Notre Dame Academy Elementary and Middle School: A Traditional Catholic School For The 21st Century

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Notre Dame Academy Elementary and Middle School (NDA) in West Los Angeles is a traditional Catholic (Transitional Kindergarten-8th Grade) located on a picturesque campus in West L.A. It is located next to its sister school, Notre Dame Academy High School (all girls). NDAâ€™s quaint, statuesque faÃ§ade may be familiar to Westsiders, since it has been a landmark on Overland, south of the Westside Pavilion for 60 years. The school is a small, safe hamlet within big, bustling Los Angeles.

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NDA is a co-ed, private school run by The Sisters of Notre Dame and a Board of Trustees. It is affiliated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles but is not a parish-supported school. NDA is a traditional Catholic school in the sense that religion class is taught for TK-8, teachers must be Catholic and there is school wide prayer every morning. Upon entering and leaving the classroom, students say a quiet prayer (so quiet in fact that I didnâ€™t even notice until it was pointed out to me). Students wear uniforms and the Sacraments are taught by a Sister in the lower grades.

The schoolâ€™s mission is as follows: â€œGuided by the Educational Principles of the Sisters of Notre Dame and the mission to proclaim Godâ€™s goodness and provident care, the faculty and staff of Notre Dame Academy believe that a solid instruction in Catholic doctrine and practices is essential for shaping morally centered adults.â€•

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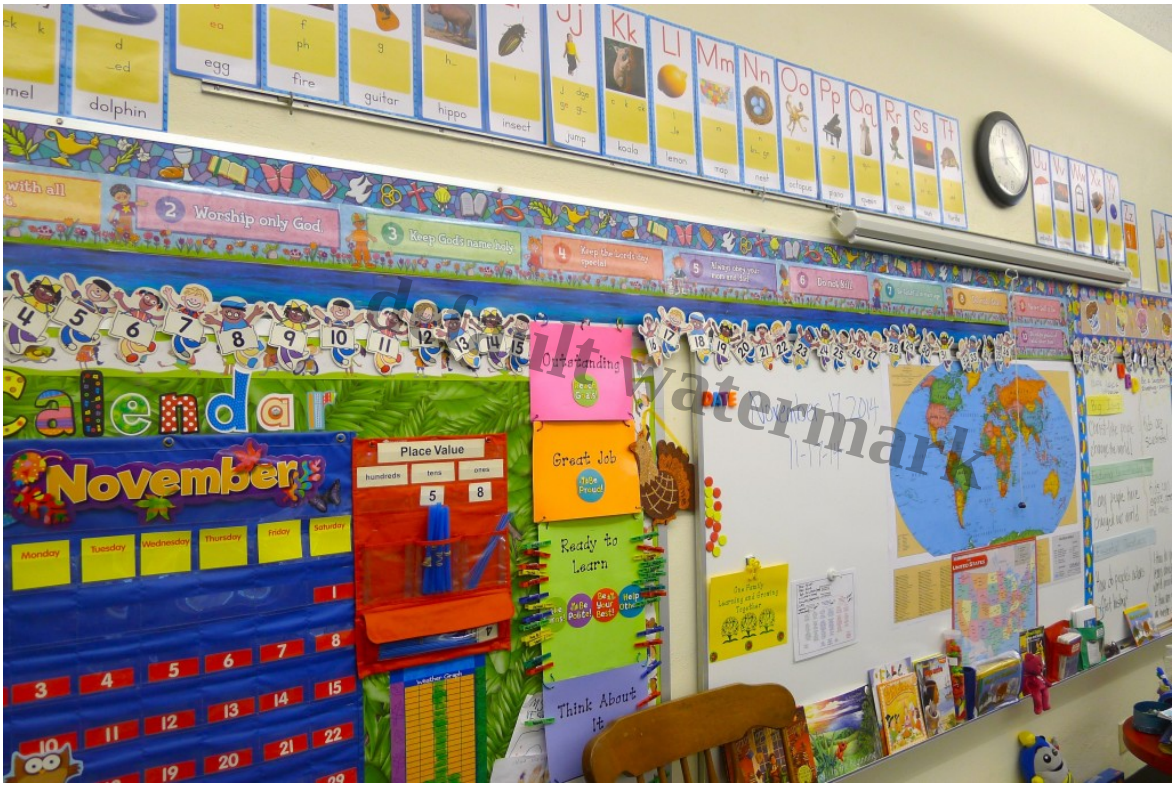
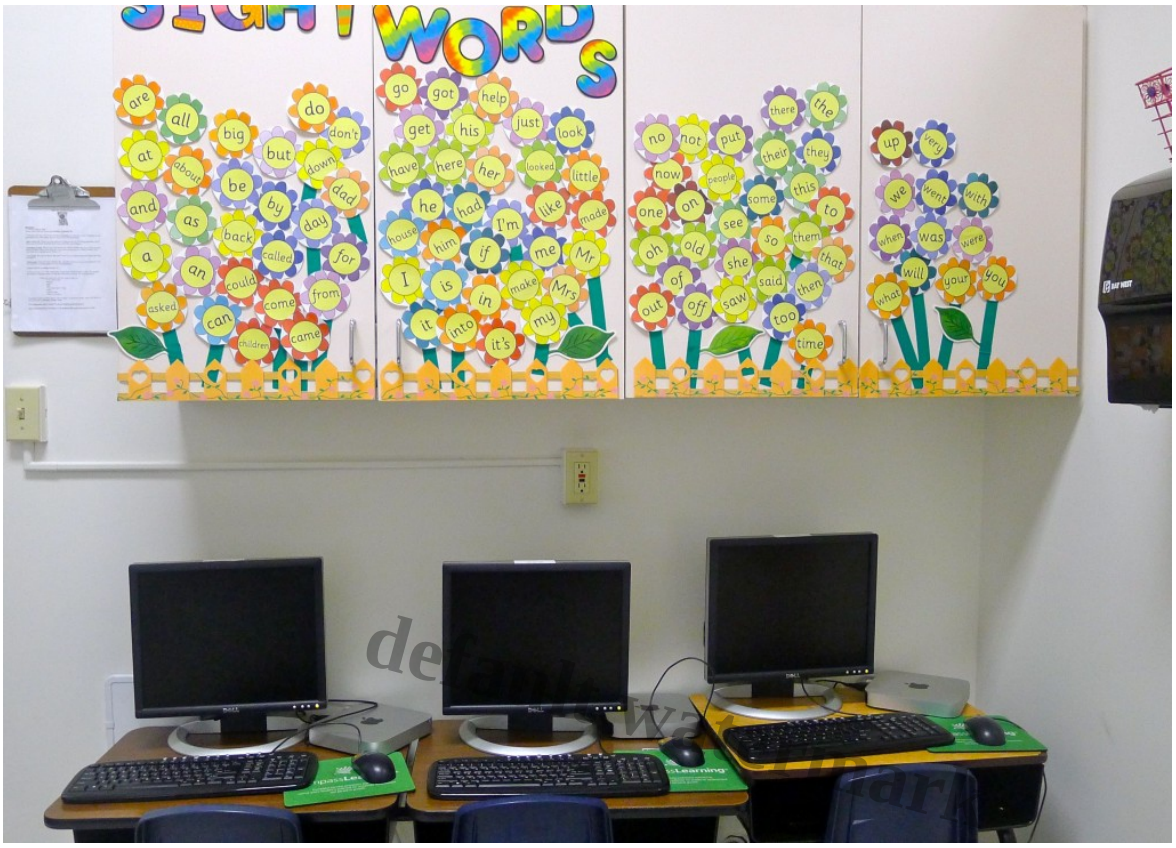
NDA exemplifies *modern* Catholic education. It is a religious school in every sense of the word. Yet it is contemporary, both in its curriculum and its bold use of technology. I was intrigued by the blending of old and new at this distinguished private school.

Meeting Lilliam Paetzold, the principal for a tour and interview was like being greeted by a dear friend. Sheâ€™s such a burst of positive energy. Warm, intelligent and dynamic, she is excited about the schoolâ€™s tremendous advances over the past five years which include a major project: to implement an updated curriculum map, which includes a significant new technology component. Lilliam is herself a graduate of NDA and her connection to the school is genuine and heartfelt. She is completing her 4th year as principal and her 25th year as an educator.



The curriculum map was created to ensure Common Core standards are met. Spanish, Technology, Drama, Music, Art, Debate and P.E. are included in the weekly schedule. Enrichment classes are offered in music, yoga and other fun subjects. School athletics begin in 3rd grade. Choir is offered for grades 2nd-8th. There is a resource specialist on staff. NDA has many of the â€œbells and whistlesâ€• of a non-religious private school, making its admissions more competitive than many other Catholic schools.

NDA is consciously, thoughtfully utilizing the best practices in the education world. The schoolâ€™s major focus on an updated curriculum with an integrated technology plan is impressive and carefully engineered. The classrooms are almost all updated with a few left to be re-designed. The amount of resources and hard work that has gone into the curriculum map is a signal that the school fully embraces teaching and learning for its current students and beyond.



Perhaps the most important aspects of the curriculum update is the full integration of technology into the classroom, with a technology coordinator and training for teachers and staff to ensure systematic use of new technologies.

For grades 4th-8th, there is a 1:1 iPad program, which is integrated with the curriculum (this means kids use the iPad for real learning, not just for fun or searching online). For grades TK-3, there are 2 iPad carts in the classrooms.

In middle school (grades 6th-8th), there is a student broadcast studio filled with all kinds of Apple equipment. The middle school offers a host of tech electives including robotics, web design and coding. Students in the middle school use iPads for their books, note taking, and project sharing and collaborating. One very talented middle schooler won an award or his iPad animated video, â€œAn Interview with Martin Luther King, Jr.â€• from the LA County Office of Education.

Using the most up-to-date technology helps ensure students work independently on platforms like *IXL Math* and *Spelling City.* Apps and programs track real time progress that is monitored by teachers and instruction is differentiated. Teachers are supplied withâ€“and trained to useâ€“Mac Books and iPads to create a true technology-based curriculum. Interestingly, students remain with the same teacher for science, math and English for grades 5^{th}-8^{th} to help ensure a smooth from elementary to middle school. There is a 5^{th} grade study skills program to help students prepare for 6^{th} grade.

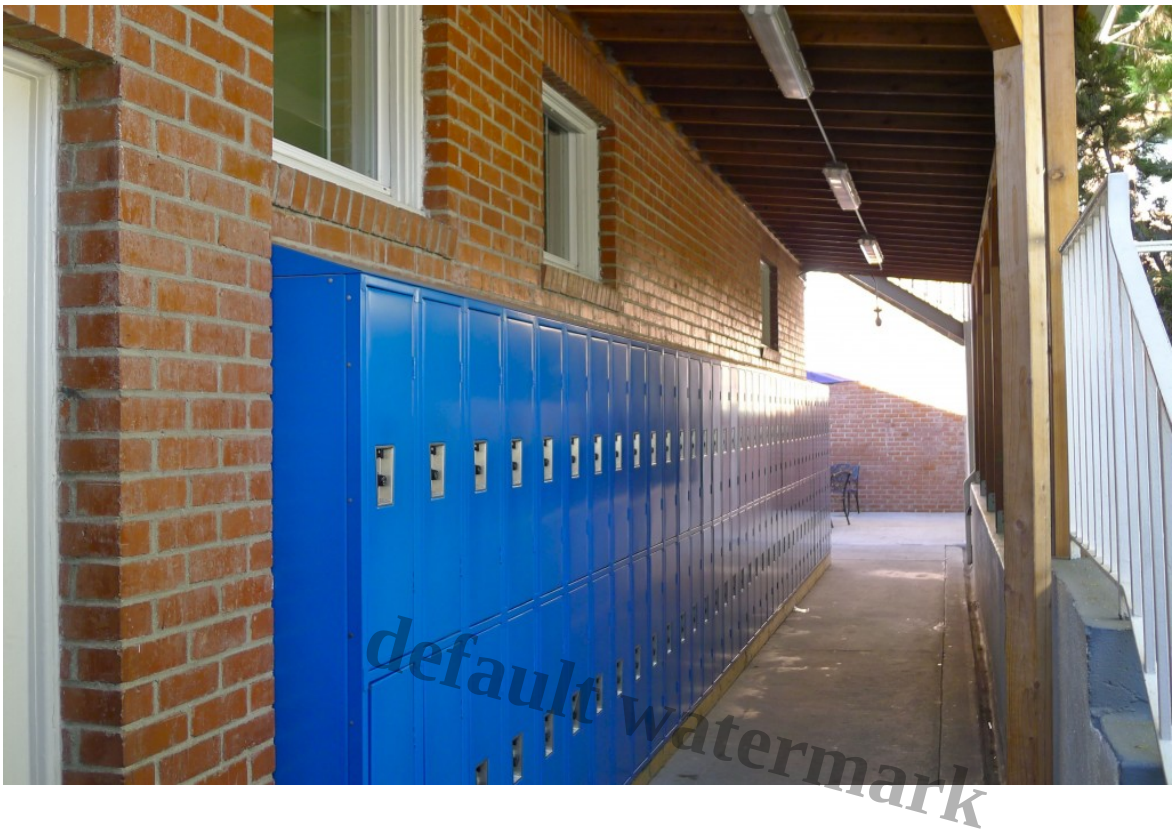
Parents benefit from the schoolâ€™s use of technology, including social media, to communicate, plan events, order healthy hot lunch online and ensure it is easy to keep up to date with everything thatâ€™s happening with just a click of the computer.

NDA students are diverse, coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. About 25 percent of the student body is non-Catholic (most are Christian and they arenâ€™t required to take communion).

After passing by this quaint school many times, I was pleased to finally visit it. I absolutely loved the school! It is impressive on many levels. NDA adheres to a personalized approach for each child. It summons a nostalgia-tinged memory of an era gone by, at the same time it is thoroughly modern and so right now it in its educational philosophy. Thereâ€™s nothing stodgy about this faith-based learning institution. This combination makes it fairly unique among Catholic elementary and middle schools. Notre Dameâ€™s covetable use of technology is a signature aspect of its commitment to state-of-the-art education. The emphasis on technology is the finishing touch on an already robust school.

Charity work includes St. Anneâ€™s Food Pantry, Halloween Candy for Operation Gratitude and funds raised for a sister school in Uganda, among other causes that are both parent and student led.

At NDA there is one class per grade with two teachers in per class. TK has approximately 20 students, with kindergarten and grades 1st-8th average 30 students. There are 280 students, with a student to faculty ratio of 10:1.



NDA is an academically rigorous, traditional school with a meticulous commitment to Catholic teachings. The school equips its graduates with the skills to aim high, to become future leaders or whatever they want to be in life. Notre Dame graduates exemplify a strong moral and spiritual foundation. The school retains a personalized approach to each child, exactly what all kids need during their formative years. All of this is a wonderful endeavor indeed.

NDA students matriculate to the following schools for 9th grade: Notre Dame Academy High School (girls), Loyola, Notre Dame High School, Marymount, St. Monica, Crespi, Pacifica Christian and Marlborough.

For more information: www.ndasla.org

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

Tags

1. Notre Dame Academy Los Angeles
2. Private Catholic School
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