



# Manzanita Charter School

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*Founded 2000  
California Distinguished School 2005  
California Certified Charter School 2007  
2009 API score 723*

## Our Mission

*Through active family involvement in self-governed public education Manzanita Charter School creates a safe, challenging, nurturing, and diverse educational community for our children.*

*Our goal is to prepare students academically and socially to be well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to themselves, their families, the community and our world.*

## Our Philosophy

We foster an environment of respect, caring and a commitment to academic and creative excellence. We firmly believe in creating a secure environment for our students, based upon self-esteem, self-respect and upon concern and respect for others. In such an environment students are able to explore without fear of making mistakes; they thrive, enabled to take risks involved in creative and critical thinking processes. At a time when many children are coping with feelings of being different or left out, we work as a community on personal, interpersonal, and social problems and situations.

Adolescence is a critical time of academic growth and transition that forms the basis for a successful high school and post-secondary experience. We provide our students with critical thinking skills as well as an in-depth knowledge of a meaningful core academic curriculum that meets or exceeds the state outcome guidelines for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. We also seek to provide our students with the personal and social skills necessary for cooperative work, and the social commitment and responsibility required in becoming contributing members of a diverse and democratic society. Finally, we are dedicated to providing each student with an emotional and psychologically secure environment that fosters his or her curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. We recognize that students learn in different ways and that an effective academic program must recognize and respond to these differences.



## General Information

Manzanita Charter School is a charter school in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. It is a family cooperative designed to educate middle school students whose parents value participation in their children's learning. We opened our doors in the fall of 2000 with a class of 6th and 7th graders. We now serve 150 students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades with a maximum of 25 students per class.

### **What is a Charter School?**

A charter school is a public school that is self-governing and is organized by parents, teachers and other community members who prefer to provide alternatives to the current public school programs and practices. The California Department of Education encourages charter school development as a means of supporting progressive educational approaches. Each charter school is bound by a charter document, written by its developers and approved by a local school board. Charter schools receive the same amount of money per student from the State of California that other schools in the local school district receive and do not charge tuition.

### **What Makes Manzanita Charter School Unique?**

Manzanita is a small middle school with a strong commitment to excellence in academics and the arts taught within a secure and nurturing community. We also focus on the developmental and social needs of adolescents. Manzanita is a family cooperative.

### **What is a Family Cooperative?**

A family cooperative is based on the idea that parents and guardians play a key role in the education of their children. Parents and teachers work together to create and maintain the school and are directly responsible for its operation. The children benefit because of parental / family support, frequent contact with other adult role models, greater opportunities for feedback, more potential help in the classroom, and an increased opportunity for all students' learning styles to be addressed. Students feel nurtured and part of a healthy community. Because parents do the maintenance and janitorial work, field trip driving and much of the administrative work, the school can use money traditionally spent on these expenses to enhance classroom resources. Parents bring a wide array of expertise to each classroom, allowing for opportunities to share skills and further enhance the academic program.

Manzanita Charter is looking for students whose families see themselves as active and important participants in their children's learning. Member families must agree to complete 8 hours of participation a month, two cleaning shifts a year, and attend all ten monthly membership meetings.

### **Where is the school located?**

The school, located at 1615 Carlson Blvd in the Richmond Annex, includes an auditorium, a gardening space, and an enclosed outdoor yard. It is close to local parks and the El Cerrito library.

## Curriculum

At Manzanita Charter School, we are implementing a challenging, standards-based curriculum that provides students with opportunities to make connections to their community and their world. The curriculum at Manzanita Charter School is structured to meet or exceed the State of California Content Standards for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In support of their standards-based curriculum, Manzanita textbooks are chosen from the state-adopted list of texts. Close collaboration among staff members supports teaching across the curriculum enabling students to make connections across course content areas. Teachers encourage students to develop critical thinking, interpersonal, and organizational skills. Key elements of Manzanita's curriculum include:

- *It is results-oriented.* What students learn is what matters most, and it is the foremost responsibility of the school to assist every student to achieve academically.

- *Its standards are high.* We believe in the potential of every student and have high expectations for the achievement of all.
- *It teaches to all students.* In all of our classes, teachers design and differentiate lessons for students at all levels of proficiency. Teachers also make use of Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) to ensure that all students have access to the school's challenging curriculum.
- *It produces self-reliant learners.* Our goal is to graduate students who are well rounded, inquisitive, thoughtful, concerned for others, devoted to and knowledgeable about democratic principles, and intellectually autonomous. We graduate students who are articulate, ethical, healthy, and prepared for further learning.

Following is an overview of the curriculum in each of the core academic content areas. Manzanita staff will examine the effectiveness of the selected curricula on an ongoing basis and make changes as it deems appropriate to best meet the needs of its students.

### **English Language Arts**

The overall goals of the Language Arts program are to help students formulate and express their ideas effectively, and appreciate literature for its own sake. Our curriculum involves thematic learning to compliment other subject areas. Themes are based on the California Language Arts Standards, as well as the concerns and interests of students. Students learn strategies that help them both enjoy different types of reading and encourage greater comprehension. At each grade level, many forms of literature including short stories, novels, plays, poetry, and essays are studied and discussed. Cooperative learning is also encouraged.

Across the school, there is a focus on vocabulary and grammar to support the students' understanding of the foundation of the English language. Students write essays, focusing on topics linked to the literature they are reading, topics relevant to them, and topics related to other content areas. Writing is encouraged through journal entries, expository and creative writings, as well as research projects. A Writer's Workshop approach is often used allowing for independence and choice with clear expectations and requirements. Through this workshop process, students learn proofreading, revising, and editing skills that will allow them to publish their final work. Over time, students become more proficient with style, writing mechanics, and further develop their organizational skills.

### **Mathematics**

Mathematics classes are oriented toward the mastery of foundation skills as well as mastering California standards. Instruction techniques include direct instruction, guided practice, independent practice, and multiple ways of assessing student learning. All classes are note-based, project-based, have nightly homework practice, and include regular quizzes and tests. The standards-based curriculum includes a focus on the development of higher order thinking skills. In sixth grade, students focus on computational concepts including fractions, percentages, and decimals while building a deeper understanding of place value and numerical relationships. The curriculum includes exercises and activities that relate these concepts to real life situations. Seventh grade mathematics is an applications-based curriculum linked to the state mathematics standards where students review computation skills including decimal operation, fraction operations, integers, exponents, and pre-algebra while learning about statistics, probability, and geometry. In eighth grade, students learn to manipulate algebraic expressions; learn to solve problems with inequalities, absolute value, quadratics, and rational expressions. They are able to graph lines and curves and extrapolate the equation of a line from two data points.

In order to provide additional support to 7th and 8th grade students, the school implements an independent math period to address skill gaps and provide homework support. The goal of the additional period is to ensure that students are well prepared for high school mathematics.

### **History/Social Studies**

The overall goal of the history/social studies curriculum is to help the students understand social systems and their own roles in society by emphasizing the development of an understanding of

history rather than memorizing facts. History Workshops and thematic units are used as appropriate. At all grades, the curriculum units are mapped to the appropriate content standards and students are assessed based on their mastery of the standards.

#### *Sixth Grade: Ancient Civilizations*

In sixth grade history, students begin to appreciate the significance of geography in history. Students gain an appreciation for the everyday life of ancient peoples, their relationships to the natural world, as well as the developing political, economic, and social structures of their societies. Students learn about the tools and technology that were used, the literature, architecture, and art that were developed in the ancient world.

#### *Seventh Grade: Medieval and Early Modern Times*

Students in seventh grade study the history and geography of great civilizations that were developing concurrently through the world during medieval and early modern times (500-1789 A.D.). Social, cultural, and technological changes that occurred in Europe, Africa, and Asia are the content area of focus. Students are encouraged to explore and recognize that significant contributions to our modern world have come from various societies.

#### *Eighth Grade: United States History*

Students in eighth grade study the ideas, issues, and events from the founding of the colonies, through the Revolutionary War, the framing of the Constitution, up to World War I. The class traces the development of American politics, society, culture, and economy and students learn how these elements created regional differences. Students are able to see connections between the rise of industrialization and their lives. Current events and social issues are discussed throughout the year. The course continuously examines the ideal of democracy through the lens of each historical era.

### **Science**

The overall goal of our science program is to prepare scientifically literate students who will have the ability to understand the rapidly changing world they will face as adults and the confidence and skills to act positively and influentially in it. The use of the Scientific Method is emphasized. The Science program provides multiple hands-on learning experiences. Students become involved in the processes of scientific inquiry and gain knowledge of concepts fundamental to modern scientific theory. It is emphasized that science is a process of exploration and revision of existing knowledge. We encourage discussion about the relationships among science, technology and society, and allow students to form their own understanding of the benefits and challenges inherent in scientific discovery. Investigation and experimentation are part of the California standards for all grade levels. Following California content standards for Science, the area of focus for sixth grade is Earth Science, for seventh grade is Life Science and the eighth grade focus is Physical Science. Curriculum at each grade level is linked to the California Science content standards.

### **Visual Arts**

At Manzanita, we view the Arts as essential to help our students express and communicate their ideas and feelings. Our goals are to expose students to a wide variety of arts, and encourage an understanding of the communicative nature of the arts. The visual arts curriculum is driven by the four areas of the Visual Arts Standards: Artistic Perception; Creative Expression; Historical and Cultural Context; Aesthetic Valuing; and Connective Relationships and Applications. The intent is to encourage growth in each student's perceptions and skills, as well as confidence in their abilities. The visual arts curriculum is integrated into other areas of the school's curriculum including links to the Social Studies/History curriculum.

### **Technology**

Manzanita is committed to providing an environment in which technology is integrated throughout the curriculum in order to enhance student productivity, efficiency, creative expression, communication, and access to information. We seek to prepare students to effectively use current and future technologies both inside and outside of the classroom.

Students are challenged to:

- Understand and demonstrate ethical behavior in use and care of technology.
- Demonstrate skill in using a variety of technologies
- Demonstrate the ability to choose appropriate technology tools to accomplish tasks.
- Recognize and evaluate the impact technology has on society.

Student technology projects include word processing assignments and reports, working with spreadsheets, and developing PowerPoint presentations. Students are encouraged to use technology regularly to communicate, collaborate, research, locate, evaluate, collect data, write, analyze, report, and learn. Our goal is to make technology a tool that facilitates students reaching their objectives, while enhancing the skills they will need to function in the 21st century.