

Sequoyah School: A Sensational Place Inspired By A Native American Wordsmith

Description



Sequoyah School, Pasadena

* July 8, 2015 update: Exciting News! Sequoyah School will add a high school Fall 2016. Click [here](#) for more information.

The minute I walked into Sequoyah School in Pasadena the I-Wish-I-Had-Gone-Here-As-A-Kid feeling swept over me. Because the school was founded 54 years ago, some very lucky people *did* attend Sequoyah, including its director, Josh Brody and Azizi Williams, the assistant admissions director.



A vintage photo of Sequoyah students. Director Josh Brody is the tall one in back row.

Arriving at the school on a recent morning, Azizi introduced me to Josh, who stepped out of his office to chat about the school for a few minutes. He's very proud of Sequoyah, both its history and the evolution it's taken over the years to become one of the most highly coveted progressive schools in the San Gabriel Valley. Josh is genuinely nice and welcoming, with a sense of humor and relaxed personality that kids can relate to. He's been profiled in *The LA Weekly*, traveled to Nepal on a Harvard Fellowship, recorded a top-selling album in Nepal and posed for Sequoyah parent and sculptor, Chris Slatoff, for a rendition of Jesus and Joseph for the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels downtown. Let's face it. He's one cool, smart dude who just happens to run one of the most impressive schools in town!

Sequoyah is an educational triumph, staying true to its roots while creating a forward-thinking school with a clear, multi-faceted vision. As Azizi explained, *what kids need now* governs the school, while always keeping in mind the original mission statement. The Native American influence is present in the name "Sequoyah" which comes from an 18th century Cherokee silversmith who invented a set of symbols used for writing words.



The campus!

An urban campus with rustic buildings punctuated by green spaces and located on two acres in the heart of Pasadena, Sequoyah is a K-8 school that puts its own stamp on progressive education. Mixed

age classes, a second year experience where kids remain with the same teacher at least twice (student can have the same teacher for K and 1), an integrated curriculum and a focus on descriptive, narrative reports rather than grades (percentages are given starting in 3rd-4th grades), are just some of the elements which define it.



Inside the multi-age K-1 classroom



Inside the K-1 classroom



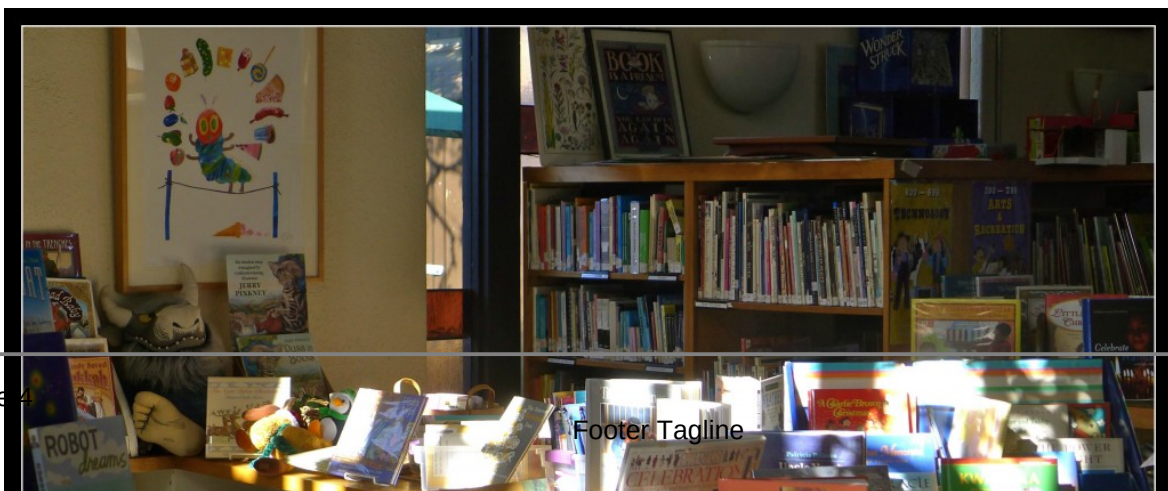
Another view of K-1 classroom

Creativity, building authentic community and hands-on learning are key to the school's signature programs. Notably, teachers, parents and students created a set of guiding principles to inform the teaching and learning that happens at Sequoyah. It's called *Habits of Mind* and includes seven customs: *Perspective, Inquiry, Communication, Collaboration, Application, Stewardship* and *Ownership*. Each concept offers a short description. For example, *Perspective* is "to seek, honor and reflect on multiple viewpoints in order to broaden understanding and solve problems."



Rustic and warm

Azizi is one of the most down-to-earth, likable admissions staff members I've met. She's the mom of two Sequoyah daughters and a graduate of the school. so she knows it inside and out. I appreciated her deep, detailed knowledge, along with her incredibly friendly, low-key demeanor. Azizi told me that while admission to Sequoyah is very competitive and the school has a high acceptance rate, they do admit families from the very large wait-list almost every year.



Sequoyah's library!

Azizi said more than 50 percent of the students are ethnically and socio-economically diverse, with about 40 percent of the student body receiving financial aid (this is very impressive!). The school has a strong commitment to a diversity that reflects its community and backs this up with its robust financial aid program.

What better way to learn than through real-world experience? At Sequoyah, the Field Studies program, which expands the classroom to include the surrounding community and natural world, is a beloved and renowned aspect of the kids' education at all grade levels. Beginning in kindergarten, students begin studying the desert a month before embarking on a camping trip Anza-Borrego Desert State Park near San Diego. Along with their parents and staff, kindergartners learn how to take care of each other and the environment by setting up tents, helping cook meals and exploring the geology and indigenous aspects of the area. Each year, students at every grade level venture to various locations including, El Capitan, Morro Bay, Big Sir, Yosemite and beyond. This standout program gives kids a change to travel outside their everyday environment to encounter new and rewarding learning experiences.



Spanish classroom!

One of the most comprehensive, useful materials for parents is the Curriculum Map, a descriptive, detailed guide to understanding what will be taught at each grade level, the skills and concepts learned, as well as essential questions that will be raised in class and discussed throughout each study area. Subject areas like Spanish, visual arts, theater and music are included. And, how kids are assessed is

also part of the Curriculum Map. This is an extremely helpful way to understanding both what will be taught and how each subject will be approached.



Science class explores the question, “How do our food choices affect us, our families, our community, the world?”

Heralding several new additions to the campus, Sequoyah will soon be expanding, with the addition of a new multi-purpose and performing arts building, a new art and science building and new 5th-8th grade classrooms, all opening in Fall 2013.

Preparing students for high school is very important at Sequoyah. The school offers extensive ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam) prep through test taking skills, a weekly seminar where 8th graders visit high schools, have a mock interview and receive support for their personal essays. Sequoyah students have been accepted to Flintridge-Preparatory, Harvard-Westlake, Loyola High, Marlborough, Mayfield Senior School, Oakwood School, Polytechnic, The Waverly School and many other top schools in recent years.



guiding principles:

care+permanence
stewardship+sustainability
historic fabric+scale
light+space
comfort+flexibility
interconnectedness : nature+community

concept sketch : view looking NW from top of parking lot

sequoyah school plan for expansion

New facilities coming in Fall of 2013!

Being at Sequoyah is like dreaming a dream about a fabulous place to learn. Only its not a dream. It really exists. Sequoyah is an intellectually stimulating, nurturing and open-minded, a school where social justice is an important as learning the ABCs. I can promise you, this school will catch your attention and hold it. If your family visits Sequoyah, it will stay in your memoryâ€™and your childâ€™s too!

For more information, visit, www.sequoyahschool.org

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