

Where Classrooms Have No Ceilings: Manzanita School Pioneers College Preparatory Education Through an Outdoor Curriculum

WASC-Accredited K–12 Independent School in Topanga Canyon Blends Rigorous Academics with Experiential Learning, Land Stewardship, and the Arts on a 21-Acre Mountain Campus



Topanga, California Apr 5, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - At a time when families across Southern California are searching for [college preparatory schools with outdoor curriculum](#) that go beyond conventional classroom walls, **Manzanita School** stands as a compelling answer. Founded in 2013 and nestled on a 21-acre campus in the Santa Monica Mountains just outside Los Angeles, this WASC-accredited K–12 independent school has built an educational model unlike any other—one that sends students into wild chaparral two days a week and into rigorous academic sessions for three, producing graduates who earn an average college GPA of 3.82.

Central to the **Manzanita** experience is its signature weekly structure of “Owl Days” and “Hawk Days.” Three days each week are devoted to traditional classroom instruction in literacy, numeracy, and an interdisciplinary humanities-science block called “Unit of Study,” where students may explore topics

ranging from atmospheric chemistry and plant botany to human prehistory and environmental ethics. The remaining two days take learning outdoors, as students set off into the protected lands surrounding campus to track animals with naturalists, study the fossil record in the mountains, build shelters, identify native plants, and practice bird language interpretation. This deliberate balance positions **Manzanita** among the most distinctive experiential learning private schools in the region, offering children an education rooted in both academic rigor and the living world.

The school's commitment to [arts-integrated education in Los Angeles](#) is woven throughout daily campus life. Every school day concludes with specialist activities that include ceramics, music, aerial arts, debate, and other creative disciplines. The arts program is designed to be both educationally sound and experientially dynamic, giving students avenues for self-expression that reinforce and deepen their academic studies. From crafting pottery inspired by geological formations to composing music reflecting ecological themes, students at **Manzanita** experience the arts not as an elective afterthought but as a vital thread connecting every dimension of their learning.

Beyond the classroom and the trail, **Manzanita** students develop resilience and collective responsibility through the school's land stewardship and permaculture farming programs. Working in cross-grade-level teams guided by adult mentors and high school leaders, students engage in regenerative agriculture on a working organic farm known as the Living Classroom. They learn to vision, design, budget, and execute real-world projects from concept to completion—skills that translate directly into college readiness and life beyond school. The campus meal program even incorporates produce grown by students, closing the loop between learning and nourishment.

Manzanita further extends its experiential model through mandatory expeditionary learning trips that grow in scope from campus overnights in third grade to multi-day wilderness and cultural immersion journeys for high schoolers, including visits to Joshua Tree National Park, the Sierra Nevada backcountry, and Indigenous communities in the American Southwest. These expeditions integrate directly with core humanities and science curriculum, ensuring every adventure carries academic weight. Graduating seniors have been accepted into the UC and CSU systems as well as elite private liberal arts colleges and universities nationwide.

Manzanita School's program is divided into four developmentally appropriate cohorts—Seeds (K–2), Roots (3–5), Trunk (6–8), and Branches (9–12)—with small class sizes and highly qualified teachers who receive extensive training. Families interested in exploring this one-of-a-kind model can learn more and begin the admissions inquiry process at manzanitaschool.org/3-12curriculum.

About Manzanita School

Manzanita School is a WASC-accredited K–12 independent college preparatory school located in Topanga Canyon, in the Santa Monica Mountains just outside Los Angeles, California. Founded in 2013, the school blends rigorous academics, land stewardship, experiential learning, and arts-integrated education on its 21-acre campus. Manzanita's innovative indoor-outdoor curriculum draws on leading-edge pedagogical theory to nurture the whole child—academically, socially, and ecologically. For more information, visit manzanitaschool.org.



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