

Sierra Academy of Scottsdale

For the new school year, Scottsdale got a new look, featuring a revamped campus design and the addition of innovative programs to augment our current school model.

Along with our more accessible **front entrance**, our spacious **Sensory Room** for our primary students, and the **Teen Clubhouse** for our high school students, the most notable technological enhancement is the inclusion of new **Panaboards**—interactive whiteboards—in every classroom.

Students, teachers, and related service providers alike are captivated with this amazing, cutting-edge educational tool that boasts many advantages over other whiteboards. First, the Panaboard allows the user to use a magic pen—a technological wonder on its own!—or their finger to write on the board. A twist of the top allows you to choose from a variety of colors for writing or highlighting, which you can change as you go for interest or emphasis. Twist again and you can easily erase your work. Another interesting feature is the Panaboard's multi-touch surface, which can recognize three separate inputs at one time, allowing three individuals (or one individual using three different fingers) to write or draw on the board at the same time. This simultaneous operation engages students and promotes collaboration. The board also supports dynamic image control, inviting users to move, scale, and rotate content directly on the board.



Microsoft programs like Word and Excel are easily accessed on the life-sized board. Our intermediate students are thus learning to use PowerPoint for writing projects and using multi-colored writing tools to solve math problems; they have also taken virtual tours of special places like the Hershey's Chocolate Factory and watched history and science videos enhanced with built-in stereo speakers. Most relevant for their futures, they're using the board to explore different career paths, research the skills required, and complete job applications. For a video demonstration of this technological advancement that has completely amplified students' enthusiasm for and engagement in their own learning, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sqvn1x4JTFs.



Sierra Academy of San Diego

There's lots going on in San Diego this semester! Here's just an overview of some of the many exciting developments energizing our campus for the 2013–2014 school year:

- Mobility Training:** Students are learning the bus routes around our new location in San Carlos using Google Maps to plan and price transportation to their desired destinations. Not only is this a great way for students to practice their time management and budgeting skills, but they're discovering great places for lunch throughout the community!
- School Garden:** Sierra is proud of our new on-site garden area, featuring an individual plot for each class. Students are excited to test out their green thumbs during our first planting, which began in October. Soil has been prepared and turned, fertilizer has been added, and now it's just a matter of time before our fruits and vegetables start sprouting!
- WorkAbility Program:** Our expanding list of community-based partnerships now comprises 12 local businesses, including Petco, Village Gym, Subway, Smart & Final, Dollar Tree, REI, and On the Border. Students interviewed for off-campus positions this past fall, followed by the commencement of on-site work in mid-October.



- Student Government:** We've had a fabulous election season in San Diego, with all of our student candidates working so hard to campaign for positions of their choice and deliver their speeches on stage. Through this valuable on-campus activity, young citizens learn the importance of being a leader and making their school an enjoyable, high-functioning place for the entire student body.

And then there's our newly formed **Spirit Squad**, our **Sierra Wolves** football team, our ever-increasing menu of **on-campus jobs** that earn students Sierra Dollars they can spend in the school store, and the continuation of the **PEERS** program, a researched-based social skills initiative focused on peer friendships. Come visit us anytime to witness firsthand San Diego's multifaceted programming!

the western connection

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Katie's Corner

This year, we are pleased to announce the implementation of Renaissance Learning STAR Assessments, the most widely used computer-adaptive assessment system in K–12 U.S. schools today. The three STAR Enterprise assessments we've adopted—STAR Reading, STAR Math, and STAR Early Literacy—help our teachers map and analyze student growth, formulate individualized instruction, and evaluate and refine the effectiveness of our learning tools. Furthermore, the system provides valuable professional development and support for our staff. STAR Enterprise assessments use the most sophisticated statistical and test-creation technology and psychometrics to get greater value out of each testing session. The assessments dynamically adjust to each student's unique responses while pinpointing student achievement levels. This data precision allows our teachers to perfectly match each learner to the curriculum and provide instructional opportunities that support each student's individual learning growth. We are proud to add yet another component to our continuously evolving educational program that supports the success of our students.

Katherine Cheney
Regional Director



facebook.com/sesischools • www.sesi-schools.com • twitter.com/sesischools



Sierra School of Butte County

2775 Yard Street • Oroville, CA 95966
P: 530-533-5464 • F: 530-533-5460

Director: Sheila McCarthy • smccarthy@sierra-school.com

Sierra School of Solano County & Solano Day Rehab

5416 Holdener Road, P.O. Box 590 • Elmira, CA 95625
P: 707-453-6227 • F: 707-453-6957

Director: Tina Crivelli-Juarez • tcrivelli@sierra-school.com
Mental Health Director: Jenelle Droke
jdroke@sierra-school.com

Sierra Academy of Scottsdale

17800 N. Perimeter Drive, Suite 110 • Scottsdale, AZ 85255
P: 480-767-8659 • F: 480-767-9776

Director: Debra Watland • dwatland@sierra-school.com

Springall Academy

6460 Boulder Lake Avenue • San Diego, CA 92119
P: 619-460-5090 • F: 619-460-5091

Director: Dr. Heather Dierolf • hdierolf@springall.org

Sierra School at Eastern

1150 Eastern Avenue • Sacramento, CA 95864
P: 916-488-2515 (Upper) • P: 916-488-5455 (Lower)
F: 916-488-6763

Upper School Director: Janine Hughes
jhughes@sierra-school.com

Lower School Director: Carlee Erickson
cerickson@sierra-school.com

Sierra Academy of San Diego

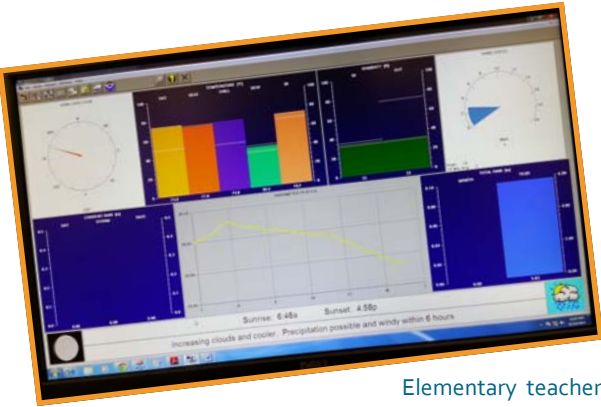
6460 Boulder Lake Avenue • San Diego, CA 92119
P: 619-460-5066 • F: 619-460-5091

Director: Katy DiSano Lopez • kdisano@sierra-school.com

Sierra School of Sonoma County

4580 Bennett View Drive • Santa Rosa, CA 95404
P: 707-591-0716 • F: 707-591-0720

Director: Jaime Horsley • jhorsley@sierra-school.com



Sierra School of Butte County

A state-of-the-art weather station has come to Butte, CA! That's right, the Sierra School of Butte County now houses highly technical meteorological equipment that allows us to track and record local weather. Our students are thrilled to participate in dynamic lessons regarding weather patterns and the interesting science behind weather. Every day, they're eager to use our new weather equipment to provide daily weather reports not only for our school community, but for the public as well, via their very own weather website at: www.wunderground.com/weatherstation/WXDailyHistory.asp?ID=KCAOROV12.

Elementary teacher Tamara Fowler was instrumental in bringing this exciting new development to our campus by collaborating with Matt Wanink—local meteorologist, field technician, and data analyst—to procure the weather system for the school. Mr. Wanink visited the Sierra School and personally assisted in setting up the equipment that is now part of our daily programming. The equipment includes rooftop sensors and the Davis Instruments Vantage Pro2 wireless weather system, which translates and interprets weather station readings.

Just another way that the Sierra School of Butte County incorporates up-to-date technology and hands-on interactive learning to stimulate our students' interest in their academic environment.

Sierra School at Eastern: Upper School

The staff of Eastern Upper is committed to involving our students in a wide variety of activities to assist with their development. As part of our **community involvement** efforts, we've partnered with the Grace Foundation of Northern California, an animal rescue center. In working with the Grace Foundation, we have two main goals. The first is to teach our students about rescue work and rescue animals; and the second is to show them how interacting with animals can positively influence their lives.



As the kids participate in caring for the horses on the Grace Ranch in El Dorado Hills, they hear about where each horse came from and from what kind of conditions. They learn about the special needs these abused and abandoned animals often have and how Grace's training of them is based on those needs. It is our hope that our students will connect with the animals' stories, in the process developing compassion that can lead them to make better choices for themselves and toward others. We're always exploring ways for our students to discover hidden potentials and shut-off feelings inside themselves while they're relaxing and having fun, and this experience is the perfect way to do that. As the horses benefit greatly from the time and attention devoted to them, and as loving acceptance is exchanged on both sides, each student comes to that place of inner discovery in their own special way. Our collaboration with such meaningful agencies as the Grace Foundation truly promotes our students' growth and enriches their ability to see their world in a different light.



Sierra School of Sonoma County

We've put forth a great effort this year to increase our **school spirit**. One of the best forums to develop and nurture this feeling of being a united community is our regular school assemblies, where we highlight our school mascot and colors. When students wear orange on assembly day—the color for our Sierra Tigers—they receive a tiger paw to decorate. Each paw earns school money for their individual student bank accounts. Then we collect all the paws to adorn our school bulletin boards.



Assemblies also provide an opportunity for us to assess our students' standing in terms of our **Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRs)** and to challenge them to continue to make improvements. Each month, we focus on one topic of great interest to our student body. The last assembly centered on health. When students were able to identify things that make an individual healthy, they were awarded with water bottles.

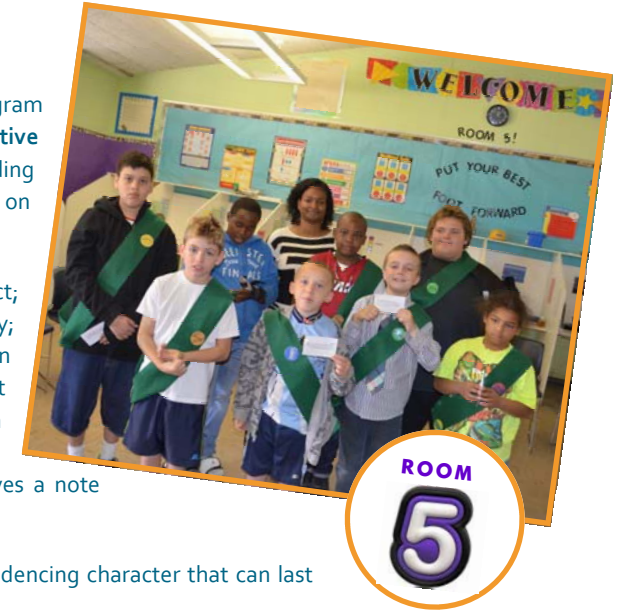
Because assembly is the only time during the week when our whole school is gathered together in one place, it also serves as a great time for our students to practice their **positive behaviors**. As we talk about upcoming events and schoolwide developments, they are encouraged to participate in the discussion, getting a chance to have their voices heard by other students and staff members with whom they don't usually interact. At assembly, students are recognized by their teachers for exceptional classroom accomplishments. They enjoy receiving the praise and the Tiger certificate and prize of their choice that accompany individual recognition.

Sierra School of Solano County

Classroom 5 at the Sierra School of Solano Day Rehab has implemented a new program within the mental health component of our curriculum that focuses on **promoting positive character trait development** in our students. Daily process groups focus on building awareness and encouraging pro-social behavior in students; emphasis is also placed on self-expression, coping skills, and listening skills through such means as role-playing.

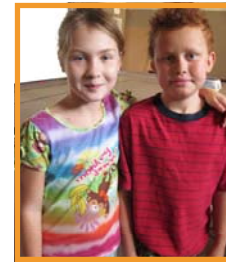
The eight character traits we aim to develop during the school year are: (1) respect; (2) assertiveness; (3) responsibility; (4) seeking staff support; (5) forgiveness; (6) honesty; (7) self-control; and (8) helpfulness. After learning each respective skill, students are given multiple opportunities to practice and master the "trait of the month," a process that culminates with a "pinning ceremony." This monthly ceremony is a way to look back on student progress and remind them of the positive choices they have made all month and can continue to make. Accompanying the relevant pin, each student also receives a note card detailing how they have shown mastery of the target trait.

At the end of the year, students will be able to proudly display their sash and pins, evidencing character that can last a lifetime.



Sierra School at Eastern: Lower School

Things are rockin' and rollin' at Eastern's Lower School! After successfully navigating the first few months of the school year—with our wonderful staff constantly looking for ways to further motivate our students and most effectively advance their academic and behavioral progress—we're very much looking forward to the coming months, when we plan to continue emphasizing particular aspects of our program model that have positive effects schoolwide. One such current focal point is the area of **community building**. To instill this value throughout the school, we've been concentrating on the demonstration of good sportsmanship in all that our students do. Whether they're engaged in physical education exercises, organized sporting events, classroom competitions during our monthly assemblies, or just free-time activities, students can be seen making a conscious effort to display sportsmanship in all their dealings with peers and staff. Our Therapy Department has been reinforcing this schoolwide goal in peer mentoring, group, and individual therapy sessions by often focusing on team-building skills that foster an even stronger, more positive school culture and environment.



The growth we've seen in our students in such a short amount of time has been impressive. "We all try to work together and make sure everyone is getting along when they lose, and we try not to get angry or say bad things," shares third grader Payten. And Leo points out the many ways in which we're building community throughout the school day: "We sometimes make breakfast as a classroom family and then we sit and bond with each other. We learn all the things we like the same and our differences."

Springall Academy

Our students are proud to give back to the local community that gives so much to them. This year, with the help of Jena Lehr, our school counselor, the students chose to participate in the AJ's Playhouse Toy Drive. AJ is a local radio station disc jockey who, for the ninth year a row, was lifted 60 feet aboveground on a scissor lift "crane," where he ate, slept, and recorded live on air until more than 102,000 new and unwrapped toys were collected for patients of Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego.

Springall students were glad to participate in this first **service learning project** of the year. Our Events Committee of four students devised and executed a plan to help out this great cause, which included Moriah creating a sign to hang in the front office, followed by a full week of toy collection from every classroom. Middle schooler Jake alone brought in two whole bags of toys that he picked out himself! Once our collection was completed, student leaders loaded up the school van with our donations and headed to the IKEA parking lot, where AJ was delighted to meet our Springall representatives. He even gave them a "shout-out" live on the radio, as well as coupons for free Jamba Juice smoothies.

When the kids returned to campus, the excitement was written all over their faces. They were in high spirits and ready to share stories of the experience with the other students. "AJ was so happy to see us! He kept our sign to hang up on the crane!" Moriah said. And Kyle added, "I met a real DJ, and he gave me his autograph."

