

Education 101

Are Santa Barbara Schools Making the Grade?

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, the days when parents would simply whisk their children off to the nearest school are long gone. Discussions of “Where are you sending your child?” dominate local parks, pediatrician’s offices and preschool playgrounds. While there’s no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to education, luckily we have lots of options in Santa Barbara. In general, our schools are getting better too—a concerted effort is underway to narrow the achievement gap between middle- to upper-class and low-income students. “Our schools are improving,” says longtime local educator Gerrie Fausett, the current superintendent of the Hope School District and former principal of Washington Elementary School on the Mesa and Santa Barbara Junior High. Fausett believes that area schools are “doing a better job educating our students and have particularly improved in their work with students that are not meeting academic expectations. The improvements and the dedication to making sure that kids are learning what they need to learn are moving forward.” Here’s a look at what our local schools—both public and private—have to offer.

by **LESLIE DINABERG** photographs by **LUCA TROVATO**



Public Elementary Schools

One big advantage of public school is obvious: your taxes already pay for it. Parents also cite the system's diverse student bodies, access to GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) programs, and the wider variety of sports and extracurricular activities that larger schools can offer. In addition, while many private schools advertise that they have credentialed teachers, they aren't a requirement—there are no legal regulations regarding the academic qualifications of private school teachers. In public schools, however, a teaching credential is required, period.

Many parents view the state's emphasis on standardized test scores as a negative aspect of publicly funded schools, complaining that the schools "teach to the tests" rather than to the individual students, but Fausett also sees a plus side: "I think it's part of being accountable as a student and as a human being. You're accountable for what you learn and what you do.... It's important to the whole process of being educated."

Public elementary systems can basically be classified into two types: neighborhood schools and schools of choice. Living in a well-regarded district makes the decision to attend a neighborhood school easier. In fact, realtors use high-performing districts

such as Montecito Union, Hope and Goleta as aggressive selling points. However, the where-you-live/where-you-go-to-school equation isn't so simple these days. Parents who don't live in their preferred district can take advantage of state sanctions resulting from the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which allows students whose schools are on probation—not meeting test performance targets for certain subgroups of students—to attend the school of their choice. (Santa Barbara Junior High, La Cumbre Junior High, Isla Vista Elementary School and McKinley Elementary School are all on program improvement status.) Coupled with loose transfer policies that make it relatively easy for parents to choose an alternative school, there's a virtual open-enrollment policy throughout the Santa Barbara School District. However, there's less mobility in Goleta and Montecito, which use a different funding model.

Neighborhood Schools

For many families, choosing a neighborhood has become more about selecting a school than a home. However, it's a two-way street—extensive parent involvement is needed for even the most well-regarded and well-funded schools to be successful. One of the extras offered at Cold Spring is the Dolphin Center, an after-school child care and enrichment program staffed by professionals and Wesmont College students with an interest in elementary education. This is one of the many ways that children benefit from the school's proximity to the nearby college.

While most public schools offer some sort of GATE program, Washington Elementary School is a magnet school for GATE students, with entire classrooms given over to an advanced curriculum. Dedicated GATE classrooms, as opposed to the more common pullout programs (in which students are with another teacher for specialized instruction just a few hours a week), are also offered at Adams (on Las Positas) and Franklin (near Milpas Street) elementary schools.

One of the things that distinguishes the Hope School District (serving students from Hope Ranch and the upper State Street area, including Hope, Monte Vista and Vieja Valley schools) is a high degree of parent involvement. "Parents have made Hope School District function like a private school by providing funds to have an art specialist, a P.E. specialist, a computer specialist....," says Fausett.

With funding now beginning to kick in from Basic Aid (a model, based on the amount of property taxes generated by a district, designed to help California schools with declining enrollment), the Goleta Union School District is able to offer better-than-average salaries to teachers as well as additional programs for students. For example, Mountain View School has a hands-on science lab and computer lab, along with specialist instructors in

those subjects, as well as in art, music, computers and physical education.

Isla Vista School partners with UC Santa Barbara on a number of programs, including a unique Parents, Children and Computers Project that gives an opportunity for parents from the community to learn how to use computers.

Aliso Elementary School in Carpinteria also has an unusual take on technology. Students participate in a virtual summer school, using their computers at home (many donated by the county's Computers for Families program) to access their school curriculum via the Internet, with connection services provided at a reduced rate. Parents are also given computer training if needed. Cleveland Elementary School on the upper eastside offers a year-round continuous learning program, and options such as Rainbow Camp, the Junior Academy for Math and Science, an Intersession Support Program and enrichment classes during vacation periods.

Charter Schools and Schools of Choice

Charter schools or schools of choice, which any student in the district can attend, are becoming more common, with five Santa Barbara elementary schools—Peabody, Santa Barbara Charter, Santa Barbara Community Academy, Cesar Estrada Chavez Dual Language Immersion Charter School and Open Alternative School—functioning in this way. The Santa Barbara Community Academy on East Ortega Street offers a year-round academic program. The academy also has other things that distinguish it. "The founding principles are core knowledge [a sequenced, coherent program that uses a grade-by-grade core of common learning], uniforms and parent participation," says founding principal Joan Jamieson, who recently retired.

East of Milpas Street, Cesar Chavez offers a 50/50 balance in the use of English and Spanish each day. Primary instruction is given in the student's native language, while second language fluency is developed through activities that focus on meaning



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and comprehension. With bilingual education out of favor in much of California, Cesar Chavez offers a clear alternative to the typical school experience. Its aim, according to the school's mission statement is "to develop bi-literate, bi-cultural students whose strong academic and cultural foundation prepare them to meaningfully participate in their families, their community and their world to create a more just and equitable society."

Another public school option is the Open Alternative School, serving kindergarten through 8th grade, on the campus

HIGHER EDUCATION

College students don't just look like they're getting younger every year—at Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) they actually are. Between fall 2005 and summer 2006, approximately 3,600 high school students took college classes both at SBCC and on their own campuses. College courses are free to high school students, who may complete up to a year of college credits prior to high school graduation, a potential saving of 25 percent of their total college costs.

While getting a head start on university courses is a motivator for some students, that's not the only reason they utilize SBCC. San Roque High School, which opened in 2005, doesn't have a physics lab, so students study at SBCC. Because San Marcos High School offers a block schedule (three of six classes each day, alternating), many of its students attend SBCC in the summer to take foreign languages and other college requirements they can't otherwise fit in with their schedules. While some see access to SBCC resources as a double-edged sword—enabling secondary schools to skate by without providing adequate courses for high-achieving students—being able to attend college-level courses is undeniably a boon for many students.



of La Colina Junior High on Foothill Road. The school provides a cooperative learning environment, emphasizing parent participation, individual growth and cultural diversity.

Public Junior High and High Schools

Between increased academic expectations and raging hormones, it's no wonder that private schools experience a "bump" in junior high-aged students. Parents will pay whatever they need to ensure their child's success during these critical teen years. But the public junior highs have much to offer students and are engaging in active efforts to reach out to families.

Parent Denice Adams, founder of SAGE (Supporters of Advanced and GATE Education), an organization that advocates for special services for high-achieving students, is a satisfied Santa Barbara Junior High customer—her 14-year-old son, Andrew, was voted most likely to succeed last spring by his classmates and won the Ray Kroc McDonald's Award for scholarship, leadership, sportsmanship and citizenship. "Andrew had a great junior high career because everybody there was on the same team," she says. "When I went in and said his weak suit was writing, the teachers came in before school and during lunch to work with him."

That same kind of personalized attention is also evident in the academy programs at the high schools. Santa Barbara High offers three academies, which operate much like a school within a school. The Multimedia Arts and Design Academy (MAD) and the Visual Arts and Design Academy (VADA) places students with mentors in the field of graphic or visual arts during their junior and senior years. The Green, or horticulture, Academy is a program for students interested in learning about environmental stewardship and developing a deep understanding of local ecological issues. San Marcos High School has a Nursing Assistant Program and Health Academy as well as Virtual Enterprise, a simulated business class designed to give students the experience of working in a professional environment. Participants conduct business transactions with other high schools and colleges in the United States and abroad.



Dos Pueblos High (DP) is lauded for its International Baccalaureate Programme, where students pursue a rigorous liberal arts curriculum that is recognized by the best colleges and universities. DP also offers an Engineering Academy, which draws upon professional engineers from Raytheon (a local defense and aerospace systems company) to work as instructors.

Private/Independent Schools

The independent school offerings are as varied as those of the public schools, but one of the things they all have in common is smaller class sizes, which means more individualized attention and a closer relationship with faculty. Private schools are also generally able to provide students with a wide variety of classes and travel experiences. While not every private school fits easily into an academic "box," for discussion purposes it's useful to categorize them as college preparatory schools, parochial or religious schools, and progressive or alternative schools.



College Preparatory Schools

Laguna Blanca School, with campuses in Hope Ranch and Montecito, is the only fully accredited college preparatory school in the region that serves the entire kindergarten through 12th grade continuum. “We provide one-stop shopping for every family’s full educational needs,” says headmaster Douglas Jessup. “The academic demands are rigorous, so students must possess both above-average ability and the motivation to advance themselves to be able to handle Laguna’s challenging workload.”

Carpinteria’s Cate School has a long and rich history. Founded in 1910 by Curtis Wolsey Cate as a boarding school, it combines the academic excellence of the best East Coast prep schools with the can-do, adventurous spirit of the west. Local author, artist and founder of the Santa Barbara Writers Conference, Barnaby Conrad, is an alumni, along with his son, two stepsons and two grandchildren. “When I was there, we all had to have horses, and you had to get up at 6 o’clock in the morning to groom them. Mr. Cate was a Spartan headmaster, and he didn’t believe in warm water—you had to take a cold shower at 6:30 in the morning,” says Conrad, who also taught creative writing at Cate and has painted portraits of all of the headmasters. “It’s a wonderful school now, I think— *Continued on page 268*

COLLEGE BOUND Giving high school students an advantage in college admissions is one of the primary reasons parents justify sending them to private schools. There’s no doubt that independent schools are much better equipped than public schools to counsel high school students and guide them through the admissions process. The ratio of students per academic counselor at Santa Barbara High is 475 to 1; at San Marcos High it is 553 to 1; and at Dos Pueblos it is 457 to 1. Private school counselors typically have caseloads of about 20 to 30 students.

Nonetheless, Dos Pueblos High had the highest combined SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) scores this year, the highest combined percentage of students taking the SATs, the highest AP (advanced placement) scores and the highest number of National Merit Scholarship finalists of all schools in the county—public or private—according to a statement from William Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools. Of the 1,355 kids who graduated from Santa Barbara School District high schools in 2005, 905 (or 68.8 percent) passed all of the University of California/Cal State University-required courses, according to the Department of Education. This is an impressive figure, especially given that countywide, only 41.6 percent of students passed the required courses for college admission and statewide that figure is 35.2 percent.

While the public schools don’t specifically track college admission rates, the private schools certainly do—it’s a big selling point for many. For example, at Laguna Blanca, all of the students are college bound with an average of more than 20 percent going on to Ivy League schools. Headmaster Douglas Jessup says 100 percent of its seniors attend college upon graduation, and 98 percent immediately go to four-year colleges. “In the past 10 years, 90 percent of our graduates have gained acceptance to one of their top three college choices, and roughly that same percentage graduate from college within four years,” he says. Anacapa School also boasts a 100 percent college-acceptance rate, as does Bishop Garcia Diego High School and Cate School.



much tougher academically than when I was there.” Indeed, not only are women now admitted, but students from all over the world compete to partake in one of the 265 spots in Cate’s rigorous scholastic program. In addition to excellent academics and college placement opportunities, Cate also provides students with the opportunity to continue their education with faculty-led trips to China, Japan and Spain.

The Anacapa School serves 7th- to 12th-grade students who want a challenging college preparatory experience in a personal, small-school setting. Located downtown, the school seeks to educate students in three specific areas: technical, personal/social and critical knowledge. Asking questions and encouraging open dialogue are fundamental principles.

Parochial/Religious Schools

In 2005, Bishop Garcia Diego High School became an independent Catholic high school serving the needs of the broader community after 70-plus years as a Catholic Church-run school. The school, located near where Highway 101 and Highway 154 meet, welcomes students of all faiths and provides them with what parent Ralph Ianeli describes as “value-based education, as opposed to strict doctrine. Basically they’re teaching kids to be good kids.”

The kindergarten through 8th grade Marymount of Santa Barbara, located on the Riviera, is “an independent school with a Catholic tradition,” according to its literature, yet welcomes families of all faiths. Students may pursue the traditional Catholic courses or a track that explores all the major world religions, emphasizing the commonalities that unite them. Both learning tracks emphasize the greater issues of values, ethics and service to others.

The teaching of values also plays a primary role at the preschool through 8th grade El Montecito School, a Christian faith-based school. “Our motto is: ‘Where Character Meets Wisdom,’ and we have the privilege of being able to do it in our own unique way,” says headmaster Jeannine Morgan.

The neighboring Our Lady of Mount Carmel Elementary School (kindergarten through 8th grade) is a Catholic parochial school working under church auspices. The curriculum is aligned with state Standards and Archdiocesan Guidelines, with the teaching and integration of the Catholic faith and Christian values at the core of the curriculum.

Progressive/Alternative Schools

Beginning its fifth year as an independent school, the preschool to 12th grade San Roque School, with campuses in

DOLLARS + CENTS

Planning to send your child to private school? That’s an average of about \$15,000 annually for the next 13 years. Just think, you could almost put a down payment on a small condo in Goleta for that! However, cost is not a deterrent for some. “If kids are stimulated and motivated, and parents see that, they’ll pay anything and do anything to support that child,” says Gerrie Fausett, superintendent of the Hope School District. While the price of free public schools can’t be beat, many parents are willing to get out their checkbooks and fork over big bucks to educate their children privately. Here’s a look at some of the yearly tuition costs in our area.

Elementary Schools

Coastline Christian Academy
Kindergarten: \$3,960
Grades 1-5: \$4,950

Crane Country Day School
Grades K-5: \$17,000

El Montecito School
Grades K-5: \$6,400

Laguna Blanca School
Kindergarten: \$15,900
Grades 1-6: \$17,300

Marymount of Santa Barbara
Grades K-4: \$13,260
Grade 5: \$13,595

Our Lady of Mount Carmel School
Grades K-8: *Call for tuition rates*

San Roque School
Grades K-12: *Call for tuition rates*

Santa Barbara Christian School
Kindergarten: \$7,538
Grades 1-5: \$8,131

Santa Barbara Montessori School
Grades K-6: \$8,500

The Waldorf School of Santa Barbara
Kindergarten: \$9,515
Grades 1-8: \$11,385

Middle Schools

Anacapa School
Grades 7-8: \$17,400

Coastline Christian Academy
Grades 6-8: \$4,950

Crane Country Day School
Grades 6-8: \$18,000

Dunn School
Grades 7-8: \$12,400
(day students)

Laguna Blanca School
Grades 7-8: \$19,400

Marymount of Santa Barbara
Grade 6: \$14,980
Grade 7: \$15,810
Grade 8: \$15,905

Santa Barbara Christian School
Grades 6-8: \$8,531

Santa Barbara Middle School
Grades 6-8: \$19,076
Grade 9: \$19,426

Santa Barbara Montessori
Grades 7-8: \$8,000

High Schools

Anacapa School
\$17,400

Bishop Garcia Diego High School
\$9,800

Laguna Blanca School
\$19,400

Boarding High Schools

Cate School
\$27,700 day students
\$36,350 boarding

Dunn School
\$15,500 day students
\$34,500 boarding

Midland School
\$31,500

Thatcher School
\$24,350 day students (must be Ojai residents)
\$36,750 boarding

San Roque and near the mission, offers one of Santa Barbara’s most unique approaches to education. A holistic method to learning—in which many different subjects are offered—allows for much of the curriculum to be directed toward students, and core subjects such as math and English are integrated into each study unit, rather than taught as stand-alone classes. San Roque brings in specialists on an as-needed basis. “When kids have a

take “parent” leadership roles in the “family.” “It’s an overall positive learning environment,” Marsted says. “As the students progress through the grades, as their families change, their web of knowing the Crane community strengthens and brings in more acquaintances into their growing circle of friends.”

One of the many components that distinguish Santa Barbara Middle School (SBMS) near the Mission is a nationally recog-

At most independent schools, tuition covers only approximately 80 percent of the cost of educating a student.

specific interest, we figure out a way for them to participate in that either at the school or in the community,” says Mike Hagen, director of curriculum.

Crane Country Day School in Montecito has innovative approaches to traditional courses. One of the many original programs that impressed Crane parent Melissa Marsted is the school’s concept of families. A Crane “family” has members from each grade team up to do activities together to promote a strong sense of community and to allow 8th-grade students to

nized Outdoor Education Program that stretches limits and builds self-confidence as children travel by bike on several weeklong trips per year. “What we really love is the focus on the whole child,” says Bruce Klobucher, whose daughter Nikki graduated in June. “The Middle School does a super job of focusing on everything from academics to the arts, community service and, of course, the Outdoor Education Program—all four things are mixed in and really create kind of a magical environment for kids to learn,” he says. SBMS is the only

The collage features several panels:

- Top left: A person performing a Pilates exercise on a reformer.
- Top middle: The word "Pilates" in white text on a dark background.
- Top right: A person in a black Pilates outfit performing a side plank on a reformer.
- Middle right: Logo for "casall Chic European Sportswear" in white text on a red background.
- Middle left: The word "Gyrotonic" in red text on a light background.
- Middle center: A Buddha statue with the text "simpatico Pilates & Gyrotonic" overlaid.
- Middle right: A person standing on a rocky shore with the text "simpatico Pilates & Gyrotonic" overlaid.
- Bottom left: A person performing a Pilates exercise on a reformer.
- Bottom middle: The text "Pilates Group Tower Classes" in white on a red background.
- Bottom right: A person performing a Pilates exercise on a reformer.
- Bottom right: Contact information: "1236 Coast Village Road, Suite 1, Montecito, 805.565.7591, www.simaticopilates.com".

independent, accredited, stand-alone middle school in California, serving grades 6 through 9. Its faculty members are specialists in the developmental stages of adolescence. That particular expertise is what draws many families—like the Klobuchers, who plan to send their younger daughter, Riley, to SBMS in a year—to put their children in private school for junior high only. “There is a chance for tremendous impact at that age—when their bodies, minds and emotions are changing—and the school helps foster that development,” says Bruce, who is development chair and vice president of the school’s board of trustees.

The preschool through 8th grade Santa Barbara Montessori School in Goleta also focuses on the development of the whole child. According to the school’s literature, in addition to a solid academic foundation, the children develop important attributes such as a love of learning, independence and responsibility, collaborative skills, grace and courtesy, confidence, and the knowledge that they can contribute meaningfully to society.

At The Waldorf School of Santa Barbara—which aims to balance physical activity, artistic creativity and academic work—students stay with the same teacher from 1st through

8th grades. “It’s a very interesting relationship that develops,” says Joni McGoldrick, the school’s business administrator and a parent of three children who have attended at Waldorf. “You don’t just get to go on to the next teacher. You have to get along and work things out with someone over time.”

Report Card

Regardless of whether children attend a public or a private school, adult support of their education is the biggest key to success. “Decades of research shows that when children know that their parents and their community are behind them, they perform significantly better in school,” says William Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools. “When parents spend time talking and reading with their children, demonstrating through their involvement that learning is important, their children excel.” And when children excel, ultimately we’re all the beneficiaries. ■

For more information on all schools listed in this article, contact the Santa Barbara County Education Office, 4400 Cathedral Oaks Rd., Santa Barbara, 805-964-4711, sbceo.org.

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