



SIERRA CANYON SCHOOL

Chatsworth, California

HEAD OF SCHOOL
Start Date: July 1, 2023
sierracanyonschool.org



Carney
Sandoe
& ASSOCIATES



Mission and Core Values

Sierra Canyon School is an academically excellent, college preparatory school committed to an empowering environment in which students realize their greatest creative, ethical, intellectual, and physical promise. We are defined by an energized, attentive, and diverse student-teacher culture. Sierra Canyon School is a special place to grow for the challenges of a fast-changing world.

The school's core values are excellence, integrity, community, independence, and perspective.

OVERVIEW

Located northwest of Los Angeles on two campuses, Sierra Canyon School is a premier independent college preparatory day school serving students from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Sierra Canyon embraces academic and personal excellence and provides an environment where each student is treated as an individual and has the opportunity to strive to attain their best.

Sierra Canyon's program draws uncommonly creative thinkers, leaders, and learners from 114 zip codes in Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Its trailblazing philosophy—referred to as Learning Forward—continues to drive everything the School does. Learning Forward ensures children gain unstoppable momentum to learn and explore, propelling them toward a lifetime of success. Grounded in the School's core values of excellence, integrity, community, independence, and perspective, Sierra Canyon students are fully equipped to rethink the familiar and embrace the unknown.

The School is seeking a Head of School starting in 2023. The Head will ensure that the School's educational and operational programs, policies, and practices are interconnected and aligned with its mission, philosophy, and core values.

At a Glance

Founded: 1978

Total students: 1,150

Total faculty: 110

Students of color: 55%

International students: 5%

Student/teacher ratio: Lower Campus

9:1; Upper Campus 10:1

Students receiving aid: 38%



THE SCHOOL

Sierra Canyon was originally founded as a day camp in 1972 and the elementary school was established in 1978. A middle school was eventually added, and in 2005 the upper school was opened and the following year the upper campus, designed for grades 7-12, was built. Despite the tremendous growth, the School has retained the warmth, joy, unpretentiousness, and child-centeredness of its original day camp.

The school's philosophy celebrates that the relationship between teacher and student is at the heart of every excellent academic institution. Sierra Canyon cultivates this relationship by providing a dynamic learning environment that facilitates positive growth among all members of the school community. Sierra Canyon School students advance their knowledge through thoughtful discussion and exploration of ideas. At its core, Sierra Canyon School develops students who are as keen to realize their potential as their teachers are to inspire it.

At Sierra Canyon, students gain unstoppable momentum to learn and explore, propelling them toward a lifetime of self-directed success. The complete Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 journey expands every child's vision, ambition, and capability a little more every day. Ingenious educators and intrepid students think and work together to understand the world more deeply—and change it for the better. Dynamic, experienced, and qualified teachers are passionate about empowering students to reach their full potential. They inspire students to achieve their personal best and develop a lifelong love of learning.



The highly cosmopolitan student community is reflective of the greater Southern California area: 55% of students identify as students of color, and the student body comes from 114 different zip codes from Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Eight percent of the students on the Upper Campus are international students, some of whom participate in homestays and some of whom live in houses adjacent to campus. “We chose Sierra Canyon because of the diverse and welcoming nature of the community,” said a current parent, “it’s an environment in which our kid could flourish, grow, and learn about many different cultures.” Sierra Canyon strives to be an excellent learning community that is inclusive, welcoming, and celebratory of all.

ACADEMICS

On the expansive, bucolic grounds of Sierra Canyon’s 17-acre Lower Campus, the Lower School program (Pre-K to grade 6) lays a firm foundation for learning and growing. For a virtual tour of Lower Campus, click [HERE](#). In the younger grades, expert early childhood teachers nurture children’s intellectual and moral development in equal measure. “The kids are growing in all aspects...their intellect is fed as well as their hearts and souls,” commented a current parent. Teachers place strong emphasis on the development of basic skills within small instructional groups. Students work at their appropriate instructional level, regardless of age and grade, and learning centers are utilized to best meet students’ individual instructional needs. “The faculty really see and understand my son,” noted another parent, “I so appreciate the care they take.” “I enjoy the collaboration we have on grade-level teams,” commented one teacher, “we’re in and out of each other’s classrooms constantly and stay in communication with the teams above and below us to check in on the students.” The later years of Lower School build curiosity and confidence through active questioning, real-world problem-solving, and thoughtful small-group work. By the end of the transitional 6th grade year, students have grown into strikingly self-aware, self-directed young thinkers and citizens, ready for the challenges of Middle School.



The Middle School program (grades 7 and 8) helps students effectively direct their inquisitive energy, while helping build the academic, social, and emotional skills to thrive as a learner and individual. Middle School students share the sweeping, sunlit Upper Campus with students in grades 9 through 12. For a virtual tour of the Upper Campus, click [HERE](#). Engaging core courses, experiential learning trips, service learning, and Peak Week—a week of local and international travel opportunities—challenge students and encourage them to take advantage of educational experiences that evoke curiosity and the desire to explore. Within this dynamic educational setting, students are able to thrive in an environment where individual growth and free thought are encouraged and celebrated. “I enjoy coming to school,” shared a current middle school student, “there are lots of choices in terms of electives and extracurriculars, and I’m able to develop good relationships with my teachers.”

Sierra Canyon students’ Learning Forward journey culminates in the intellectual laboratory of the High School (grades 9 through 12), where their well-earned academic and personal confidence launches them into college, career, and life beyond. The Upper School offers a rigorous academic curriculum taught by passionate, diverse, and expert teachers. With 25 Advanced Placement (AP) courses, 34 honors courses, and a wide range of electives, the program is designed to provide a breadth of intellectual opportunities that allow the student to challenge themselves and to delve deeply into areas of particular interest.

College Matriculation

Students from the class of 2021 matriculated to the following institutions, among others:

- American University
- Boston College
- Boston University
- Bowdoin College
- Brown University
- Bryn Mawr College
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Chapman University
- College of William and Mary
- Columbia University
- Emerson College
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Howard University
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Indiana University
- Lewis & Clark College
- Loyola Marymount University
- New York University
- Northeastern University
- Pepperdine University
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- San Francisco State University
- Santa Clara University
- Sarah Lawrence College
- Stanford University
- Swarthmore College
- Syracuse University
- The American University of Paris
- United States Naval Academy
- University of Arizona
- University of California - Berkeley, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara
- University of Chicago
- University of Colorado
- University of Michigan
- University of Notre Dame
- University of Southern California
- Whittier College

[See the full list.](#)



An entrepreneurial, question-driven philosophy fosters both independent thinking and productive collaboration. The faculty are well supported in their professional development and their work to innovate and collaborate. “There’s an entrepreneurial spirit here,” commented a faculty member, “there’s opportunity to create, build, and collaborate with colleagues who I really respect.”

Given the range of intellectual and co-curricular opportunities, and with the guidance of supportive and attentive teachers and college counselors, students are equipped to confidently determine their own path to college and personal and career success. The vast majority of Sierra Canyon students choose to attend college, and while the matriculation list reflects some of the most selective institutions in the country, the community celebrates that students’ options and choices align with their interests, aspirations, and strengths. With only fourteen graduating classes, Sierra Canyon’s alumni body is relatively small but mighty... Trailblazers in spirit and in practice. For a few snapshots, click [HERE](#).

Central to Sierra Canyon’s mission is the belief that students should be given opportunities to investigate the world beyond the four walls of the classroom and to let that world inform the knowledge they are gaining from traditional coursework. Experiential learning is an important part of the Sierra Canyon education at every grade level.

Teachers frequently use field trips to extend or enhance ideas discussed in the classroom and to bring learning to life. These “field study” excursions not only enhance the curriculum, but also teach students about the importance of group living, leadership, and team building skills. Every October, 8th grade students embark on a five-day/four-night journey through Washington, D.C. to complement the US History curriculum. [Peak Week](#) may be Upper Campus’s most beloved signature program. Every year, students choose from dozens of local and international experiences that take their learning beyond the classroom and into new territory. Recent trips have included backpacking the Canyons of Navajo Mountain in Arizona and embarking on a literary tour of London.



ARTS

The arts are an important part of students' curricular and co-curricular experiences. From orchestra to digital media to the SC Film Festival, Sierra Canyon guides students to discover, celebrate, and share their one-of-a-kind perceptions. By nurturing both creative and critical thinking, the Visual Arts Department provides the tools for students to foster their artistic expression and inspire innovation. While the Lower Campus Visual Arts curriculum introduces fundamental knowledge to students at an age-appropriate level, the Upper Campus offers advanced courses for students who wish to develop work for their college applications, art school applications, or personal advancement. Students who wish to develop an Advanced Placement Portfolio choose their area of specialization by 11th grade and take Advanced Placement Studio Art in the 12th grade.

Sierra Canyon performing arts students develop the skills and the discipline to be intuitive, imaginative creators and observers in all areas of their lives. Teachers are practicing artists; they inspire and challenge their students to participate in the creative process. Concerts, plays, and performances fill the school calendar and celebrate artistic accomplishments. Introductory courses are required, but many students go beyond the basic requirements.

Students in the music program will experience both making music vocally and instrumentally. Lower and Upper Campus students are taught a comprehensive, multifaceted music curriculum that encompasses a range of topics, idioms, and styles. With a diverse musical curriculum, students at all levels can cultivate and refine their technical and musical skills.



ATHLETICS

Sierra Canyon is renowned for its high-achieving and championship-level teams, and it is truly an inclusive program—there are no cuts on teams. Students have the opportunity to stretch themselves, try new sports, and grow. In addition to taking physical education courses, Lower School students can also join teams that include soccer, basketball, flag football, volleyball, and swimming. Once in Middle School, options expand to include cross country, lacrosse, baseball and track and field. The program expands in Upper School to also include beach volleyball, cheer, equestrian, golf, softball, and tennis, as well as one of the country's strongest e-sports teams, which was initiated by an Upper School student.

In just fifteen years, Sierra Canyon has established itself as one of the premiere high school athletic programs in California and the United States. School teams have won twelve State Championships and sixteen CIF-SS Championships along with eleven additional CIF-SS Final appearances. For the past several years, the Trailblazers competed in the Gold Coast League in which they won 60 League titles. Next year, Sierra Canyon will compete in the Mission League.

For a comprehensive overview of the Trailblazers' athletic program and accomplishments, please click [HERE](#).

SCHOOL LIFE

“I love the energy on campus,” commented a current faculty member, “something is always going on and there’s a buzz on campus.” Lower School students participate in grade level, theme-based performances during a scheduled assembly. The Assembly Program teaches presentation skills procedures for students and provides an appropriate arena to develop self-confidence and public speaking abilities before a large group. Extended day care and the enrichment program offer Lower School students time to play and to take fun classes ranging from clay and sculpting to marine biology, to chess to ukulele!



Student council at all levels give students a chance to get involved, plan events, suggest new programs, and develop their leadership capacity. On the Upper Campus, students have the opportunity to initiate and run different clubs and organizations ranging from the Baking Club to the Black Student Union, from Junior Classical League to Youth in Government, from Music Appreciation Club to the Muslim Student Association. Also of note, Sierra Canyon’s debate and math teams regularly garner national and international accolades, and Sierra Canyon students are regularly selected for the All-American High School Film Festival. “We’re a small school with big opportunities!” noted a current Upper School student. Please click [HERE](#) for more information on student life.

CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA

Chatsworth is a diverse neighborhood in the northwest area of Los Angeles County noted for having one of the lowest population densities in the city. While Los Angeles might offer residents the benefits of urban living, many residents who choose to live in Chatsworth enjoy its natural beauty, rural atmosphere, family-friendly environment, and welcoming community.

Tranquil and serene, Chatsworth has many recreational facilities and parks scattered throughout the neighborhood, making it easy to enjoy an active outdoor lifestyle. Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park is the neighborhood’s largest park, offering 680-acres of biking and hiking trails, horseback riding, picnic areas, historical sites, and nature and wildlife viewings. Another popular park in the neighborhood, Stoney Point Park, is favored by rock climbers and outdoor enthusiasts interested in exploring the park’s huge boulders, mini caves, and short trails. Many equestrians come to Chatsworth as well because it’s one of four existing horse-zoned properties. In fact, horses can be seen daily utilizing the equestrian trail which runs along the perimeter of Sierra Canyon’s Lower Campus and continues to the north of the Upper Campus. Sierra Canyon built and maintains a portion of that trail.



Of course, Chatsworth’s proximity to Los Angeles offers convenient access to the amenities of this major city. The City of Los Angeles, with four million people, is the most populous city in California and scores high on just about every livability index. On the entertainment front, LA is home to the Los Angeles Music Center, one of the largest performing arts centers in the nation; The Walt Disney Concert Hall (home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic); the Dolby Theater (venue for the Academy Awards); and the Los Angeles Opera. The city also has a remarkably robust art scene with 841 museums and galleries in the region. Notable museums include the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Getty Center, the Natural History Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The city is home to an unusual number of professional sports teams, including the Dodgers and Angels in baseball, the Lakers and Clippers in basketball, and the Chargers and Rams in football, professional women’s teams including the WNBA Sparks and the recent debut of the NWSL Angel City Football Club. LA is also home to some of the nation’s top colleges and universities, including UCLA, University of Southern California, Occidental College, Loyola Marymount University, and Mount St. Mary’s College. For those who love outdoor sports, state parks and four national forests and mountains within easy driving distance.

LOOKING AHEAD

Sierra Canyon has been able to grow remarkably over the past few years while retaining a sense of family that has its roots in Sierra Canyon’s day camp. The growth has been possible because the entrepreneurial spirit that pervades the school encourages innovation and an openness to new possibilities. The next Head will be asked to continue to nurture these important aspects of the School’s culture.



In its next stage of development and growth, the Sierra Canyon looks forward to:

- Building out the Upper Campus with particular hopes of more space for the arts.
- Developing and supporting the arts program.
- Continued celebration and support of diverse community—geographic, socioeconomic, neurodiversity, cultural, racial—with eye on inclusion and belonging. Sierra Canyon’s inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was hired last summer.
- Greater connection and communication between Upper and Lower campuses and greater K-12 alignment.
- Greater attention to social emotional learning.
- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty and staff that better reflects the diverse student body.
- Developing systems and structures to support and sustain the School’s growth and dynamic programs.
- Continuing to support and develop the academic program—particularly around cohesiveness, innovation, and use of technology. An internal audit of all diversity, equity, and inclusion elements within each grade level and department began in the summer of 2020 and is ongoing.
- Development of an advancement team and corresponding strategy and program.
- Transitioning from a highly successful and dynamic Founding Head of School to a new leader who will guide the community through its next chapter. In order to allow the next Head to have the time to connect with the community and to focus on the School’s ambitious goals for its program and people, the Board has asked Founding Head, Jim Skrumbis, to help with the build out of the Upper Campus, particularly with the fundraising for a Performing Arts Center. In this capacity, Jim’s title will be President, and both he and the Head will report to the Board.



DESIRED QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

Sierra Canyon seeks:

- A community builder who works with other leaders to keep the student-centered and family feeling alive at Sierra Canyon. This includes a leader who demonstrates a palpable enjoyment of being an active and visible presence on both campuses as a foundation for strong, supportive relationships with all community members.
- Effective and inspiring communicator who is able to connect with all community members and to help all engage with and focus upon the School's vision and commitment to celebrate the excellent programs throughout the school.
- A compassionate, collaborative, and approachable leader who empowers other leaders and Sierra Canyon teachers to learn, grow, and innovate, always with the students' needs at the center.
- A strategic and systems-oriented thinker with a passion for educational and organizational excellence and demonstrated experience in providing the leadership necessary to help Sierra Canyon as it enters the next chapter of its development.
- Personal and professional commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging with demonstrated success in helping advance a school-wide commitment to DEI.
- Experience in recruiting, retaining, supporting, and developing the growth and evolution of a talented, diverse, and committed faculty, staff, and administration.
- Bachelor's Degree required; graduate degree preferred.

PERSONAL QUALITIES DESIRED

The favored candidate will be someone with a lively intellect and a warm and energetic presence, someone who relishes knowing and being known by the full community. This person will be confident with strong emotional intelligence, fine personal values, and excellent communication skills. A down-to-earth, accessible style, a sense of humor, and a willingness to listen, while drawing wisdom from the views of faculty, students, and parents and others will be valued and appreciated.



TO APPLY

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultants in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position.
- A current résumé.
- In lieu of an educational or leadership statement, we request two writing samples (e.g., letters to the community, articles, blog posts, or text from speeches). Additional information may be requested.
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each. Ideally, this list will include colleagues who, collectively, will provide a 360-degree view of the candidate. References will not be contacted without the candidate's permission.

Please submit materials directly to:

Jennifer Christensen

Search Consultant

jennifer.christensen@carneysandoe.com

Bob Fricker

Search Consultant

bob.fricker@carneysandoe.com

SEARCH CALENDAR

July 6: Application materials due. Please let us know of your interest prior to this date.

July 19: Search update

August 4-6: Semifinalist interviews (tentative)

Early-Mid September: Finalist interviews