

Los Angeles County High School for the Arts

Los Angeles, United States



A tuition-free public conservatory embedded on a Cal State LA campus, where audition, not address, decides who studies art

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	41/100
Academic outcomes	16/100
University placement	79/100
Prestige & heritage	51/100
Alumni network	0/100
Facilities	49/100
Transparency	56/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Los Angeles County High School for the Arts occupies a rare niche in the American market: a **tuition-free** public conservatory for ages **14-18**, based on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles, with entry by audition or portfolio rather than postcode. Founded in **1985**, and run by the Los Angeles County Office of Education in partnership with Cal State LA, it combines a US High School Diploma with Advanced Placement and daily conservatory-style training in cinematic arts, dance, music, theatre and visual arts. That combination matters. Many schools offer arts enrichment; LACHSA is built around the arts. The point is not an occasional production or a strong orchestra, but **serious artistic formation** alongside college-preparatory academics.

What puts it on a shortlist is the structure. This is a public school with a specialist admissions gate, a university setting and a clear vocational tilt. Students work inside an environment shaped by performance, exhibition, rehearsal and critique. The school also pushes interdisciplinary arts, including musical theatre and theatre tech, which broadens the offer beyond the standard five-discipline conservatory model. Parents looking for *a genuine pre-professional arts track* without private-school fees will find very few direct competitors. The trade-off is just as clear: this is not a broad, all-purpose high school with arts on the side. It is for teenagers ready to commit time, stamina and identity to an art form, while keeping up with an academic programme that includes AP.

The right student for LACHSA is not just talented, but disciplined. Audition-based schools reward *technical promise*, yes, but they also demand resilience, receptiveness to critique and comfort in a peer group full of other strong performers and makers. A teenager who wants Friday-night football culture or a conventional suburban high-school experience will find the centre of gravity elsewhere. A teenager who wants *daily immersion in craft*, high-level peer competition and the energy of an arts-focused community on a university campus will find a much better fit here. For families in Los Angeles, the strongest argument is blunt: if your child’s art is not an extracurricular interest but the main event, LACHSA belongs on the list.

STRENGTHS

- Operates as a public magnet school under the Los Angeles County Office of Education, so there is no tuition charge for eligible county residents.
- Campus is co-located with California State University, Los Angeles, giving students access to university-level performance and studio facilities.
- Offers conservatory-style training across multiple disciplines including theatre, music, dance, visual arts, creative writing and cinematic arts alongside the academic diploma track.
- Admission is by competitive audition rather than academic grades alone, drawing serious pre-professional talent from across the county.

TRADE-OFFS

- As a public day school there is no boarding option, so out-of-area or international families must independently arrange local housing.
- The dual arts-and-academics schedule is demanding and may not suit students wanting a conventional, broad-based high school experience.
- Limited traditional extracurricular offerings such as school sports compared with comprehensive high schools.
- Admission is highly competitive and audition-based, meaning strong academic students without a demonstrable arts talent are unlikely to gain a place.

ADMISSIONS

Entry is by live audition or portfolio review in the student's chosen arts discipline, combined with academic eligibility; the school is a Los Angeles County Office of Education magnet, so priority and free tuition apply to county residents. Auditions are typically held annually for the following academic year, with places awarded competitively based on artistic merit and available seats per department. Because it draws applicants countywide and trains at a pre-professional level, competition for popular disciplines such as film and theatre is intense, and prospective families should confirm current audition dates, repertoire requirements and residency rules directly with the school.

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_52a05d7f76.