



# A little about us...

**San Luis Obispo Classical Academy** is an exciting and unique educational alternative, serving students from Preschool through High School, whose goal is to partner with parents to create a wonderfully rich, rewarding, effective and meaningful education. Among many excellent public and private schools on the Central Coast, we offer a distinctive learning community that brings students, parents and teachers together. This community is defined by determination, creativity, and a desire to continue learning together at all times. We see ourselves as a team serving the sole purpose of capturing the minds and hearts of our children as we prepare them uniquely to be our future leaders.

Our goals are simple:

**Exceptional Education:** We want all students to receive a strong foundation of knowledge, a passion for learning and the tools necessary to think for themselves. With these gifts, we believe that children can accomplish just about anything.

**Character Formation:** We desire also that not only academics be developed, but that the whole child thrives. Character development is integrated throughout the program. In addition, we work to nurture excellent group skills, personal organization, comfort with public speaking, community service and a belief in one's self.

**Family Involvement:** We also encourage the development of strong families. We believe the parents are key to every child's development and education, and we desire that this program bring families together. Parents are integrally involved when a student attends SLO Classical Academy, and parents repeatedly describe the program as rewarding and life altering.

**Sense of Wonder:** In the big picture, we want families not to be amazed at what the school offers, but at what they see happening in their children.

## MISSION STATEMENT

SLO Classical Academy is a community that forges character, fosters wisdom, and nurtures a lifelong passion for learning.

## ON CLASSICAL EDUCATION

SLO Classical Academy is committed to classical education as the guiding spine for making academic decisions. Classical education promotes a lifelong love of learning and provides the tools to think for oneself. It is a time-tested educational approach that lays a firm foundation in history, language, math, fine arts and science, training students to think clearly and critically and to express themselves effectively through both verbal and written means. Students educated in this manner have shown to be exceptionally equipped not only for academic proficiency, but for success in any field or endeavor, be it personal or professional.

History is the guiding force in a classical education as it is woven throughout each subject. A classical approach to history is based in Western thought and tradition, yet honors the contributions of other cultures and traditions. SLO Classical Academy includes the studies of other histories as limited time allows.

We are committed to a solid academic program that is infused with learning that is stimulating, engaging and creative. The love of learning is an essential area of focus at every level. Classroom time is best spent in activity that students cannot do on their own, and teachers and parents alike are committed to reaching each student in the learning process.

## OUR CORE VALUES *Kindergarten through High School*

The community of SLO Classical Academy, consisting of Leadership, Staff, Teachers, Parents and Students, hold to the following core values:

### ***On Education:***

- We are committed to classical education as the guiding spine for making academic decisions. Classical education promotes a lifelong love of learning and provides the tools to think for oneself. It is a time-tested educational approach that lays a firm foundation in history, language, math, fine arts and science, training students to think clearly and critically and to express themselves effectively through both verbal and written means. Students educated in this manner have shown to be exceptionally equipped not only for academic proficiency, but for success in any field or endeavor, be it personal or professional.
- History is the guiding force in a classical education as it is woven throughout each subject. A classical approach to history is based in Western thought and tradition, yet honors the contributions of other cultures and traditions. SLO Classical Academy includes the studies of other histories as limited time allows.
- We are committed to a solid academic program that is infused with learning that is stimulating, engaging and creative. The love of learning is an essential area of focus at every level. Classroom time is best spent in activity that students cannot do on their own, and teachers and parents alike are committed to reaching each student in the learning process.
- We are committed to a Socratic, integrative approach to learning and the development of critical thinking skills. We encourage students to ask questions.
- We seek to reach a broad range of students with divergent learning styles through varied methods of teaching
- In addition to excellence in academics, our desire is to encourage development of well-rounded, thoughtful and responsible individuals through an emphasis on character, community and service.

## **OUR CORE VALUES** *Kindergarten through High School* (continued)

### **On Virtue:**

- It is our belief that developing virtue is of utmost importance. Opportunities to contemplate, grow, and practice virtue should be available at all times – in classroom discussions, in addressing relational issues, etc. — with the goal of helping students develop lasting virtue.
- We will uphold the Code of Conduct set in place by SLO Classical Academy.
- We desire our students to be role models and leaders for younger students and others out in the community. We want students to be aware of their responsibilities in this area, and to desire to pursue virtue, but we also believe that the school can provide a safe environment for both success and failure to occur – that mistakes are expected and welcomed as opportunities for grace to be extended and growth to occur.

### **On Family Involvement & Independence:**

- We believe that parent involvement is essential and when possible, parents should be involved with their children's education and development during childhood years. Parental involvement takes different forms and levels for different kids and ages, but engagement in the educational process is valued and expected at SLO Classical Academy. The staff and teachers see themselves as partners in this journey, and we thus encourage strong parent-school communication, parent-teacher communication and parent-child communication.
- Our goal is for our students to move from becoming dependent learners to independent scholars who take joy in and responsibility for their learning. We understand that students will develop independence at different paces, and we will work to encourage appropriate levels of independence for each student.
- We value sensitive, clear and timely communication between staff, students, and parents.

### **On Community:**

- We believe that our school community serves to assist, support and inspire our roles as parents and staff as we seek to reach common goals together.
- Our community has one shared core agenda – that of providing a quality, vibrant classical education and all that encompasses.
- We are a learning community – one that acknowledges that we are all still learning and which values that lifelong learning process.
- We are a community that can only function well when all members are committed to being a part of making our school a place characterized by both excellence and grace. All community members are needed and valued for their unique perspective and contributions.
- We are a community that values not only excellent academics, but also character development.
- We, as a community seek to model exemplary behavior by honoring our Code of Conduct.

## PHILOSOPHY

The education we work together to provide at San Luis Obispo Classical Academy is purposeful and rich. It is meant to provide a strong foundation of learning, solid basic skills, and the tools necessary to think for one's self. It is intended to be engaging, rigorous and meaningful. The curricula chosen to support this wonderful and effective education has been carefully chosen by many - teachers, lead staff, curriculum specialists, and experienced parents. The following document was created to help all educators (parents and classroom teachers) to be on the same page together in terms of understanding the philosophy and plans for the various levels of learning, the curricula chosen and the philosophy and plans for subject studies.

## PROGRAM GOALS

### **Preschool/Junior Kindergarten: The Playful Learner**

In Little Wonders, the student introduction to classical education begins. Our program is filled with opportunities for purposeful, high-level, and mature play; well-distinguished children's literature; poetry recitations and math; as well as music and art. Parents and teachers agree to work towards:

- **Fostering a love for learning** - While we unconsciously teach our children new things on a daily basis, we can strive to consciously work towards fostering a love of learning, in the hopes of guiding them to be life learners. To help foster the love of learning we will be: providing children with plenty of time for play (striving for purposeful, high-level, and mature play), reading books (lots and lots of books), exposing children to a variety of experiences (music, art, dance, etc.), creating an environment that fosters a love of learning, encouraging children to actively explore their world, answering their questions, and showing a value for education, learning, and knowledge.
- **Strong academic skills** – During the Preschool and Junior Kindergarten years we will lay the foundation for success in language arts and math skills. We will work together using a unified math and literature program, as well as a unified recitation schedule. Math will be taught through hands-on tasks and meaningful activities that will prepare our young students for subsequent stages of mathematical thinking. The beginning stages of reading will be fostered through reading aloud and engaging the children in conversations about stories. Nursery Rhymes and Poetry recitations are done approximately every month, reciting whole group, with opportunities given to recite independently.

### **Kindergarten: The Natural Learner**

In kindergarten, the student introduction to classical education continues. Our program is filled with opportunities for purposeful, high-level, and mature play; well-distinguished children's literature; poetry recitations; math, reading and writing instruction; as well as music and art. Parents and teachers agree to work towards:

- **Fostering a love for learning** - While we unconsciously teach our children new things on a daily basis, we can strive to consciously work towards fostering a love of learning, in the hopes of guiding them to be lifelong learners. To help foster the love of learning, we will be: providing children with plenty of time for play (striving for purposeful, high-level, and mature play), reading books (lots and lots of books!), exposing children to a variety of experiences (music, art, dance, etc.), creating an environment that encourages learning, encouraging children to actively explore their world, answering their questions, and showing a value for education, learning, and knowledge.

## PROGRAM GOALS (continued)

- **Strong academic skills** – During the kindergarten year we will lay the foundation for success in language arts and math skills. We will work together using unified math, reading and handwriting programs, as well as a unified recitation schedule. Math will be taught through hands-on tasks and meaningful activities that will prepare our young students for subsequent stages of mathematical thinking. Reading will be taught through an explicit phonics program (starting with vowels and consonants, and moving on to short vowel words and blends). Handwriting will be taught through a multi-sensory approach that generalizes to Zaner Bloser paper. Poetry recitations are done approximately every month, reciting whole group, with opportunities given to recite independently.
- **Strong character** - Taking care of children's physical needs is vital, and helping them develop strong character is just as important. During the kindergarten year we will have the opportunity to build a foundation that will help guide and shape the character of our children as they grow, giving them an inner compass to help guide them through life. To achieve this we: work towards expecting moral behavior; reading good literature, both at home and in class; using teachable moments; recognizing strong character traits; incorporating the golden rule; assigning responsibilities; and, most importantly, modeling good character.

### Primary: The Emergent Learner

The primary years at the SLO Classical Academy provide the underpinnings for success in all of the goals of the entire school, namely, to establish a foundation of learning that will nurture and motivate independent, analytical thinkers. Eventually, these natural leaders can effectively communicate and support their ideas orally and in written form. In order to achieve this, students, parents and teachers agree to work towards:

- **Strong Academic Skills** - Our students come from a variety of experiences and classical education may be a new approach for many families. As such, it is vital that there be consistency in the basic skills instruction. Students who have a good base will continue to build. The teachers and parents will work together to help the students achieve a sound academic foundation in math, reading and writing. Parents will be committed to basic reading instruction that will be the groundwork for all other content areas. This will include phonics instruction. They will also read the assigned literature with their student and develop their student's ability to grasp new concepts through discussion. Teachers will create lessons that build on thoughtful processing and synthesis of conceptual understanding. During home studies, parents will instruct on a variety of techniques that are among the pinnacles of classical education. Included are handwriting practice, copy work, dictation, narration, memorization, and recitation. Parents will support the classroom teacher by following along the content areas in math during home instruction. If there are areas of concern, parents will communicate with classroom teacher. While working on a variety of math concepts, parents will continue to have students practice basic math fact memorization and work on computation skills all throughout the year.
- **Strong Analytical Skills** - Using our history, literature and science as opportunities for discussion, students will be challenged to apply ideas from the past to the present. As students are exposed to new information, they will have the opportunity to discuss (using the Socratic Method) and digest what they are exposed to so that they learn to absorb increasing amounts of information. The student's ability to get the big picture, the themes across literature and history, and the ability to make connections with their own lives will be promoted with assignments in all areas.

## PROGRAM GOALS (continued)

- **Strong Character** - Although they are among the youngest students of our school, how the primary students act and treat others is of utmost importance. The establishment of this responsibility for self early on is paramount. There are many opportunities to help students grow in this area from the simple (like completion of assignments on time and bringing of materials to school) to the profound (a discussion in history about owning slaves). The student's management of learning materials at school and home, and the transition between the two is an important part of emerging organizational skills at this level. Community service, behavior accountability and discussion will help the students grow towards autonomy and responsibility.

### Intermediate: The Assisted Learner

The intermediate level of the SLO Classical Academy is an extremely important time in the life of a classical learner. The assisted learner is now required to put in more structured and concentrated effort to their studies. This is a big change from the "learning strategy" of an emerging learner in the primary level. Intermediates are now exposed to longer pieces of great literature. They are introduced to in-depth discussions about character, theme, and historical context. History instruction begins to explore the details that underlay the "big idea" themes. The success of the assisted learner at this point depends largely on the parent/teacher partnership that exists between home and school. This is the stage of learning that prepares students to become Independent Learners. In order to achieve this, students, parents and teachers agree to work towards:

- **Strong Academic Skills** – Basic skills in all areas of learning continue to be of paramount importance. The grammar instruction that occurs at school needs to be reinforced at home. During the two years as an intermediate student, the students will grow in their level of independence. The first year there is an expectation that the parents will strongly support the students as they learn the basics of paragraphs, outlines, and creative writing. The second year, the students will be expected to have a greater level of independence as they practice the same type of skills. This will be excellent preparation for the following year of Lower Middle School. Students will also gain age appropriate basic math skills. Most assisted learners will need to have their literature selections read to them. However, independent reading is extremely important and opportunities for this will be provided. Both teachers and parents will work together to help the students achieve these goals. Parents will reinforce classroom instruction and modify and adjust the learning assignments to fit their individual child.
- **Strong Organizational Skills** – During the assisted learning stage personal organization of materials is a foundational skill that needs to be taught, supported, and reinforced both at home and at school. Transporting necessary learning items and assignments between home and school becomes a larger responsibility during this stage, and being organized in a thoughtful and intentional manner will make success in this area easier to attain. Parents need to assist their child with basic organizational tasks by helping him/her sort through their backpack and cubby on a regular basis until the child can competently complete these tasks independently. Teachers commit to providing written and oral prompts as to where and how assignments and papers are to be completed and organized. Teachers will also create an environment in the classroom that nurtures growth in personal responsibility over learning materials and assignments. (See next section on Big Ol' Binder - BOB)

- **Strong Analytical Skills** – Using our history, literature, and science as opportunities for discussion, students will be introduced to critical analysis through guided discussions of what they read, hear, and speak. The student's emerging ability to get the big picture, the themes across literature and history, and the ability to make connections with their own lives will be nurtured. Parents will read the assigned literature with their student and help their student's power of analysis grow through prompting questions and directed conversation. Teachers will create lessons that build on thoughtful processing and synthesis of conceptual understanding.
- **Strong Character** - How they act and treat others continues to be of paramount importance. The responsibility for personal character lies with the individual assisted learner. Respect of others and respect of self become the main boundaries for all intermediate learning and interactions. This respect surrounds all aspects of academic success, from basic assignment completion to the creation of a safe classroom environment where honest discussions and interactions with literature and history can occur. Parents and teachers agree to partner in maintaining and implementing age-appropriate standards of excellence and personal responsibility. Parents and teachers also agree to offer assistance as needed, all the while providing opportunities for growth in independence.

### **Lower Middle School: Emerging Independent Learner**

The Lower Middle School of the SLO Classical Academy is a transitional period when students are moving from concrete thinkers in the grammar stage to burgeoning logical thinkers. Building on the foundation set in the primary and intermediate levels of our school, the Lower Middle School seeks to shepherd students through this time by introducing them to logical thinking through the use of English grammar, pre-logic exercises, and encouraging connections in history and literature. Students are challenged to seek the meaning behind the content they learn in all subjects.

- **Strong Academic Skills** – Lower Middle School students continue to refine basic skills developed in the intermediate grades while being introduced to logical thinking skills that will translate into independent thought in Upper Middle School and High School. The goal of this stage of learning is to make use of the emerging independence of these students and translate their desire for independence into ownership of their own education. Students at this stage must begin to learn the why and how of the subjects they learn. While grammar continues to be important, students are ready to understand the system of English grammar and how the parts of speech work together to form well-crafted sentences. These sentences can then be developed into meaningful and purposeful paragraphs. Students will continue to sharpen basic math skills, but also strengthen their understanding of how these concepts work together and the relationships between numbers and how they work in space and time. Reading and writing go hand in hand throughout the curriculum at SLO Classical Academy, but in this stage students will learn that this relationship is integral to becoming part of the great conversation in which we learn from authors and historical figures of the past while communicating ideas in the present and into the future. Parents continue to reinforce the work done at school, but more and more students are encouraged to own their education.

## PROGRAM GOALS (continued)

- **Strong Analytical Skills** – Like the ability to speak, walk, talk, and read all require a combination of training and developmental readiness, logical thinking develops when teaching and logical readiness meet. Emerging independent learners need support from the adults in their lives to test the waters of reasonable thought. It does not require a teaching degree to recognize that middle school children want to exert their wills, but that their wills are not to a level of maturity to make them completely tolerable. Rather than fight against some of the unreasonable claims of these emerging thinkers, the teachers at SLO Classical Academy begin equipping students with the tools of reason. We call this instruction pre-logic. Students are exposed to logical fallacies, writing strategies, and Socratic questioning that all sharpen their abilities to think and communicate in an orderly and thoughtful way. Mastery of thinking skills is not the goal; but rather recognition of faulty thinking and practice in the tools of reasoning well.
- **Strong Character** – With greater maturity, personal responsibility for one's actions becomes more important. As emerging independent learners it is important for students to recognize how individual character fits within the greater community of learners at SLO Classical Academy and beyond. Teachers and parents will continue to partner in maintaining and implementing age-appropriate standards of excellence and personal responsibility. What is distinct about students entering into the logic stage is that they will likely test the waters and question the validity of boundaries. It is important to offer support through logical consequences and reasonable conversations regarding standards of behavior.

### Upper Middle School: The Independent Learner

The middle school of the SLO Classical Academy is a natural extension of the goals of the entire school, namely, to establish a foundation of learning that will nurture and motivate independent, analytical thinkers. These natural leaders can effectively communicate and support their ideas orally and in written form. In order to do achieve this, students, parents and teachers agree to work towards:

- **Strong Academic Skills** – Continued support of basic skills in all areas of learning continues at this stage, but more emphasis is given to cultivating the students' developing logical thinking skills. Students are taught formal logic at this level to strengthen their independent thought while grounding it in well-reasoned principles. English grammar will continue to be practiced on a daily basis to strengthen students' abilities to communicate effectively. The goal of this stage of learning is to make use of their growing independence. Ownership of their own ideas will be emphasized even more at this stage as students grow in their independent, rational capacity. Students at this stage maintain a desire to understand the why and how of the subjects they learn. Students will continue to study English grammar and will be expected to use writing skills persuasively and with greater eloquence. Longer papers will be assigned at this level requiring planning and greater synthesis of ideas. In math, students will strengthen their abilities to think abstractly and logically through algebraic functions. Students will read more complex novels and primary texts and will be prepared to dialogue intelligently regarding major themes and ideas presented by the authors. While parents still have an integral part in motivating the Upper Middle School students, the goal for this stage is to enter high school as independent learners who appreciate the value of their own education.
- **Strong Organizational Skills** – Independent learners will choose to utilize the organizational skills they possess to maximize their own learning. Some will have learned to apply these skills well while others will still need coaching from the adults in their lives. It is important for teachers and parents to support growth in organization while continuing to train children in strategies that work for the personality of each child. Teachers will continue to provide written and oral prompts regarding the assignment, completion and turning in of work. Teachers will also teach students the logic of organization providing students with motivation to become and stay organized. The skill of note taking and the keeping of a daily agenda for completing work will be emphasized at this level.

## PROGRAM GOALS (continued)

- **Strong Analytical Skills** – Using our history, literature and science as opportunities for discussion, students will be challenged to apply ideas from the past to the present. As students have mastered the simple absorption of information, they will be asked to critically analyze what they read, hear and speak. Parents will read the assigned literature with their student and help their student's power of analysis grow through discussion. Teachers will create lessons that build on thoughtful processing and synthesis of conceptual understanding.
- **Strong Character** – As they prepare to enter high school, the upper middle school students are the upcoming role models for rest of the student body. As such, how they act and treat others is of paramount importance. The foundation of this is responsibility for self and consideration for others. There are many opportunities to help students grow in this area from the simple (like completion of assignments on time and bringing of materials to school) to the profound (a discussion in history about owning slaves). Community service, behavior accountability and discussion will help the students grow towards autonomy and responsibility.

### High School: Persuasive Learner/Rhetoric Stage

The rhetoric stage builds off of the two prior stages of the Trivium, grammar and logic, by honing a students' ability to persuade. The art of persuasion demands not only a grounded understanding of a topic, but also a critical interpretation of it, and finally the ability to effectively communicate this opinion through oral presentations, class discussions, debates and essays. This approach guides instruction in every class as students are asked to absorb, evaluate and then express their outlooks on everything from fictional characters to scientific theories.

SLOCA HS is a unique combination of exceptional classical education, highly qualified and dedicated teachers, and students who are thinking and thriving. The unparalleled learning environment crafts a different type of student – one who is knowledgeable and thinks critically with the ability to discern, analyze, problem solve, and effectively communicate his or her own opinions. Students are not only well prepared to succeed in college, but are also imbued with the increasingly rare skills and habits required to become leaders and lifelong learners.