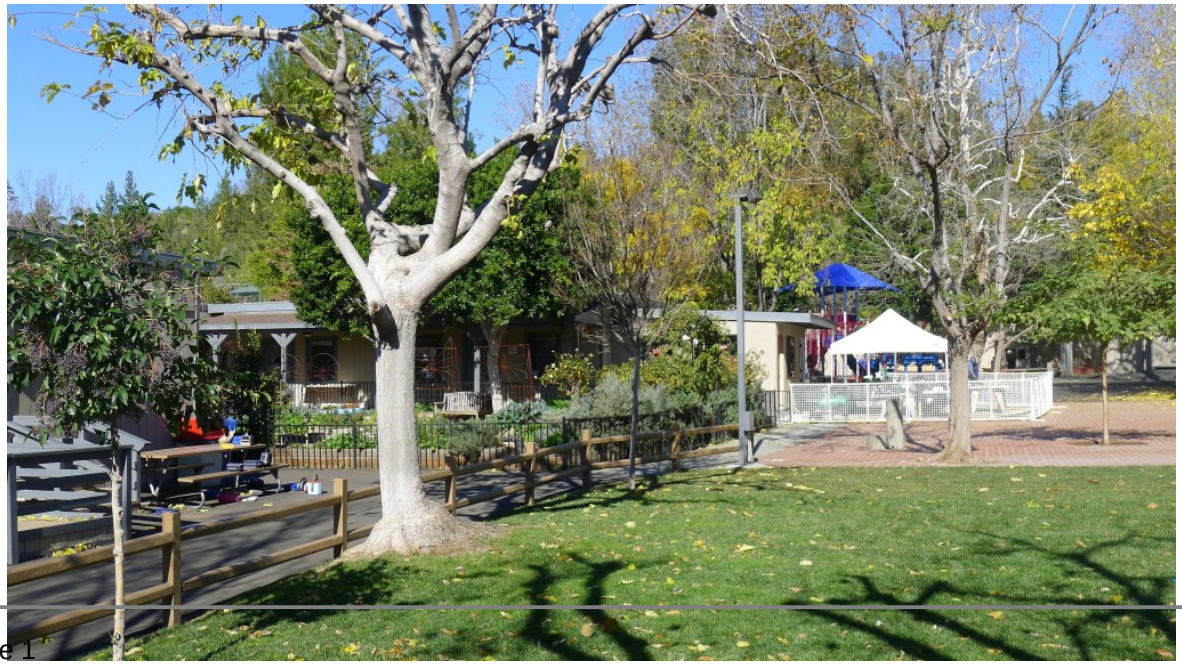
Sierra Canyon School: Majestic Beauty Illuminates Illustrious Tradition

Description

Take a beautiful campus, a multi-generational connection to one of the visionary founding families and an unyielding focus on academic and athletic prowess and the result is Sierra Canyon, an Early Kindergarten-12th school on two campuses in Chatsworth. Iâ€™ve wanted to see the school for several years so I was super-excited when Kendall Pillsbury, Sierra Canyonâ€™s admissions director, invited me to tour the school and have brunch from the delicious Brentâ€™s Deli.



Campus view!

Arriving at Sierra Canyon requires a short drive along a rural road to the entrance of the lower school, which is extremely private, sitting on 17 acres of classrooms, outdoor play areas and sports fields. The campus is a palette of earth tone, greenery dotted with one-story brown-hued buildings. The school is currently undergoing a renovation of one of its outdoor spaces and has completed the first phase of its athletic field expansion

On a bright, cold morning, I spent about more than an hour talking with three top administrators and touring the school. Sipping coffee with Kendall, Adam Horitz, dean of students and Kristine Theodoratos, lower school director, gave me a thorough sense of the schoolâ€™s history, philosophy and plans for the future. This is a traditional academic school with an energetic, upbeat ambience tucked away on secluded, spacious grounds.

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One story-classroom and learning buildings give the school a rustic feel

Sierra Canyon has some of the L.Aâ€™s most experienced educators on its staff Head of School, Jim Skrumbis previously spent 10 years at Marlborough School, as a dean and head of the upper school. Although I didnâ€™t meet Jim, I learned he has an impressive background (heâ€™s also coached sports and taught history) and the big picture vision to lead the school into the future.

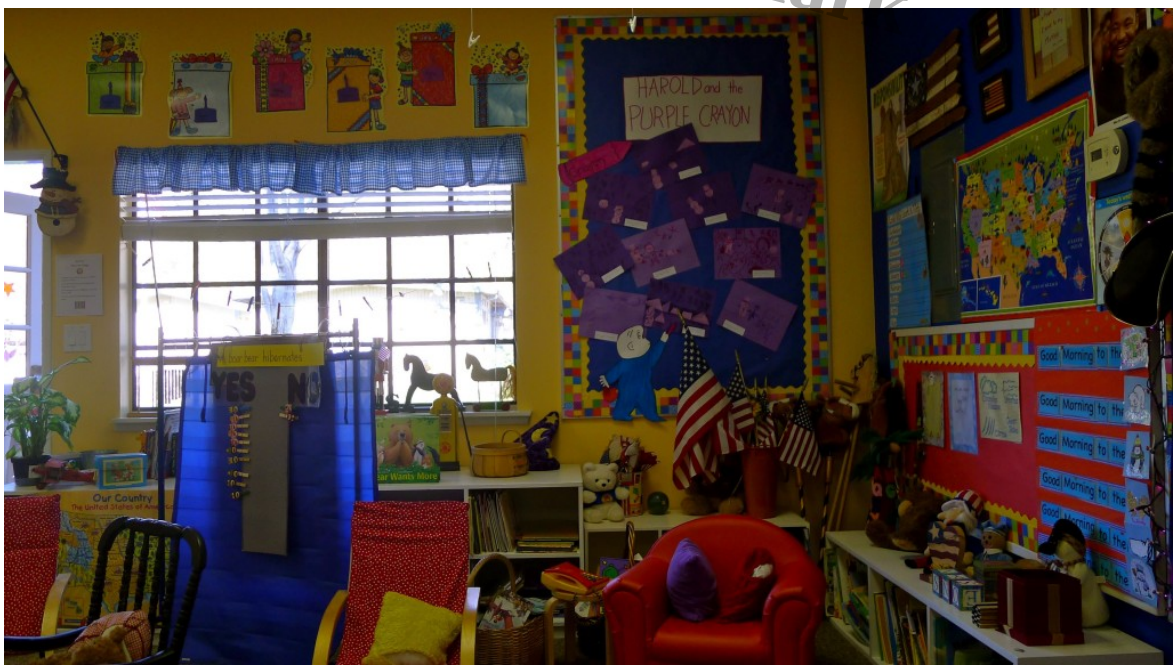
Kendall is a warm, bubbly Texan, the mom of three Sierra Canyon students. Sheâ€™s super-easy to talk to and tries to make the admissions process as accessible and un-intimidating as possible for families.

State of Nature: The garden

Sierra Canyon is steeped in family tradition. Adam Horwitz is the connection between the schoolâ€™s past, present and future. His father (currently a board member) is one of the schoolâ€™s founding families. Adam, a graduate of the school, is the dean of students and also a father of two Sierra Canyon students. He has been at Sierra Canyon since the beginning, literally (the school opened in 1978). Adam is a genuine, outgoing and dynamic guy who is truly a huge part of the heart and soul of this community school. He is steeped in the schoolâ€™s history and cares about its roots and future. Keenly attuned to student life, Adam knows all the kids and cares deeply about them.

Kristine Theodoratos, who hails from Turing Point School, is the lower school director and also the mom of two Sierra Canyon students. An experienced educator with a calm, friendly demeanor, she discussed the schoolâ€™s academic approach within the kindergarten and lower school. Sierra Canyon, she explained is a traditional school with a developmental twist. Beginning in kindergarten, the school utilizes what it calls â€œLike Learner Groups.â€• These include: On Grade, On Grade Enriched and Above Grade. These groups are fluid and kids may move between the groups within a school year, depending on their needs. There is also a gifted teaching specialist who pulls out highly gifted kids for math. Starting next year, the kids will wear uniforms. Sierra Canyon utilizes the well-known â€œCharacter Countsâ€• program, which ties directly into the schoolâ€™s theme, *Excellence Is Its Own Reward.*

A kindergarten classroom



Get ready for kindergarten!

Sierra Canyonâ€™s educators are both in their comfort zone and always looking for new ways to innovate, whether its in the area of curriculum, technology, facilities or any aspect of the school. Smart Boards and a computer lab comprise the basis for elementary school technology education.

Hitting a high note in the music room

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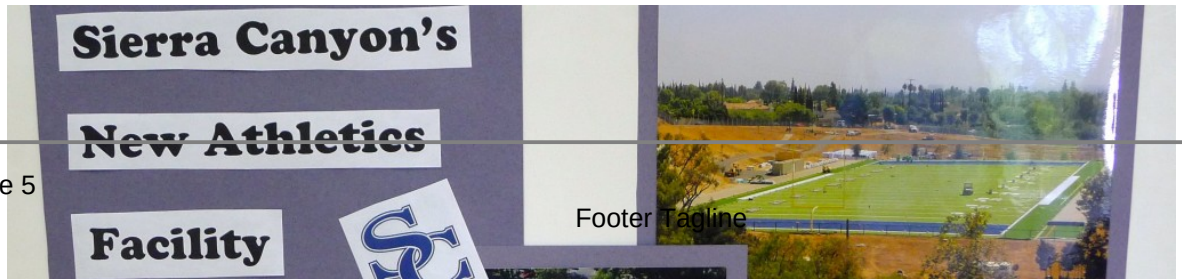
Ethnic and socioeconomic diversity is another of the schoolâ€™s assets (about 39 percent of the student body). And, I saw diversity among the faculty and staff too. Approximately 15 percent of the schoolâ€™s budget is designated for financial aid. Families attending the school live in 95 different zip codes!

Field of Dreams



Rendering of athletic field renovation

I was extremely impressed to learn that Head of School, Jim Skrumbis, accompanies upper school students on one of the Civil Rights tours in Alabama. This is the first school Iâ€™ve encountered that takes this trip. When my kids are older, we plan to visit this take this same trip.

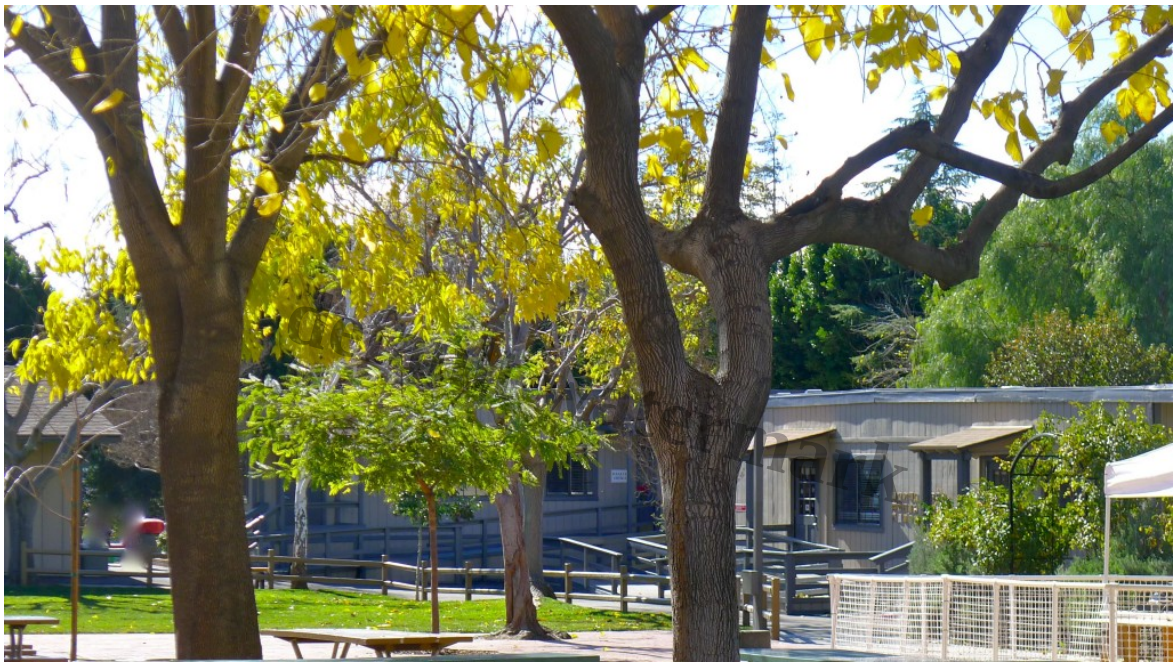
Sierra Canyonâ€™s high school is 5 years old and on a separate campus. It has already distinguished itself with college acceptances to a variety of top schools including, Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Northwestern, Yale and this year an Early Decision to Harvard for one student.

Library!

Sierra Canyon takes its cues from its understated past and blends that legacy with a 21st century focus on academic excellence, diversity and sports. The pristine beauty of the school is a nostalgic reminder of a time when kids could be kids. Itâ€™s a place you want to linger and explore. And thatâ€™s exactly what the students at Sierra Canyon do!

Art studio!

I was excited to see Sierra Canyon and to offer it a chance to take a solo turn in the spotlight on this blog!



Kid-friendly!

For more information, please visit, www.sierracanyonschool.org

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