

Catlin Gabel School

Portland, OR, United States



First U.S. high school online in 1989, still pairing progressive pedagogy with a 67-acre Portland woodland campus.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	66/100
Academic outcomes	75/100
University placement	74/100
Prestige & heritage	74/100
Alumni network	10/100
Facilities	76/100
Transparency	72/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Catlin Gabel’s defining trait is the tension it manages well: a **genuinely progressive** classroom model inside a school that still talks openly about rigour. This is not a loose, child-led enclave pretending structure is optional. The school states that learning is hands-on, inquiry-driven and deeply personal, while also claiming one of the more rigorous educations in Oregon. For parents who want an American day school that rejects rote instruction without sacrificing intellectual demand, that combination puts Catlin Gabel firmly on the shortlist. The scale helps: ****787 students**** from preschool through 12th grade is large enough to sustain breadth, but still contained, and the ****15:1**** student-teacher ratio supports the school’s insistence on close adult knowledge of each child.

The campus is part of the appeal and part of the educational proposition. A **67-acre** site five miles west of downtown Portland gives the school room to make outdoor learning, arts, sport and community activity more than brochure filler. Catlin Gabel has done this for a long time: it was founded in 1957, and the school’s own history includes an early move into online schooling in 1989 that still marks it out as *intellectually adventurous* rather than tradition-bound. This is a non-religious day school teaching in English, accredited by NAIS, and it draws from across the metro area, with students coming from 60 zip codes. Diversity is not incidental here either: 51% of students identify as people of colour or multiracial, and students speak 44 languages. That gives the school a wider social and cultural mix than many expensive American independents.

Fees sit at an average of **\$43,120** a year across the full age range, which places Catlin Gabel in the expensive tier of the Portland market and squarely in the premium U.S. independent bracket. Parents paying that level need clarity on what they are buying. Here, the case is strong: a *serious progressive school* with tangible scale, visible diversity and enough land and programme breadth to turn inquiry-based education into daily practice rather than rhetoric. It will suit bright, self-motivated children who like discussion, experimentation and teacher attention, and whose families want a school that values initiative, creativity and civic engagement alongside academic foundation. It will not suit children who want a *highly conventional* or tightly hierarchical education, nor families looking for a narrow exam factory. Catlin Gabel’s strongest market position is with parents who want their child challenged, known well, and given room to think in more than one direction.

STRENGTHS

- Progressive, project-based pedagogy delivered through small classes, with the school describing itself as built around close teacher-student relationships and the philosophy that "there is no back row"
- Ninety-nine percent of Catlin Gabel graduates go on to four-year colleges or universities, and the senior class has regularly included National Merit and Presidential Scholars
- More than a quarter of the student body receives need-based or merit financial assistance, with the school publishing income bands for aid recipients rather than leaving affordability opaque
- Long-established institution (formed in a 1957 merger) on a 67-acre suburban campus, accredited by the Northwest Association of Independent Schools
- Alumni track record spans creative and public-service fields, including film director Gus Van Sant and television writer Megan Amram

TRADE-OFFS

- Tuition is high by national standards, listed at roughly \$33,500 to \$41,500 depending on grade level for the 2023-24 year, before fees
- Admissions are competitive: independent rankings place Catlin Gabel among Oregon private schools with the lowest acceptance rates
- It is a day school only, with no boarding option, so relocating or international families must independently arrange local housing and a resident guardian
- The school's progressive, discussion- and project-based educational model is a deliberate departure from conventional exam- or textbook-driven curricula, which may be an adjustment for families expecting a more traditional academic structure

ADMISSIONS

Catlin Gabel admits at multiple entry points: Beginning School (preschool/kindergarten), Grade 1, Middle School (Grade 6) and Upper School (Grade 9), each with its own priority deadline typically in January or February. The process includes an online application, a required campus tour for younger applicants, and a student visit or 'Shadow Day' for older candidates. Application fees run around \$75 (discounted for early submission). International applicants may apply only if living locally with a parent, relative, or legal guardian, since the school does not offer boarding. Independent rankings place the school among Oregon's more selective private schools, so early, complete applications are advised.

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_d003dd16d0.