



Menlo Park Academy

Developing the Potential of Gifted Learners

2013-14 SCHOOL PROFILE

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Beverly Veccia, Director • Jim Kennedy, Dean of Students / Assistant Director



VISION & MISSION

Our vision is that all gifted learners achieve their potential. Our mission states that Menlo Park Academy, a public school, develops gifted learners through an exemplary program of rewarding experiences that nurtures the whole child.

CORE VALUES

Student-Focused
Community-Centered
Integrity-Driven
Empowered

MPA has enjoyed the state's highest ranking of charter schools since 2008, with an A rating in 2013-14

SCHOOL QUICK STATS

K-8

Grades Served

352

Enrollment

1:12.5

Teacher-Student Ratio

KG=18;
Grades 1-4=22;
Grades 5-8=24

Maximum Class Sizes

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Our overall educational philosophy focuses on gifted learners thriving. We believe in a **whole child approach** to learning and have implemented programs to address each child's academic, as well as **social & emotional needs**. We also assure that students aren't held back in their learning, but are **encouraged to soar**. Instruction is differentiated and **flexible grouping strategies** are used to address each learner's needs. We believe that children learn best by doing and provide a **hands-on approach via cross-curricular projects** and assignments. We know that our students don't need as much classroom seat time so content repetition is not emphasized. We plan several trips and activities to provide a deeper understanding of instructional topics

EDUCATIONAL PILLARS

Menlo Park Academy is a school environment that provides an understanding of the **unique qualities of gifted children** and the frequently asynchronous development of their emotional, spiritual, physical, and academic abilities.

Viewing **each learner as a whole** is at the core of our educational model.

We know that gifted children learn best in an **enriched environment** designed to develop their skills as well as meet their different intellectual, social, and emotional needs. True learning involves the development of the "whole child" and includes the support students need to develop high **level critical and creative thinking skills**.

At Menlo Park Academy, we provide **gifted classrooms at all grade levels** from Kindergarten to eighth grade. Our curriculum offers more **density, complexity, and moves at a faster pace** than is available in typical school environments

Our gifted students are able to learn and grow with their peers and feel a sense of belonging that may not be found in traditional classrooms, where they feel different and may attempt to fit in academically. Here, they can be truly challenged to work towards achieving their full potential while forming friendships with a diverse group of academically-oriented learners with advanced abilities.

GRADE

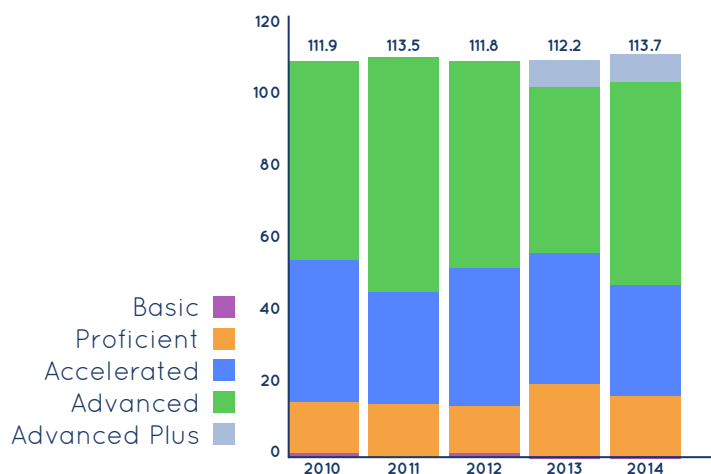
A

94.8%

114 of a possible 120

A HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE

2013-14 Ohio Achievement Assessment Results



100% of our 8th grade students passed the Ohio Achievement Assessments with at least 75% scoring accelerated or higher in all three areas tested.

MPA is one of the highest ranked K-8 public schools in Ohio with a performance index of 114



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Key Indicators Between *Bright Students* and *Gifted Learners*

BRIGHT STUDENTS	GIFTED LEARNERS
Knows the answers	Asks the questions
Is attentive	Is mentally and physically involved
Has good ideas	Has wild, silly ideas
Works hard	Play around, yet tests well
Answers the questions	Discusses in detail, elaborates
Top group	Beyond the group
Listens with interest	Shows strong feelings and opinions
Learns with ease	Already knows
6-8 repetitions for mastery	1-2 repetitions for mastery
Understand ideas	Constructs abstracts
Enjoys peers	Prefers adults
Grasps the meaning	Draws inferences
Completes Assignments	Initiates projects
Is receptive	Is intense
Copies accurately	Creates new design
Enjoys school	Enjoys learning
Absorbs information	Manipulates information
Technician	Inventor
Good memorizer	Good guesser
Enjoys sequential presentation	Thrives on complexity
Is pleased with own learning	Is highly self-critical
Is alert	Is keenly observant



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

At MPA we utilize various strategies to create a learning environment conducive to the gifted learner. Accelerating (whole-grade or subject), telescoping, compacting, ability/flexible groupings, differentiating, and team teaching are all strategies that may be used in our classrooms. MPA recognizes that gifted students can benefit from acceleration options, either whole grade or by subject. The school has an acceleration policy that explains the process for these situations.

Because our core program is already advanced, these needs are not seen as often as may otherwise be necessary in a school that provides a program with a more traditional pace and curriculum. **Students begin at a base that is one grade level above in both Math and Language Arts.** Gifted students need less time for mastery of basic material due to their ability to learn at an accelerated pace, their capacity to understand in greater depth and complexity, and their interests that vary from those of their age peers.

Pacing is accelerated to support students who learn more quickly (*Adapted with permission from Joyce VanTassel-Baska*). When appropriate, curriculum compacting will be utilized to make the time students spend learning to be as effective and meaningful as possible.

These methods of curriculum design will allow for students to participate in learning experiences that are deeper in breadth and width than a traditional curriculum would allow.

Overall, MPA provides opportunities for whole grade acceleration for those instances where the student will benefit most from being placed in another grade.

For subject acceleration, students are assessed each year in both math and reading and may be

recommended for acceleration in one or both of these subjects. These placements can also be requested by a parent, per our acceleration policy. MPA also offers a credit flexibility plan that allows for our middle grade learners to earn high school credits in several subjects. See our credit flexibility policy and plan for more details as the offerings change frequently.

CURRICULAR OFFERINGS

MPA offers a base core curriculum that is based on the state standards for the core subject areas of Math, Language Arts, Science and Social Studies. We then layer the encore courses of Technology, Art, Music, World Languages, and Health/Physical Education. Our encore offerings also include student-selected elective options that vary by grade level.

Additional lessons in character education, social and emotional needs, student success skills, and the arts are weaved throughout the coursework and enriched with field trips, assemblies, contests, and/or after-school clubs.

CORE

Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies

ENCORE

Art, Health, Music, Technology, Physical Education, World Languages

ENRICHMENT

Assemblies, Character Education, Clubs, Contests, Electives, Field Trips, Guidance Services



ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES & EXPERIENCES

Menlo Park Academy students are able to take advantage of a wide array of enrichment options and experiences.



ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES & EXPERIENCES

Because gifted children begin each year with strong knowledge in many areas and have the ability to grasp concepts at a faster pace, students in our school are able to take advantage of a wide array of enrichment options and experiences.

1. Elective Options

Each grading period our students have the opportunity to participate in a selection of elective options. These are built into the schedule for each grade. Offerings may include topics such as **Creative Writing, Public Speaking & Debate, Organizational Skills, Robotics, etc.**

2. Field Trips & Activities

In an effort to provide an engaging and stimulating learning environment, faculty members plan several field trips, assemblies, and activities each year. These events are tied

directly to the curriculum and are often timely (i.e. President's Assembly around President's Day). **We are thrilled to be able to include these components in our program and know that they are a key to providing the students a deeper knowledge and understanding of topics learned.**

3. Contests & Competitions

According to *Karnes & Riley, 1996,*

“students gain in a multitude of dimensions by participating in contests and competitions. Their knowledge bases are expanded in the specific areas of the contests, along with the concepts and skills needed for participation. Gains are made in process skills, personal and interpersonal development, and product production. The process skills of creative problem finding and solving, critical and creative thinking, leadership, group dynamics, goal-setting, and communication skills are used. Self-directed learning and a sense of autonomy are also enhanced. When teams are involved, cooperative learning can be strengthened.”

We invite our students to participate in a variety of contests and competitions. Some are local, such as our own **Science Fair** and **Young Authors Conference**, some are regional, and some are national/international via the Internet. Varying opportunities are available by grade level which allow our students to both flourish in an area that is their strength, as well as learn to deal with the disappointment of not winning every time in every area. **Our school environment provides a rare opportunity to compete with a group of cognitively similar peers.**

4. Project-Based Learning

Educator and presenter Mary Hennenfent says,

*“As educators of gifted children, we have the opportunity to provide our students with the social skills necessary to work on group projects. We can also challenge their problem-solving abilities in a way that connects to the real world. Project-based learning is an excellent way to meet this goal. **Students are highly motivated by problems that make them perplexed. They need to take the time to think and make meaningful discoveries.** Problem-based learning is a transferable process that spans curricular content.”*

At MPA, faculty members integrate projects and problem-solving approaches throughout the curriculum. **Students have frequent opportunities to work individually and in groups creating real-world displays, books, brochures, and 3-D projects.**

5. Guidance Services

As a part of our whole child approach at MPA, we provide guidance to our students in several ways. **We host peer group sessions on varying topics depending on grade level. These services are invaluable to our student development.** We also provide guidance for students on secondary school options.

6. Student Clubs

MPA offers after-school clubs for students to participate in additional activities with their peers. We utilize our faculty members as well as engage with local organizations to provide optional items of student interest such as **chess club, boy and girl scouts, recreational sports, science club, and art classes.** These vary based on interest and availability.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT MODEL

As a part of MPA's whole child approach to learning, the school presents a classroom management style that integrates the student's social & academic learning. **We seek to allow learners the opportunity to be themselves, have a choice in their educational process, and learn the skills of self-control, respect, and self-management.**

Social learning is as important to student success as academic learning. The highest levels of cognitive growth occur through exploration and discovery as well as social interactions with peers. Our teachers are not just instructors or presenters of knowledge, but guides and partners on the student's journey to acquire and apply knowledge.

We are in the process of implementing the Responsive Classroom (K-4) and Developmental Designs (5-8) models in our classrooms.



READING INSTRUCTION

Many of our students have advanced vocabulary and reading abilities. Students are assessed and placed into leveled reading groups in each classroom. **“Those gifted in reading have a unique ability to perceive relationships, solve problems, demonstrate observational skills, and to grasp abstract ideas quickly”** (WITTY, 1971).

Even though many of our Kindergarten students begin their formal education already reading (spontaneous readers), there are many reading skills that must be learned. **We blend a Phonics and Whole Language approach to assure each child’s learning style is addressed.** In grades K-4, every class has a time set aside each day for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) that we call DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time.

“Gifted readers are so advanced that they have little to gain from the reading materials and activities normally given to others of their age and grade. They require far less drill and practice than their peers (WITTY, 1985). Gifted readers have special needs just as other exceptional learners do. The greater the ability in reading, the greater the need for a special program commensurate with that ability (HOSKISSON & TOMPKINS, 1987; WALLEN, 1974). Gifted readers benefit from special programs and may be penalized if not provided with special attention to help achieve full potential (TUTTLE, 1987). In short, they need the same diagnostically based instruction that should be afforded to all learners (BOND & BOND, 1983; CARR, 1984; RUPLEY, 1984).”

“Researchers, (BARTELO & CORNETTE, 1982; BAGAJ, 1968; CORNETTE & BARTELO, 1982; AND SAKIEY, 1980) have presented some general guidelines for reading instruction for gifted students:

- Instruction in basic word attitude skills should be kept to a minimum

- Challenging materials should be made available, especially to young gifted readers
- Instruction should facilitate critical and creative reading
- Use of analogies should be studied, especially in classes for older gifted students
- Inductive, rather than deductive instruction should be provided
- Flexibility in assignments should be provided
- Unnecessary repetition in instructions should be eliminated
- Students’ divergent and diversified interests should be nurtured

Independent projects such as sociograms, time machine models, newscasts, games based on story themes and simulation role-playing should be encouraged”.

MPA uses a variety of these strategies in our classrooms and strives to reach the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy during instruction.

We agree with Dr. David Levande when he says, “To grow intellectually, gifted students need challenging books. They need fiction with complex plots and carefully developed characters, and informational books that explore topics in depth. They should read books and periodicals that spark their imaginations, broaden their horizons, and cause them to wonder and question.”

“Gifted Readers and Reading Instruction”, Dr. David Levande, Associate Professor of Education, Southern Connecticut State University.

HOMEWORK

MPA’s approach to homework assures that the work is brief, relevant to the lesson, and extends learning. We address 3 main areas – **A) parent**

partnerships, B) appropriate time and level, and C) feedback.

A) Parent Partnerships - Our faculty members ask that parents partner with them in order to facilitate homework completion, but that they do not assist with homework content. It is important for faculty members to be aware if there are concepts that students have not grasped. Parents who assist their child(ren) with teaching the content also risk their child(ren) becoming dependent on the one-on-one time provided – **the student may learn that they don't need to pay attention in class because their parent will just explain it to them at home later.** As much as we all want every child to succeed, it is critical that student work is completed autonomously.

The parent role is to set a time and environment conducive to learning and guide their child(ren) in focusing appropriately on that time. **Provide resources if necessary, but refrain from too much instruction.**

B) Appropriateness - The amount of time students will spend on homework will gradually increase as they progress in grade levels. Homework amounts will also vary based on other projects and assignments. Our youngest students benefit from learning these important study habits at an early age.

Homework is assigned at an appropriate instructional level that matches the student's skills and abilities and has a clear purpose. **Homework is not busy work, but intended to reinforce learning, extend a lesson, or prepare for a future assignment or exam.** This may mean that students in the same class have different homework assignments depending on their needs.

C) Feedback - Students receive feedback on their homework when appropriate, which helps the child experience the results of their efforts and provides a forum for learning from mistakes, persevering and learning from the ideas and experiences of others.

GRADING PRACTICES

MPA's grading practices focus on learning and providing meaningful feedback to students and their parents. The practice considers the relevance and use of both **summative** and **formative assessments**.

Summative assessments are given after completing the instruction and students are ready to show mastery of a topic. They normally gauge student knowledge at a particular point in time relative to the course content and occur after the instruction. Summative assessments are items such as chapter tests, final draft papers, projects, and performances. These assessments make up a significant majority of a student's achievement grade because they demonstrate mastery of unit goals and objectives as well as standards.

Formative assessments are a core part of the instruction process. They often provide the information a teacher needs to adjust teaching during the unit of instruction. The main intent is to provide feedback to both the student and teacher so that instruction can be adjusted. These may include items such as a pop quiz, teacher observations, drafts of a paper, and notebook checks.

Non-academic items are communicated separately from the student's academic achievement. These include items such as attendance, punctuality, attitude, class participation, and homework (if it is based solely on completion). These items have a place in the evaluation of a student but are not a measure of the student's academic achievement.

Letter grades follow a standard 4.0 grading scale (see current grading scale for reference). Our youngest learners receive different indicators of achievement on their report cards that allow for an opportunity for more descriptive information on student progress.



ACADEMIC ACCELERATION

All children learn and experience success given time and opportunity, but the degree to which academic content standards are met and the time it takes to reach these standards will vary from student to student. **All students, including advanced learners, should be challenged and supported to reach their full potential.** For many advanced learners, this can best be achieved by affording them access to curricula, learning environments, and instructional interventions more commonly provided to older peers.

Menlo Park Academy recognizes that gifted students can benefit from acceleration options, either whole grade or by subject. Because our core program is already advanced, these needs are not seen as often as may otherwise be necessary in a school that provides a program with a more traditional pace and curriculum. **Students begin at a base that is one grade level above the standard material in both math and language arts.**

Our school provides opportunities for whole grade acceleration for students who will learn best by being placed in another grade. For subject acceleration, students are assessed each year in both math and reading and may be recommended for acceleration in one or both of these subjects.

The Menlo Park Academy acceleration policy includes identifying students who could benefit from:

- Early admission to kindergarten
- Being accelerated in one or more individual subject areas
- Being promoted to a higher grade level than their same-age peers

OHIO'S CREDIT FLEX PLAN*

Ohio's "Credit Flex" plan shifts focus from **evaluating student learning based on "seat time" to assessing students' demonstrated academic and skill level or performance.** The plan does not eliminate Carnegie units or "seat time" requirements altogether. Rather, it retains seat time as one option and expands the number of options for earning credit by adding demonstration of subject area competency and structures that support it irrespective of any time requirements.

Credit Flex...

- Offers learning opportunities not found in the one-size-fits-all factory process model.
- Focuses on performance, not counting seats and hours.
- Acknowledges and addresses students' differing learning styles, paces and interests.
- Offers students opportunities to demonstrate creativity, explore academic and career interests, and practice critical thinking.
- Recognizes that measures of engagement and ownership are as important for achievement as measures of attendance and access.

These options fit perfectly within Menlo Park Academy's educational model. We have a board-approved credit flexibility policy, and the School Director creates a Credit Flex Course Guide each school year.

*Taken from "New Emphasis on Learning - Ohio's Credit Flexibility Plan Shifts the Focus from "Seat Time" to Performance". To read the full article, and other materials generated by the Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team, visit Ohio Department of Education's website.

The Edison Club



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MENLO PARK ACADEMY OFFERS A BEFORE- AND AFTER-CARE PROGRAM CALLED THE EDISON CLUB.

It is designed to be an on-site, affordable option for those families needing childcare on a regular basis. Our goal for parents is to provide an affordable, dependable and caring environment for their children. Our goal for students is to create a fun, safe place to work and play with their peers.

The Edison Club meets from 7:00-8:15 a.m. and from 3:15-6:00 p.m., with 3 designated pickup times at 4:30, 5:30 and 6:00 p.m.

It is staffed by a trained Menlo Park staff member and run by an experienced director with her Masters in Education. **We meet the needs of working parents with both consistent and flexible schedules.**

The morning club includes quiet activities and

games. **The afternoon club** includes snack time (*you provide the snack*), homework time and other activities such as crafts, recreational activities, special events, field trips, computer time, movies, community service projects and more.

The children benefit from playing with friends of all ages, and parents are at ease knowing that their child(ren) can stay in the same caring place before and after school.

Cost is just \$4.00 per hour per child and includes materials. There is a 10% discount for two or more children, and a one-time \$25 registration fee per family. For those planning to use the club only on certain days, you must provide notification each Sunday evening by 6:00 p.m. Monthly statements will be provided to all families for tax purposes.

If you would like to enroll your child/children, you must contact **Katie Gerba** at EdisonClub@MenloParkAcademy.com or **(440) 871-5153**, and complete the Registration Form, before your child can attend Edison Club.



THE EDISON CLUB

Our goal for parents is to provide an affordable, dependable and caring environment for their children. **Our goal for students** is to create a fun, safe place to work and play with their peers.



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Menlo Park Academy is Ohio's only kindergarten through 8th Grade community school exclusively serving the needs for gifted learners. Drawing from over 40 school districts, MPA provides gifted programming all day, every day.

AS A SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES, MENLO PARK ACADEMY IS OFFERING ADMISSIONS TESTING AT NO CHARGE*.

This testing will take place at Menlo Park Academy and will be administered by qualified and trained educator.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Students ages 5 and up are welcome to participate in the testing. Parents with an early admission candidate, please indicate below.
- Students and families should expect the process to take around 3 hours from start to finish.
- Test results will not be immediately available.
- Per the state criteria in our charter, all students with an I.Q. assessment of superior cognitive will qualify for admittance.
- Immediate enrollment is dependent upon class availability.
- Per the state criteria, and outlined in our charter, all students with an identification in Superior Cognitive Ability will qualify for admittance.

If you have any questions or to schedule testing for your child, please call the MPA school office at **(440) 925-6365** and select the Admissions Department or send an email message to admissions@menloparkacademy.com. We look forward to meeting your student and family.

*There will be a \$50 charge if a student qualifies for admission and chooses not to enroll or be placed on the wait list. This minimal charge covers the cost of test materials and staff time.