

DA VINCI

Where Bright Minds



ACADEMY

Take Flight

Welcome to Da Vinci Academy



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Jeffrey Stroebel
Head of School

B.S. in Secondary Education,
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M.S. in Educational
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Endorsement in Gifted and
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2001 Indiana Association for the
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It is my pleasure to welcome you to Da Vinci Academy, an independent school serving intellectually gifted and talented students in grades PreK-8. While many schools have gifted students and programs, Da Vinci is a truly unique learning environment in which every aspect of the program has been specifically designed for gifted learners from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Our small classes, challenging curriculum, and experienced faculty provide an opportunity for each student to develop his or her own strengths, interests, and potential.

Da Vinci's teachers and staff are committed to providing an exceptional experience for students who are highly talented, intellectually curious, and enthusiastically seeking new avenues for personal growth and development. We work very hard to establish strong bonds between teachers, parents, and students to assure that our educational goals are met. Da Vinci has grown from a dream into an outstanding independent school serving over 130 students.

Some may question why gifted students need their own distinct academic program. My own experience in working with high ability learners over the past three decades has clearly led me to understand that gifted students need a faster pace, deeper and richer content, and a peer group that shares their passion for learning. Without this, many gifted students will never reach their true potential. At Da Vinci Academy, students are immersed in challenging and stimulating activities, guided by caring, talented teachers, and surrounded by supportive peers. Independent testing by the Educational Records Bureau and the Midwest Academic Talent Search indicates that Da Vinci students significantly outperform students in other independent schools and gifted programs. Da Vinci is truly a school in which bright minds take flight.

Da Vinci also offers a full range of activities beyond the classroom. Our chess team has quickly developed into one of the top programs in the state, and our students also participate in basketball, soccer, volleyball, MathCounts, and robotics. A strong drama program is an integral part of the curriculum for all middle school students. In addition to its regular program, Da Vinci offers a Saturday Enrichment Program and Summer Camp that are open to the public. We are proud to offer these programs that can benefit all families.

Thank you for your interest in Da Vinci Academy, and we hope you will enjoy learning more about our school. We encourage you to visit our website and to visit us in person to fully appreciate the unique learning environment in which our students thrive. Please contact our Director of Admissions for more information about scheduling your visit or beginning the application process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Stroebel', written in a cursive style.

Jeffrey Stroebel
Head of School



Mission & Vision

Mission Statement

Da Vinci Academy provides intellectually gifted and talented students a unique educational community that develops a student's strengths, interests and potential. We offer a challenging curriculum focusing on the learning process, personal growth, and self-direction enabling students to become productive leaders in an ever changing society.

Vision Statement

We aspire to be an extraordinary school for gifted and talented students.

In the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom we strive to make Da Vinci Academy a unique learning community through innovative programming. This includes a challenging curriculum, flexible teaching strategies, and experiential learning with emphasis on the development and growth of the whole child.

At the heart of the Da Vinci Academy program are the children. They are supported by dedicated professionals who will continue to encourage creativity, promote positive risk taking, and acknowledge and support individual learning styles. We will provide dynamic and effective instruction within a nurturing environment.

Embedded in the Da Vinci community are the attributes of respect, acceptance and cooperation. We will continue to seek a diverse community of learners supported by parents who embrace the mission of the school.

Da Vinci At-a-Glance

School Founding

Da Vinci Academy was founded in 2000 to serve the needs of intellectually gifted and talented students in grades PK-8. The school is located just west of Randall Road in Elgin, about 10 minutes south of I-90 and about 10 minutes north of Rt. 64.

Enrollment

Da Vinci enrolls over 130 students from Pre-K through 8th Grade. Our families come from all over the western suburbs and Fox River Valley area. Over two-thirds of our families come from the nearby areas of St. Charles, Geneva, Elgin, and South Elgin, while about one-third come from greater distances in all directions from the school.

Class Size

Maximum class size in Pre-K is 12, and in Kindergarten it is 14. Both Pre-K and Kindergarten have full-time assistants who help the grade level teachers. Classes in Grades 1-8 have a maximum of 16 students. The overall student-to-teacher ratio is approximately 8:1 including grade-level teachers, Pre-K and K assistants, and teachers in Spanish, Art, Music, Computer, and Physical Education.

Teacher Credentials

100% of Da Vinci Academy grade level teachers hold Master's degrees or other graduate level education and training. Teachers are also active in professional development pursuits such as graduate work, college teaching, gifted summer programs, conferences and seminars, and more.

School Year

Our calendar runs from late August to early June and follows an academic trimester system. We observe major holidays and have days off throughout the year for teacher in-service and parent-teacher conferences. Major breaks from school include the week of Thanksgiving, a two-week winter break, and a week-long spring break.

School Day Hours

All grade levels are in session Monday through Friday, with classes beginning at 8:45 AM. Students may enter the building starting at 8:25 AM. Dismissal for Pre-K and Kindergarten is at 2:15 PM. Dismissal for Grades 1-8 is at 3:15 PM. The school offers before and after school care every day as early as 7:00 AM and as late as 6:00 PM.

Extra-curricular Activities

Middle school students participate in team sports (basketball, soccer, and volleyball) and Da Vinci competes in the Fox Valley Athletic Conference. After-school clubs and programs include chess, robotics, and math. Da Vinci also offers a Saturday Enrichment Program and a Summer Camp open to the public.

School Mascot

The Knights

School Colors

Blue and White



Programs to Benefit All Families

Gifted and Talented Students in Grades PK-8

Da Vinci Academy is an independent school serving the unique educational needs of intellectually gifted and talented students in grades PK-8. The school was founded in 2000 to help gifted students reach the full potential of their talents and abilities. With all the benefits of small classes, challenging academics, and experienced teachers who understand how gifted children think and learn, Da Vinci students flourish and are well-prepared for success in high school and beyond.

Our approach to meeting the needs of gifted students involves four key components. First, we provide a challenging curriculum in a small class environment (maximum of 16 students) to keep students engaged and working at a high level. Each grade level is designed to be one year ahead as a starting point. We study topics in great depth and across subject areas. Many assignments are project-based and involve creative hands-on activities. The students often work in groups and gain valuable experience in developing their public speaking and presentation skills.

Second, our teachers are skilled at using flexible teaching strategies to meet the varied learning styles of gifted students. This differentiation allows students to work at appropriate levels and to receive instruction that connects with how they think and learn most effectively.

Third, we provide a nurturing environment that balances academic needs with the social, emotional, and developmental needs of our students. Teachers know the students well and are there to help them in and out of the classroom. For example, in middle school each student has a faculty advisor who serves as a mentor. Students keep the same advisor through grades 5-8, so over those four years the advisors form close relationships with the students to help them with both academic and social/emotional needs.

And finally, there is the valuable peer element of having gifted students working with each other every day. Although our students have a wide array of interests and learn in different ways, they are on a similar intellectual level and share an enthusiasm for learning. Da Vinci students learn a lot from working together, sharing ideas, and understanding how other people think. They also form close friendships that sometimes are not as easy for gifted students to form in other schools. Many families have cited the peer factor as a major reason why their children have been successful at Da Vinci, especially if they are transitioning from other schools.

Saturday Enrichment Program

Da Vinci Academy offers Saturday Enrichment classes open to the public that allow students to spend extra time studying their favorite subjects or to discover something totally new. Classes are offered for specific age ranges in traditional academic subjects like math, science, and art, as well as in specialty areas like robotics and engineering. The program is offered in 6-week sessions with classes running from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. More information is available on the school website.

Summer Camp

The summer day camp program is open to the public for students entering grades K-6. The camp also has a half-day program for children ages 4-5, and a Leaders in Training program for students entering 7th grade and above. Supervised by an experienced adult staff with education backgrounds, campers take part in a program that combines opportunities for creativity and enrichment with traditional sports and recreation. The camp runs in weekly sessions throughout the summer, and families can register for as many weeks as they want. More information is available on the school website.



Sports & Clubs

As important as academics are at Da Vinci, we also support and encourage our students' interests outside the classroom. Students have many opportunities to represent the school through team sports and clubs.

Athletics

Da Vinci competes against other independent schools as a member of the Fox Valley Athletic Conference. The school has three sports seasons: boys' soccer and girls' volleyball in the fall, co-ed basketball in the winter, and boys' volleyball and girls' soccer in the spring. Team sports are open to all students in grades 5-8, and any student who wants to participate is welcome to play. The majority of middle school students play at least one sport. The emphasis of the athletics program is on building skills, learning teamwork, and having fun while representing the school. Since 2005, many of the school's teams have had winning records.

Chess

Chess is very popular at Da Vinci. Students from all grade levels are eligible to participate in the Chess Club, which meets before school every day and after school on Fridays. The club is open to all levels from beginners to experienced players, and the students gain a tremendous amount of practice to hone their skills. Students also have the option of joining the Chess Team at various local and state-level tournaments. The team usually competes in more than ten tournaments throughout the year, including events in downtown Chicago and the state tournament.

Over the last few years, Da Vinci has established itself as one of the top chess programs in the state. Our students regularly place at the top of many competitive individual and team tournaments. Since 2006, the team has placed in the Top Ten at the state tournament.

Robotics

Another popular and successful club program is robotics. Middle school students compete in a national program in which students work in teams to build and program computer robots using Legos. Da Vinci teams meet weekly in the fall to prepare for the regional tournament held in December. In 2006 and 2007, Da Vinci teams qualified at the regional competition to advance to the state tournament. In addition to the robot design and programming, the teams must complete a research project and do a presentation for the tournament judges on their design strategy and how they worked as a team. The program is an excellent opportunity for students to learn teamwork, leadership, responsibility, and presentation skills.

Math Team

Middle school students also compete in math. The primary program is a national level competition called MathCounts, and our team meets weekly in the fall to prepare for the regional tournament held in the winter. MathCounts combines individual and team events, and in recent years our team has advanced to the state competition. The math team also competes in other local math events.

Other Clubs

Students also participate in other clubs and activities offered by Da Vinci teachers, such as weekly academic clubs in art and math for younger students. We have also had parent volunteers lend their time and expertise to offer additional programs.



Faculty

The most valuable resource at Da Vinci Academy is the talented and experienced faculty. All of our teachers have Master's degrees or graduate level training. Their expertise and dedication to gifted education provide the high quality program that helps Da Vinci students succeed.

Pre-K

Mirielle Strasser - with Da Vinci since 2001
B.S. in Elementary Education, Illinois State University
M.S. in Education, Dominican University

Kindergarten

Diane Tovar - with Da Vinci since 2000
B.A. in Early Childhood and Family Relationships, Illinois State University
MAT in Elementary Education, National-Louis University

1st Grade

Cynthia Pighini - with Da Vinci since 2001
B.A. in Marketing Communications, Columbia College
M.S. in Early Childhood Education, Rosary College

2nd Grade

Mai Tu - with Da Vinci since 2005
B.A., Northern Illinois University
M.A. in Teaching, National-Louis University

3rd Grade

Jean Von Heimburg - with Da Vinci since 2000
B.S. in Music Education, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
Certification in Elementary Education, Northern Illinois University
M.S. in Special Education, emphasis Gifted Education, Rosary College

4th Grade

Tom Mikolyzk – with Da Vinci since 2004
B.A. in Elementary Education and English Literature, Beloit College
M.A., University of Chicago
C.A.S. in Educational Leadership, Concordia University

Middle School Language Arts

Marge Uhlarik-Boller – with Da Vinci since 2001
B.A. in Education, University of Illinois-Chicago
30+ hours of graduate school work

Middle School Social Studies

Patty Burns – with Da Vinci since 2001
B.A. in Sociology, St. Norbert College
M.Ed., National-Louis University
C.A.S. in Educational Leadership, National-Louis University

Middle School Math

Clare Detzler – with Da Vinci since 2006
B.A. in Economics, Michigan State University
MAT in Secondary Education-Mathematics, National-Louis University
MBA in International Business, DePaul University

Middle School Science

Rod Allen – with Da Vinci since 2002
Bachelor's degree in geology, Beloit College
Master's degree in geology, Queen's University (Ontario, Canada)
Working toward a Master's degree in teaching at Benedictine University

Technology

Peter Laimins – with Da Vinci since 2005
B.S. in Mechanical/Aerospace Engineering, Illinois Institute of Technology
B.S. in Computer Science, Illinois Institute of Technology
M.S. in Computer Science, Illinois Institute of Technology

Spanish

Maria Schnecke – with Da Vinci since 2006
BBA, Georgia State University
MBA, Keller Graduate School of Management
M.Ed., National-Louis University

Physical Education & Athletic Director

Blake Craig – with Da Vinci since 2005
B.S., Purdue University
Master's in Recreation Science, Ohio University

Music

Alison Gaines – with Da Vinci since 2007
D.M.A. in Orchestral Conducting, University of Kansas
Master's in bass performance, University of Southern California

Art

Karyl Shields – with Da Vinci since 2005
B.A. in Art, Columbia College
M.S. in Art Education, Northern Illinois University
20+ years in design

Parent Testimonials

“I think the biggest draws to Da Vinci were the small class sizes, which give the teachers the ability to respond more individually to the needs of each child. I think there is a higher level of commitment on the part of the teachers and they have the ability to recognize the needs of kids that need more challenge and stimulation.”

“Da Vinci is a special place for many reasons. The small class size is important because it allows the educational product to be specialized to the needs of the child. The learning styles are different for each of my children, and I feel that Da Vinci has been brilliant in understanding that and adapting the classroom situation to help each child maximize their learning potential.”

“We appreciate the availability of the teachers to us as parents, and their responsiveness when needs and concerns arise.”



School Community

Parent Association

Families who enroll their children in Da Vinci Academy become part of a vibrant school community that shares core values about the importance of providing students with the best possible education. Da Vinci's small size provides parents with many opportunities to be involved. Just as the students benefit from being with other children at their level, parents benefit from forming relationships with other parents who understand the needs of gifted children. Many Da Vinci parents have described the school community experience as feeling like part of a family.

Every parent of a Da Vinci Academy student is a member of the school's Parent Association. The purpose of the Parent Association is to support the school's mission and programs by promoting positive school spirit, supporting positive parent-to-parent and school-to-parent communications, helping with special classroom and administrative needs, and raising funds in coordination with school-wide development policies and programs.

The Parent Association meets every month during the school year, and all parents are invited to attend the meetings. The Parent Association officers oversee volunteer committees responsible for many important school community events and programs such as the Back-to-School Picnic, the New Family Welcome program, the Fall Family Festival, Fast Funds, school spirit wear, parent-only social events, the holiday wreath sale, and the Mother's Day Plant Sale.

The Parent Association plays a vital role in the school community thanks to the time, talents, and dedication of our families.

Supporting Da Vinci

Like almost all independent schools, Da Vinci relies on fundraising to maintain a quality educational experience for the students. Tuition accounts for about 90% of the cost of educating a Da Vinci student. The school's other needs for expanding and enhancing the program are met primarily through two major fundraising events, the Annual Giving Campaign and the Auction, which fund school technology, professional development for the faculty and staff, and long-term improvements to the curriculum and facility. Support in these areas directly benefits our teachers and students.

The Annual Giving Campaign takes place from October to December, although gifts can be made any time during the year. The focus of annual giving is on participation from our entire school community: the Board of Trustees, the faculty, current families, and our alumni families. Our goal is 100% participation with each family contributing at a level that fits their means. Donations to the campaign, unlike tuition payments, are tax deductible, so we hope that our families will make Da Vinci Academy one of their top philanthropic priorities.

The Auction is the major community event of the entire school year. Planning and organizing the event takes most of the year, so parents have many opportunities to help along the way. The result is a wonderful evening featuring dinner, live and silent auctions with outstanding items for any budget, raffles for both small and big ticket items, class art projects, and fund-a-project items that support specific school needs. Parent attendance is crucial to the Auction's success, and Da Vinci families are encouraged to bring family members and other guests. The Auction is a special evening that brings our school community together to support the continued growth of the school.

Parent Testimonials

"Da Vinci Academy offers us an environment where our child is accepted for who he is. He came from a different school where his intense curiosity was ignored and his strengths were not nurtured. At Da Vinci, he feels relaxed and accepted. We like that the school atmosphere is friendly and caring."

"We have been looking for a place where our children fit in and feel accepted. We believe we have found it. Our boys are happy now and making friends. As a mom, I have never had a support system for myself. In Da Vinci, I believe I have found that as well."

"The school is a very small place, so people get to know each other quickly. You can really feel part of a family. That helps the child, it helps the adults, and you tend to end up with good friends here on the adult level as well as the kids."



Admissions

Admissions Process

As a school for intellectually gifted and talented students, Da Vinci Academy has requirements for admission and a specific process that families must complete. Choosing the right school is a major decision that families make, and similarly for the school, it is important to admit students who will be successful in our program. Prospective families and the school collaborate through a careful admissions process to find the right fit between a student and the Da Vinci program.

The following steps outline the admissions process and requirements:

1. Families schedule a tour with the Director of Admissions, or attend one of the Open House tours scheduled throughout the year. This initial visit can be just for the parents, or they may bring their child/children with them. Tours typically last 30-60 minutes to see the classrooms, discuss the program and the child's interests, and answer questions about the admissions process.
2. Families wishing to apply for admission begin filling out and returning the application materials. The application materials include a two-page application, a parent questionnaire, teacher recommendations, and a request for school records. All of the application materials can be printed from the website.
3. For students entering grades 1-8, IQ test results are required for admission. The IQ results are a helpful quantifiable measure of cognitive ability, and we look for full scale scores of 125 and above on the Wechsler (WISC) test. IQ results are not the sole indicator of a student's ability to succeed in our program, however, so we consider all aspects of the applicant's qualifications when making admissions decisions. Applicants with Full Scale WISC scores below 125 will be considered case-by-case with consideration given to the other factors that indicate a child's ability to succeed in our school.

Families can submit results and documentation from a previous IQ test, or schedule testing with the local professionals on Da Vinci's list of recommended testers. IQ testing is not required for applicants to Pre-K or Kindergarten, although families are welcome to have children tested at age 4-5 using the WPPSI version of the WISC. In the absence of IQ results, the Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers use a screening tool that provides age-equivalency scores for language and cognitive skills. We look for Pre-K and Kindergarten applicants to score at least one year ahead of their chronological age on the screening tool.

4. The Director of Admissions and the appropriate teacher(s) coordinate with the family to arrange for the applicant to have a full-day visit with the class that the applicant would be joining.
5. After all the application materials, testing, and class visits are completed, the Admissions Committee reviews the application to determine whether an enrollment contract will be offered.
6. The Director of Admissions notifies families of the decision. If an enrollment contract is offered, families must return the signed contract and a 10% tuition deposit to secure the enrollment spot.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Da Vinci Academy policies do not allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, disability, national or ethnic origin in the administration of its admissions, employment or academic policies, or any school administrative programs.

Parent Testimonials

"My #1 reason that any parent should consider the school is it raises the bar. The kids become enthusiastic learners and the atmosphere feeds on itself and spreads throughout the students. All of a sudden it's 'cool' to study, learn, and dream. We are so happy to have found this school."

"We had looked at many other schools, including public schools and other private schools. With a gifted child we wanted to make sure that she was getting the appropriate education that would challenge her, and we definitely found that here at Da Vinci Academy. We spoke with a number of parents before we came here as well, and they all spoke very highly of the school, and we felt very comfortable as a final decision to have our daughter come here."

"Luke was so unhappy in public school, but within two weeks at Da Vinci he was smiling again."



Tuition & Financial Aid

Tuition

Tuition is set each year by the school's Board of Trustees as part of planning the school's overall annual budget. Da Vinci Academy's tuition is comparable to other leading independent schools in the area and reflects the school's cost in providing a quality education to each student. In setting each year's tuition, the Board seeks to balance funding the school's operating expenses with keeping the school affordable to current and prospective families. The goal is to maintain a high quality program that is available to mission-appropriate students.

Please check the [Tuition & Financial Aid page](#) in the Admissions section of the website for the current school year's tuition rates.

Tuition at Da Vinci Academy covers the educational program, including textbooks. Tuition also includes the cost of day field trips and the cost of special presenters, programs, and assemblies. Families are responsible for other expenses such as school supplies, school uniforms, overnight field trips, the optional hot lunch program, and the optional before and after care programs.

Value for the Tuition

Families choose independent schools because of the value of the experience and the difference it makes in students' lives. At Da Vinci, we are dedicated to providing our families with value for the tuition they pay.

Intellectually gifted and talented students require a different program because they think and learn differently than other children. Da Vinci Academy's mission is to meet the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of these students. Many families arrive at Da Vinci having experienced a school environment that did not adequately meet those needs, and the difference they see in their children at Da Vinci confirms that they found the right fit. The value of the Da Vinci experience lies in families finding a place where their children are intellectually challenged, socially comfortable, emotionally nurtured, and encouraged to pursue their strengths and potential.

In the long term, the value of a Da Vinci education is confirmed by the success of our alumni students. Da Vinci graduates are desirable candidates for any high school program, whether they choose to attend public school, independent schools, boarding schools, or programs such as the Illinois Math & Science Academy. Our alumni stay in touch and credit their Da Vinci experience for preparing them well for high school.

Financial Aid

Da Vinci Academy seeks to enroll mission-appropriate students from all socio-economic backgrounds. The school offers need-based financial aid to help families who need assistance in order to afford a Da Vinci education. Financial aid is awarded based on a family's demonstrated financial need, and the assistance is given as a grant to bridge the gap between tuition and what a family can afford to pay.

Da Vinci uses the School and Student Service (SSS) for Financial Aid to determine a family's demonstrated financial need. SSS is a service of the National Association of Independent Schools and is used by independent schools across the country. Information about the SSS application process is available through the NAIS website at www.nais.org/financialaid/sss. SSS also has a toll-free Helpline at (866) 387-2601. Please contact the Director of Admissions for more information about the financial aid process.

Parent Testimonials

"Our daughter, Hannah, started in Kindergarten, and obviously we've been very happy because we've been back for seven years in a row. It's a wonderful environment. A place for her to grow, a place for her to be mentored, a place to create friendships, and really become the academic person and child she is meant to be."

"Courtney is doing amazingly well at Taft (a co-ed boarding school in Connecticut). She is one of the top students in her class and has an overall GPA of 5.1 and an A effort grade in all classes! I credit everyone at Da Vinci with helping Courtney. She was well prepared as she entered one of the most challenging academic institutions in the country."

"I think the most important thing that has happened to my children here to prepare them for high school is a sense of responsibility. They know what they're supposed to do, they organize their time, and have a sense of ownership of their work and their responsibility to do the work. For some children that comes easily, and for one of my children, it's a miracle."



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