

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT: Choosing a High School as a Gifted Student

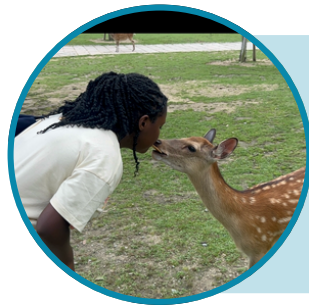
IEA Students on Finding the Right Fit

In these profiles, IEA students share how they discovered their best fit high school, what they learned along the way, and the advice they believe families would like to know.

From public and private schools to magnet programs, boarding schools, and more, each gifted learner's path looks different. Through their reflections, our students offer guidance and encouragement for families exploring high school options.

Thank you to all of our students for their participation and words of wisdom.

Student responses have been edited for brevity. Their full responses are available in our blog series Finding the Right Fit: Choosing a High School as a Gifted Student at www.EducationalAdvancement.org/finding-the-right-fit-series



Daryn

Boarding
Phillips Academy Andover
CLASS OF 2026

IEA Program: CDB Scholarship

Other Schools Considered: Other New England boarding schools and local private prep schools

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

- A range of academic and extracurricular offerings
- Autonomy in activities and classes interests
- Where students are self-advocates

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Extensive, unique course offerings that I may not have had a chance to take elsewhere
2. I fell in love with the friendly, supportive community
3. I appreciated the location and environment of Andover, which is right outside Boston, with an amazing walkable downtown

What do you enjoy most about your high school?

I enjoy Andover's community the most about the school. The school's motto, "Youth from every quarter," is represented in the diversity of the faculty, staff, and student body. Some of the best lessons I've learned have come from my classmates' contributions during a group discussion. And I love the Andover tradition to always hold the door open for someone behind you.

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

The discussion-based environment and flexibility within classes appeal to me as a gifted student.

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

Given the high academic rigor across the board, the school environment can feel intense. Allowing students more time to step away from academics and engage with different creative activities would be a great way to improve balance in daily routines.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

If you are considering attending a boarding school, boarding school is a comprehensive lifestyle that includes high academics as one of its aspects. Whereas with day schools, the primary focus is on academics, so consider the overall experience you wish to have socially, athletically, and mentally in a 24/7 community.

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Chloe

Public Magnet
Eagle Rock High School
CLASS OF 2028

IEA Program: Academy & EXPLORE

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

- Magnet program
- Support for gifted talent
- Advanced studies
- Sports program

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Travel distance
2. IB/magnet
3. Sports programs
4. Costs

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

Eagle Rock School offers a lot of places to cool off and de-stress if you need it and a lot of people you can talk to if you need help

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

I found programs outside of school to fill gaps, like the IEA EXPLORE program.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Find a high school that offers what you are interested in. Don't think too much about it if you don't get the school you want. Don't stress about it; it's no big deal.



Shaurya

Public
Pasadena High School
CLASS OF 2028

IEA Program: EXPLORE

Other Schools Considered: Stanford Online High School

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

Freedom to explore various courses and programs without limitations (like grade level) as well as teachers that could push me far and support me for whatever I wanted to do.

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Math Academy accelerated program
2. Able to do AP courses as early as Freshman and Sophomore years
3. Access to programs such as Summer Research Connections at Caltech

What do you enjoy most about your high school?

I enjoy how everyone in my school is unique and diverse, so it is a lot easier to make friends and get to know each other. My school has a friendly environment.

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

I get to dive deep into my interest areas without restrictions on courses, including AP's. The teachers and staff support me and my accomplishments, such as when I earned honorable mention in the US Physics Olympiad.

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

One issue that I've faced is that my school does not currently offer high level AP courses or testing, including the AP Physics C. It also only offers 7 periods, which presents some challenges for course scheduling. For instance, I've had to delay taking AP Cybersecurity to make my 10th grade schedule work out.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Pick a school that will support you based on what you want to do. If you really want to play sports in high school, pick a school that offers a good sports program, while if you want to get an admission to a really good college by merit, pick a school that offers difficult courses and college prep programs.

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Daniel

Independent / Private
Harvard-Westlake
CLASS OF 2026

IEA Program: CDB Scholarship

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

- **Academic Freedom.** Minimal core requirements and the flexibility to explore advanced academic interests (including AP).
- **Location.** Being in or near a city was essential.
- **Community.** I looked for a school with strong school pride and a vibrant campus culture to reflect my own personality.

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. **Debate Team.** I'm deeply passionate about Lincoln-Douglas debate and I wanted to be part of a program with a dedicated debate community and the resources to support national-level competition.
2. **Proximity to Home.** After spending time at a boarding school on the opposite coast, I realized how much I missed being close to my family.
3. **Academic Structure.** Andover's quarter system made it difficult to form lasting relationships with teachers. Harvard-Westlake's trimester system offers a more stable learning environment that supports both academic growth and personal development.

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

Harvard-Westlake has supported my growth as a gifted student not just through rigorous academics, but through the flexibility and freedom it offers students to pursue their interests and connect deeply with faculty and peers.

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

While the counseling staff is limited in number, they consistently are working toward meaningful mental health improvements on campus.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Begin reflecting on what defines a fulfilling high school experience for you. Consider not only academic achievements, accomplishments, and recognition, but also the character and values you want to develop. Think about the kind of person you aspire to become.



Santiago

Independent / Private
Polytechnic School
CLASS OF 2027

IEA Program: CDB Scholarship

Other Schools Considered: Flintridge Preparatory School

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

I was looking for a supportive, challenging environment with strong academics, engaging teachers, and opportunities to grow both personally and intellectually.

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Rigorous academics that would challenge me and prepare me for college.
2. Supportive community with dedicated teachers and diverse extracurricular opportunities.
3. Balanced focus on both intellectual growth and personal development.

What do you enjoy most about your high school?

The strong sense of support and community at my high school. My classmates challenge me to improve while remaining supportive, and the teachers genuinely care about our success and are always eager to assist.

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

By giving me access to teachers who are enthusiastic about their subjects, challenging coursework, and chances for independent study. They inspire me to think critically, delve deeply into subjects, and go beyond the required curriculum. The atmosphere encourages creativity and curiosity, which has helped me develop academically, socially, and as a problem-solver.

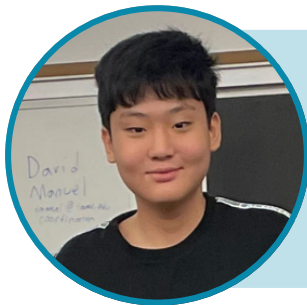
Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

I think there could be more opportunities for interdisciplinary projects and more flexibility for pursuing advanced topics at my own pace.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Consider factors other than academics. Verify that the school provides a nurturing atmosphere where you are both challenged and inspired. If it is possible, visit schools, speak with current students, and consider what kind of community will support your personal and academic development.

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Channing

Independent Online
Davidson Academy Online
CLASS OF 2028

IEA Program: CDB Scholarship

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

- A good student:teacher ratio
- Like-minded peers
- Strong academic focus
- Freedom of selection of courses
- Counselor support
- Course rigor

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Great focus on academics and fosters discussion with students and teachers.
2. Very good student:teacher ratio (5:1) conducive for learning student-centered.
3. Students placed based on ability (not age), so I would always feel challenged.

What do you enjoy most about your high school?

I like our classroom model. We are expected to come to class already having read relevant materials. This enables the class to focus on students asking questions and collaborating to solve problems. The active learning model allows me to gain a much deeper understanding of the material compared to lectures.

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

It's helped me realize that learning is collaborative and see the opportunity that's out there. If I had never thought of writing collaboratively and a skill that takes time and precision, I would always have been stuck in the mindset of filling up pages as quickly as possible.

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

As I'm far advanced in math, I have found the need to take courses outside of the school for math credit. My counselor and teachers are supportive of me taking such courses at Stanford Pre-Collegiate University Level Online and Euler Math Circle, which I appreciate.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Ask yourself what you need and what serves you best. Don't chase big name schools if you don't feel that they suit you. If you're unsure about which school to pick, don't be afraid to ask students in the school about their experiences.



JohannaKate

Early College Entrance Program
Early Entrance Program at CSULA
CLASS OF 2021

IEA Program: Yunasa

Other Schools Attended: Alhambra High School and Alverno Heights Academy

What type of support and learning environment were you looking for?

Despite attending two of them, highschool did not provide the kind of support or learning environment I needed. The Early Entrance Program at California State University Los Angeles provided a pathway to attend college as a regular student and be surrounded by a cohort of kids around my age.

What were your top 3 reasons for choosing your school?

1. Challenged me academically
2. Would be around other people like me
3. Location

How has this school supported your needs as a gifted student?

The EEP program allowed me to socialize while being academically challenged. Events such as our annual spring formal or having a year book insured we didn't "miss out" on typical highschool activities.

Are there any ways you wish your school could better support you?

I wish more gifted students had access to programs that balanced the multi faceted educational requirements of gifted students while allowing them to be surrounded by peers, both gifted and otherwise.

Do you have any tips or advice for gifted 8th graders?

Sometimes it's okay to choose a school based on how cool the library is.

Nobody's path is linear. Never feel bad about needing to slow down or take a break. Sometimes that is just as important as challenging yourself. Do what is best for you at this current moment.