

Cate School

Carpinteria, United States



A century-old mesa-top boarding school above the Pacific, where equestrian roots meet inquiry-driven academic rigor.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	77/100
Academic outcomes	79/100
University placement	77/100
Prestige & heritage	77/100
Alumni network	76/100
Facilities	80/100
Transparency	74/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Perched above the Pacific in Carpinteria, eleven miles from Santa Barbara, Cate trades on something rarer than scenery: scale, selectivity and seriousness. This is a small American boarding and day school for ages 14 to 18, founded in 1910, with a student body recorded at ****270 students**** and drawn from ****31 states**** and ****18 countries****. That matters. Schools of this size cannot hide weak teaching, loose culture or indifferent pastoral care behind sprawl. Cate’s identity is clear: a university-preparatory school with a ***tight academic core***, a boarding culture and the confidence to stay small.

Its market position is straightforward. Cate sits in the US top tier of boarding schools: expensive,

selective and built for families who want an intimate residential setting rather than a vast East Coast institution. The average annual boarding fee is **\$82,600**, which places it firmly in premium territory. Parents are paying for more than a bed and a timetable. They are buying access to a compact campus community where teenagers live and work in close formation, and where the school’s old California boarding tradition still has force. The school’s accreditations, NEASC and NAIS, give it the expected institutional credibility; the stronger point is the combination of *mesa-top seclusion* and intellectual ambition. Cate does not offer anonymity. For the right student, that is a major strength. For a child who wants constant choice, urban energy or room to disappear, it is a poor fit.

Why shortlist it? Because Cate occupies a distinct niche that few schools match well: *serious American academics* in a small, high-trust boarding environment on the West Coast. It also has enough cultural weight to register beyond its size, with **30 notable alumni** catalogued in Wikidata across science, writing, music and the performing arts, including **3 star-tier award winners**. That does not make it a celebrity factory, but it does mark a school with durable intellectual and artistic reach. The student who thrives here will be self-propelled, comfortable with adults, and willing to lean into a community that is *close-knit* and demanding. This is not a glossy resort school. It is for adolescents who want *structured independence*, strong preparation for university, and a boarding experience with real shape and pressure.

STRENGTHS

- Very low student-to-faculty ratio (around 5:1 to 6:1) with average class sizes of roughly 10-11 students, allowing close contact with teachers.
- A high proportion of faculty hold advanced degrees, with 82% holding advanced degrees and 18% of those holding PhDs.
- Strong college outcomes: roughly 60% of a recent graduating class matriculated to the country's top 25-ranked colleges, with 18% going to Ivy League schools or Stanford.
- A diverse student body for a school of its size, drawing around 21% international students and reporting 54% students of color.
- Substantial need-based financial aid budget, with the school offering more than \$3,000,000 in aid annually to about 30% of students.

TRADE-OFFS

- Boarding tuition is high, listed at around \$79,980 to over \$87,000 per year depending on the source and year, before any aid.
- Admission is highly competitive, with a reported acceptance rate of around 14-17%, well below the average for private schools nationally.
- The school is small (around 300-310 students total), and most openings are at grades 9 and 10; it is described as highly unusual for a twelfth-grade place to become available.
- Cate offers no ESL program, so international applicants must already be fluent in English and pass the TOEFL as part of admission.

ADMISSIONS

Cate is a selective grades 9-12 coeducational boarding and day school with an acceptance rate typically cited around 14-17%. Most openings occur at grades 9 and 10; eleventh-grade spots are limited to exceptionally qualified candidates and twelfth-grade admission is rare. The process includes an application, teacher recommendations, SSAT scores, and an on-campus interview. International applicants must submit TOEFL scores, as the school does not run an ESL support program. The stated application deadline is January 15, and need-based financial aid is available to roughly a quarter of enrolled students.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (30)

SPORT: Otis Chandler, Tracye Lawyer

MUSIC: Billy Steinberg, Werner Klemperer, Stephen Malkmus, David Crosby

DRAMA: Chris Strachwitz, Q706993, Terry Sanders, Catherine Reitman, Barnaby Conrad, Werner Klemperer, Larry Niven, David Crosby

VISUAL_ARTS: Barnaby Conrad

LETTERS: Barnaby Conrad, Dayton Hyde, Mark Whitney Mehran, Nadine Haobsh, Larry Niven, Raisa Bruner, Nellie Bowles

POLITICS: Malcolm Wallop, William M. Roth

SCIENCE: George Ledyard Stebbins, Antony Garrett Lisi, James S. Ackerman, Burton Smith, William H. Andrews, Larry Niven

BUSINESS: John Bond, Otis Chandler

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_cfea46bb96.