think, create, innovate!
COLORADO ACADEMY’S ADMISSION MAGAZINE

COLORADO ACADEMY
I am asked that question a lot.

This is a place that pulls you in, that engages you, excites you, and endears you. Every day on our campus, you can see our commitment to our mission to educate, nurture, and challenge the whole child. We offer an innovative and rigorous curriculum rooted in the liberal arts and sciences.

We do it with innovation and creativity and by encouraging students to think outside the box. We do it with an incredible staff of dedicated teachers who spark students’ intellectual curiosity. We want students to ask “why?” and also to have the freedom and courage to ask, “why not?”

We are a school that understands that children’s formative years are profoundly important to who they become; we push students to grow as artists and athletes. We encourage their development through inclusivity and through service to others, and we ask them to take a hard look at their strength of character…to test and discover their own mettle.

One student described CA as “a small school made up of big people”—people with big hearts, enormous ability, and unbridled promise.

Please get to know us and see for yourself what makes this school an extraordinary learning community.

Michael G. Davis, PhD
Head of School, Colorado Academy
Creating curious, kind, courageous, and adventurous learners and leaders.

1. **We foster courage:** exploring new challenges in academics, athletics, the arts, and experiential learning.
2. **We nurture curiosity:** the foundation of lifelong, creative discovery.
3. **We choose kindness:** engaging graciously in an inclusive, joyful community.
4. **We encourage understanding:** listening to others and acting ethically, with integrity and respect.
5. **We embrace inclusivity:** working through education to create empathy and compassion.
6. **We promote habits of health:** both physically and mentally, strengthening resilience and confidence.
7. **We believe in a dynamic response:** to the needs of an ever-changing world.
8. **We inspire thoughtful individuals:** who are ready to transform the future.

[ca by the numbers](#)

**Founded:** 1906
**Head of School:** Dr. Michael G. Davis

**Accreditation**
- Association of Colorado Independent Schools
- Pre-Kindergarten and Employee Child Care Centers licensed by the Colorado Department of Human Services
- Member in good standing: National Association of Independent Schools
- Recognized by the Colorado Department of Education, the College Entrance Examination Board, the Colorado High School Activities Association, the Educational Records Bureau, the Association for College Counselors in Independent Schools (Founding School), and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, complying with the NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice.

**Grade Levels and Enrollment**

- **Lower School**
  - Pre-K through Grade 5: 360 students
- **Middle School**
  - Grade 6 through Grade 8: 232 students
- **Upper School**
  - Grade 9 through Grade 12: 415 students

**Total:** 1,007 students

**Tuition**

$25,000-$30,840

Upholding the school’s belief that ability to pay tuition does not determine access to a CA education, financial aid is available to admitted students based on a family’s financial need. 19% of current student population is supported by a $3.9 million financial aid budget.

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Why We Chose Private Education

The Guo Family

Vicky Chao was an educator in Taiwan before immigrating to the United States, so it’s no surprise that she considered choosing a school for her son, Yowei, as an extremely important decision. When Yowei was very young, she began researching schools to find one that would be the best fit for him. “It takes a long time to do your due diligence,” she says. “I wanted a school where he would be challenged in a positive, encouraging environment.

“Our child’s core values must come from us,” adds her husband, Wei Guo. “But his peers and school will also influence him, so we wanted a school that would share our values, principles, and vision. We took this decision seriously.”

After years of considering their options, Vicky and Wei decided to enroll Yowei in Pre-Kindergarten at CA in 2019. “It’s not very often that your impression of something gets better and more positive with each experience,” Wei says. “Every time we visited CA, we liked it more and more.”

Vicky brought Yowei to multiple “Explore CA” events, including classes in music, PE, technology, and visits to the library. “The books in the library talk about being kind,” says Vicky. “The teachers are engaged and patient, the classrooms are filled with natural light, and the children in the computer lab are coding! CA is amazing and will open Yowei’s eyes at a young age.”

Wei was impressed by CA’s emphasis on the “whole child”—a focus not just on the brain but also on the heart of a child.

“We want to expose him to as much as possible—sports, arts, academics—so he can find his passion in life,” Wei says. “I don’t want to limit his focus or force him to specialize, because what if I make a wrong choice for him?”

Vicky and Wei have family overseas and hope their son will grow up to be a “global citizen.” They attended “Taste of CA,” an event which celebrates diversity within the school community and loved that CA showcases many different cultures—especially international food. “The world is not just limited to cheeseburgers, chicken nuggets, and fried rice,” says Vicky. “CA shares the value of diversity with us.”

“It’s important to us that our son learns tolerance and acceptance,” says Wei. “At CA, he will meet people from different cultural backgrounds, and he will understand that all cultures have good people.”

Vicky and Wei took their school research one step further and met CA alumni, teachers, parents of current students, and current students. Consistently, they were impressed by the people they got to know, finding them to be respectful, self-possessed, confident without being arrogant, and polite. They are thrilled that Yowei is now at CA, and they have joined the CA parent community. But they have not lost sight of their first and foremost goal. “We just want our child to be happy, healthy, kind—an all-around good person,” Wei says. “Those are our guiding values, and we see CA as a strategic partner in helping us raise our child.”

CA by the numbers

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Pupil/Teacher Ratio 9:1
Average class size: 15
Maximum class size: 20
Pre-Kindergarten: 36 students with six full-time teachers and access to specialists in art, dance, music, PE, technology, library, and science one to three times a week.
Kindergarten: Three classrooms of 16 students, each with a homeroom teacher and access to specialists in literacy and math, as well as art, music, PE, technology, library, science, and Spanish two to three times a week.
First Grade: Three classrooms of 15-17 students, each with a homeroom teacher and access to specialists in literacy and math, as well as art, music, PE, technology, library, science, and Spanish two to three times a week.
Second-Fifth Grades: Three classrooms of 16-20 students, each with a homeroom teacher and access to specialists in literacy and math, as well as art, music, PE/kinesiology, technology, library, science, and Spanish two to three times a week.
Middle School: Students cycle through daily classes of math, English, social studies, French or Spanish, art elective, science, and athletics. Important social-emotional learning also occurs during dedicated advisory time, class meetings, and MS Town Meetings. Class sizes range from 11 to 20, depending on the hour of the day, with average class size at 15.
Upper School: Students cycle through daily classes of math; English; social studies; French, Spanish, or Mandarin; art elective; science; and
On the first Monday morning after the last official day of school, Colorado Academy students might have considered starting their summer vacation by sleeping in. Instead, on June 8, 2020 students from Upper School and Middle School attended one-hour divisional Courageous Conversation meetings via Zoom to discuss their thoughts about systemic racism, Black Lives Matter protests around the world, and the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others.

Led by CA’s Director of Inclusivity Sarah Wright, the conversations also included many CA faculty and staff members. Wright directed the discussions with clear and careful questions: “How are you feeling? What do you need? What do you know about what is happening? How do you feel about the protests?” She also had students, faculty, and staff enter Zoom breakout rooms to talk in small groups.

Head of School Dr. Mike Davis thanked the students who attended. “This helps me in my work,” he said. “We are at an inflection point for the country. How do we work together to change a new reality? That is why we work in education—because we want to save the world.”

Thoughts and observations

Throughout their time together, people listened carefully, as group members shared their thoughts and observations.

“When you see so many people who care about the same cause around the world, you feel like you are not alone.”

“I feel disappointed about how the media is covering the protests. They are not all violent, and by portraying them that way, they miss the point. These are peaceful protests, and they are very powerful.”

“I’m grateful to have family discussions about these issues, because it gives me more information.”

“I am getting a better understanding of the role of police unions.”

“Hearing different people talk about these topics helps me better understand the issues.”

“This is also LGBTQ Pride Month. More than any other time, people seem to want to be involved. There are so many real-life issues coming up, issues that we have not had to navigate before this.”

“Latin communities are also included in this movement. Reforms will benefit them too.”

“Teenagers are often told we are overreacting. These protests show that it’s important that we are heard by the adults in our lives.”
In spring 2019, Colorado Academy parents, students, and teachers gathered for a morning of discussions about racism, unconscious bias, privilege, and power, with an emphasis on ways CA could better embrace diversity and inclusion.
Questions
The students also posed very tough questions for the group to consider.

“Systemic racism has been going on for decades. Why did it take phone video for action to finally happen?”

“Is protesting right? Should the police be defunded?”

“Many unjustified killings of minorities are not reported at the time they happen. Silence is complicity. Why is it the media do not report all these deaths?”

“Do people see something of themselves in Amy Cooper in Central Park? This was not a case of police brutality—it was something much deeper.”

“I’m concerned about protesting during COVID-19. Is there a way to make my voice heard safely?”

“This is about something bigger than police issues. What are our values as a society? Are they aligned with violence or non-violence?”

“These people’s deaths should not be just another statistic. Their lives mattered. What if this had been my mom, my dad, my cousin?”

Why is racism difficult to discuss?
In the second part of meetings with both the Upper School and Middle School, Wright asked her own tough question: “Why are race and racism so difficult to discuss?”

Here students referred back to discussions they had had in classes at CA. One student mentioned her class talking about the fear that people have that they might say something wrong. “That’s why people are unwilling to speak,” she said. “But in class we learned it’s okay to talk, and we also learned how to apologize if we are insensitive.”

Other CA students shared their experiences in classes where they had studied the history of slavery and discussed the presence of systemic racism in today’s society. It was clear that, in recent weeks, students had been reading on the topic of race. Individual students shared articles they liked.

“We are all learning together,” Wright said. “We should not hold back talking about these issues out of fear.”

One way that Wright is helping students learn together is by writing about her personal experiences and sharing her blogs with the CA community, including one titled “Two different Americas.”

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- CA’s new Ponzio Arts Center opened in January 2017, providing a creative home to students’ expression in the visual arts.
- The Upper School building opened in January 2013 and features expanded math and science labs, an Innovation Lab, and collaborative spaces for the humanities.
- A new Field House was completed in March 2018, followed by the opening of the full Athletic Center in February 2019.
- Upgrades to the current performing arts space are slated for 2020-2021.

The divisions share a dining hall, arts and athletic facilities, playing fields, two libraries, and leading-edge technology spaces.

Curriculum
Colorado Academy offers a college preparatory, liberal arts and sciences curriculum, emphasizing the basic disciplines in the liberal arts and sciences, while providing opportunity for advanced work in the areas of a student’s interest and special competence. The school emphasizes 21st century skills, including:
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Character development
- Cultural competence

Solid core teaching in courses including reading, writing, literature, the sciences, mathematics, global languages, and history/civics provides a strong educational foundation.

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Two Different Americas

By Sarah Wright, June 2020

I’m filled with deep sadness and grief as I’ve watched these months unfold. If explaining a pandemic to children at Colorado Academy weren’t hard enough, we find ourselves tackling compounding issues of racism, xenophobia, and the multiple stereotypes and prejudice that this period continues to bring to the forefront. There are many emotions to describe how I feel regarding the current events; as a Black woman raising a future Black woman, there’s a sinking feeling of familiar times.

In 2001, my Junior year of high school was interrupted by the death of Timothy Thomas on April 7, 2001. I watched my hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, as it was overtaken by riots that would last five long days, after an unarmed African American was shot by the police. I can recall how powerless I felt as a student entering the halls of high school after much tension, pain, and grief. I vividly remember my teachers, all of whom identified as white, not knowing what to say to a class of predominantly African American students. They tried to console us through words and examples of the wonderful encounters they had with our local police force.

It was at that moment that I realized that we can live in two different Americas. My teachers had not experienced being racially profiled, calling the police and experiencing a delay in response time, and having police respond with an assumption of guilt. My teachers weren’t grappling with the same internal conflicts I had. I was asking:

“Are all cops bad?”

“If my cousin is a police officer, what does that say about him?”

“My bus driver is also a police officer, and he is very nice. Is he just the exception?”

The adult lens

As an adult with lived experiences, I have a better understanding of the questions my teenage self asked. I know there are bigger systems in play, and that overcoming bias, prejudice, and stereotypes is an internal journey that some have not explored. Dismantling systemic forms of oppression against marginalized groups takes collective efforts. We must all work towards becoming anti-racist. This requires action on all our parts. As the Minneapolis Chief of Police said, “Being silent or not intervening is being complicit. If there was one solitary voice, that’s what I would have hoped for.”

There have been so many moments throughout this quarantine during which we all were looking for one solitary voice. Perhaps it was in those moments when someone threatened or used anti-Asian language against our Asian friends and family. Perhaps, it was in those moments when xenophobic remarks flew through the air. Conceivably, it was when the homelessness rates increased and the safety of youth who are part of the LGBTQ+ community was in jeopardy. Or it is now, when the list of unsafe activities dangerous to partake in has expanded to jogging and bird watching while Black.

If I could provide myself a younger self with ways to manage such heavy and historical moments, it would be through the lens of what she could do. I believe this is a pivotal moment for us to educate, grow, and move towards a future where history doesn’t repeat the cycle of oppression. It is our moment to envision and take steps towards a more equitable future—a future where people are not afraid that their identity makes it unsafe for them.
CA by the numbers

foundation. CA strives to develop the whole child through a rich, challenging, and balanced curriculum within a caring, forward-looking community.

Services
Ten CA bus routes serve the Denver metropolitan area; late bus routes run for students in after-school activities. Nutritious, well-balanced lunch is included in the price of tuition. Organic, vegetarian, nut-free, and gluten-free options are available. Before and after-school care for Lower and Middle School students is offered from 7:15 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. and from 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Raether Library and computer area are staffed from 7:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. on school days (until 4:00 p.m. on Fridays). A variety of summer programs is available, including day camp, sports camps, travel opportunities, academic enrichment camps, and service options.

Libraries
CA’s two libraries, staffed by teaching librarians, serve grades Pre-K–12, with an average of 38 volumes per student and web-based library catalog with school and home access to print, audio, video, and online resources.

Technology
The campus-wide network supports both Windows and Macintosh platforms. Students in Grades 5–12 have 1:1 iPads. Grades K–4 use classroom iPad sets. Lower School students learn from dedicated technology and robotics instructors in the iLab—a technology, computing, and coding

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Mustang Mentors

It’s 8:00 a.m., the time Fifth Grader Georgia Roberts refers to as “rush hour” in the Lower School drop-off circle, as cars swing into the loop one after another to unload children. Wearing a high-visibility vest that fits her like a dress, Georgia calls a friendly “Good morning!” as she opens yet another car door and helps a younger student adjust backpack straps and head off to class. “Have a great day,” she waves, bidding farewell to the driver behind the wheel. Like all Colorado Academy Fifth Graders, Georgia is a Mustang Mentor, and this job, she says, is her “destiny.”

“I call it my destiny, because it is something that I love to do that makes me happy,” she says. “Even when I was little and saw older students with responsibilities, I couldn’t wait to do those jobs and show leadership.”

‘Working for the mission of the school’
The Fifth Grade mentorship program has long been a voluntary option for students, but under the leadership of Lower School Principal Angie Crabtree, the program is now required and has a new structure, philosophy, and formal name: Mustang Mentors.

“I hope the Fifth Graders see themselves as a cohesive group, working for the mission of the school,” Crabtree says. “The jobs they are doing make a difference. With them we can do more, plan more, and experience more.”

All Fifth Graders now go through a formal application process for a leadership position. They can apply for one of five different roles:

■ **Morning Safety Patrol:** Students open car doors, greet families, help younger children, and in the process learn communication skills and poise.

■ **Pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten Mentor:** Students help teachers of younger students in various ways. They learn how to teach what they know, and they gain a behind-the-scenes appreciation for a teacher’s job.

■ **Physical Education Mentor:** Students help execute the P.E. lesson for younger students. They teach sportsmanship, how to win and lose gracefully, and they also tie a lot of shoes!

■ **Special Area Mentor:** Students help Pre-K and Kindergarten students in the dance program, the library, and in science classes.

■ **First Grade Mentor:** Students work in a First Grade classroom as a teaching assistant, supporting the teacher by creating materials, decorating bulletin boards, and working with younger students.

“For the Fifth Graders, this is their opportunity to give back to the Lower School and leave a legacy,” Crabtree says. “It is a lesson in gratefulness. Before you depart, you pay it forward and do something to make a difference.”

‘Find what makes your heart sing’
Fifth Grader Wilson Love confesses that being a Pre-Kindergarten Mentor was not his first choice for a Mustang Mentor job, but now that he has the job, he can’t imagine he would like anything more. “I really like being able to interact with the youngest kids,” he says. “It helps you remember when you were that little, and you say, ‘Wow, that was me once. Now look at me!’”

On a typical day, Wilson hangs student art and helps on the playground, pushing Pre-K students on the swings or helping build a snowman. He has a big smile on his face all the time. “Mustang Mentors was such a good idea,” he says. “Someday, these Pre-K kids will get to the Fifth Grade and remember that I set an example for them.”

Being a Mustang Mentor gives students a taste of life
in the real world. Every student keeps a binder with documentation of their assigned job. They fill out a job application which asks them, “As a leader, what is your goal?” The form also asks them to create a six-word memoir, which will inform their approach to leadership. The memoirs are insightful and heartfelt and could serve to inspire leaders of all ages.

“Be true, you only have you.”

“Have fun, remember kindness, love life.”

“Keep on going no matter what!”

After Mustang Mentors finish a task, they fill out a timesheet, recording the service they provide once every six-day rotation. They write self-evaluations about their experiences. “Dancing with the Pre-K puts a smile on my face,” writes one student. The Fifth Graders are also evaluated by an adult team of supervisors who complete a form giving them feedback on their participation, ability to work independently, and attitude. They meet with Crabtree monthly to do team-building exercises and reflect on their jobs. She is already seeing results for the program as students mature, develop independence, and become more invested in their school.

“They truly feel that things won’t function unless they are here!” Crabtree says. “When this class is in the Upper School preparing to graduate, I believe they will look back at the impact they had on the Lower School.”

No doubt Georgia Roberts will, since she has now had the chance to fulfill her destiny and live her six-word memoir: “Find what makes your heart sing.”
Tributes to Colorado Academy Students

At Colorado Academy, Fifth and Eighth Grade Continuations are special ceremonies, as students celebrate all they have achieved to that point and look ahead to their future at CA. But what makes these days particularly meaningful are the personal tributes that teachers write about each student. The teachers share these tributes with all students and their families at Continuation. We are sharing just a few with you!

Class of 2027 (Ms. Ohly, Mr. McKenna, and Ms. Wachtel are the Fifth Grade Homeroom teachers.)

Brielle Burkett
Energetic, joyful, loud, and happy, you bring passion to our community. Deeply connected to your family, you beam when sharing about them, and your relationships with friends are paramount to you. Learning to be a positive leader, you lift your classmates up, enriching all of us.

Ms. Jessica Ohly

JR Ege
A skilled conversationalist, you take a genuine interest in others. Considerate, thoughtful, and engaged, you thrive on connection and never fail to reach out and include everyone. Your inclusive nature and willingness to work hard make you an excellent academic partner and friend. Your tenacity and grit will take you far.

Ms. Jessica Ohly

Mila Heater
Mila, moving into a new school community can be challenging, but you have been a wonderful addition to CA. I always knew you were special, which is why it came as no surprise when you decided you wanted to start an organization called “Partners in Kind” at CA. You are a natural leader, Mila, and I can’t wait to see what future goodness you bring into the world!

Ms. Sara Wachtel

Jack Shapiro
Jack, you are truly a Renaissance man. As an athlete, you talk about your teammates with such passion. As a family member, you smile with soldering pride, and as a student, you show a creativity that will take you to great heights. Our class will always be grateful for your humor and the gratitude you express.

Mr. Buck McKenna
Heidi Sohn
With the pencil in your hand, Heidi, you can construct a piece that is full of heart and information. You work through your day, seeing the forest, while also brimming with happiness at the smallest tree. You make CA great, because you care not only about CA as a whole, but also about the smallest members.

Mr. Buck McKenna

Shreyas Leon
Your smile lights up our room. You care for our classroom community, looking out for the emotional well-being of friends, as well as using your genius-level organization skills to keep our materials neat. You push yourself by reading new books, writing with detail, playing with math challenges, and trusting in new friendships.

Ms. Jessica Ohly

Luke Michaud
Humorous, genuine, and engaged, you are a true Renaissance man. Your passion for powerfully emotional books is second only to your desire to learn calculus, or at least algebra. A committed mentor in Pre-K, you support each member of our community, encouraging others, even as you bring your A-game to everything you do.

Ms. Jessica Ohly

Alegría Monterroso
Your artistic spirit guides you through every aspect of your day, as you see every opportunity to bring color into our class. Each day of your Lower School career is filled with strong effort, passionate friendships, and a spirit for every single themed day at school. Homemade dresses and drawing challenges, Alegría, you are a human firecracker.

Mr. Buck McKenna

Olivia Nelsen
Olivia, you are the student that every teacher needs in their classroom, not only because of your kindness and your helpful nature, but because you are the student that every teacher knows they can count on. You are dependable, loyal, and the glue that holds our class together. You are an absolute gem, and I’m so excited for you as you move on to the Middle School.

Ms. Sara Wachtel

Jackson Wells
New to CA this year, I am not sure anyone would know it. You quickly showed your academic grace, while also showing what it means to be a kind friend. Nimble with numbers, you displayed to our class what it means to be academically flexible, while also sharing your passion for tennis. Thank you for joining CA!

Mr. Buck McKenna

Global Studies
Foreign travel and global studies opportunities are available to students. Recent destinations have included Québec, Belize, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, China, Haiti, Senegal, Cuba, Spain, Tanzania, and England.

CA offers a 5th Grade and 11th Grade student Scottish Exchange Program, a student exchange in Colombia and Spain, and CA faculty and students collaborate with schools in Rwanda and Haiti.

Experiential Education
- Annual 3rd Grade trip to the Plains Conservation Center
- Annual 4th Grade mountain hike

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Class of 2024

Daniel Farmer
Your alter egos “Li'l Dan Man” and “High Council”—to name only two—accomplished a great deal over three years. On the basketball court you are silky smooth; in the classroom you are a wonderful thinker. Embrace your humor, push yourself, and be confident; you will be missed.

Mr. Matt Olmstead ’95
Middle School English

Nora Knight
Aerial dance performer, Children's Chorale singer, stage actress…there's no end to your artistry, and we thank you for sharing your talents with both us and the world! You are also a voracious reader, a dedicated student, and a compassionate, humorous, and loyal friend to all.

Ms. Erin Galvin
Middle School Science

Sydney Leach
It is rare and inspiring to encounter a Middle School student as intellectually curious and principled as you are. As powerful a force on the stage as you are a committed social justice advocate and passionate reader, it has been a true delight to teach and learn from you.

Ms. Allie Bronston
Middle School Librarian and Computer Science

Alex Miramontes
Behind your quiet personality, we see an incredibly kind, thoughtful young man and a wonderful friend. A hard-working student, you always work tirelessly in class, on the soccer field, and on the b-ball court. We will miss your quiet leadership in the Middle School and are proud of you!

Ms. Erin Carlson
Middle School French and Spanish
**Graham Neely**
You already grasp what is most important: the world around you and the people within it. Without a hint of selfishness, you embrace all you are dealt and reorganize it into a solid foundation. Wherever life takes you, others will always want to be a part of what you build.

*Mr. Liston Hills ’95
Middle School English and Civics*

**Odicei Okra**
With a quiet fierceness you continue on, even when faced with a daunting task. Odicei, you live your life, pushing yourself to make each minute count, never forgetting what is truly important and seeing the true value in a day well spent. We are all behind you, ready to watch you soar.

*Ms. Liz Estacio
Middle School Core & Learning Specialist*

**Jason Richardson**
You treated Middle School like your own playground, delighting in the camaraderie and endless contests. As King of the Court, your goal was for all to experience the joy you do. Through everything, you realized that while life is defined by big moments, it’s determined by little ones.

*Mr. Eric Augustin
Middle School English and Civics*

**Tyler Schulte**
Tyler, you have made a huge impression on us during your three years here, and the Upper School is lucky to have you! You are a student who is truly a wonderful mix of so many things. Bright. Hardworking. Perseverant. Joyful. A friend. A leader. An actor. We will miss you!

*Ms. Donna Farrell
Middle School Spanish*

**Shea Stone**
You are the epitome of a leader and the embodiment of kindness. A natural on Leadership Team, you guide others with your calming presence, impeccable work ethic, and charismatic smile. With genuine compassion and determination to succeed, you will tackle any challenge you face.

*Ms. Kathy Zolla
Middle School Math*

**Georgia Burstein**
Lover of llama hats and writer of llama songs; when you enjoy something, it shows! Whether it’s being involved in Student Council, Leadership Team, finding a great read, theater, or enjoying your hockey happy place, your smile reminds us all to enjoy and embrace opportunity.

*Mrs. Renee Medina
Middle School Math and Spanish*
The Advantage of the Arts

At Colorado Academy, there are always three “A” disciplines in every student’s life—Academics, Athletics, and the Arts. While some might question the need for art as a required class for all students, CA never doubts the advantage of the arts—from the studio to the stage, from the dance floor to the choir room, from making a film to playing an instrument.

We talked to Director of Visual and Performing Arts Katy Hills, Director of College Counseling Sonia Arora, and to a variety of students to learn how being involved in the world of art carries over to academic work, other disciplines, daily lives, and even college aspirations. What is the advantage of the arts? Here, in their own words, are their answers.

“Instilling in our students the belief that they can create something out of nothing is of utmost importance. When they do so, they become designers, builders, creators, makers who can solve problems. In a world that changes daily—even minute-to-minute—students who have experience with art are flexible, adaptable, agile thinkers.”

Katy Hills, Director of Visual and Performing Arts

“Performing in front of people can make you feel vulnerable, but that is outweighed by the confidence you gain. Sometimes when I am working on Physics, I get stuck, and then I play the piano or sing, and it opens different pathways in my mind. You can’t be thinking about your Physics lab when you are playing Rachmaninoff!”

Colby Lish, Junior, Upper School Choir, Piano, and Musical Theater

“It is no surprise to me that some of the most dynamic professionals in the world are also practicing artists. They have had practice engaging in what we call ‘artistic behaviors’.”

Katy Hills, Director of Visual and Performing Arts

“Music Theory is very mathematical and has lots of ties to Physics and Math class. Practicing music creates a solid work ethic. Music connects people like nothing else. It’s made me a more social person. Actively trying to get better on my instrument translates into my life, where I am trying to better myself as a person.”

Jack Kuelling, Junior, Academy Jazz

“Performing in Choir has made me more comfortable with public speaking. Singing a solo is just like giving a speech, only with notes. Piano has taught me patience. The more advanced the piece, the harder I have to work. That teaches you that if there are tricky spots in any project, you will not get to an end product unless you spend the time and work at it.”

Jo Rydberg, Freshman, Upper School Choir, Piano

“Colleges are looking for strong artists to enhance their communities. When students apply to college, they often are allowed to submit art supplements to show off their talents, whether in photography, painting, film, digital media, creative writing, music, or performing arts. CA’s Portfolio Program is perfect for this, because students put together a gallery show demonstrating their artistic vision.”

Sonia Arora, Director of College Counseling
“Art asks you to take chances. It also demands that you participate and become involved in the process. It teaches you to take the time to improve yourself. You learn you have to keep trying.”

  Nate Kay ’20, Studio Art

“Music trains the brain. In our group, we hold each other accountable, just like people do in the real world. In order to play jazz well, you have to explore where it came from. Learning the cultural significance of jazz and recreating the feelings of people who played it at a certain time is like taking a deeper dive into history.”

  Chloe Brants, Junior, Academy Jazz

“There is a deeper level of thinking that happens in the Ponzio Arts Center. Art helps you solve problems. You will be painting, and it’s just not working, but there is no answer sheet to tell you if you are doing something right or wrong. It’s up to you to find answers to the problems and challenges.”

  Britt Lochhead, Junior, Studio Art

“To have a successful career, we have to be dynamic problem solvers. Major companies—some of the most influential modern companies—are hiring people who demonstrate artistic behaviors, because they want people exploring ideas that others might think are impossible.”

  Katy Hills, Director of Visual and Performing Arts

“Choir activates both sides of your brain. You are listening, singing, changing pitch, changing dynamics all at the same time, and that gets your whole brain firing. There are neurological advantages of that to other parts of your life. Singing makes you better at multi-tasking.”

  Henry Chesley-Vogels, Junior, Upper School Choir

“When we become overscheduled with busy lives, one of the first things to go is practicing the creative process. It’s important for students to carve out time in their days to keep art in their life. It may be a challenge, but today, make time for art.”

  Katy Hills, Director of Visual and Performing Arts

“When you perform, you have to be true to yourself and grow as a person. You cannot do that if you don’t know who you are. And if you know who you are, you will succeed.

  Colby Lish, Junior, Upper School Choir, Piano, and Musical Theater
In a record-setting evening, Colorado Academy honored the “strength that lies in differences.” More than 400 people, from grandparents to young children, packed the Campus Center for the annual “Taste of CA: A Celebration of Cultures,” enjoying home-made food and festivities from around the world.

The Co-Chairs, Christina Joymon and Meghan Geisler, were delighted by the turnout. “There are so many cultures at CA, but we are one community,” said Joymon. “It’s a beautiful night of life as we celebrate our different cultures.”

The quantity and variety of potluck food was staggering—including Iranian lentil rice, Mexican red and green tamales, Chinese pearl meatballs, Japanese sushi, Vietnamese egg rolls, Swedish meatballs, Irish soda bread, Kenyan meat samosa, Philippine lumpiang shanghai, Argentinian empanadas, Israeli hamantaschen, German bratwurst and sauerkraut, and Australian sausage rolls.

A dozen students from Grades 5 to 11 greeted the crowd in different languages, including Mandarin, Spanish, German, Japanese, Hindi, Vietnamese, Dutch, Arabic, and Hebrew.

One of many highlights during the evening came during the “Parade of Nations” with CA students, parents, and faculty parading across the stage to celebrate their ethnic origins from all over the world.

Led by well-known hip hop percussionist Aaron Templer, and encouraged by a joyful Geisler and Joymon, a flash mob took the stage for the traditional Punjabi dhol and bhangra dance.

Head of School Dr. Mike Davis had started the evening observing that of his many favorite events at CA, this one was high on the list for the best of reasons. “We share values,” Davis said. “We respect the dignity of everyone in our school.”

(continued on page 21)
CA Senior Named Boettcher Scholar

“We are over-the-moon proud,” says Colorado Academy College Counselor Sara Purviance about CA Senior Walt Jones, who has been named a recipient of the prestigious Boettcher Scholarship. “It is a truly extraordinary honor,” she says.

The coveted award is one of the oldest and most prestigious merit-based scholarships in the State of Colorado. It covers the cost of a student’s tuition, fees, and books for eight semesters at a four-year Colorado university or college. Boettcher Scholars, on average, are in the top two percent of their class and exhibit their strengths through leadership and service. Each year, 42 high school seniors from across the state receive this honor. Jones is CA’s first Boettcher Scholar since 2005.

The award is the culmination of a rigorous and time-intensive application procedure coincident with the college process. Applications are due in the fall. For those chosen to continue through the process, the culminating event is a group interview before a panel of adults. “This was a panel of eight of the most well-respected and incredible people,” says Jones. He was able to draw upon the expertise of Upper School Principal Dr. Jon Vogels, who was also named a Boettcher Scholar as a high school senior, but also on Jones’s many experiences as a CA student. “As soon as they started asking me questions, I realized that all the training I did in Mock Trial was really preparation for how to talk to people.”

Mock Trial was just one of the many extracurricular activities Jones explored during his four years at CA. He has been Co-President of CA’s Amnesty International Club and also an intern with the organization. He also took part in theater productions—both on stage and as part of the technical theater crew—played the cello, competed on the Rock Climbing and Cross-Country teams, took up Chinese, and traveled to China twice. Jones’s propensity for new experiences has led him to design an impressive gap year before attending Colorado College in the fall of 2021, where he’ll also be a member of CC’s Cross-Country Team.

Beginning this summer, Jones will volunteer with the Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association in Colorado’s high country. As part of his gap year, he also will take a Wilderness Medicine and Rescue course through the National Outdoor Leadership School. Finally, international travel permitting, he’ll wrap up his gap year living and working on farms in New Zealand through WWOOF, or World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

Perhaps most impressive, though, is this student’s down-to-earth nature, gratitude, and humility. Again, College Counselor Sara Purviance: “Walt was humble, intentional, and thoughtful during his college application process….He let his deep self-awareness, intuition, and care and curiosity about the world guide him every step of the way.” One of Jones’s teachers says of him, “He is driven and creative; he sets lofty goals and often hits his mark.

A peer says, “What makes Walt unique is how he cares, and how much he cares. Whether it is with people or ideas, Walt allows his convictions to fill his entire heart.”
People are drawn to him because they feel the passion he wields. People gravitate towards his conviction, because they want to be cared for with that heart that beats so hard for the people he loves.

For his part, Jones has taken the campus closure due to COVID-19 to spend time with some of those people he loves, including his parents and two siblings. “My family is always joking that this is the most they’ve seen me in four years. I think that makes me wonder if I missed out on the family front, being so busy.” He says, during coronavirus social distancing, it has been nice to slow down and recognize that, “At least I have my family and great school.”

School, specifically Colorado Academy, says Jones, is what spurred him to pursue the Boettcher Scholarship. “I feel very fortunate to have gone to a school where I have had endless opportunities to do really cool things, and CA has provided me all of these chances I wouldn’t have had elsewhere.”

Jones’s opportunities will only expand by being part of the Boettcher Scholar network. Boettcher alumni number in the thousands, some of whom he has already met. “These are really smart and interesting people who go on to do incredible things.”

And, the Boettcher Foundation’s emphasis is on keeping these incredible people in Colorado. Says the foundation’s Director of Programs Tiffany Anderson, “Walt Jones really stood out with his commitment both in and out of the classroom. We’re proud to have him representing the Boettcher community, and we look forward to seeing how his future leadership impacts the State.”

(continued on page 21)
From 1978 to 2020: The Pirates of Penzance

When the Colorado Academy Middle School performed Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* in February 2020, it brought the Froelicher Theatre full circle—accidentally.

In April 1978, the very first performance dedicating the brand-new Froelicher Theatre was *Pirates*, the classic 19th century comic opera about a young pirate, young love, and the unintended consequences of Leap Year.

It’s been 42 years since the theater opened, and the Middle School performance of *Pirates* was one of the last in the space before it is razed to make room for the Leach Center for the Performing Arts. *The Pirates of Penzance* is the alpha and the omega—what a wonderful, intentional way to honor the long history of Froelicher Theatre!

Except, it wasn’t intentional. “It’s just a crazy coincidence,” said Director James Meehan. The play turns on a single plot twist—Leap Year. Coincidentally, 2020 is a Leap Year—and the play closed on (you guessed it) February 29. None of that occurred to Meehan when he chose it. All he had in mind was the timeless appeal of the show.

“Gilbert and Sullivan were the clever social commentators of their time,” he said. “They spoke truth to power. If they were alive today, they would be writing *Hamilton*.”

**Living up to the legacy**

The CA students cast in the 2020 *Pirates* didn’t even seem to notice they were performing an opera that had its debut 141 years ago, a true tribute to the time-transcending appeal of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Eighth Grader Hero Clinemills, who played Major-General Stanley, called the plot a “cool story.” She confessed that she had been doing some mouth and tongue exercises to warm up before her show-stopping number, “I am the very model of a modern Major-General.”

Nora Knight, Grade 8, is a fan of modern musicals but called *Pirates* “fun.” She played Ruth, Pirate Maid-of-all-Work. “I love comedic roles,” she said. “I go over the top and everyone laughs.”

Seventh Grader Margie Timmers had her eye on the role of Mabel from the start. “I’m usually typecast in an emotional dramatic role,” she said. “I’ve never done comedy, so doing this vain character is new and different.”

Sydney Leach, Grade 8, has a long history with *Pirates*. It was the first live performance of a musical she saw (at age four), and it became a favorite family soundtrack around her house. She loved playing the Pirate King. “He’s the best character, because he runs around singing about himself,” she said. “All the characters are larger than life and funny in a way that is so obvious, it’s ridiculous.”

When today’s students learned they were coming to the end of the Froelicher Theatre’s run with a performance that opened it, they were struck by the symmetry. “We are coming full circle,” said Hero. “We are ending in the same place the theater started,” added Margie. “We are living up to the legacy of those early performers, even if it wasn’t intentional.”
Gilbert and Sullivan’s
The
PIRATES
OF
PENZANCE
OR THE SLAVE OF DUTY
As performed at
Colorado Academy
April 28 and 29, 1978
8:00 pm Froelicher Theatre
Celebrating the dedication of the Froelicher Theatre.
These Three Graduates Accepted the ‘Challenge’

“I feel like I have won the lottery.” That’s what Brian Labra Vergara says when asked about being a Challenge Foundation Scholar. “I may not be the richest person,” he adds. “But I have won something much better—the chance to make something of myself in this world.”

Brian is one of three Challenge Foundation Scholars in Colorado Academy’s Class of 2020. All were identified in elementary school as students with potential and underwent rigorous and competitive evaluation before being chosen by The Challenge Foundation to receive funding to attend an independent school. For these three CA students, the education and ongoing support they have received through The Challenge Foundation have been life-changing.

**Brian Labra Vergara**

Neither of Brian Labra Vergara’s parents graduated from high school, but they wanted something more for their children. “Ever since I was young, they said ‘study hard, get a good job, make something of yourself,’” Brian says. “You have the right to do what you want, and those opportunities will come from education.”

Brian, who is bilingual, chose to attend CA’s Upper School for a variety of reasons. He knew Monika Williams ’19, another Challenge Scholar, who is now studying at Howard University, and she introduced him to the possibilities the school would offer. When he shadowed at CA, he sensed that the teachers would support him as he pursued ideas in different fields. Then he interviewed with Upper School Principal Dr. Jon Vogels, and the deal was sealed.

“I asked Dr. Vogels if I would ever be limited at CA,” he remembers. “I said, ‘If I have enough art credits to graduate, would I have to stop taking art?’ And he said to me, ‘Of course not. We will work with you to develop a program.’”

In spring 2020, four years after taking his first-ever art class during Freshman year, Brian presented the culmination of his CA art studies at his Senior Portfolio Show. He was also the student director for *The Addams Family* musical.

“I love being creative, because there is no limit on creativity,” he says. “It’s everywhere, in painting, acting, directing, digital media, graphic design.”

Brian will attend Skidmore College. He would like to be CEO of his own company, a dream made possible by The Challenge Foundation. “They are the most amazing people I have ever met,” he says. “They work day and night, and they have transformed so many lives and families through what they do. I am so grateful I had this opportunity, and that I have made as much out of it as I could.”

**Sergio Hernandez**

The idea of a private school had never entered the mind of Sergio Hernandez’s parents until The Challenge Foundation made it possible. Today, he looks back on his years in Middle and Upper School at CA and says simply, “It’s the best education.”

Sergio knew from the day that he shadowed fellow Senior Chris Wachuta that he was headed to CA. “I was immediately accepted,” he says. “I felt like I belonged right away.” But, he acknowledges, making the transition...
from his elementary school in Aurora, Colo., was not easy. “Everything was different—including, first off, CA has an actual campus!” he laughs. “I realized how much work I would have to put in to advance my education.” At CA, he found teachers who were willing to help him succeed. “The teachers care,” he says. “I am so thankful that I could always talk with them and trust them.”

He had been at the top of his class in elementary school. True to the name of the foundation that brought him to CA, he says he “needed a bigger challenge” academically, and at CA he found it. Bilingual, he advanced his study of Spanish. He also played soccer and lacrosse, went canoeing on the Green River in Utah for Interim, and traveled to Florida to study marine biology.

The Challenge Foundation was with him every step of the way, and he has never forgotten it. “They are family,” he says. “They saw potential in me, and it’s my job to prove to them that what they saw is there. I put it on myself to never let them down. I did that for them, because they were going the extra mile for me.”

Sergio says his favorite part of CA is the school community, because it has allowed him to “stay true to my roots.” He is filled with pride that his next step will be Colorado College (CC). “If I had not had a Challenge Foundation Scholarship and come to CA, I never would have managed to go to CC,” he says. “I put in the hard work, and now it has paid off.”

“I made friends easily, even though I was new and a minority student,” he says. “CA is a welcoming place, and CA made it even easier, because racial issues were discussed openly, and I could feel comfortable with my identity.”

Ask him about his favorite part of CA as he prepares to graduate, and he doesn’t miss a beat. “The people are my favorite,” he says with a big smile. Sergio and he will be friends for life, they agree. They have become as close as brothers.

Sebastian is bilingual and studied French at CA. He raves about the many opportunities he has had in the past seven years, including lacrosse, soccer, and kayaking on Interim. His interest in fashion design was reinforced by participating in the Senior Portfolio Program where he discovered a passion for painting. He also praises his teachers at CA, because they “truly care” about each student.

“You don’t feel like CA teachers are just working for a paycheck,” he says. “They are so nice and always there for you.”

None of this would have been possible without The Challenge Foundation, which has provided more than just the opportunity to attend CA. There has been what Sebastian calls the “extra stuff,” like school books and even a computer charger. He also praises the community of Challenge Foundation Scholars who know each other and get together for summer programs, led by Foundation staff. “They are mentors for us,” he says. “It’s like you have a guardian angel flying by your side with eyes on you—in a good way.”

It is hard to believe that he is a Senior, Sebastian says, and preparing to head to Colorado State University. Today, he says “I own who I am. I am me.” And for that achievement, “Thank you to CA. Thank you to The Challenge Foundation,” he says. “I would not be here without them. There is no way I can pay them back, but I will try.”

Sebastian Parra Estrada

Sebastian Parra Estrada hopes to someday own his own fashion design business. If his sense of style originates with his identity, he can credit The Challenge Foundation and CA for helping him discover who he is, starting in Grade 6 when he came to CA.
Independent study: Students have the opportunity to design and pursue faculty-guided independent study, developing deeper understanding in an area of interest, such as neuroscience, postmodernism, and ornithology.

Capstone projects in each division are designed to demonstrate students’ transfer of learning. Fifth Grade, Eighth Grade, and Twelfth Grade culminate with capstone projects. For Seniors, these projects allow students to spend a portion of their final academic year working on an independent project.

Parent Involvement

Parent Association promotes a high level of family participation in the school community.

- Topical parenting seminars and school-wide speaker series with approximately 20 events annually.
- Parent activities including hiking, book club, museum tours, and more.
- Formal parent conferences in fall and spring.
- Average parent participation in the CA Fund: 82%

“We were active volunteers at CA for 14 years. Volunteering gave us an invaluable perspective on the complexity of running an independent school and also cemented friendships with parents, trustees, faculty, and administration that date back to the time our daughter was in Pre-Kindergarten. For many years, CA was our second home.”

Renée and Marc Ducnuigeen, Parents of Eliza Ducnuigeen, CA Class of ’17

CA by the numbers (continued from page 24)
What Makes Pre-Kindergarten ‘Special’

The Specials at Colorado Academy Pre-Kindergarten are aptly named. These are times of each day when students leave their classroom to do a “special” activity: art, physical education, science, library and craft time, and music and movement. The same kind of learning happens every day inside the Pre-K classrooms, but the additional time outside the classroom offers students a chance to focus on one activity under the watchful eye of a “Specials” teacher.

“It’s like students get a little field trip almost every day without ever leaving campus,” says Pre-Kindergarten Director Lizzie Rockmore ’90. “It takes what we do in the classroom one big step further, enriches our curriculum, provides a change of scenery, and gives them the adventure of walking around campus and seeing older students.”

Lower School Principal Angie Crabtree sees Specials as CA’s way to expose students to a broad range of opportunities and provide a foundation for future learning. “It may pique an interest or spark a passion for these young students,” she says. “In the future, they will have the chance at CA to dive more deeply into a subject.”

Rockmore likes to refer to the Specials as a source for “hidden curriculum.”

“In Specials, students are practicing skills we are teaching in the classroom, learning without even knowing it,” she says. She also believes it’s good for Pre-K students to see a variety of teachers—and for teachers to see them—“so many people can contribute to the development of a child and help us meet every child’s needs.”

“These Specials teachers have unique training and are passionate about teaching this age group,” adds Crabtree. She is also delighted to see Mustang Mentors from the Fifth Grade helping the teachers in every Pre-K Special. It’s a chance for Pre-K students to meet older students and learn from them. “And in seven years, the Pre-Kindergartners will be Mustang Mentors,” says Crabtree. “That’s the most exciting thing.”

Pre-K Art

Pre-Kindergartners and paint—what could go wrong?

In fact, much goes right when Jorge Muñoz is teaching. He starts the art class by gathering very attentive Pre-Kindergartners, all clad in neon-green smocks, to explain clearly what will happen after they disperse to their individual easels. Each will get two strips of tape to stick to their paper. Then they paint the paper. Finally, they will remove the tape and what remains is their individual masterpiece.

It may seem a simple assignment, but the students are developing complex art skills and habits by using their imaginations, improving fine and gross motor skills, and engaging in creative problem solving. “I am acquainted with them with artistic language and basic foundational art skills like collaging, drawing, and painting,” Muñoz says. “We build on these skills as they progress through the art program at CA.

“Why not start teaching art as early as possible?” Muñoz says. “You get them going on the right track. They create with wonderment and bring their imaginations to life through their art.”
Pre-K Library

At their first visit to the Library of the school year, some Colorado Academy Pre-Kindergartners aren’t sure what to make of this Special. The experience of sitting in a group and listening to stories may be new to them, and it could feel like playtime in a new environment. But very quickly, that changes as Librarians Allison Peters Jensen and Mary Leyva transform their youngest students into great listeners.

By the time mid-December rolls around, Leyva looks out at a group of students gathered on their listening rug, in their favorite listening positions—most of them with legs crossed, or as they would say, “criss-cross applesauce.” Their voices are turned off, and their ears are turned on, and it only takes a gentle reminder in case someone forgets how to be an expert in story time listening. Leyva has picked two holiday-themed books to read.

When she asks what is on the cover of one book, Yowei Guo’s hand shoots up. “It’s a menorah,” he says. And he is right.

“The fun of reading to this age is in the unexpected,” Leyva says. “As we discover and learn together, my goal is to create joyful memories that kindle ongoing interest in books and stories.”

As Director of Libraries at CA, Jensen is establishing behavior in the Pre-Kindergartners that will last throughout their career at CA—and beyond. During story time, she believes they develop a rich vocabulary, view many different kinds of art in the illustrations, and make connections between the words and illustrations in a book. They meet a variety of characters, learn how to follow a storyline, and build background knowledge through stories. They also explore a craft together each session. All of these experiences contribute to increased language development and processing in the young brain.

“As apart from brain development and the theories of learning, we think it is important for Pre-K students to learn that reading is fun,” Jensen says. “Already, we are starting them on the path to becoming lifelong readers!”

Pre-K Physical Education

CA Pre-Kindergartners spend plenty of time enjoying freedom and activities provided by recess—riding tricycles, building snow figures, flying through the air on swings. But they also make a regular journey to the CA Athletic Center, where they participate in more organized athletic activities, under the watchful eyes of Coaches Bob Ulrich, Beth Folsom, Dan Pratt, and Hunter Worthley.

Physical Education starts off with a burst of speed, as all the students run in a circle around the Field House. It’s a good energy-burning activity. What follows may feel like pure fun to the students, but all the games—whether they involve hopscotch or bunny hopping—help build important locomotor skills. These are the basic building blocks of coordination: walking, galloping, jumping, hopping, side-sliding, leaping, and skipping.

The work students do during Pre-K will create a foundation for Physical Education in Lower School, where the curriculum is built around the study of Kinesiology, with a focus on the characteristics, interests, and needs of the students.

The coaches work with students to organize age-appropriate relay races, with the emphasis on organizing. “They are learning to listen and follow directions,” says Folsom. “In many ways, that is just as important a part of P.E. as the movement skills.”

P.E. ends with a perennial favorite—the giant rainbow parachute. “Everyone hold it with your right hand and walk in a circle,” call out the coaches. There is some fumbling as students remember right from left.

“Now switch to your left hand and walk in a circle,” comes the direction. After the Pre-Kindergartners head out the door back to their classroom, the Field House seems unnaturally quiet. Coach Folsom breathes out. “With Pre-Kindergartners every day is different,” she says. “It’s fun because they are seeing all these activities for the first time, and they are always excited.”
Pre-K Music and Movement

Schotters Music Center is a music paradise for Pre-K students. In the classroom, there are different instruments set up, but the students select their favorite within seconds of arriving. They race to the huge drum in one corner, arrange themselves in a circle, and start drumming together. Isabella Ubertone, who is also CA’s flute instructor, uses the moment to teach some basic music skills.

“Hands up!” she calls. All hands fly to the air. “Hands down,” she tells them, and the drumming continues. The Pre-Kindergartners think they are having fun, but they are also learning to keep a beat, work together, and follow a conductor.

After drumming, the students dash to stand on their assigned places, marked with colorful dots on the rug, and sing, first loudly, then quietly. They are learning music dynamics. Then Ubertone segues into what is clearly a favorite activity. She holds a puppet version of Hedwig, the owl made famous by Harry Potter books, and visits each student singing, “Hello, I’m glad you are here today.” The students sing back to her. It feels like fun, but these young students are matching Ubertone’s pitch with their first solos.

Then, it’s time for a new activity as students gather in a circle, each with a glockenspiel in front of them. “Everyone find the orange key,” Ubertone calls out. “That’s the letter A.” Now the Pre-Kindergartners are all percussion players, and what follows is some enthusiastic improvising. “I am playing the piano with my safe hands,” Pre-K student Dylan Driver announces.

“I love teaching Pre-K Music, because it is an international language that connects us all,” Ubertone says. “My goal is that at the end of the day, my students have a melody or rhythm that has brought them joy.”

Pre-K Science

Someday, the CA class of 2033 may produce some of the country’s leading scientists, the kind of researchers who change the future with their discoveries. If that’s the case, those scientists could trace the start of their career to Pre-K Science with Jeff Goldstein ’88, or Mr. G., as the students call him.

Today is a big day for Pre-K in science. They spent their last class building a vermicompost bin. Composting with worms requires a “worm bed.” They collected leaves, tore up old newspapers, mixed them together in a bin, and made certain the mixture was moist with water.

Then they introduced the red wigglers to their home. Today, they will get to hold the worms and study them closely.

“Let’s think about our own beds,” Mr. G. tells the students, who are gathered on a rug at his feet, fixated on him. “What words would be used to describe our beds?” The hands shoot up and the words come quickly. “Fluffy…cozy…soft…warm…lovey.”

“So now let’s think about a worm bed,” Goldstein asks. “How would you feel lying in a worm bed?” More hands. “Squishy…wet…rough…yucky…pokey…itchy.”

Goldstein brings the vocabulary lesson back to science. “But which bed would a worm rather have?” he asks. “A worm bed!” the Pre-Kindergartners chorus.

The pay-off moment has arrived. Goldstein distributes small piles of worms from the bed to two-person teams of Pre-K students seated at lab tables. A few make their intentions clear from the start. “I am not going to touch that worm,” they say, only to be overcome by curiosity and end up closely eyeing the worm in their hand.

Ask Goldstein what makes Pre-K Science special, and it comes down to one word for him. “It’s all magical to them,” he says. But watching him teach, you begin to suspect that there’s still magic in it for him as well.
Middle School Advisory Puts Mission Statement into Action

It is Kameron Barthels’ birthday, and his Eighth Grade Advisory group, led by Middle School English teacher Liz McIlravy, is celebrating. There is the traditional birthday snack, but before cookies, everyone in the Advisory takes time to truly celebrate what makes the birthday person special.

McIlravy gives students a series of prompts to inspire their writing.

“Kam, thank you for…” “You have a great way of…” “I have always admired…” “I appreciate the way you…” “Wasn’t it great when we…” “In class, I have learned from you that…”

When everyone has finished, McIlravy reads the messages to Kam. Occasionally, he nods and smiles as he listens.

“Kam you are such a unique, cool, creative guy and incredibly good at building and taking things apart. You have a passion that not a lot of people have at this age, and it’s very inspirational.”

“I admire the way you are always so kind to everyone, no matter what.”

“I’m grateful for you always having a positive attitude.”

Birthday well-wishes ended, the Advisory digs into the cookies, and then begins an exercise called “Poetry Scramble.” The warm, light mood established during the birthday wishes exercise continues, as students work in teams to create impromptu poetry from random words.

“They wouldn’t say they are doing social and emotional learning, because it doesn’t feel forced,” McIlravy says. “And yet, that is exactly what is happening.”

On other days, the lesson may be more direct. “We’ve talked about bullying and about respecting people of different heritages,” says Eighth Grader Abe Kirkpatrick. “I feel like it’s opened my mind to different perspectives.”

How Advisory has changed

Colorado Academy Middle School Advisory has always been a place for a group of students to make close friends, engage with an adult who serves as an advocate for the student and a liaison with parents, and most important, have fun.

In 2019-2020, Advisory was still that, but more. Now, Middle School has adopted a program developed by the Institute for Social and Emotional Learning (IFSEL), an organization with an international reputation. The curriculum focuses on five areas of learning: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

CA believes these social and emotional competencies help promote a healthful school climate where students can succeed socially and academically, grow into leaders, learn to respect diversity, achieve, collaborate, and develop mindfulness. The many topics students might tackle include technology safety, healthy friendships, bullying and resolving conflicts, giving and receiving feedback, drugs and alcohol, and living with digital media.

“As students have become more adept at using technology for communication and interaction, they have less practice in face-to-face community building and problem solving,” says Middle School Principal Bill Wolf-Tinsman. “Developing those skills is every bit as important to long-term success as the academic challenges we provide.”

‘Lift-Up’ and ‘No-Joke Zone’ lists

The Advisory, comprised of 12-16 students, meets daily with an adult Advisor. Exercises may range from improvisation, group building, book reading and discussion, relaxation time, meditation, mindfulness, journal writing, and attending school assemblies. Students know that Mondays and Fridays focus on social and emotional learning. Advisories also meet a second time each day for study hall, so their Advisors can track both emotional and academic progress.

Starting the first day of school, Sixth Grade Advisor Peggy Butler has used a number of exercises to help her Advisory students build friendships. There is a “No-Joke Zone” list compiled by students, listing things people should avoid saying because they are not funny to others: “Making fun of my height.” “Talking about how I dress.” “Laughing and joking about something online and making fun of me for not knowing what it is.”

“It’s so important that from day one, they know what words might hurt someone else,” Butler says. “It’s been my experience that students often hold on to the comments they hear that first week,
and that can impact their work in the classroom. If they feel safe and comfortable, that pays off in their classwork.”

“Talking to others helps me work with people in groups,” adds Sloan Greenawalt. “You have to do that when you grow up, and so this is a perfect way to prepare you for life.”

Butler does all the same exercises she asks of her students as a way to “level the playing field.” A veteran teacher of 40 years, she has tried a variety of programs focused on social and emotional learning. “This is, by far, the best I have seen,” she says. “It’s authentic. It’s flexible. I’m so grateful we chose IFSEL, because this program really reaches students.”

Open Session
It’s Open Session Friday for Forbes Cone and Jessica Campbell’s Seventh Grade Advisory. The students are sitting in a circle with small pieces of yellow, red, and blue paper on their laps. They have already submitted comments that will be the subject of their discussion, indicating on the submission if they want to remain anonymous.

In front of them on the board is the code to the colors they hold: tossing a yellow piece of paper into the circle means the student is asking a clarifying question. Red stands for a comment that expresses empathy. Blue is wisdom. Cone and Campbell read their submitted comments and the students share their responses with the group. Some comments are marked “Joy.”

“I’m really looking forward to break to spend time with family and friends and catch up on sleep.”

But many of the comments express deeper concerns.

“I study a lot but I don’t always get the outcome I want.”

The responses from the group—clarifying questions, empathy, and wisdom—come quickly.

“You could go to your teacher during study hall and ask for help.”

“Do you spread out your studying or do you wait until the last minute?”

“I find that repetition helps me remember when I am studying.”

Another comment speaks to a common complaint from students.

“I feel like I am the only person who is stressed. It would help to know if someone else is.”

The group’s responses make it clear—whoever wrote this is not alone.

“I’m sorry that you feel that way. Try taking a deep breath and staying calm.”

“I’ve had four tests and homework this week. You just have to keep trying to get through it.”

“Stress is a natural thing, and it’s going to happen in Seventh Grade, so try to find something to do that helps you relax.”

While Open Session can lead to difficult discussions, Cone likes it, because the topics come from the students. “So often, we pick the topic, but this flips the script,” he says. “This is powerful, because they are choosing what they want to discuss and crowdsourcing wisdom for each other.”

Seventh Grader Coco Ardell agrees. “It’s good that people feel like they can open up to each other. We have a good community and we can trust each other.”

McIlravy praises the new curriculum focusing on social and emotional development, because it means the Advisory messages are consistent across the Middle School, with the potential for growth each year. And Cone points out that CA’s commitment to its mission is not being left to chance.

“In our Mission Statement, we espouse courage, kindness, leadership, but that doesn’t happen by osmosis,” Cone says. “With this program, we are intentional in addressing these skills and using the exercises to develop them.”

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Education Beyond APs: The Honors Electives

Every fall, Admission Officers at Colorado Academy hear a familiar question from prospective families.

“How many AP classes does CA offer?”

The answer to the question is easy: 17.

But Director of Admission and Financial Aid Catherine Laskey hopes applicants will also pose a different question. “Ask us about Honors Electives that allow students to brainstorm, analyze, discuss, and apply what they’ve learned on a particular topic—in essence, courses where students can take a deep dive into a faculty member’s area of expertise, making the learning relevant and engaging,” she says.

CA offers more than 40 Honors Electives in subjects as varied as “The War on Terror,” “Contemporary Literature of the Middle East,” and “Statistics and Data Science.” Many Juniors and Seniors take Honors Electives in addition to AP courses. They are seeking balance in their education, knowing that both types of courses will be of interest to colleges when they apply and also will benefit their overall education and ability to think critically about issues as college students and adults.

While AP test scores may indicate mastery of subject matter to a college, students who take CA Honors classes feel like they have experienced a college course while still in high school. “Nearly all secondary schools in the Denver metro area offer either AP classes or an IB curriculum,” says Upper School Principal Dr. Jon Vogels. “CA is proud to also offer in-depth discussion-based Honors Electives where students have the opportunity to sharpen their reasoning, inquiry, conceptualizing, problem-solving, open-mindedness, and writing. These types of courses are typically only found at the college level.”

To offer a sense of how Honors Elective courses distinguish CA, we spent time observing four different courses, talking to students and teachers.

**Honors Elective: Gender Studies**

“I don’t think I could ever be a mom!” This declaration—which comes from a male Senior as soon as he drops his backpack and sinks into this seat—starts an enthusiastic discussion before Gender Studies teacher Elissa Wolf-Tinsman has even begun class.

Wolf-Tinsman goes with the flow established by the lead-off remark. “Why not?” she asks. And that’s all it takes for her class to swing into a free-ranging discussion of a wide variety of ideas: How has the role of motherhood changed through history? How do Instagram influencers lead mothers to feel guilty about their parenting? What did Freud say about the best way to be a mother? How did feminist Betty Friedan give voice to a different view of a woman’s role as a mother?

Every single member of the class, which is sitting in a circle, is intensely engaged. Wolf-Tinsman blends into the circle, prompting the discussion with quiet questions. The good-sized group is evenly divided between males and females, a fact that delights Wolf-Tinsman. As a student, she studied Women’s History and watched as the field evolved into Gender Studies, which she believes is more inclusive. “Boys are enrolling in this class now because they see it as not just about girls and women,” she says. “It’s about humans and how we move forward as a society understanding each other better.”

The students come to that new understanding through a rigorous selection of readings, many of which have been published in the past two years. As times change, Wolf-Tinsman can tailor the reading to societal issues, something students really like. “I took the class because it is relevant to today’s society, like the #MeToo movement, gender discrimination in employment, stereotypes about gender in school and at home,” says Junior Henry Chesley-Vogels. “I wanted to have thought-provoking discussions that allow me to look at gender with a new lens.”

Like many in the Honors class, he is also taking AP courses, which he finds equally rigorous but in a different way. “The AP test is coming in May, so it’s important to stick to the text on a schedule,” he says. “The Honors Elective gives me more opportunity to delve deeply into a single topic for a longer period of time.”
Wolf-Tinsman created the course with fellow Gender Studies teacher Emily Pérez, and the two teachers collaborate to improve the curriculum each year. The culminating project in the course is a lengthy, college-level research paper on a topic chosen by each student, complete with thesis, outline, sources, rough draft, revisions, and final product. “This course has really elevated my writing skills,” Chesley-Vogels says. “I’m more of a math and science guy, but I never loved writing more than doing this paper, because I got to write about a topic that was important to me.”

The class ends with a discussion about the gender pay gap, and now Wolf-Tinsman challenges the students to break into small groups and come back to the larger group with solutions. “Your generation is moving into the professional workforce,” she tells them. “How will you address this issue?” They return with truly creative ideas. Wolf-Tinsman smiles. “I love this class,” she says. “I so appreciate their honesty.”

**Honors Elective: Literature of the Apocalypse**

English teacher Tom Thorpe would be the first to acknowledge that the Honors Elective course “Literature of the Apocalypse” deals with dark themes. The readings include Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Road*, Tom Perrotta’s *The Leftovers*, as well as writing from Jewish and Christian apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tradition. “The course asks that we think broadly about the human condition,” Thorpe says. “What makes us obsessed with the idea of ‘The End’?”

The topic may seem an unlikely choice for students in Grades 11 and 12, but there are no empty seats in the classroom. Junior Elsa Mushkin explains it simply. “We tend to run away...”
from dark things," she says. “But in our culture, it’s important to face the darkness, and you feel more protected doing it through literature.”

“I am actually less frightened of an apocalyptic event after taking the course,” says Junior Makayla Martinez. “This class asks you to think about the big questions—if it happened, what would it be, how would we react, how would society continue?”

Thorpe maintains that students in Honors Elective Courses have taken an important first step in their preparation for college simply by enrolling. “In college, they will be presented with many options for elective courses with a huge amount of freedom to choose,” he says. “How are they going to figure out what courses to take unless they have had some practice in researching a course? That’s what our Grades 11 and 12 electives allow them to do—practice choosing.”

In one way, the course is very different from a college course. At the beginning, Thorpe alerts parents to the dark themes that students will confront and suggests that their readings may provide opportunity for conversations at home. “The literature we tackle prompts profound discussions about difficult topics,” Thorpe says. “We do it with safety nets and scaffolding around them, always remembering this is literature created from someone’s imagination.”

In the classroom, Thorpe breaks the students into small groups and assigns quotes from The Road to each group. Students make a beeline for someone who has a quote that interests them. “Perhaps in the world’s destruction, it would be possible at last to see how it was made.” McCarthy’s words spark passionate discussion. What does the author mean? What are the implications of these words for the characters in the context of a post-apocalyptic world? The discussion is intense and driven by the students as they move around the room.

“They are learning how to think and how to think about their thinking,” Thorpe says. “Their responsibility to interact with the material and each other prepares them to take on the next hard text and learn how to deal with the ambiguity of complicated ideas and writing.”

The students embrace the challenge. “This course tests your maturity,” says Senior Lexi Howard. “As we get older, it will be our responsibility to address the problems in the world, so it feels safe to start by reading and discussing a book you know isn’t real.”

**Honors Elective: Advanced Computer Science: Data Structures**

“It took me 25 hours to create this assignment,” teacher Kimberly Jans announces at the beginning of her class in Advanced Computer Science: Data Structures. The eight students in the class are riveted as she plays the results of her work, a programming assignment requiring students to add visual and audible elements to a sorting algorithm and create a unique animation. When she finishes, the students applaud enthusiastically.

This is not a class for novices, as indicated by the textbook: Java Methods: Object-oriented Programming and Data Structures. The students have already taken AP Computer Science, some of them as Sophomores, as a prerequisite for the course. “They picked up great skills in AP, and the work piqued their interest in computer science,” Jans says. “That’s what brings them to this class.”

This Honors Elective is the equivalent of a college freshman’s second semester of computer science. “The course allows you to be creative in the subject,” explains Senior George Davis. “You apply the knowledge from year to year, moving to a higher level and expanding what you can accomplish.”

As Jans leads the group in their understanding of the language of searching and sorting data, the students bounce ideas off each other and off their teacher with ease and authentic determination to solve the problems. Jans keeps the discussion about sorting algorithms and analyzing their complexity moving with prompts and encouragement: How do we take objects and compare them in Java? Is it worth it to do a binary search? Don’t worry, you will understand this algorithm when we get done!

“I love this class,” Jans says, who has been teaching computer science for 30 years. “The students are here because they also love computer science, and they want to dig deeper. Even though we have a set curriculum, we have the flexibility to take time out to do projects that interest the students.”

Seniors Walt Jones and Tyler Wolf Williams are a good example of students pursuing an interest. They have just taken two weeks to transform the classic board game “Battleship,” coding it so that a computer-based artificial intelligence plays against another computer. “Ms. Jans says, ‘Is there any interest in doing this?’ and if there is, she creates the curriculum,” Jones explains. “You are learning because you are curious about the content. The next thing I want to learn more about is quantum computing encryption.”

Senior Sammy Moore-Thomson sums up student sentiment. “In this class, we have a say in deciding what we are learning.”
Honors Elective:
Environmental Chemistry

In Environmental Chemistry, teacher David Frankel makes sure that nothing happens at the beginning of class. In fact, he guarantees it by setting a timer. For two minutes, the classroom is silent as everyone practices Mindfulness, shutting out the distractions of the day. Some students’ heads tilt downward, some eyes close. It is how Frankel starts all of his classes. “This helps all of us focus and be present in the moment,” he says. “Students know there is a predetermined way every class starts. It’s our routine.”

But when the mindfulness minutes end, the class explodes with energy. Frankel doesn’t say much beyond, “Let’s get to it,” and everyone moves to the lab bench to grab beakers, pipettes, testing strips, and water samples. They know their goal. They are safeguarding Colorado’s water.

The previous day, the students traveled by bus to Bear Creek to take water samples. Now they are testing the water for pH, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, and hardness. They will send their results to River Watch, a statewide citizen science network of more than 200 volunteer groups with this motto: “Real People doing Real Science for a Real Purpose.” River Watch is supported by Colorado Parks and Wildlife in its mission to gather high-quality data, which will influence the state’s decision-making about preserving and restoring the condition of Colorado’s water.

The students test the water they gathered with a sense of higher purpose. What they learn matters in the state they inhabit.

“I’m passionate about our environment, and I want students to be more aware of their impact on the environment,” Frankel says. “I want to make sure they understand the science of what’s happening around them—what happens when we put salt on the roads, when we look up and see a brown cloud around Denver, when we have ozone warnings.”

In this yearlong course, students study water quality, air quality, toxicology, and the science of climate change. Senior Paul Chandler says students in the class are “freed from a textbook,” because Frankel asks them to find readings on the topics that interest them and share what they learn with the entire class.

Asked why they chose an Honors Elective, the students have varying answers. “The subject matter is advanced,” says Senior Jasmine Moore, “and you have so much legroom to explore.”

“An Honors Class has an approach individualized for each student,” says Senior Ella Greene.

“The teachers who choose to lead Honors classes are passionate about what they are teaching,” adds Senior Jake Donaldson-Reid. “They are teaching what they love.”

Frankel would agree. He likes to talk about the “Aha moments,” when students make changes in their lives based on what they are learning—adding a second recycling bin at home or turning off the lights when they leave a room. “They are finding their own carbon footprint and realizing there are things they can do to minimize it,” he says. “Hearing a student say that this should be a required course, because they are all learning about how they impact their environment—that’s when I know the course is a success.”
Coach Wes Kirk: ‘He Does Not Sugarcoat Things!’

When the new Athletic Center opened last year, you couldn’t miss Colorado Academy’s commitment to the concepts of strength and conditioning.

In the old gym, the “weight room” was a smallish, windowless room tucked in a back corner of the building. In the new Athletic Center, the spacious Bansbach Strength and Conditioning Center is front and center, brightly lit, with natural light and glass walls so everyone can see the state-of-the-art equipment and the people using it. And now, it’s run by a coach who has stepped up CA’s game with big plans and a big voice.

The coach

Wes Kirk’s coaching career started after an injury ended his collegiate football career during his freshman year. The setback sent him home to Arizona, where he trained to join a hotshot fire crew and served as the defensive coordinator for a middle school football team. In coaching, he found meaning and purpose.

“Some of the most important figures in my life were coaches, because they held me to a high standard,” Kirk says. “As I was debating what direction I wanted to go in life, I decided I wanted to work with kids and be impactful, like my coaches had been.”

Kirk moved from middle school to high school, college, and professional coaching opportunities, with stops at the University of Oklahoma, Florida State University, and the University of Arizona. Along the way, he picked up a BS in Biology, an Associate degree in Recreational Management, and a Master of Education with an emphasis in Intercollegiate Athletic Administration. Although he has experience coaching professionals, he believes he can have more impact with younger students, and the position of Strength and Conditioning Coach at CA working in a facility he calls “amazing for a school this size” seemed like a perfect fit.

“I saw the opportunity for longevity, building a program, seeing it succeed,” he says. “The students like the structure. They are smart, they ask questions, and keep me on my toes, so they are great to coach.”

Girls Volleyball

The Girls Volleyball Team is suited up for practice, but instead of heading into the gym, they go straight into the Strength and Conditioning Center and cluster around Kirk. He shows them a digital screen with a list of their circuit training for the day, and for the next 20 minutes, with music pounding, there is non-stop motion in the room, as the team moves in small groups from goblet squats, to push-ups, to bar holds, to step-ups, and a series of other activities designed to maintain their performance while they are competing in season.

No one is slacking off. There’s some panting, flushed cheeks, and a fair amount of laughter, but if the pace lags, Kirk lets the team know about it—loudly.

“His voice is big!” says Co-Captain Merrill Rollhaus. “Last year, I don’t think I picked up a weight once, but he has really increased our intensity level. He does not sugarcoat things!”

Boys Soccer

During their first weeks of training, the Boys Soccer Team worked on building strength through body weight training, with a focus on functional movement, flexibility, and mobility. Those weeks provided a foundation for the strength and conditioning work during the competitive season. What pleases Coach Gabe Bernstein most about the experience the team gets with Kirk is the continuity.

“He has brought structure, discipline, and an attention to detail to strength and conditioning that we as a coaching staff try to maintain on the field,” Bernstein says. “He has set the bar, and he has the expertise and presence that demands that the students step up their game.”

“Coach Kirk woke a lot of people up with his training,” adds Co-Captain Liam Hall.
“We’ve learned that the more work we put in, it will be reflected in the way we play and feel.”

‘Better competitors’

In addition to working with teams, Kirk is an instructor, teaching Middle School and Upper School Sports Performance classes. “I want all the students here to know you don’t have to be intimidated by a room with weights,” he says. “I’m teaching students across the CA community to be healthy for the rest of their lives.”

“He’s not just a conditioning coach,” says Rollhaus. “He builds our character and inspires us to be better competitors.”
How to Apply
We welcome your interest in Colorado Academy!

We are currently taking applications for the 2021-2022 school year. On our website, coloradoacademy.org, you will find a link to our application portal, videos that highlight different aspects of our community, answers to the most frequently asked questions, as well as information for applying for financial aid.*

For your planning purposes, here is a checklist for the Admission process:

☐ Explore the CA website, specifically the Admission pages, where we have curated a virtual experience just for you!
☐ Submit online application form.
☐ Schedule a Student Visit/Interview and Parent Meeting.
☐ Submit Applicant Testing (Grades 1-12); note that CA is a “Test Flexible” school.
☐ Request Transcripts and Teacher Recommendations be sent directly to CA.

Please call the Admission Office at 303-914-2513 or schedule a meeting with an admission counselor for more information.

Other opportunities to learn about our community include: SPEAK lecture events, music recitals, theater productions, art shows, choir concerts, and athletic contests. We start taking applications for the 2021-2022 school year in September.

CA is a community that values and honors difference and seeks to be a place where students of all ages, and families of all backgrounds, are understood, represented, and highly regarded. Many people who get to know our community immediately notice the welcoming atmosphere, our engaged and engaging students, and the multi-age interaction that is fostered through our Pre-K through Grade 12 student body.

*How to make CA affordable for your family? Apply for financial aid. Applications for Financial Aid are considered separately from the Application for Admission. A link to the financial aid portal can be found under the Admission tab of the CA website.

Colorado Academy Mission Statement

Creating curious, kind, courageous, and adventurous learners and leaders.

CA is an independent, coeducational, college preparatory day school.
Colorado Academy does not discriminate in any of its programs, procedures, or practices on the basis of age, color, disability, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion or creed, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or other protected classifications defined by applicable law.