



Vista Newsletter #3
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"No other age level is of more importance to the future of individuals, and, literally, to that of society than the middle school years, because these are the years when youngsters crystallize their beliefs about themselves and firm up their self-concepts, their philosophies of life and their values - the things that are the ultimate determinants of their behaviors."

Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years
John H. Lounsbury

Why Choose a Middle School for Gifted Adolescents?

The beginning of the fifth grade school year can bring about the usual excitement of seeing friends and meeting new teachers, but can also be accompanied by some anxiety about the end of elementary school and the somewhat intimidating process of applying to middle school. In addition to the added responsibility and accountability associated with life as a fifth grader, many students and their families must also juggle open house visits, application completion, test preparation, and essay writing.

Several key factors need to be considered when choosing the best middle school option for your gifted child. This article will address the importance of considering a school specifically geared to meet the needs of gifted students, and why Vista Academy may just be the ideal place for your child.

All middle schoolers are in a period of rapid transition. They are developing meaningful relationships, a personal and social values

system, a healthy self-esteem and identity, and increasing independence from their families. All adolescents at this age need role models, supportive adults, and appropriate intellectual stimulation to ensure growth. Yet gifted adolescents have unique needs which go beyond these characteristics.

Gifted adolescents are often significantly more advanced than their peers in one or more academic areas, and have a greater propensity for deductive thinking. These students tend to have increased sensitivity to people and events, are more deeply introspective, and often display a higher sense of justice and fair play. Their actions and ideas are often influenced by heightened self-criticism, sensitivity, and intensity (Mendaglio, 2002). Understanding these characteristics can help guide gifted students toward self-actualizing behaviors and emotional growth. They need to develop relationships with people who take them seriously and have similar awareness.

Their sophisticated abilities to conceptualize, seek alternatives, explore diverse relationships, make connections, and find creative ways of self-expression should serve them well come adulthood, but during adolescence, these same qualities may create, rather than solve, some unique problems.

Middle schools which cater to the needs of the gifted adolescent should be characterized by an integrated curriculum where students produce projects that demonstrate meaningful applications of the knowledge they are acquiring. Students should be investigating the questions that they themselves are asking about the world and their place in it. They are supposed to be solving problems, making connections, asking questions, and taking risks. These characteristics are at the heart of Vista's curricular philosophy.

Yet according to researchers Buescher and Higham, young gifted learners between the ages 11 – 15 frequently report a range of problems as a result of their exceptional intellect. These include:

- perfectionism
- competitiveness
- mixed messages about their talents

- unrealistic appraisal of their gifts and talents
- rejection from peers
- an unchallenging school program

Vista Academy builds on the strong tradition of academic excellence of Open Window School, which has served the needs of gifted children for over 20 years. Our experienced faculty and staff are trained in best practices to maximize the boundless potential of this unique student population. Our small class size, commitment to individualized instruction, and curricular philosophy of “raising floors” and “eliminating ceilings” help us recognize, understand, and nurture the advanced abilities of the gifted adolescent.

While other schools may offer a rigorous curriculum and tout their advanced coursework, few area middle schools cater exclusively to the gifted adolescent, and this could mean the difference between an isolated, unmotivated and disengaged student, and a high achieving, passionate young scholar.

Vista’s small size, dynamic curriculum, unique off campus experiences, and expertise in the area of gifted education make our school a wonderful option for middle school.

Best wishes for a wonderful start to the school year, and I do hope you consider Vista Academy as an exciting and viable option for sixth grade.

I look forward to welcoming you back to school.

Tim Costello
Middle School Head

