

The Harker School

San Jose, United States



In Silicon Valley's backyard, a student-run research symposium turns science fair projects into published papers.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	78/100
Academic outcomes	82/100
University placement	80/100
Prestige & heritage	75/100
Alumni network	73/100
Facilities	78/100
Transparency	76/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

The detail that matters here is not the Silicon Valley address but the student-run research symposium in the tagline: Harker has built a school culture in which academic work is expected to travel beyond the classroom. That puts it in the **fiercely academic** end of the American independent-school market. This is a non-religious day school in San Jose, founded in 1893, teaching an American curriculum in English from age 3 to 18. It educates 1,975 students and reports a ***10:1*** student-teacher ratio, which gives it the scale to offer serious breadth without losing the staffing density parents pay for. At an average annual day fee of ***\$61,117***, it sits squarely in the expensive bracket, and families should judge it against the strongest college-preparatory day schools rather than against local private schools with thinner

programmes.

What marks Harker out is the combination of scale, academic ambition and location. The school states that it is the largest independent school of its kind in California, with separate lower, middle and upper school campuses in San Jose. In practice, that matters: large schools can field deeper clubs, labs, sports teams and specialist teaching, and Harker has the enrolment base to do it. The Silicon Valley setting also sharpens the school's appeal for students drawn to STEM, research and competitive intellectual culture. If your child wants a *high-octane* peer group, extensive extracurricular options and a school where scholarly polish counts, Harker belongs on the shortlist. If you want a small, gentle, low-pressure environment, it does not.

The trade-off is clear. Big, ambitious schools can feel *intense*, and Harker reads as a place for students who enjoy being busy, measured and stretched. Its recent destinations include American University, Amherst College and Babson College, which tells you less about prestige theatre than about a broad US college-prep pipeline. Parents should not choose Harker for pastoral softness or alternative education rhetoric. They should choose it for structure, opportunity and an *unmistakably competitive* academic culture. The pupil who thrives here is bright, organised, self-propelled and happy in a setting where achievement is public, programmes are plentiful and the bar is set high.

STRENGTHS

- Harker operates three campuses in San Jose - Bucknall (Lower School, K-5), Union (Middle School, 6-8) and Saratoga (Upper School, 9-12), giving each division age-appropriate facilities within one institution founded in 1893.
- In 2026, 77 Harker seniors - 40% of the entire class - were named semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program, breaking the previous year's record.
- The school's student-teacher ratio is 10:1, supporting smaller classes than many large private day schools.
- Harker's admission process is need-blind - the admission committee evaluates applicants without access to financial aid information, with aid applications reviewed only after admission decisions are made.
- Harker students have a long record in national science competitions, including semi-finalist places in the Siemens Competition and, from 2007 to 2009, the largest number of Intel Science Talent Search national semi-finalists of any school west of the Mississippi.

TRADE-OFFS

- As of 2025, annual tuition for the Lower School is \$49,900, rising to \$64,800 for the Upper School, placing Harker among the pricier options in an already expensive regional market since Harker School's tuition is higher than comparable private schools in the Bay Area.
- Standard entry points are limited to kindergarten and grades 2 through 6 and 9; at other grades, the number of openings depends on attrition and there are usually more qualified applicants than spaces, making off-cycle entry harder to plan for relocating families.
- Harker does not offer an ESL program, boarding or arranged homestays, and expects lower and middle school students to reside in the Bay Area with a parent or legal guardian, which limits suitability for families relocating without an established local base.
- Multiple student and parent reviews describe an intensely competitive academic culture; one Niche reviewer wrote that "Competition starts absurdly early, as even in kindergarten, kids are already separated into placement levels" and that pressure "becomes relentless" as students get older, a pattern echoed in local press coverage of Silicon Valley school stress.

ADMISSIONS

Harker admits new students at all grade levels except 12, with standard entry points at kindergarten and grades 2 through 6 and 9; other grades depend on attrition and are more competitive. Applications run through the Ravenna portal, typically opening in late August/September with a deadline in the first or second week of January, alongside ISEE/SSAT testing and an interview. The admission process is described by the school as highly selective and is need-blind, with financial aid reviewed separately after admission decisions. International applicants must apply directly, not through agents, and must arrange local guardianship since the school offers no boarding or ESL support.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (1 1)

SPORT: Q4755212, Maverick McNealy

VISUAL_ARTS: Alexander Wang, Matt Wolf

SCIENCE: Esther Wang

BUSINESS: Andy Fang

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_91819c42df.