



San Lorenzo Valley Nature Academy

The Integrated Approach



The Nature Academy serves students interested in a rigorous, classroom-based program, with high academic expectations. The program is brain-compatible and emphasizes character-based education at this critical developmental stage where ethics are a deep concern. The Nature Academy is distinctive because of its underlying philosophy- and successful practice - of an integrated approach to learning.

This approach has at least four crucial components:

First, although traditional-classroom-based learning is our focus, education at the Nature Academy is augmented by carefully planned and integrated study trips. Many trips focus on local watersheds, while others can range further afield to destinations like the Exploratorium, the Tech Museum, and even the Boardwalk (for math and physics instruction). In addition to study trips, team building excursions (e.g. Ropes Courses, Pacific Edge, etc.) further extend the Nature Academy commitment to making learning an integral part of daily living.



Second, personal growth and development at the Nature Academy is treated as a thoroughly integrated part of the learning experience. The Nature Academy emphasizes Lifelong Guidelines (Truthfulness, Trustworthiness, Active Listening, No Put-Downs, and Personal Best) and Lifeskills (Organization, Flexibility, Problem Solving, Perseverance, Responsibility, Effort, Integrity, Common Sense, Cooperation, Patience, Sense of Humor, Caring, Curiosity, Courage, Friendship, Initiative, Pride, Joie de Vivre and Resourcefulness). As part of this process, the Nature Academy builds a supportive environment where students feel safe and willing to share and to face new challenges.

Third, the Nature Academy places unique demands upon its teachers and parents as well as its students. The integrated approach is successful because the Nature Academy core teachers have accumulated experience and expertise that are essential for such an ambitious agenda to be realized. In addition, extensive support from parent volunteers allows the teachers to focus their attention where it is most productive, while parents target their energy and expertise on complementary activities such as providing: in-and out-of classroom support, leading hikes, teaching special electives.

Last, Nature Academy students, staff, and parents constitute a tightly knit community in which everyone has a mutual investment and a shared commitment. Again, parents are a critical component in supporting their children through the challenges of becoming an educated person.

Students and Curriculum, The Nature Academy is geared toward any academically-minded, self-motivated student who relishes a challenging curriculum. Because of the time spent in the field, students must expect a considerable amount of homework, especially as they enter the higher grades.

The Nature Academy curriculum is based on the assumption that our natural world dictates our cultural world. The focus of attention is on recognizing and articulating links between these two worlds. Geographic awareness is stressed as well.

The Nature Academy places a strong emphasis on both science and writing, not merely as topics of instruction but as crucial underlying themes and skills, woven throughout the curriculum. Students must read independently and write frequently, in a variety of genre and for a wide range of audiences. Students often read in excess of 200 pages weekly outside of classroom texts. Math instruction at the Na-



ture Academy is generally accelerated.. It is not uncommon for 8th graders to take 10th grade math, and all graduating 8th graders are encouraged to at least demonstrate proficiency in Algebra, enabling them to take geometry as they enter high school.

The Nature Academy also offers a highly diverse elective program, drawing heavily on parent volunteers. Electives have included electric car engineering, jewelry casting, astronomy, watercolor painting, sound and music engineering, cake decorating, fly-tying, quilting, and numerous other topics. In addition, Nature Academy students participate in a regular Physical Education program as well as frequent hikes and a wide range of other outdoor activities.

Summary, The focus of the Nature Academy is not so much on "nature" itself as on learning through experiences with our immediate surroundings, and on the role of the natural world in our lives. The underlying premise of the Nature Academy is that humans are inherently highly motivated, competent, uncompromising learners.

This inherent potential is realized when appropriately prepared students are placed in an environment that integrates learning with real life in a meaningful community of fellow students and supportive adults.





SAN LORENZO VALLEY NATURE ACADEMY

Since 1998

Upcoming Important Dates for 2012!!

Meet the Teachers
SLVMS Open House, May 24th, 6pm

March 19
Applications available @ SLV Charter Office (or online)

Information Night, Room 22 MS campus
6:00-7:00pm

April 13
Applications MUST be @ SLV Charter Office by 2pm

April 19
Lottery @ Charter Office 3:30pm

Established in 1998, the Nature Academy provides a unique educational experience with an outstanding record of student accomplishment. Some students have learning styles and/or interests that are well matched to the Nature Academy approach; others do not. This brochure aims to help prospective students and their parents assess the potential benefits of the Nature Academy for themselves. View us on line:

<http://www.na.slvusd.org/>
831-336-8527 (Charter Office)
831-335-5762

A School within a School...

The Nature Academy is a charter school for 6th, 7th and 8th grade students co-located on the San Lorenzo Valley Middle School campus. Nature Academy students have access to many of the same opportunities as Middle School students: they share the same breaks and lunch periods, and they can participate in the same after-school sports programs, dances, plays and other extracurricular activities.

During school hours, Nature Academy students and teachers work together as an independent, cohesive unit to pursue state academic standards through an integrated curriculum with explicit links between subject areas. The Nature Academy student-to-teacher ratio is 26:1. Taught by veteran SLV teacher John Kiersted, 6th grade operates as a self-contained classroom. Led by Nature Academy founding teachers Melissa Stockton and Carter Milhous, 7th and 8th grade students together progress through a two-year integrated program. Sixth grade students join 7th and 8th grade students for some special occasions and excursions.

The Nature Academy relies heavily on parent volunteers to provide the wide range of support and enrichment necessary for a successful program.

