial situation and the demographics of the school.
- Exhibits integrity and a high level of emotional intelligence.
- Has the ability to work with and develop relationships with all employees and the board, targeted to student success.
- Is accountable and holds others accountable.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the Odyssey School of Denver, we look forward to finding your next leader that fits the criteria of your stakeholders.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Richie, HYA Vice President

DATA SUMMARY

The interviews and focus groups of stakeholders generated the following responses. Careful attention has been made to accurately convey the message. *The comments listed below emerged from statements made by stakeholders and they are to be considered personal opinions of the individual making the comments.*

STRENGTHS

BOARD MEMBERS - Odyssey School of Denver Strengths:

- Learning model - EL
- Strong community
- People are very invested in the EL model and tied with this is the adventure picture
- Great instruction
- Very caring community, teachers care
- Very involved community
- Getting students outdoors is huge strength
- Academic, community operational
- Doing research and presenting to adults
- Helping kids own their experience
- Taking pride in work
- Galvanized around the vision
- Legacy and tradition
- Student centered
- Conflict generally does not affect the students
- Size of the school is a strength
- Looking at the whole child
- Longevity of Odyssey
- High performing school
- Stable school

PARENTS - Odyssey School of Denver Strengths:

- Adventure programming, getting kids outside
- Diversity of the classrooms
- Student presentations
- Student led conferences
- Crews are warm and family
- Values of learners are the core of everything
- Level of pride for being a teacher here and parents are proud their kids go to Odyssey
- Reputation of Odyssey is really special
- Looks at learning differently, testing is not the most important, how do you use your voice to articulate well and solve problems
- Very welcoming school/community

STAFF - Odyssey School of Denver Strengths:

- Small community allows for deep relationships with staff
- Really get to know the students and learning styles
- Connections with families
- Learning beyond the classroom, adventure, experts, the world is not just classrooms
- Aware of best practices
- Do EL really well
- Popular choices for families, a long standing wait list
- Adventure programming
- Kids do work that matters, secret sauce, kids and adults feel it, Crew not passengers
- Grow good humans
- Great with equity
- Lifelong learners
- Small class sizes
- Students needs are being met here that may not be met in the traditional setting
- Many opportunity for students to take charge of their own learning
- Teachers like to stay at Odyssey
- Adventure programs
- Students are open minded and community oriented
- Students can stay in one building K-8
- Strong EL framework
- Feels like a special place, more like a home
- Relationships with the community
- Talented teachers
- Positive staff culture
- Nurture students to be active and successful in society
- Cultivating character in students, character building
- How students learn is as important as what they learn
- Autonomy as staff as to what they can teach
- Staff are treat as professionals
- Inclusion
- Small school feel
- Students are impressive
- Crew focus
- Family support
- Importance of practicing what we preach
- Two big adventures per year
- Celebration of diversity
- Celebrating student learning
- The adults care about all of the students
- Stressed the importance of social and emotional learning
- School is organized

STUDENTS - Odyssey School of Denver Strengths:

- Adventures
- Community cares, Crew
- Family here
- Safe community
- Everybody knows everybody
- Can bond with outdoors and each other
- Very friendly and welcoming
- Easy to connect with students and staff
- Good education
- Perfect size, not too big
- After school programming
- The teachers are friendly
- Exhibition nights are great, show work (showcase) to parents and community
- Middle school clubs: climbing, cooking, reading, knitting, soccer, arts, board games
- Good library, great variety of books
- Good specials classes: art, music and PE
- Open and flexible
- Like having fun with the teachers
- Like earning the fun days
- Very kind school
- Supportive teachers
- Family feel
- Variety of food
- Have computers available and other supplies as needed
- Learning style is interactive
- Older students get to interact with the younger students

CHALLENGES

BOARD MEMBERS - Odyssey School of Denver Challenges:

- Need to build a different kind of culture, we are not the traditional model and that's why people like it, want feedback from staff, a more fluid model, this looks nice on paper but hard to do
- Parent involvement can be difficult at times, hold board, staff and administration to a high standard and accountable
- Need to make sure the people are heard
- Becomes very competitive when families do not get in, frustrating to families
- Expensive to run the outdoor activities (adventure side of it), fundraising plays a key role (three fundraisers per year)
- Need to frame what we are trying to do right now and into the future
- Need to get everyone on board with vision, things need to get out front the right way
- Elementary and middle school are distinct entities

- Once in 6th grade some kids are ready to leave and new kids coming in have not had the taste of the special sauce, this is challenging and can create problems
- The elementary philosophy of Odyssey is hard to grasp in 6th grade if you have not attended Odyssey prior
- Elementary vs middle school issues, BIPOCs population (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)
- Concerned about DPS if the board is less charter focused, what happens to Odyssey?
- Higher teacher turnover, need to retain a good staff
- Need to navigate special education population
- Must be able to manage relationships with the families

PARENTS - Odyssey School of Denver Challenges:

- More diversity in the teaching staff
- Need more family nights, activities
- Staff turnover
- Small school so any change with staff can be a big deal
- Better communication
- Growing pains of adding classes
- Scrappy school, not the most beautiful school or lots of space but Odyssey makes due
- Sense of community is a strength and also a challenge
- Why are teachers leaving Odyssey?
- Teachers are pulled in a lot of directions
- Little school trying to do a lot
- Better communication
- Advocating for more supports, not set up for success at all levels
- Lacking behavioral supports
- Discrepancy between elementary versus middle school
- More outlets for academic challenges
- More support in the classroom for the teachers
- Math tends to be a big gap, need to differentiate
- How to manage buildout with the classes, need a plan
- Communication
- Onboarding of new families needs to be improved
- Let parents know when a speaker will be coming into the school so parents are aware of what is going on and can have a conversation with child about the activity

STAFF - Odyssey School of Denver Challenges:

- Family involvement, small groups of families most involved (same families)
- Need some work around staff cultures, some silos
- Must walk the talk with Crew
- Improve systems for using data
- Missing some important curriculum especially in the area of literacy, there is some work in progress
- Parents need to read and understand the parent handbook (code of conduct)
- Middle school struggles at times, many new students come into middle school every year, behavior needs some work

- Middle school students need to be more engaged
- Students need to participate in the adventure trips and not opt out
- Middle school curriculum/literacy starting to make some nice improvement but need to get all staff on the same page
- Not enough support for struggling math students like there is for reading/literacy
- Sometimes community/family can feel disjointed
- Behavioral changes in middle school
- Need to give middle school students more of a middle school feel verses an extension of elementary feel
- Space is an issue, we need more space
- A lot is expected of staff
- Need to make sure professional development is relevant
- Expected to differentiate instruction, all staff need to be on the same page with this concept
- Expansion space/grade level challenge will be an issue that the new Executive Director must be aware of and get through the transition
- How do we retain staff
- All the issues that go with a charter, financial picture, support from DPS, pay scale
- Middle school can be a struggle with staff retention, it's not run like a true middle school
- Continue to focus on math instruction
- Need a focus on data culture, progress monitoring, continuous improvement
- Size can put on a strain, we are asked to do a lot
- Need a math interventionist
- Responsibility seems to fall with individuals and not roles
- Mission driven but lacking operational structure
- Advocating for more supports, not set up for success at all levels
- Lacking behavioral supports
- Discrepancy between elementary versus middle school
- More outlets for academic challenges

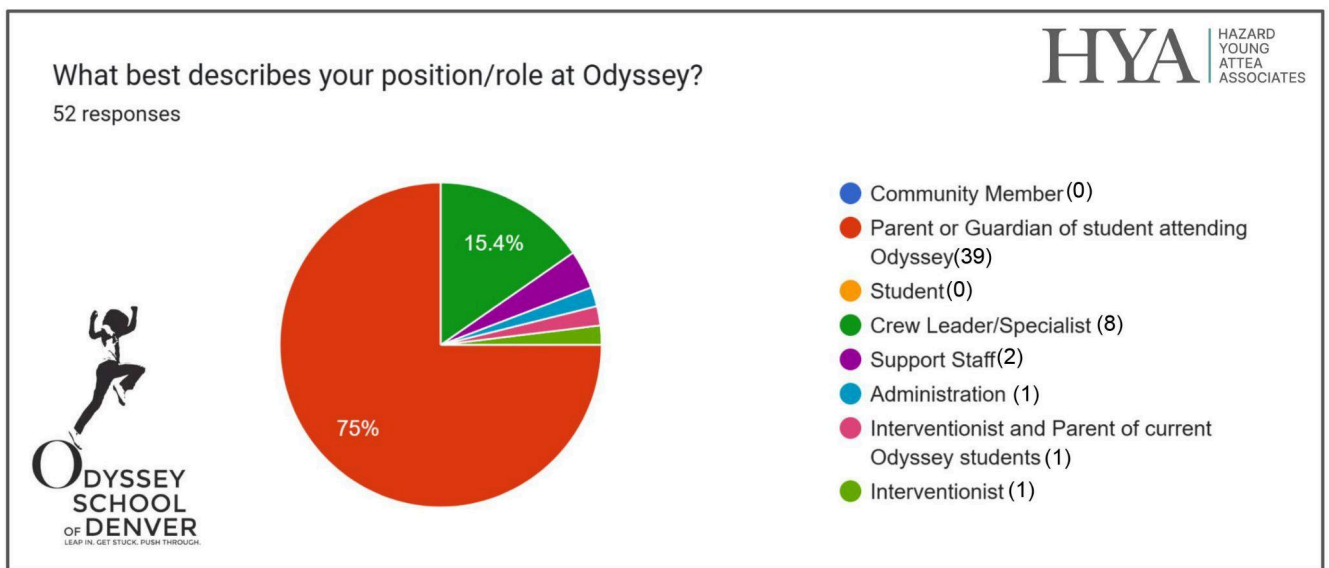
STUDENTS - Odyssey School of Denver Challenges:

- Don't like the scaled down version of the adventure program
- School discipline system can be improved, enforcing more rules, consistency, students get away with lots of stuff
- More opportunities for students, talent shows, school dances etc.
- Lunch can be improved, better quality
- Bathrooms can be improved, cleaned, sinks don't work well
- Better water fountains (water seems to be hot)
- Better basketball hoops outside
- Blacktop/court need to be improved (cracks)
- Getting the Student Council involved more (no meetings or very few), more organized
- Lockdown was scary, make sure all student know what to do and reassure that they are safe
- Staff can be more understanding to student needs at times, make sure they know the entire story
- Like the learning style and teachers are very nice but they don't push us enough
- Short on substitute teachers
- More remedial help in math

- More all school activities
- Need to learn a wider range of things
- More of a student voice in decisions
- Would like to see a world language opportunity
- Student discipline can be an issue, student feel there are not consequences
- Would like to see field trips
- Would like to see more speakers/experts come into school or go places to listen to people speak (museum)
- Make things fair for all grades
- Middle school students need to be better prepared for high school
- Change the cell phone rule
- Hard to meet all of the expectations in middle school
- Look at lunchroom schedule, more separation between elementary school and middle lunch period
- Middle school students would like more freedoms and to not be treated like elementary students

Stakeholder Survey Results

The Odyssey School of Denver is conducting a national search with HYA for an Executive Director. Part of the engagement process asks stakeholders to participate in an online survey which was open from April 4 - 19, 2024. There were 52 individual participants. Comments from the long answer questions can be found in this survey response document.



What are Odyssey's strengths that the next Executive Director can build upon? (52 responses)

The Mission, Vision, Values and overall culture. There has been a decent amount of turnover with leadership, teachers, etc. but the MVV and Culture have held strong. The ED should be one to understand and embrace Odyssey's legacy and direction. Not to say that there could not be refinements.

Odyssey is a small community where everyone feels known and seen. The community is warm and caring and inclusive. The leadership is flexible and willing to support students and parents individually. My hope is that warmth and inclusivity is the guiding light for this director search.

Odyssey is grounded in community. We believe in learning that is authentic, beautiful and meaningful to students. We value adventure and have a deep desire to cultivate strong life habits for our students.

Community building, confidence in leadership, deep belief in EL curriculum

Visionary leadership, open mind to new ways of doing things, clear and open communicator, middle school program development

Unique approaches to student led learning and empowerment

Strong community, amazing teachers and students

The core mission of Odyssey is exceptional, and the more the executive director can build on "leap in, get stuck, push through", and "we are crew not passengers", the better the school will be.

Spirit of adventure, strong community, beautiful atmosphere of student work on display, habits of a learner.

Adventure program, a knowledgeable staff that take on leadership roles, supportive crew and staff culture

High Quality Work, intervention support for struggling readers and writers, commitment to expeditionary learning

The adventure program, quality academics, seeing the best in kids, community feel

Being a community, being involved beyond just the education aspect.

The adventure program/expeditionary learning curriculum, fieldwork, small class sizes, high levels of family involvement/sense of community, good reputation in the community.

Community, inclusiveness

The EL focus, and established culture of outdoor education.

Odyssey's staff culture is already strong, but there's always room for improvement. We are rooted in a history enriched by its adventure program and commitment to EL education. Supported by a team of enthusiastic educators, this passion should be kept alive. Odyssey gives opportunities for educators to step up, lead PD, and travel to conferences to deepen their learning through school site visits and conferences.

Crew culture and Habits of a Learner - working to establish community wide consistency around language and implementation.

Leadership skills, empathy, best practices and advances in curriculum development in EL, educational vision, strong community engagement, financial management, advocacy, and adaptability. Looking for grant opportunities and looking to community members to help support this effort, tracking impact and funding impact.

A solid adventure program and solid staff. Some really supportive parents. Some great kids!

Adventure, crew culture, creativity in Expeditions, passion for the community and habits

Inclusivity.

Our community supports each other and sticks to the habits to foster inclusion.

Community feel of staff.

community of families that come to Odyssey to be here for the long haul. A staff that makes students feel safe and celebrated for their differences.

community feel, EL education, adventure, SEL and habits of mind

Inclusivity and hands-on learning

Sense of community and belonging/support for our community; individualized and personalized attention to every student; amazing teachers and staff; commitment to EL and adventure programming;

Community mindset, character building, adventure seeking

Community based, adventure, flexibility with programs, high expectations, crew mentality, all of us are learners.

Accessible and responsive to parents, working collaboratively as a partner with families

Community engagement, diversity, equity, inclusion, learning resources/enhancements

The values of the school and community on paper are really amazing.

Diverse and inclusive community where every child is seen and known; Strong adventure program; Engaged staff who are aligned with Odyssey's mission and vision. I've seen marked improvement in special education/mental and behavioral health supports over the last 3 years.

My favorite thing about Odyssey is how many different ways the school allows students to thrive and shine. Not every child does well with worksheets and classroom work and Odyssey does a great job bringing these students into environments where they get to be leaders. "Success" isn't just defined in terms of academic achievement, students are honored for curiosity, kindness, courage, and for being a good community member.

Our small community allows teachers to do what they feel is best for students in a variety of situations. Overall our students and families are happy at our school.

EL - Catering to different learning styles; hands on learning, etc.

Odyssey has a wonderful welcoming community, great planning and communication, and amazing teacher staff!

Crew, adventure, Community Circle, Expeditions and field work, small class sizes.

Strong community with families who are excited about Odyssey's EL learning model and adventure program. It's an honor and a privilege to go to Odyssey... let's keep it that way!

Odyssey makes learning fun. The children know how to be curious... ask questions and explore ways to find the answers. The social and emotional piece is wonderful. We are so lucky our children are seen as whole humans and treated this way as well. The staff and teachers are the best. Odyssey is an incredibly warm and welcoming place. Kathryn has truly stayed her ground and taken risks to show we are accepting and loving of everyone. This has been so special to watch.

Crew mentality, Social emotional learning, pushing through,

Community, students feeling that they are known and seen, strong adventure program

Community, caring/supportive/excellent teachers and staff, encouraging growth mind set of all students

Community, education, adventure

The culture of exploration and curiosity among students. Staff seem extremely dedicated and committed.

Diversity in an expeditionary learning model.

Odyssey is an established school with a clear vision. The teachers are fantastic and the families are very engaged. It is a close-knit community. The EL model and adventure program are a unique trait of the school, and these programs/philosophies need to be continually supported and prioritized.

Support and community

Warm, welcoming environment. Affirm students' efforts and support kids where they are individually. Strong adventure program.

Excellent reputation, awesome adventure program, crew building

Inclusion, Diversity

What are the challenges facing Odyssey that the next Executive Director should be aware of, or you would like to see addressed?

(52 responses)

Probably the middle school and how to best serve the needs of students at that age balancing academics with SEL. Once students get to 6th grade, they start to have more diverse needs and the school has historically struggled to meet these needs.

I believe one of the challenges with the current director is lack of a soulful connection to the concept of EL and of crew. While Kathryn has been committed vocally to fostering warmth and community, she is fairly cold when interacting with her one on one and lacks compassion when we have come to her with any concerns.

We've grown steadily through the years creating different needs in different grade bands which can be challenging when running programs for everyone from newly turned five year olds to teenagers. We want our school to have successful elementary, intermediate and middle school grade bands. There has been an empathy/understanding gap in the recent ED which has caused tension, mistrust, and hurt. I think it's important that our next ED possesses an empathetic mindset in interactions with both staff, students, and families. Odyssey has so many strong and passionate educators. And we've lost a lot to the unsustainable reality of what it takes to be a strong educator (in any setting). Odyssey is unique in that we seek even more from our teachers. Unprotected by union protocols and rules, our teachers are 24/7 while on adventures, and are asked to give multiple late nights every season through conferences, exhibition nights, and other school events. Teachers spend breaks securing guest speakers, booking field work experiences, and seeking chaperones and support for said trips. I think many of our teachers are at a tipping point and considering careers outside of education despite deep belief in the good work they do. We need an ED that sees the hard work happening, helps us think of systems to make the work more sustainable and works to create a fiscally responsible budget so that teachers have the supports they need.

GT support for students, opportunities for foreign language exposure?

Middle school vision, communication, the school is very large now—the adventure program may need more support and staff to properly run trips or look into outside professional groups to team up with programs for certain adventures to help with the high burden of risk and responsibility current adventure staff carry.

Teacher apathy/dismissiveness instead of responsiveness to individual learning needs

Odyssey continues to have challenges with the middle school program for various reasons. We also have space issues at the school.

It seems like there is a relatively high turnover in teachers at Odyssey (which may, or may not be true / accurate). I'd love to see an Executive Director be able to foster more longevity and consistency in the teaching staff.

High turnover of good staff. Charter renewal? Student retention. Maintaining a culture that is positive and visible and you can tell the staff enjoys what they do.

There is a feeling of being micromanaged at times which needs to be addressed and rectified. There are some curricular changes that need to be supported with professional development and learning labs. There is ongoing DEI work that needs to be prioritized to ensure all stakeholders feel comfortable and like their voice matters.

Our middle school culture is hugely concerning. We have many students who are struggling academically and not getting the resources/supports they need to thrive; many students seem checked out in classes and not completing work nor participating; there's a lot of disruptive and disrespectful behaviors....I also think that staff morale feels lower than I would like. Staff feel a bit unseen/unsupported and left to figure out large, school-wide topics on their own.

Perhaps more support, such as paras and more mental health support

Mental health issues, students being behind in reading, math and comprehension due to the pandemic.

Very high rate of teacher turnover is concerning to families and gives a sense that staff is not committed to the school long-term. It also seems like there's a high percentage of high-needs kids that take a lot of energy and time in the classroom away from others.

Academic success, not an issue per se but continuing that focus.

Odyssey is a growing and expanding community and a leader who is focused on this "growing pain" phase is important. Additionally, this time of transition opens up the need for more concretely expressing and deciphering what our values are as we grow into the next phase, I think this needs to be a really important priority.

Previously, educators and staff members experienced a sense of micromanagement and a lack of trust. An Executive Director who demonstrates an ability to regard all stakeholders as professionals, fosters meaningful relationships with students, and provides support for student behavior would significantly enhance our community.

Staff culture - there has been a bit of an imbalance over the past years of whose voices and ideas are heard and honored.

balancing innovation and tradition - navigating this balance and staying true to the roots of Odyssey's founders focus and mission, not defaulting to traditional learning. building a stronger middle school affinity - building relationships. staff development and support, intentional retention and recruitment. Adapting to changing educational trends - new technologies, teaching methods, pedagogical approaches emerging, proactive focus to staying informed about trends and incorporating relevant changes into the schools programs.

Some of the turnover that is taking place this year. Challenging middle school students and parents, more so in the raising 8th grader class.

Middle School behavior, consistent school-wide practices for things like expectations, curriculum, habits, and other classroom practices, more instructional focused PD and coaching

Push Adventure and Expeditionary learning. Building middle school retention of students and faculty

Teacher burnout, low wages, lack of behavior structure and follow through on repeated behaviors.

Complete lack of recurring systems/structures for the middle school. Staff has been a rotating door supposedly for the past 5+ years. Because of this, when I came in as a MS teacher last year, there were no systems/culture in place. We have been shooting from the hip and building the ship as we fly it for the past two years. We now have some level of consistency over the last 2 years, but the top-down systems/structures/decisions are still completely lacking. Any oversight and change to the middle school comes from the teacher level, not at the administrative level. Middle school feels like the ugly duckling of the school, and nothing has been done on an administrative level to address that.

We need to continue to build upon our DEI work making sure that ALL families feel welcome and as important stakeholders in the community. I believe there also is a need to improve staff culture. The elementary school feels very cohesive but the middle school isn't there yet. Finding a way to get buy in from middle school students and families.

expedition and literacy feels very solid, math not so much

Balancing parent involvement with not asking for time and money too often,

Middle school generally; teacher pay and retention; helping new kids find their comfort zone quickly;

Abundant transparency and more complete, contiguous and consistent communication. Especially around safety, testing, and enrollment.

Alignment from K-8 is lacking, lack of consequences for serious behavior issues, not enough focus on supporting teachers and talking about actual instruction, lack of school wide behavior expectations and follow through.

Teacher retention

Bigger focus on fundraising, enhance academic standings, staff retention

1)The shift towards authoritarian leadership. 2)The lack of enthusiasm within the school for the middle school. The recruitment for the middle school is abysmal because there isn't a love for the middle school from within. Middle school can be an amazing time of life with the right leadership and staff.

Uneven academics, e.g. math esp. grade 3 or 4 and up, limited differentiation for advanced or accelerated students; abysmal GT support; sense that many teachers are pulled in multiple directions - not sure this is different anywhere in teaching today but it's a real challenge.

I'd love to see Odyssey develop a stronger GT program. I think a lot of parents of non-studious GT kids gravitate towards odyssey because there is so much opportunity for learning through play, through movement, adventure, etc. It's hard to find a place in public school for gifted kids

who aren't academic overachievers and I'd love to see Odyssey bump up their support for these students.

a clear vision for our math and literacy curriculums k-8. on boarding new students and families to odyssey culture/community.

Diversity and inclusivity; attracting and retaining a diverse range of families

I don't see any problems to address.

Making sure to retain good and high quality staff. Figure out the path from expanded elementary school into the Odyssey middle school.

The new transition of upcoming 5th grades from 40 students in 2 crews into 1x 26 student middle school crew. What happens if more than 26 students want to stay at Odyssey? Is there flexibility or is that a firm number. Parents in this crew and future crews are wondering what will happen. - GT programming and support has been minimal and does not seem to have been helping students with this designation. - Some parents have opted their children out of the adventure program - at least for the overnights. How can this be addressed to ensure all kids are getting this important experience?

The growth obviously is about to be put to the test in middle school. I wish the middle school could focus more on academics and challenging all students. Odyssey also does not have all the resources larger schools have. Sometimes Odyssey isn't the right fit for certain children and it impacts whole crews while the focus becomes centered on just the one child. I think this needs a solution. Math in middle school also needs to align better while providing varying levels for all learners.

Attracting and retaining middle school students and teachers

Staff support and frequent turnover, a struggling middle school

Enrollment concerns, prep of middle schoolers for high school

Safety

Challenges seem to remain around diversity and equity. Potential challenges around facilities and the two-crew-per-grade approach after fifth grade. Obviously, if a lot of students from those crews stay, there will be difficulties.

Decrease of diversity.

There seems to be an issue with the growth of the middle school and how that will be managed. As a new parent, it seems there is significant teacher/staff turnover, but perhaps that's the norm at most schools. Nevertheless, teacher and staff retention seems to be an issue. The focus on cohesive crews is wonderful and provides stability for kids, but I would like to see more ways for students to be challenged or supported if they've above or below grade level in certain areas.

Challenging academically with homework

Maintaining and building diversity of the student body along lots of lines - racial, national origin, socioeconomic, etc. Build community without over programming students and parents.

High percentage of students with high needs. May need additional support staff, pull out programs etc.

School Expansion

How could the next Executive Director help Odyssey continue to grow and improve? (46 responses)

Address middle school student needs and ensure Outdoor Adventure thrives with their change.

The next director should be warm. First and foremost. They should welcome everyone. They should be responsive to community feedback. And they should be passionate about EL.....they should provide a loving, safe and approachable community space. They should treat their staff and teachers with reverence and respect.

There are cultural needs within our school community. I hope the next ED could help us grow our MS culture so that it can become a beacon of leadership for the rest of our community. I hope our next ED can maintain our strong relationship with our Expeditionary Learning network and begin to cultivate even more curricular alignment with our K-8 structure. I hope our next ED can support us in being financially stable so that we can provide the resources, experts, programs, and supports that are needed to best serve students.

See above answers

Create more crew spirit and be more involved in the students' experiences (my son still doesn't know the name of the Executive Director)

Seeing the big picture of Odyssey while also holding on to its roots.

By being a confident yet humble leader, energetic, positive, a fantastic listener and strategic problem solver, a go-getter who takes charge, exercises full transparency and involves the community. A leader who can manage both kinder all the way up to 8th with ease, grace, humility and leadership. Overall they need to LOVE this school and we need to FEEL and BELIEVE it!

We need to prioritize personnel to support our ongoing goals. Staff have been asking for math intervention for years. Staff have also requested additional support with behavior management and prevention.

I think the next ED needs to prioritize the culture of middle school in order to create a full school community that values learning and being kind. Younger kids would feel more comfortable and older students would feel like important leaders. I also think the next ED needs to place a high importance on establishing large-scale projects for middle schoolers like the ones we saw at the EL conference. This would help tremendously with buy-in.

Come into the school wanting to really learn from current staff and families.

Being present, ensuring teachers, staff, students are involved and there continues to be open communication and involvement for all.

Have a strong understanding of the school's history, strengths, and challenges. Listen to and appreciate and keep clear communication with families and students. Have a plan for attracting teachers who are committed to staying at Odyssey. I am very concerned about the high turnover, especially this year. I also think the new executive director needs to work on getting more help for the high-needs kids while also making sure that the kids who don't take as many resources and time aren't getting left behind/stagnating.

More afterschool activities for all ages

Creating a feeling of increased belonging to the Odyssey community.

They could contribute to the ongoing growth and enhancement of Odyssey by focusing on improving productivity while prioritizing the best interests of students. Recognizing the importance of time for teachers, the Executive Director could implement strategies to streamline processes and provide necessary resources, allowing educators to devote more time to their students. Additionally, a data-driven approach could be employed to identify areas for improvement and inform decisions aimed at enhancing student outcomes. As the cost of living rises in Denver, a leader who can help fight for teacher pay and retention.

Continue to hold students accountable for unkind, disrespectful behavior - particularly, middle school needs to be held accountable and encouraged to be role models while in the building.

Be supportive of the adventure program, helping develop a system of either requiring participation, and, then those who choose not to attend will have more consequences than staying home. Mainly a middle school issue

by addressing challenges and upholding an open, kind, inclusive, and manageable culture of work

See above

Being collaborative with teachers and staff to find solutions

Focus on what I said in response to the previous question.

As the current 4th graders move up the ED could help flesh out the expansion plan and what it looks like for middle school. They could also work on teacher retention, especially in Kinder and middle school.

Continue to rebalance testing (as much as possible) with real learning, investing in EL education and math instruction

Advocate for changes to adjacent street design to make Odyssey more inclusive to people who want to walk or bike. Current design of all adjacent streets and sidewalks is very hostile and dangerous to anyone not in a car in my opinion.

Creating an environment where rising 5th & 6th graders want to stay for middle school; strengthening middle school itself; teacher retention, pay, benefits; figure out ways to draw a wider pool of students to apply to Odyssey; improve overall organization and communication school-wide

Fostering a culture of transparency and openness

Help improve middle school culture, develop professional learning opportunities that are impactful and improve our practice, align literacy learning and resources.

Hear from families, ensure kids with disabilities have support and there is a strong SPED program

We need to have a better plan for physical space as we finish the "double the elementary" expansion. Asking kids to eat outside year-round because we can't figure out an actual classroom space for a full-time teacher is not great. We are "getting by" like this isn't a permanent situation and we still have one whole crew to add. It would be great if the next ED had tangible ideas for how to create a thriving middle school and was excited to work with middle schoolers and recruit middle school teachers who are passionate about that important developmental stage in life and learning. I know I'm harping on the middle school part, but going through the process this year to decide if we are keeping our child at Odyssey for middle school or moving them was a real bummer. There was barely an effort to retain students, and the effort that was made was frankly offensive.

Odyssey needs to remain committed to its core strengths, e.g. robust adventure program, teachers with autonomy who rise to the challenge, diversity and inclusion AND a commitment to strong academics, while addressing some of its enduring challenges, especially poor math performance, a lack of meaningful differentiation for students and a sense that teachers are frequently burned out. The small class sizes k-5 are a strength and a weakness and a school leader needs to be able to navigate that while strengthening certain areas.

By being open minded and continuing to grow.

leveraging financial/fiscal growth to build even more capacity for teacher support in all classrooms, robust field experiences and materials for more science based expeditions. Our small economy of scale can be a blessing and a curse.

I think ask the staff what they need. I am very happy as a parent and trust that the staff knows best what they need to be successful.

Odyssey has set a very strong foundation under Kathryn, so continue building on that. Especially by continuing to focus on field work, adventure and habits of a learner. Kathryn has done a good job at expanding Community Circle to involve community members who tie to that month's habit.

Continue to support strong community involvement and create a positive and safe environment for all students and families.

I am hopeful we can find strong teachers. I would love for the middle school to develop a stronger reputation and for it not to feel second to the elementary grades. This aspect has improved in the last year or so but needs to recover from previous years. I know people are leaving the profession but it would be amazing to keep more of our incredible teachers.

EL is so unique to Odyssey- every chance we can get to incorporate EL into learning tasks- more speakers, experiences, field work, project based learning, etc.

Creating an environment where staff feel supported in their work and see opportunities for growth for themselves to prevent strong teachers from leaving. A better support system for neurodiversity in the school.

Sports or other clubs for students to join that will be available to them on high schools as well, continued support of art/music/pe

Push for safer building conditions

Fundraising is always an issue. And ensuring that Odyssey is able to deliver on its intentions around DEI.

Do real inclusivity work towards marginalized and underrepresented population.

Support and listen to the teachers and past leaders. Value the history of the school but don't be afraid to move in new directions. The school's focus on adventure and outdoor education sometimes seems lost in the day-to-day operations. More efforts to address the climate impacts of the school (cars idling at drop off) would be an area in which the school could grow and be a leader in the field.

Supporting families with resources

Message the why of this school to new audiences for outreach. Keep strengthening fundraising so it's not all from families.

By continuing to build collaboration between teachers, students and families and by retaining our fabulous teachers.

What characteristics or traits are you looking for in our new Executive Director? (50 responses)

Leadership, Empathy, Vision

Openness, kindness, warmth.....steadiness.

Empathetic, organized, systems thinker who can also (with support) tend to the details, someone who seeks first to understand and then to feel understood, someone who can backwards plan or "begin with the end in mind", a collaborator/connector.

Visionary, open minded, kind, good communicator

Sense of immediacy/responsiveness, someone who is willing to be at the level of the students including knowing them, ability to think outside the box when confronted with challenges by the teachers, someone who is a community leader, someone who is innovative, someone who truly understands expeditionary learning, someone who is somatically connected.

Empathy, humility, commitment, presence.

Clear and open communication (with parents and with teachers and staff), an open and welcoming personality, an enthusiasm for the mission of the school, and the ability to motivate and inspire students and staff in pursuit of personal growth and improvement.

Confident, adventurous, positive, honest, direct, warm, motivated, caring, good listener, empathetic, a good speaker and motivator. Someone who is experienced but knows they are always learning, flexing and growing.

Someone flexible and kind who values staff as whole people. Someone organized who can deliver all necessary resources in a timely manner.

Kindness, compassion, integrity, presence, humility, passion, commitment, empathy

Strong leadership qualities, confident and consistent leadership, prior experience and the willingness to take on a challenge.

A strong leader with a clear vision of why people are attracted to Odyssey. But also someone who is humble and willing to listen and take into account family needs/wants. A clear communicator who can get people excited about the school.

Communicative, honest, curious

A more seasoned educator, focus on building community, commitment to DEI and belonging.

We seek a candidate who embodies qualities of approachability, adaptability, and possesses extensive classroom experience. This individual should demonstrate a willingness to lead by example and actively engage in modeling classroom instruction for our teachers. We are

looking for someone who prioritizes collaboration and empowerment, avoiding behaviors that lean towards controlling tendencies.

Strong EL Education roots. A good listener. Empathy. Social Awareness. Even-keeled. Strong-willed.

Inspirational and charismatic, allowing children to view the ED more as an inspirational leader vs. disciplinary (aka not being the traditional principal).

Transparent, supportive, great interpersonal skills. Someone who will hold staff, students, and parents accountable.

patient, detailed, understanding, and supportive

Confidence. Commitment.

A collaborator who can support teachers, especially when it comes to parents.

Experience teaching all grades, not just lower elementary. Passion for the outdoors/adventure side of EL.

open minded, flexible, transparent,

a good listener, someone that builds community between staff, parents, and students, someone that trusts their teachers to make decisions that benefit the students-even if it doesn't use every minute of instructional time,

Willing to try new things and not bound by the status quo.

A good listener; calm and steady leadership; someone who can de-escalate situations; someone with vision who can develop an actionable plan;

Open and transparent communicator, strong leadership and resilience/adaptability, compassion and standard setting.

dynamic, problem solver, collaborative, authentic, bold, forward thinking, leader, experience leading a school, caring, empathetic, has been a teacher.

focus on equity, collaboration and fostering the well-being of kids

Someone who clearly demonstrates leadership, thoughtfulness, consistent communication, and a drive to continually improve the school.

Self confidence without the need to always seem right. A leader who is collaborative. Someone who asks why we do something the way we do it and improves on it. Someone who is joyful and appreciates all different personalities that come through students and staff. Accepts people without asking them to fit the mold.

Strong leader who can make hard decisions while building positive, enduring relationships with staff and students. Someone who builds trust and inspires others, especially when things are hard. A commitment to Odyssey's vision of EL and making the implementation of EL even better, including robust adventure, and a relentless focus on student achievement.

I'd love to see someone who has experience with special education, gifted education, neurodiversity, etc. I hope for someone who is really passionate about teaching and supporting the whole child, not just looking at them in an academic sense.

a genuine human being who loves education, not just a manager of regulations and people. Someone who not only cares about the students in the building but also cares equally for the adults too.

Flexible, responsive, grounded, non-reactive, active listener

Transparent, good communicator and visible.

To be caring, welcoming, transparent, communicative and receptive to the students, staff and community as a whole.

- Passionate about EL learning - Kind and compassionate towards students - A good manager to keep Odyssey's amazing staff happy and reduce teacher turnover

Diplomacy, knowledge, leadership, ability to attract amazing teachers, community building skills, experience in a charter school, experience in EL, or at least a strong belief in its powers, , politically savvy, marketing knowledge, financial awareness, experience in middle schools, true ideas to grow toward and achieve meaningful equity and inclusivity, creativity...

Enthusiastic, fair, kind, engaged with students

A love of teaching, working with kids/families and the EL model. A desire to spend time getting to know the community deeply. A commitment to supporting all types of diversity. Experience.

Supportive and caring of students, staff, and parents. Good communicator. Open to ideas and feedback. Leadership skills and ability to help support crew mentality

Honesty, Good communicator, will stand for what's best for our kids.

Having a vision and leadership that is complementary to the existing culture. I don't think we need someone to come in and shake things up for the sake of shaking things up, but rather to continue to build on what seems to be a very strong foundation.

Honesty and willingness to grow with the input of the community.

Creative, friendly, forward-thinking, flexible, approachable,, not "stuck in old ways."

Kindness and strength

Vision, supports teachers, loves kids and cultivates the love of learning. Handles administrative issues with inclusion and thoughtfully, messages clearly. Takes safety seriously.

Community building, engagement with students and families, strong admin background

Diplomatic and Approachable. Experience with EL.

What should be our top priorities or considerations when hiring a new Executive Director? (44 responses)

Similar to above with a balance of experience and open-mindedness (great listening skills), trust, and growth mindset.

Find someone passionate about EL who embodies the idea of crew. Not just passionate about trips. Passionate about the concept of crew.

My biggest fear is the time crunch we are in and the unfortunate timing of the current ED's decision with our next academic year right around the corner. Transition can be very complicated, especially in a charter school (and especially if we are considering out of state applicants who don't understand the local educational landscape and the anti-charter sentiment in our state). A lot of supports will need to be in place depending on who is interested in the role. Odyssey has many stakeholders who view their individual needs/desires as critical and I think communication, transparency and opportunities for stakeholders to feel heard will be important. I think it is critical to see how potential future ED's interact with the staff and students.

Strong leadership skills, visionary, capable, proven strong work track record, ability to navigate the complexities of a combo middle and elementary school.

That they have the number one goal to teach students the way students learn, instead of pushing students to learn in cookie cutter ways.

Familiar with EL curriculum (would be nice), familiar with K-8, strong leadership background, familiar with adventure.

Finding someone for whom the unique characteristics of odyssey are a calling. Odyssey isn't the same as every other school, and finding someone who wants to be the executive director of ODYSSEY, rather than the executive director of an elementary school. Also - finding someone who wants to build on what is great about odyssey, rather than seeing it as something broken that needs to be fixed.

Retention and employee satisfaction -- the root of our children's experiences. Maintaining the culture and core values of the school while being innovative and creative.

Someone who knows EL, someone who values what Odyssey already has going for it

Our top priorities should be picking an ED who is highly respected by the staff and who has deep roots in education. This person should be widely considered to be a positive force that can bring about energy, inspiration and the best that Odyssey can be.

Compassion for staff, families and most of all the students. A leader that wants to go the extra step to make a change for the students.

Someone who has proven leadership abilities and understands the value of expeditionary learning. If possible, someone from or familiar with the Denver area / local school systems. Someone with confidence, humility, vision, and passion.

A true focus on DEIA

Staff input- while the board makes the final call, the teachers and staff are the ones affected by the decision. With teacher turnover on the rise it's important for staff to feel supported and happy within their positions. Staff need a voice!

EL Education familiarity and connections. Charismatic leader who can connect with all constituencies.

Well-respected in the Odyssey community. Has successful expeditionary learning experience, launching an EL school, growing an EL school, and innovative ideas to bring to Odyssey that they have implemented at another EL school. Knowing the demographic and population of Odyssey

Experience with school leadership, parent engagement and fundraising.

Commitment.

Someone who embodies the Odyssey Habits and can also reform our behavior structure to ensure both student and staff safety and success.

Willingness to see what is working already and be willing to leave those systems in place (valuing work that has already been done) while also looking for ways to bring Odyssey to the next level.

Someone that has experience with EL education. Someone that has a track record of building community in the school. Someone that understands the challenges of a charter school and is interested in being there to create lasting change.

Strong leadership skills, willing to take unpopular stands when necessary, is clear on values and can set healthy boundaries and expectations for students, staff, and caregivers

Qualifications and experience of course, but also sincerity, integrity, someone who instills confidence.

Leadership experience, tolerance for dealing with DPS, EL commitment, IT understanding, strength in conflict resolution, clear and direct communication style.

Find the right fit. This is a unique school and the leader needs to be ready to take on the challenge of balancing EL, supporting teachers, establishing vertical alignment, and providing resources for social emotional learning.

Experience in and a proven track record of success in all of the above

Welcoming/warm communicator. Understands budgeting and has ideas for monetary gains for the school. (Will leverage community members to write and submit grants if they don't have that expertise). Has lived experience in the EL model and believes it is the best school learning model.

Experience with and a commitment to EL; Background working in diverse schools; Focus on student achievement, especially identifying challenges and implementing evidence-based solutions to improve student growth; Excellent track record of building positive relationships with staff especially classroom teachers; Understanding of the challenges and opportunities that come with being a single site charter school.

Someone with experience with ALL learners, not just typical ones. Someone who truly understands EL education.

connections to EL learning a must. ED/principal experience with single site charter a plus. understanding of denver/colorado/national fundraising. innovative, progressive educator who will help Odyssey continue to nurture "citizen scholars".

Someone who will listen to staff and stakeholders.

To find someone who has EL experience and has been a classroom teacher. Ideally someone who is familiar with and understands the unique characteristics of Odyssey.

EL experience, strong managerial skills, passion for education and kids

Her leadership skills.

Qualified, leadership experience, EL experience preferred

See above

Strong EL background

Experience, vision, dedication

Experience with EL, demonstrated commitment to equity, commitment to supporting staff and teachers.

Has done real JEDI work itself!!!!

Ability to "wear multiple hats," understand of or willingness to learn about the EL education and Odyssey's adventure program.

Background on school

Experience leading through change. People leadership skills. Culture building skills.

Emphasizing an inclusive environment. Someone who will embrace our unique EL learning and special sauce.

What other requests, suggestions, or ideas would you have for the next Odyssey Executive Director?

(32 responses)

None

I recommend you recruit and hire Pete Martinez who was in the running last round. He is spectacular. I have no relationship to him whatsoever. Objectively, he is the ideal candidate.

Teaching children the way children learn and being truly student led (not making students who are talking heads when leading)

We need someone who can build community relationships, handle difficult parent situations, help drive staff towards a common vision, and be organized and able to maintain financial stability of the school.

Based on what you know about Odyssey, what would your priorities be instructionally, in regards to professional development, and in regards to family engagement?

Be energetic! Be willing to go the distance!

I hope they are willing to spend the summer getting up to speed on the school, staff, and community.

We need a streamlined behavior management system across grade-levels (PBIS or something)

Seek staff input and opinion often and certainly if the hiring process comes down to the wire. Do not make this an uninformed board decision. Staff needs to know their opinion is highly valued as this is the person they need to be proud to work for.

Can we get creative and allow some kids to interview the executive director candidates? Could this be a good exercise for the middle schoolers to leave their legacy in having a buy-in?

Adventure program Staff retention

Please be fully aware of and able to communicate what safety precautions are in place for our school. Ex. The emergency office button

ability to work with all stakeholders, respect the staff as the professionals that they are-valuing our time and knowledge.

Treating teachers with respect, giving them autonomy, but also a vision that inspires the teachers to work toward that vision.

I am confident whoever the committee selects as the next ED will build onto Kathryn's work and continue improving and strengthening Odyssey.

Find a more organic and grounded role for family council. Keep the community as fully informed as possible on matters that impact each crew.

N/a

This is just an idea and resource I have worked with in the past: Look into working with The Conflict Center to help add training support for the staff especially the Assistant Director and Executive Director if they haven't gone through restorative justice training recently. We only had one year with a director of culture and I think we could have done more with that role. My perspective of the middle school is that it is missing the feel of respect and joy that may be supported by more information around how to hold open dialogue during conflict.

I'd request that they be continually learning and working to honor and learn from the voices of the community

have a clear vision for staff, value PD time, value adventure, listen to staff as much as parents (maybe more!), don't always defer leadership,

none

See above.

Ideas for how to continue to make odyssey the best and most attractive school for all grades. Ideas on how to maintain community while the school is in this growth phase. Aligning the middle school better with elementary. Making sure the challenging aspects in middle don't just originate because of behavior or even social emotional but some academics are sprinkled in too

Any type of service related learning activities they could do, volunteer activities that could support or enhance educational experiences.

It's always difficult to assess, but someone who can be committed for a long run would be awesome.

A person of BIPOC!

Be kind and honest

It's really a great school and leading this place will be a challenge but a gift too. Whoever should get this job should realize all the good they have to build on even if there is work to do...

It's important to have someone who is available, approachable, shares new ideas and listens to suggestions.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?25 responses

None

I've seen Odyssey through lots of change through the years. Through inspiring leaders who have become mentors and life/career changers to those who have done great harm with the culture. We have a saying on adventures (and Outward Bound) which is "leave it better than you found it." My ultimate hope is that our next ED can do just that.

I'd love to see more opportunities for parents and students to get to know each other and get involved, particularly for parents and students who are new to the school and haven't been there since Kindergarten. It's easy to continue to feel like outsiders because most of the students and parents have already clicked.

Not at this time.

Thanks so much for finding the next era of leadership for the school!

Mental health care is very important for the success of everyone in the school. Make it a priority!

Thank you!