ACELA SOLUTIONS

Advocates for Catholic Education, Leadership, and Advancement

ACELA SOLUTIONS PRESENTS A NATIONAL SEARCH

Saint Michael Indian School

HEAD OF SCHOOL

St. Michaels, Arizona | Navajo Nation



ANTICIPATED START DATE:

JULY 2027

(OR SOONER)

SAINT MICHAEL INDIAN SCHOOL
Est. 1902

A mission to carry forward

Saint Michael Indian School seeks an accomplished Catholic educator to unite academic leadership and institutional stewardship as its next Head of School. This is an opportunity to lead a preschool through grade twelve community whose future rests on the aspirations of its students, the strengths of its people, and a mission that has endured since 1902.

The next leader will engage, excite, and inspire faculty, staff, families, alumni, and Native community partners around a shared vision. Working through a collaborative leadership team, the Head will strengthen teaching and learning, school culture, and operational vitality while inviting broad participation in the mission.

298 STUDENTS	**~47** FACULTY AND STAFF	**PreK–12** GRADES SERVED
1902 YEAR FOUNDED	**125** YEARS IN 2027	**98%** RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID*

Approximately 47 full- and part-time faculty and staff. *Financial-aid percentage reported by the school.

Location	St. Michaels, Arizona, on the Navajo Nation
Accreditation	Cognia and Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA)
Church relationship	Independent Catholic school within the Diocese of Gallup
Current sponsor	Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament
2026–2027 published tuition	$5,000–$7,250 annually, by grade, before aid and additional fees
School identity	Home of the Cardinals
Recent campus milestone	The Nest gymnasium, a $6 million project, dedicated May 14, 2026

Many pathways beyond Saint Michael

In addition to local favorites such as Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, the University of Arizona, the University of New Mexico, and Fort Lewis College, Saint Michael students have matriculated to some of the top colleges and universities across the country, including Cornell, Duke, Harvard, and Yale. Other graduates have continued through community colleges, skilled trades, and service in the United States military. These varied pathways reflect the school's commitment to helping students pursue their interests, strengths, and aspirations.





Saint Katharine Drexel and the school's heritage



A vocation that became a school

Raised in Philadelphia in a family that welcomed neighbors in need into its home, Saint Katharine Drexel learned to connect faith with practical service and generosity. She devoted her life and resources to Catholic education for Native American and African American communities, founding the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1891. Saint Michael Indian School became an enduring expression of her Eucharistic faith and educational ministry on the Navajo Nation.

The foundations were laid before the school opened. With Saint Katharine Drexel's encouragement and support, Franciscan friars from the Province of St. John the Baptist in Cincinnati arrived at St. Michaels in 1898. Saint Katharine made repeated visits to the Navajo Reservation and worked with the Franciscans and local Navajo leaders toward establishing a school. The history of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament emphasizes this collaboration and the contribution of local knowledge and relationships.

On December 3, 1902, Saint Michael Indian School opened as a boarding school, welcoming 76 Navajo students. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament staffed the school, while the Franciscans provided an ongoing religious ministry to the Sisters, children, and wider community. High school classes began in 1946, and the first high school commencement followed in 1950. Today, the school serves students from preschool through grade twelve.

Carrying Saint Katharine's charism forward

The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament describe Saint Katharine's vision as uniting Eucharistic faith with education that prepares people to lead in their communities. For the next Head, carrying that charism forward means making Catholic formation, educational opportunity, human dignity, and service visible in school life. It also calls for listening to Diné families, alumni, and elders as the school understands its history and shapes its future together.

1891	1898	1902	1946	1950	2027
Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament founded	Franciscan friars arrive at St. Michaels	School opens with 76 Navajo students	High school classes begin	First high school commencement	125th anniversary

Learning connected to life



The preschool and elementary program combines core subjects with Navajo language and culture, Catholic religious education, arts, and physical education. Team teaching begins in kindergarten. Middle and high school offerings extend into robotics, design and printing, healthcare exploration, small business, music, sewing, baking, and Faith in Action. Block scheduling provides longer periods for collaboration, projects, and sustained attention to learning.

Educating the whole student

The school organizes its published student outcomes around body, mind, spirituality, and community. These aspirations connect intellectual growth with physical well-being, religious formation, cultural identity, and responsible participation in community life. Religious education, weekly Mass, prayer, and service give Catholic identity a place in the student experience while the school welcomes families of different religious backgrounds.

Experiences that expand opportunity

Healthcare exploration. The Pre-Med Society introduces students to healthcare careers through practical learning and clinical education experiences, connecting classroom interests with possibilities for future service.

Language and culture. Navajo language instruction begins in the early grades. Navajo Language and Culture education includes dedicated language classes and weaves Navajo traditions, cultural teachings, and heritage through subjects across the curriculum, including a class in Navajo tribal government. These experiences help students deepen their understanding of their cultural identity and community.

Creative expression. Participation in the Heard Museum Youth Art Show and Sale connects student work with a wider community of Native artists. Design and robotics experiences encourage students to create, collaborate, and solve problems.

These programs offer a foundation for a shared academic vision. In collaboration with academic leaders and faculty, the Head will connect experiences across grade levels, align curriculum and assessment, and use evidence of student learning to strengthen instruction, support, and professional growth.

Student outcomes

Body | Mind | Spirituality | Community

Access, belonging, and daily school life





Making a Saint Michael education possible

Affordability is central to the school's mission. Families can explore several scholarship and education-funding pathways, with guidance from the school as they navigate applications and enrollment. Catholic Tuition Support Organization (CTSO), Catholic Education Arizona, and other scholarship partners connect donor generosity with educational opportunity. Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account program offers another pathway for eligible families; additional programs serve preschool students and families in neighboring New Mexico.

Depending on the program and eligibility, assistance can cover tuition and may also support eligible fees, supplies, and other educational expenses. These pathways give the next Head a strong foundation for helping families understand their options, completing the steps to enroll, and sustaining access throughout a student's education.

The federal tax credit scholarship program is scheduled to launch on January 1, 2027, and could be a significant and transformational benefit to the school community and to K–12 education across the nation, in both public and private schools. Whenever the next Head begins, the Head will be expected to move forward vigorously on the program once it is available to the school, ensuring that the school community maximizes its benefits. Participation depends on each state opting in. As of late October, Arizona has not yet done so, and the school is hopeful that the governor of Arizona will opt in to the program.

Support that extends beyond the classroom

Free student breakfast and lunch, local bus service, and after-school enrichment, supervised care, and tutoring help families manage the practical demands of school life. Full-day preschool includes shorter Fridays, while the wider school calendar makes room for worship, cultural observances, community events, and professional learning. Together, these supports connect educational access with a welcoming daily experience.

An opportunity to connect the whole experience

Working with the Admission & Student Accounts Manager and leaders in finance, student support, and operations, the Head will connect admissions, financial assistance, transportation, and family communication. Clear guidance and coordinated services strengthen access, belonging, and retention from first inquiry through graduation.

Community and campus





A place to gather and grow

The Nest gymnasium, a $6 million project completed in May 2026 and funded entirely through philanthropy, was dedicated on May 14, 2026, with a traditional Navajo prayer and a blessing by Bishop James S. Wall of Gallup. It serves athletics, student activities, and community gatherings. The Class of 2026 was the first to graduate in the new facility. The school gratefully recognizes the exceptional philanthropic commitment and enduring friendship that helped make The Nest possible.

The Nest was the first completed project of the school's current capital campaign. Additional phases include an Early Education Building, track and field and soccer fields, baseball and softball fields, and a scholarship endowment. Building on the momentum of The Nest, the next Head and Board will lead the campaign forward, using inclusive strategic planning to confirm priorities, sequence the remaining phases, and connect investment with educational needs and sustainable operations.

People who sustain the mission

Alumni contribute as educators, coaches, volunteers, and Board members. Project Pipeline illustrates how those relationships can expand opportunity: an alumna helped bring National Organization of Minority Architects mentors to campus for a summer program that connects design, Indigenous architecture, and career exploration.

Saint Michael continues to strengthen and expand its relationships through partnerships with universities, educational cohorts, pilot programs, tribal organizations, and parish communities nationwide, creating opportunities for collaboration, resources, and support that enhance student learning and school programs. Annual gifts, major support, planned giving, and volunteer expertise help sustain the mission.

A local mission with national reach

Saint Michael's distinctive mission draws donors and friends from across the country, including people whose connection began through a visit or service at the school. The Board and current leadership team have identified grant prospects and other significant philanthropic opportunities for further campus initiatives. The next Head can build on this work, engage alumni nationwide, and cultivate sustained partnerships around clearly defined priorities.

Closer to home, alumni, families, and neighbors on the Navajo Nation can contribute through campus volunteering, mentoring, community projects, and facilities improvements suited to their skills. Time, talent, cultural knowledge, and financial gifts all have a place. The opportunity is to help people see where they can contribute and organize that participation so it makes a lasting difference.

A new chapter in governance



Local stewardship of an enduring mission

Saint Michael currently operates within a dual-board structure: a local Board of Directors reports to a corporate members board held by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. For the 2027–2028 school year, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament are transferring governance of the school to the local Board.

Independent governance within the Catholic Church

The school will remain an independent Catholic school within the Diocese of Gallup, carrying forward the charism of Saint Katharine Drexel. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and local Board are working with the diocese and its bishop to sustain Catholic identity and continuing engagement with this distinctive mission. Institutional governance will rest with the local Board and administration with the Head, while honoring the bishop's pastoral leadership and the school's relationship with the wider Church.

A unified Head of School model

The president and principal structure will become a unified Head of School role, combining educational and executive leadership. The Board will govern and evaluate the Head; the Head will lead school administration in collaboration with academic and functional leaders. Goals, decision-making authority, and reporting relationships will be established within the school's governing documents.





The Head of School opportunity

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Head serves as chief executive and educational leader, accountable for academic quality, school culture, and operational vitality. The opportunity calls for a leader who can engage, excite, and inspire the school community around a shared vision.

Leading in collaboration with a capable team

The Head sets direction, aligns resources, supports leaders, and evaluates results. Academic and functional leaders manage daily implementation within delegated authority. The team includes academic leadership, the Director of Advancement, Athletic Director, Admission & Student Accounts Manager, and personnel responsible for marketing and communications, finance, human resources, facilities, food service, and technology. Final reporting lines will reflect the approved organization.



Clear authority and shared accountability

The Head exercises authority within governing documents, approved policies, and budget. With the Board, the Head establishes goals and reporting relationships; with supervisors, ensures fair personnel practices, current handbooks, professional development, and consistent evaluation. The Head remains accountable for delegated work.



Responsibility for the whole school

- **Mission and formation.** Work with the chaplain, academic leaders, and school community to sustain Catholic identity, Saint Katharine Drexel's charism, and respect for Navajo culture.
- **Teaching and learning.** Lead a shared academic vision with academic leaders and faculty, aligning curriculum, assessment, faculty evaluation and growth, student support, and Cognia and WCEA accreditation.
- **People and student life.** Develop excellent faculty and staff and a collaborative culture. Work with academic, student life, and athletics leaders to support safe programs, student formation, and meaningful participation.
- **Operational vitality.** With functional leaders and contracted professional service providers, oversee budgets, financial controls, staffing, enrollment, facilities, and dependable daily services. Connect resources to educational and strategic priorities.
- **Advancement and communication.** Personally cultivate philanthropic support with the Director of Advancement and Board. Work with marketing and communications personnel on the website, social media, and materials serving schoolwide and departmental needs.

Housing included The position includes a two-bedroom apartment on campus. Further housing information appears on page 12.

Shaping the next 125 years

Building an inclusive strategic plan

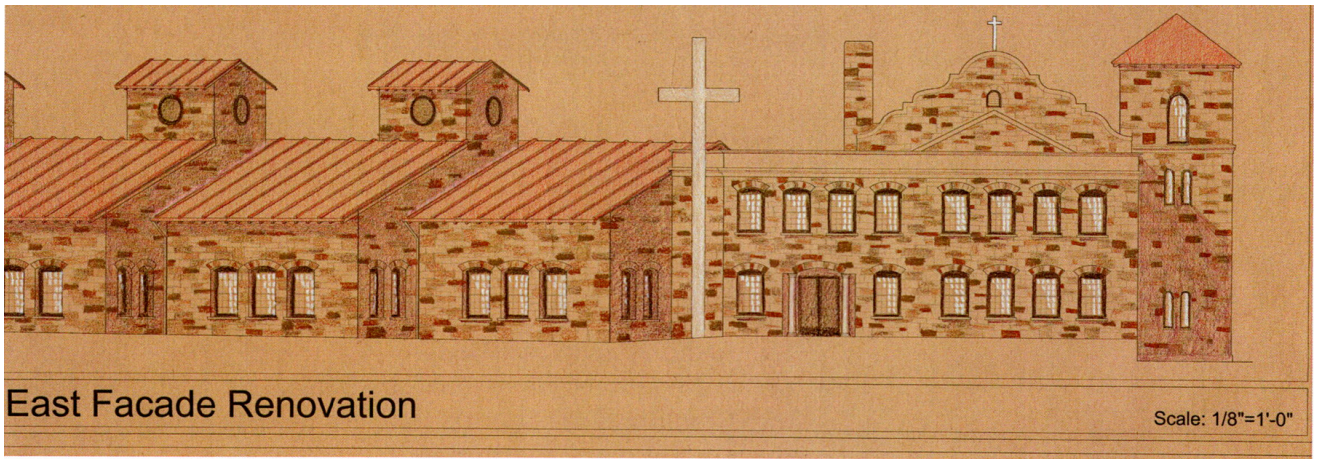
As Saint Michael approaches its 125th anniversary in 2027, the next Head and Board have a compelling opportunity to engage, excite, and inspire the people who will shape its future. The mission and ministry begun by Saint Katharine Drexel in 1902 continues through today's students, educators, families, and friends on the beautiful Navajo Nation. This anniversary invites the community to honor Saint Katharine's legacy by imagining what its school can become.

The Head will guide the Board and school community through an inclusive strategic planning process, engaging faculty, staff, students, families, alumni, donors, elders, and community partners. Listening to their thoughts, hopes, and dreams will help the Head come to know the school and give constituents an opportunity to know their new leader. Together, they will identify priorities across teaching and learning, student programs, facilities, access, and long-term sustainability.

From community aspirations to achievable investment

The school's current capital campaign includes an Early Education Building, track and field and soccer fields, baseball and softball fields, and a scholarship endowment. The completed Nest gymnasium, the campaign's first project, demonstrates what shared purpose and generosity can accomplish. Strategic planning will help the community confirm priorities and sequence the remaining phases as it considers the needs and possibilities of the coming years.

The resulting three-to-five-year strategic plan will establish shared goals, priorities, milestones, and measures of progress. With that direction in place, the Board and Head can commission facilities assessments, cost estimates, and fundraising feasibility studies to determine how best to accomplish the community's goals. This work can inform project sequencing, grant opportunities, philanthropic partnerships, and the remaining phases of the capital campaign, grounded in the school's educational vision and capacity to sustain new investments.





The Nest was the first completed project of the campaign. The next Head will help carry the remaining phases forward.

Campaign concepts: façade renovation and athletic master plan excerpt, reproduced from the school's campaign brochure.

Challenges and Opportunities

The following priorities connect educational quality, a healthy school culture, broad participation, and long-term sustainability.

1 Create a shared academic direction

Engage educators, students, families, alumni, and community partners in defining what a Saint Michael education should make possible. Translate that vision into curriculum maps, a coherent scope and sequence, aligned assessment, and appropriate intervention and enrichment. Connect accreditation goals, faculty development, and resource decisions to that same direction.

2 Develop people and shared leadership

Build on the expertise of faculty, staff, and functional leaders. Support meaningful decision authority, clear responsibilities, and resources for success. With academic leaders, connect classroom observation and evaluation to coaching and professional growth. Work with human resources and supervisors on current handbooks, consistent expectations, and effective personnel development.

3 Sustain a collaborative school culture

Build trust through accessible communication, regular listening, and respectful dialogue. Apply personnel policies and performance expectations fairly and consistently. Encourage broad participation, explain how community input informs decisions, and follow through on shared priorities.

4 Invite more people into the mission

Engage local and national alumni, families, elders, and friends through gifts of time, talent, and financial support. Organize campus volunteering, mentoring, community projects, and appropriate facilities improvements with clear purposes and coordination. Value each contribution and make participation meaningful regardless of a person's capacity to give financially.

5 Strengthen operational vitality

Work with advancement, enrollment, finance, facilities, and marketing and communications leaders to align resources with the academic vision and strategic plan. Engage internal expertise and contracted professional services in sound financial management. Build annual giving, grants, and major gifts; advance the current capital campaign with the Board and Director of Advancement.



Agree with the Board on starting measures and realistic goals for student learning, school culture, enrollment, philanthropy, and financial health, then report progress consistently.

The candidate

The strongest candidates will bring successful educational leadership and the ability to engage internal and external constituents around a shared vision. They will demonstrate sound stewardship, effective collaboration, and results in teaching, team development, school culture, and operational vitality.

Ideal preparation and experience

- A practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church, prepared to lead through personal faith, professional integrity, and commitment to the school's mission and founding charism.
- A master's degree in education, educational leadership, or a related field. A graduate degree in business or nonprofit leadership must be accompanied by demonstrated preparation and successful experience in instructional leadership.
- At least five years of successful educational leadership experience, including curriculum and instruction, faculty supervision and evaluation, and school improvement.
- Evidence of improving teaching and learning, attracting and retaining excellent faculty and staff, and building shared academic direction through collaboration and clear accountability.
- Sound financial judgment and experience managing complex operations, implementing strategic priorities, and making timely resource decisions amid competing educational and institutional needs.
- Demonstrated fundraising and relationship-building ability, including direct donor cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Eligibility for, or possession of, the Arizona school administrator credential specified by the school for this position.

The anticipated start date is July 2027. Ideally prepared candidates will be considered for an earlier start date, as early as January 2027.

Qualities and characteristics

A strategic, visionary, and approachable leader whose integrity, warmth, and judgment inspire confidence. This person communicates the mission with conviction, engages diverse stakeholders, makes thoughtful decisions, and applies expectations fairly and consistently.

Cultural responsiveness and respectful partnership with Native communities are essential to the mission of the school. Knowledge of Navajo language and cultural protocols, or a demonstrated willingness to learn them in partnership with the community, is required. So is the ability to lead in a cross-cultural setting: a Catholic educational institution serving predominantly Native American students and families, while collaborating with individuals and organizations from different cultural, religious, professional, and geographic backgrounds. Experience in Catholic, independent, PK–12, or Native-serving schools and in accreditation, enrollment, grants, and advancement is also preferred.

A collaborative leader who shares meaningful authority, coaches colleagues, and follows through on results. The Head will value the arts, athletics, service, and student organizations as integral to formation, while inviting families, alumni, and friends to contribute their time, talents, and resources.





The community and the search

Living and leading on the Navajo Nation

Saint Michael is located in St. Michaels, Arizona, near Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation, and the Arizona–New Mexico border. The surrounding region brings together tribal government, education, healthcare, arts, and community life. The Navajo Nation Museum and Window Rock Tribal Park and Veterans Memorial offer places to deepen an understanding of the region and its people.



Housing and the surrounding area

The position includes a two-bedroom apartment on campus, offering convenience and a close connection to daily school life. Candidates who prefer a more urban or suburban setting may explore housing in the greater Gallup area, the closest larger population center. Availability and commuting arrangements will depend on the property selected.

No additional housing allowance is provided for those who choose to live off campus. ACELA welcomes early conversations about housing, family needs, and the practical considerations of living and leading in this rural community.

Explore the opportunity. Begin a confidential conversation.

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Katie Shubnell | Vice President & Senior Partner
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Your next chapter begins here

ACELA Solutions invites confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications for the Head of School position at Saint Michael Indian School. The anticipated start date is July 2027. Ideally prepared candidates will be considered for an earlier start date, as early as January 2027. All inquiries and applications will be treated with confidentiality and professional discretion.

To apply

Please submit the following four documents, confidentially and as separate PDF attachments in one email to Michael Furey and Katie Shubnell:

1. Letter of interest that aligns your experience and skills with the current needs and mission of Saint Michael Indian School, as you understand them.
2. Statement of Catholic educational leadership philosophy.
3. Current résumé with all appropriate dates included.
4. List of five professional references with names, relationships, phone numbers, and email addresses. References will not be contacted without your knowledge and approval.

Please include “Saint Michael Indian School — Head of School” in the subject field.

Assemble and attach all application materials as individual attachments in one email

Send your materials to both search contacts below. ACELA welcomes confidential conversations with prospective candidates and those wishing to nominate a leader for this opportunity.

INQUIRIES, NOMINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

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