

OUTLINE

“Academics at Living Wisdom School”

**A Talk for Parents by
LWS Director Helen Purcell**

Our version of academic rigor is different from public schools because it:

- Values depth, exploration, and making meaning and absorbing it.
- Doesn't rely on standardized testing to measure learning.

Our version of academic rigor is different from other private schools because:

- Instead of emphasizing grades and “studying to the test,” we develop students' intrinsic motivation for learning. As a result, we don't give grades, calculate grade point averages, or separate children into “gifted” and “standard” categories. We are concerned with helping the individual child, not sorting, categorizing, and standardizing the children in groups.
- We don't coerce children to learn. Instead, we invite them to construct meaning by in-depth study that reveals connections between fields; e.g., between history, math, and language arts.
- We offer support whenever it's needed. We don't believe children should be “thrown into the deep end” and judged on whether they sink or swim.
- We give homework when it's meaningful, and we respect the children's need for play.
- We do not confuse “more” with “better.” Our education emphasizes *quality* over quantity.

Our version of academic rigor is infused with the *Education for Life* philosophy. A core belief of EFL is that the goal of all education is maturity, defined as the ability to relate to ever-expanding realities.

Our students are held accountable for doing their individual best in:

- Academics
- Attitude
- Moods
- Behavior
- Interactions with others

We help children develop will power, self-control, kindness, generosity of heart, and self-discipline.

And...

- We make learning human. We base instruction on interest, enthusiasm, and relevance.
- We take the children out of the classroom on frequent learning adventures.
- We integrate the curriculum across disciplines in accordance with research that shows a cross-disciplinary curriculum which emphasizes connections grows the child's brain circuitry. The annual LWS Theater Magic event is a paramount example of our intensive, cross-subject curriculum (but not the only one).
- Because our classes are small, we are able to offer each child individual instruction in all grades.
- We accommodate individual needs whenever it is in the best interests of the child.
- We replace standardized testing with Authentic Assessment. Although we do regularly test the students in their academic subjects, Authentic Assessment enables us to evaluate each student's abilities and achievements in meaningful ways, frequently.

Why Authentic Assessment Produces Deeper, Longer-Lasting Learning than Standardized Testing:

- It involves students in tests that are meaningful, and that reflect actual learning – not memorization of quickly forgotten facts.

- Authentic Assessment looks and feels like learning activities, not traditional “guess-what-I’m-thinking-and-spit-it-back” tests.
- Authentic Assessment requires high-order thinking skills and gives children the ability to assimilate and organize a broad range of subject knowledge.
- Authentic Assessment requires metacognition – the ability to examine one’s own thought processes. For evidence, see the annual [LWS Literary Magazine](#).
- With Authentic Assessment, the students know in advance the standards by which their work will be judged.
- The assessments include oral interviews, group problem-solving, group sharing, individual presentations, and the creation of a folder of exemplary work.
- Authentic Assessment culminates with a portfolio of the student’s outstanding work, plus a Science Fair, participation in national math contests, national analogy problem-solving contests, publication of the LWS Literary Magazine, participation in the annual all-school Theater Magic event, the All-School Art Exhibit, the Fall and Winter Concerts, Student Qualities and Graduation Ceremony, in-class presentations, and research papers, etc.

What evidence can we offer that engaging students’ enthusiasm is the best way to prepare them for success in later years, in school and life?

- They typically score above the 90th percentile on high-school entrance exams.
- LWS students have been accepted by the SF Bay Area’s best private high schools.
- They perform well in high school.
- They perform well in college.
- LWS children score well on the annual American Mathematics Competitions, sponsored by the Mathematical Association of America, and in the Math Olympiads.

- LWS students consistently score above the 90th percentile on the annual Word Masters Challenge, which requires solving difficult analogy problems.
- Children who are unable to perform well in academics for special reasons leave us with their self-worth intact, because LWS sincerely recognizes and celebrates their unique gifts. After leaving LWS, they tend to flourish in high school.