



The Cottonwood High School

Montessori-Inspired, site-based High School Program

A supportive environment where students follow their natural curiosity to learn.



Offering 2 & 5 Day Programs



Teacher/students Ratio is 15:1



Holistic, Personalized and Deeply Tailored



No Curve Grading Mastery Learning

Reimagining Community. Reshaping Education.

About Us

The Cottonwood site-based High School is a Site-Based FREE public charter school located in the Buckeye Union School District in beautiful El Dorado Hills. At Cottonwood, we prepare students for the 21st century using a very different approach and methodology from traditional schools. We use project-based learning, interdisciplinary studies, coupled with Montessori principles of teaching and learning.

At Cottonwood students lead their own education by choosing topics that interest them, creating a love of learning.



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Our Testimonials



"The teachers and students are very close together. We get to know each other. It's a lot of fun."

10th Grade Student



"The school is amazing. I've never had a bad day here and I'm glad to be in this community."

9th Grade Student



"It has been nice that it's not a big school, so you don't get lost in the shuffle."

10th Grade Student



"These are very small class sizes and the school is open to new ideas."

9th Grade Student

Reimagining Community

When you enroll in The Cottonwood School, you become part of a community where student's voice is valued and student agency encouraged. Inspired by the Montessori approach, we understand that to thrive, students need a safe and supportive environment, rich with opportunities to explore their interests.

The Cottonwood teachers work together with students to provide a stimulating education that keeps pace with each individual learner's personality, needs, and goals. We strive to support students' academic, social, and emotional development because a well-rounded education creates responsible, successful adults who contribute to our diverse world.

Reshaping Education

Our approach to high school education at Cottonwood is very different from traditional schools. We believe that when students guide their own education, they come to value learning and recognize its relevance to their life – and their success.

Establishing a lifelong love of learning

We emphasize project-based learning and interdisciplinary studies that allow course content to develop around the individual student's interests. Students are matched up with a single teacher, or learning coach, for the entire four-year high school experience. With the help of their coach, each student builds their curriculum – one that not only meets or exceeds the California State Standards but also satisfies the student's natural curiosity and supports their unique gifts.

Honoring a holistic education

The Cottonwood School's on-site high school provides a supportive and safe environment that nurtures whole-learner development. Our methodology is based on Montessori principles of teaching and learning. We believe that balanced, holistic development enhances overall learning. We nurture the students' growth socially and emotionally, while also making sure the students can achieve the academic excellence they need to successfully transition into college or a career.

Building community together

We recognize that for high school students to profoundly contribute to our diverse world, they must feel rooted in a supportive community. That's why we encourage families, students, teachers, and staff to participate in our many Cottonwood community events and activities. Education goes hand in hand with collaboration, relationships, and a strong sense of belonging. At The Cottonwood School, we are reimagining community and reshaping education to keep pace with the evolving

Our flexible approach to learning allows students to develop all aspects of themselves. The Cottonwood School promotes a positive growth mindset that embraces learning and establishes a strong foundation for future personal success in academics, career, and community.



Why Choose Us

Supporting Holistic Learning

The Cottonwood High School's approach is grounded in Montessori philosophy. We create a safe and supportive environment that allows students to follow their natural curiosity and desire to learn.

All our teachers, or learning coaches, are specially trained and fully credentialed. They work with each student, always meeting the individual student right where they are to be sure of their holistic development—including social and emotional growth, and academic achievement—is optimally supported.

At Cottonwood HS we do more than support academics. We believe in the value of community in your child's educational development. Every month our supportive community comes together in many different ways to foster positive social and emotional development in addition to academic excellence. The Cottonwood School is reimagining community and reshaping education for a better tomorrow.

Teacher to Student ratio is 15:1

We believe in keeping the teacher-student ratio low, which creates a trusted environment for the students. With a low ratio, students are able to create deeper relationships with their teachers. This in turn provides a supportive space to develop projects and experiences tailored to each student.

Choice of Learning Programs to Fit Your Needs

We offer 2 different on-site programs. Both emphasize community and collaboration. The course work is developed by the teachers, and students can choose to come on campus 2 or 5 days per week. And, each student's Instructional Fund is applied to either of our on-site programs.

Synergy Program

2 days/week on campus – Students are responsible for completing 3 days of schoolwork at home. Teachers have office hours on remote days.

Fusion Program

5 days/week on campus – Students are responsible for completing the work at the school site with the guidance of teachers.

Montessori-Inspired FREE Public High School

The Montessori approach is an award-winning education approach developed 50 years ago by Dr. Maria Montessori who believed that schools should be designed to meet the personality and interests of students at every stage. At Cottonwood HS, our school is built upon that belief. There are 20 Montessori inspired high schools in the U.S; Cottonwood HS is the only one in the Greater Sacramento Area.

One Learning Coach for Entire 4 Years of High School

Every day, students meet one on one or in a small group to discuss their progress with their learning coach. The learning coach and student relationship is an important one. Over time, the trust that is built helps the student develop self-confidence and elevates their ability to make good choices and decisions for a bright future.

Service-Learning to Grow Community

Service-learning opportunities allow students to become knowledgeable in specific areas of interest while serving local and global communities. Learning coaches help students find ways they can contribute in their area of interest. At Cottonwood HS we believe learning to serve the community is a valuable piece of a teenager's education. It builds self-esteem, as well as a sense of belonging and purpose.

Grades determined by subject mastery

At Cottonwood HS, we do not emphasize academic competition among students. Instead, students are evaluated against clearly stated academic objectives through a wide variety of authentic assessment techniques, including portfolios, long-term projects, and self-evaluation.

Interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning for Real-World Skills

Project-based learning (PBL) gives students the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills that prepare them for the challenges and problems of the real world. PBL is learning by doing. At Cottonwood, we practice Interdisciplinary PBL every day. Whatever the current real-world issues are, we integrate them into the high school student's curriculum to make their learning engaging and relevant.

Holistic, Individually Tailored Learning Experience

At Cottonwood HS, we help young people discover and develop their interests, all while following California State Content Standards. We carefully prepare an environment and curriculum that helps teenagers pursue their passion while developing mastery across subject areas.

Every student is unique, and so are their interests. If your student is interested in fly fishing, for example, they might research the history of fly fishing, write a paper on fly fishing, learn about the length, distance, and trigonometry relevant to fly fishing, and learn about the life cycle of the fish that can be caught fly fishing.

Core Groups to Enhance Education

Cottonwood offers 4 clubs during school hours:

- Literary Art Magazine – students write articles and produce a graphic magazine
- Readers Rendezvous – students read a book and discuss it in a group
- Student Leadership – students boost their leadership, learn team-building skills, and discover the value of networking
- Model United Nations (in association with U.C. Berkeley) – students learn parliamentary procedures, public speaking, and debating skills, world politics and events, and more

Contact Us



Interested to learn more about The Cottonwood High School?

We're happy to answer your questions. Contact us!



THE
COTTONWOOD
SCHOOL

Reimagining Community.
Reshaping Education.

Montessori-inspired, site-based high school program
A supportive environment where students follow their natural
curiosity to learn.

Also offering dynamic homeschooling programs for TK-12
A uniquely personalized, whole-learner approach that nurtures
academic, social, and emotional achievement.



ADDRESS :

7006 Rossmore Lane,
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762



PHONE & FAX :

(530) 285-2578



EMAIL :

info@cottonwoodk12.org



WEBSITE :

www.cottonwoodhs.org