

BISHOP O'CONNELL HIGH SCHOOL



HEAD OF SCHOOL

October 28, 2025

CATHOLIC RECRUITER ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE SEARCH • MANAGEMENT CONSULTING



BACKGROUND

Bishop Denis J. O'Connell High School is a Diocesan Catholic coeducational school community within the Diocese of Arlington, with a seven-decade long history of helping young men and women recognize and use their God-given talent to serve and positively impact those around them. The O'Connell community respects and values each individual as a precious creation made in the image and likeness of God.

This educational community recognizes five dimensions of the whole person: spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and physical. To encourage spiritual development, the administration, faculty, and staff work to provide an atmosphere of true Christ-like compassion and concern in which students may experience the Gospel message. This atmosphere allows the students to recognize themselves as personally redeemed by Christ and to generate a response rooted in knowledge and love and manifested in service.

Each faculty member provides quality academic instruction in order to inspire students with a love of learning and to give them knowledge and skill in specific disciplines. Each teacher presents to the students the opportunity to develop reason, to find truth, to express their thoughts clearly, and to be able to comprehend the development of ideas presented by others. The administration, faculty and staff strive to adapt this instruction to the intellectual needs of the individual students so that they may become more confident and therefore better prepared to face the challenges of society.

The school provides students with a variety of extra-curricular activities in order to help them become aware of their individual talents and limitations. These activities challenge students to contribute to the needs and spirit of the school and the community, making them more aware of their responsibilities to others. The students' emotional needs are met through the combined efforts of professional counselors and faculty. The students' physical needs are addressed by physical education, intramural, and inter-scholastic athletic programs.

History

With the post-World War II expansion of Arlington County came the need for a diocesan high school to serve the needs of families in Northern Virginia. To care for this need and, at the same time, honor an outstanding educator and seventh Bishop of Richmond, the late Most Rev. Denis J. O'Connell, six parish priests purchased a twenty-acre tract of land in 1949, and subsequently devised a plan for a fund drive that culminated in a ground-breaking ceremony on March 27, 1956. Sixteen months later, the school building which included a classroom wing for boys, a classroom wing for girls, and a center wing which housed the administration offices and facilities shared by boys and girls was completed.

On September 9, 1957, Bishop Denis J. O'Connell High School opened its doors as a co-institutional college preparatory school, admitting 360 ninth graders from the six founding parishes: St. James, St. Thomas More, St. Ann, St. Charles, St. Agnes and St. John. Greeting the class of 1961 were Brothers of Christian Schools and Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), who would guide their education. The school will celebrate its 70th birthday in the Fall of 2027.

Since then, Bishop O'Connell has prepared over 18,000 young men and women to play significant roles in our competitive and richly diverse world. Today, the school continues to serve the original six parishes as well as students from more than 80 different schools and parishes throughout the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

Student Experience

Bishop O'Connell High School offers a dynamic student life that integrates rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and a strong religious foundation. Academically, students excel in AP and honors courses, and the school boasts a 98% college acceptance rate, with graduates earning scholarships to top universities.

Spiritually, students are able to take advantage of a range of retreat experiences at every grade level that foster faith, reflection, and community bonding. In addition, class-wide, club and individual Christian service activities afford students opportunities to see Christ in others and serve them.

The school supports a wide range of clubs and activities. Choral and instrumental music, performing arts, and studio art opportunities are available along with academic, leadership and service clubs. On the athletic front, Bishop O'Connell fields 53 teams in 27 sports and has a proud tradition of success, winning multiple state championships with a strong commitment to excellence and teamwork.

Across these experiences, students come to know Christ and know themselves, developing a greater capacity to discern God's plan for their lives.

Governance

Bishop O'Connell is one of 4 Diocesan high schools in the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, which celebrated its 50th Jubilee in 2024 (Bishop O'Connell was part of the Diocese of Richmond, VA prior to August 1974).

In 2004, upon the retirement of long time principal Alward Burch (28 years in the role), the school moved to a President/Principal (Head of School/Principal since 2013) model. The person chosen to be head of school in this search will be the 6th person (one being a one-year interim) to serve in that role since 2004.

Bishop O'Connell is a Diocesan high school with a Board of Advisors appointed by the Bishop that has specified responsibilities. The Board assists school leadership in the areas of strategic planning, policy formulation, finances, facility maintenance and improvement, and mission advancement.

School Campus

Bishop O'Connell is located on an approximately 20-acre plot of land that makes it neighbors residents in the Williamsburg and Arlington/East Falls Church communities of Arlington, VA. Major additions to the school are summarized here: Addition of 1400 seat auditorium (mid-1960s); addition of auxiliary gym and related athletic spaces as well as band room (mid-1980s); re-orientation and renovation of athletic fields (2011); and construction of new academic wing with chapel and new atrium main entrance and main corridor (2018-2020).

Job Summary/Description:

Bishop O'Connell seeks a new Head of School who will provide strong vision and leadership, in the following areas:

- Catholic Identity
- Leadership
- Fiscal Management
- Planning
- Institutional Advancement
- Public Relations
- Supervision of programs and personnel

Qualities & Characteristics:

Bishop O'Connell is seeking a head of school who:

- Is a devout and unapologetically Catholic educational leader in communion with the Church who models and champions the traditions and values of Catholic education and is ready to provide spiritual leadership to the community.
- Has an advanced degree in education or business-related field with a full understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Catholic education.

Instructional and executive administrative experience in a Catholic college-preparatory environment is a plus.

- Is a Catholic education advancement professional ready to build on a strong foundation to reach new heights in development efforts for the school.
- Is a natural, approachable leader with skills as listener, team-builder, visioner, and executer who will inspire and empower the school's leadership team and whole community. This person is a fair, fun and compassionate executive who leads with missionary zeal and embraces collaboration
- Possesses proven capacity in leading mission-critical functions of budget, financial management, and institutional advancement. Has demonstrated ability to think and act strategically while staying focused on operational imperatives and adapting to unexpected change.
- Employs superb communication abilities that include strong listening skills, interpersonal engagement gifts, and extemporaneous and formal public speaking talents – all of which will be leveraged in, among other things, mission advancement, talent development, and enrollment management work.
- Has strong marketing instincts that will both help distinguish the school in a competitive environment and identify, attract, develop and retain high quality and mission-driven professionals dedicated to providing a transformational Catholic education experience.

Opportunities & Challenges:

This leadership opportunity at Bishop O'Connell is a rich one for a Catholic education leader ready to bring the qualities described above to the task at hand.

The school has accomplished a great deal over the past 15 years and has been very skillfully led for the past six by a veteran Catholic school leader with strong knowledge of the greater DC (the "DMV") private school marketplace.

Bishop O'Connell and its three sister Diocesan high schools enjoy the benefit a high functioning Diocesan Chancery that provides leadership direction, as well as school policy, legal, human resource, risk management, safe environment, communication, and construction management guidance and support. The head of school at Bishop O'Connell reports directly to the Superintendent of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington who oversees the schools on behalf of Bishop Michael F. Burbidge, the Fourth Bishop of Arlington.

The student body, which is roughly 83% Catholic, comes to the school from as many as 80 different sending schools and more than 50 different zip codes in the area. This is one measure of the school's unique diversity.

Bishop O'Connell has a robust College preparatory curriculum that includes 29 AP courses and 36 honors courses, but it is also distinguished by the range of electives it offers, the support it provides to students requiring accommodations, the expanded services it offers to students with intellectual disabilities (and related peer mentoring program), and the intentionality of its processes for attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining mission driven Catholic education

professionals. The role of the Head of School in academics is to provide vision, oversee the good work of a talented principal, and keep facility, finance, and fundraising (among other) distractions away from the principal so they can focus more intently on the daily progress of students.

Bishop O'Connell recently contracted with outside experts to develop a revised and updated facility master plan (the previous one dated back to 2013) and the new leader of the school will be tasked with working with the board of advisors and the Diocese to phase and fund needed renovations and enhancements identified in the master plan. The school is currently servicing a debt with the Diocesan Investment and Loan (DIAL) corporation related to its major renovations done from 2018-2020.

Bishop O'Connell's advancement program is mature and robust. It has demonstrated the capacity to run and successfully complete a major capital improvement campaign and then to sustain annual and endowed giving while also advancing smaller capital projects. The fiscal year 2025 "Knight Fund" (annual fund) exceeded \$825,000 in unrestricted giving. The school's endowment, which barely existed less than a decade ago, is now over \$3 M and there are 19 different endowed scholarships for students.

Salary: Commensurate with background and experience. Comprehensive benefit program (details will be furnished to finalist candidates).

Application Deadline: December 31, 2025

(We reserve the right to shorten the deadline for applications if we have sufficient interest. Please apply early to ensure your background will be considered.)

For consideration, please email resume to:

Marie Keith

Vice President, Education

Catholic Recruiter Associates

Marie@CatholicRecruiter.com

Note: Only those selected for an interview with the search committee will be contacted.

Search managed by:

CATHOLIC RECRUITER ASSOCIATES

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