

Oakwood School

North Hollywood, CA, United States

A 1951 Dewey-inspired experiment in progressive education, still pairing relational pedagogy with a hands-on CalArts arts partnership in North Hollywood.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	71/100
Academic outcomes	73/100
University placement	71/100
Prestige & heritage	69/100
Alumni network	79/100
Facilities	68/100
Transparency	66/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Oakwood occupies a distinct niche in Los Angeles independent education: a progressive, arts-literate day school founded in **1951** that still takes John Dewey’s core premise seriously — education as lived experience, not rote delivery. Its philosophy is unusually explicit. Oakwood wants students to “grapple meaningfully with ideas”, discover links across disciplines, and grow into independent moral thinkers. That gives the school a clear centre of gravity: not old-school academic drill, not glossy Westside status performance, but a deliberately relational model that prizes autonomy, dignity, community and public-mindedness. For parents weary of schools that talk about the whole child while running on competition and anxiety, Oakwood offers a more *humane*, *thoughtful* proposition.

What marks Oakwood out is the consistency of that mission. The arts are not decorative here; they sit alongside sciences, humanities and athletics as part of the school’s founding rationale. The school’s own language keeps returning to passion, self-knowledge, risk-taking in learning and respect for young people’s feelings and thoughts. That is not standard college-prep boilerplate. Add the **1:8** student-teacher ratio and you get a school built for close adult attention and high-touch teaching. The payoff for the right family is substantial: *serious intellectual work* in a culture that still protects curiosity, voice and emotional safety. The trade-off is just as clear. Families seeking a highly conventional, rule-bound, explicitly exam-driven environment will find Oakwood’s progressive stance less comfortable.

It belongs on a shortlist for parents who want an American curriculum in English, non-religious, day-school format, with genuine emphasis on arts, discussion, belonging and student agency from ages **5–18**. Oakwood fits children who are bright, expressive and motivated by engagement rather than fear; children who thrive when adults know them well; and children who want room to test ideas, make things, speak up and revise their thinking. It also suits students with a strong artistic identity who do not want to

sacrifice academic ambition. The best match is a young person drawn to *independence of thought*, *creative intensity*, *moral seriousness* and *joyful learning* — not a child who wants anonymity, relentless rank-ordering or a narrow definition of success.

STRENGTHS

- Founded in 1951 by parents including Robert and Jessica Ryan and Sidney Harmon, the school originated as a response to a perceived need for a richer, more progressive education, making it one of the older independent schools in Los Angeles.
- The school consists of two campuses: an elementary school in Studio City and a secondary school in North Hollywood, giving each age group a purpose-built site rather than a single shared building.
- The school's student-teacher ratio is 9:1, according to U.S. News data, suggesting relatively small class groupings.
- The school is a National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) member, giving it recognised third-party accreditation.
- Notable alumni include Chris Pine, Noah Wyle, Todd Haynes (film director), Elizabeth McGovern (actress), Lily-Rose Depp, Zoey Deutch, and Alex Ebert, a Golden Globe and Grammy-winning musician, indicating a strong track record of graduates entering the arts.

TRADE - OFFS

- The acceptance rate of Oakwood School is 15%, which is lower than the national average of 81%, making places genuinely competitive rather than a formality.
- Tuition is set at K-6: \$45,990 and 7-12: \$55,070, plus a separate application fee of \$150, placing Oakwood firmly in the upper tier of LA day-school costs.
- Oakwood is a day school only, with no boarding option, so relocating families must secure independent housing within commuting range of North Hollywood or Studio City.
- Its alumni base is heavily weighted toward entertainment-industry names, reflecting a distinct Los Angeles, celebrity-adjacent social culture that will not appeal to every incoming family.

ADMISSIONS

Oakwood runs two campuses -- elementary in Studio City, secondary in North Hollywood -- and admits via the Standard Application Online, with a priority deadline in mid-November and a final deadline in mid-December. Requirements include transcripts, teacher recommendations, a \$150 application fee, standardized testing (ERB, ISEE, CTP4, CAASPP or MAP), and an interview; international applicants also submit TOEFL scores. With an acceptance rate reported around 15%, Oakwood ranks among the more selective independent day schools in the San Fernando Valley.

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_23658ed6f7.