



Where
Parents Choose
and
Students Succeed

South Sutter Charter School
gives families the permission to
do things differently

South Sutter Charter School

Where parents choose and students succeed

BY ANNE STOKES

At South Sutter Charter School, educators put the power of choice into families' hands. The home-based personalized learning charter school provides students with alternatives to the traditional educational system and gives parents the tools and support they need to help their children succeed.

"Our organization is really built around [the] vision that every single child is different — they have different interests, they have different abilities ... they learn at different paces," says Susan Clark, executive director of Innovative Education Management, the nonprofit public benefit corporation that operates South Sutter and two other personalized learning California charter schools. "Each student has a program that's specially designed for them. If you couple that with giving parents as much decision making as you can in the education of their own child, those two things together are going to create lifelong learners and contributing members of society."

First opened in 1999, IEM now serves nearly 6,000 students in Northern, Central and Southern California. They provide home-schooling support for elementary and middle school students and independent learning programs for high school students. According to Clark, the fact that their schools have been around for nearly 20 years reassures parents seeking educational options.

"We've been in business a long time ... and we know the rules and regulations of charter schools," she says. "Our

historic stability [and] our clean audits guarantee for parents that this school is going to be here tomorrow, it's going to be here next year, it's going to be here five years from now."

With IEM, home schooling families can connect with 4,000 different vendors through which they can choose the curriculum, materials, programs and other educational resources that best suit their children's needs and learning styles. South Sutter Charter School supports both students and parents with diagnostic assessments, curriculum recommendations, tutoring and parent trainings.

"Together [teachers and parents] choose what books might be best, what supplements might be best, what services they might need — it's truly a collaboration between the teacher and the parent," says Clark. "We're not cookie cutter. You can talk to 10 different families and you will find 10 different ways that they're reaching students."

Whether students have specialized needs that aren't easily addressed in a brick-and-mortar classroom or crave a more advanced curriculum, South Sutter Charter School can provide the means for them to excel.

"These kids are really getting such an independently designed program that gives them the option to move at any pace," says Clark. "We're able to really meet the needs of just about any student there is."

According to Susan Clark, IEM executive director, students who may not fit into a traditional educational environment can find success at South Sutter Charter School through personalized attention and customized curriculum. "We believe we can serve any student," she says.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



"We're able to really meet the needs of just about any student there is."

Susan Clark
Innovative Education Management
Executive Director



MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOUR FAMILY

While the traditional classroom with one teacher and dozens of students may work for some students, many students don't fit that mold. Many parents aren't aware of any other options.

Charter schools like South Sutter exist to give parents a choice in their child's education. "We believe

that the old model of education where every child must learn from the same book does not meet the needs of all children," says Cynthia Rachel, director of education support services. "We want to help parents educate their children in the way that meets their children's needs. This may be different for every child."

As a public school, South Sutter:

- Is FREE (no tuition)
- Is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges
- Accepts any student living within Sutter and adjacent counties
- Allows for flexible daily schedules
- Offers curricular choices to suit students' needs
- Provides support from credentialed teachers

To see if South Sutter is right for your family, visit www.sscs.cc or call 800-979-4436.

Parent Emma Biedenbender meets the varied educational needs of all three of her children through the flexible curriculum choices offered by South Sutter Charter School.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



“No one knows the kids like we do — their strengths and their weaknesses.”

Emma Biedenbender
parent, South Sutter Charter School

Finding Time for Family

South Sutter family has the freedom to engage with kids on their own level

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

From the beginning, Emma Biedenbender knew she wanted to home-school her three children, Jacob, Jaina and Jacie.

“We decided there were too many things going on at the public schools, they just weren’t family-oriented,” she says. “And no one knows the kids like we do — their strengths and their weaknesses.”

Thirteen-year-old Jacob, for example, has always tested “very high,” in reading says Biedenbender. Studying through South Sutter allows him to excel and move forward at his own pace in a way traditional schools could not. “When he was in fifth grade, but wanted to read a book at the 12th-grade level, he could,” she says. Biedenbender describes setting books on the table — on subjects she knows he’s currently interested in, such as geology — and he will grab them excitedly and run off. “I never have to say ‘go read these,’” she laughs.

On the opposite end of the educational spectrum, a flexible curriculum accommodates her 11-year-old daughter Jaina, who is on the autism spectrum. “We’re focused on things she needs to learn, like life skills — cooking, telling time,” Biedenbender says. “South Sutter doesn’t [stress] if she’s following a strict 5th- or 6th-grade curriculum.” Jaina is also able to access a full range of services through South Sutter, including a math tutor, a special education teacher, a speech therapist and an

occupational therapist. “She also has me,” says Biedenbender. “If she’s having a hard time, I can say, ‘Let’s stop this now — go paint or play outside — and we’ll do this later.’” Jaina’s therapists tell Biedenbender this loving and supportive environment is vital, and “if she was in school, she wouldn’t be thriving like she is.”

Biedenbender suggests, however, home schooling’s greatest benefit may be the gift of time. She lists off a litany of extracurricular activities they have happily pursued: ceramics, cake decorating, ukulele, guitar, swim, ice skating, STEM and rocketry. “But we usually don’t do classes in the afternoon or evening — we’re at home with my husband, playing board games, seeing neighborhood friends — like the way we were raised,” she says.

They also are big fans of hands-on learning, whether that’s dressing in period clothes and baking bread at Sutter’s Fort, or taking off on a summer road trip across the American West (motivated by Jacob’s geology passion). “I left my job to stay home,” says Biedenbender, who admits it is sometimes financially challenging. “But my gosh, I wouldn’t trade this for anything.”

To see how South Sutter gives families the freedom to choose what’s best for their children, visit www.sscs.cc or call 800-979-4436.



IS HOME SCHOOLING RIGHT FOR YOU?

Parents should ask themselves some questions before embarking on a home-school path. But one thing they shouldn’t worry about is not being qualified. “People say they aren’t smart enough, they’re not a teacher,” says Shauna Anderson, education specialist advisor. “They just don’t realize how much support is out there.” At South Sutter, there is a wealth of curriculum available, as well as an educational specialist assigned to every family who is available at all times to help.

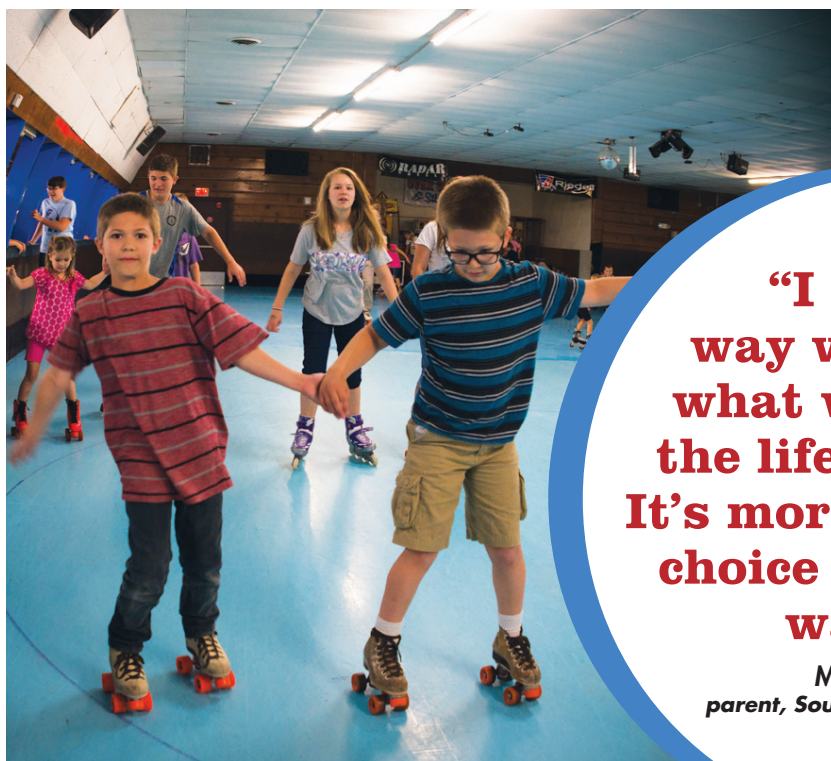
Parents also worry about the time involved, but Anderson suggests what takes eight hours in a traditional school takes two hours at home. “We don’t try to replicate a classroom,” says Anderson. “Instead it’s a lifestyle of learning.” That means field trips, time to imagine and play, extracurricular classes and activities.

Still, she warns it’s challenging and “not for everyone.” Her best advice for a successful home-school experience? “You need to be very in tune with what your kids want and need,” she says.

Social Opportunities

Activities with peers abound for home-schooling families

BY MATT JOCKS



The Calapp children experience a wide variety of social experiences with a diverse group of other children, including roller skating.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Most home-schooling parents are venturing into the unknown when they make the decision to lead their children away from the public or private school system.

Not Melissa Calapp.

Calapp is part of a relatively small demographic: a second-generation independent schooler. She left the public school system at age 16 and has first hand experience of the path she is currently guiding six of her seven children down (her youngest not yet being school age).

“When I did that, socialization was a lot harder,” says Calapp. “The setup then, of independent co-ops no longer really exists.”

According to Calapp, what has taken its place offers home-schoolers enough opportunities that the old apprehension about home-schooled children being sheltered is no longer relevant.

“I love the way we’re doing what we’re doing, the life we have. ... It’s more of an active choice for what we wanted.”

Melissa Calapp
parent, South Sutter Charter School

“I think my kids are probably more socialized, if anything, than kids in public schools,” says Calapp. “We do things purposefully.”

While public school students may have more face time with their peers in classes every day, Calapp says her children and other home-schoolers get a wide variety of social experiences.

She rattles off a partial list of excursions – concerts, plays, camping trips, visits to outdoor venues like a sturgeon farm, television studios, police and fire stations. Each trip not only involves education but allows the children to interact with each other and with the professionals and adults at the venues. The trips and activities, facilitated by South Sutter, usually involve about 35 children, about the same size as a typical public school class.

“There are different races and religions in the group,” she says. “Different ages, people with disabilities. There is diversity.”

With six children in school, Calapp knows there are different interests and tries to find avenues to explore them. While three played soccer in community programs, other athletic outlets can be found through activities like gymnastics and dance through South Sutter’s vendor networks.

Calapp’s oldest child, Kamron, is ready to graduate and head to a four-year college, right after completing a religious mission trip. Sixteen-year-old Aubrey is starting with early junior college classes with an eye on a career in marine biology.

Calapp says when her children left public school, it was over a concern that her time was not being used as well as it could. With the expansion of socialization opportunities, she sees the decision paying off.

“I love the way we’re doing what we’re doing, the life we have,” she says. “This is not a reaction to the public schools. It’s more of an active choice for what we wanted.”

To find out if South Sutter Charter School is right for your family, visit www.sscs.cc or call 800-979-4436.



GET HANDS-ON WITH GROUP EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Learning can be done hands-on, feet-on or eyes-on. It can be done sitting, standing, walking, running or riding. And it can be done all over the place. That’s the message South Sutter Charter School tries to drive home with its group educational activities.

Students have visited Sutter’s Fort, Safetyville and the World of Wonders Science Museum in Lodi. There is the “Trilogy GEA,” a

three-stop venture to the Capitol, an IMAX movie of California history and the Sacramento History Museum. And there have been plenty of plays with the Sacramento Theatre Company.

Although many of the excursions are focused on the Sacramento area, education liaison Jolie Hauck said more distant destinations are on the horizon.

“We’re putting together a trip to Yosemite and another to Disneyland for the education series of classes they have,” Hauck said.

Aside from excursions, South Sutter offers competition in the spelling bee (with top finishers qualifying for further competition) and Family Day outings.



South Sutter Charter School alumnus Leo Granados-Gersalia is set to start his second year at Woodland Community College in the fall, where he is studying his passions – anthropology and history.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

Learning to Thrive



A PATH TO COLLEGE

South Sutter Charter School prepares college-bound students with the guidance and coursework needed to continue their education past high school. Students have their choice of more than 100 courses that meet A-G requirements through book-based, project-based or online programs approved through the University of California Office of the President – the same requirements as any brick-and-mortar school.

“We want to create that successful plan around the student, their needs and their learning styles,” says Joyce Padgett, guidance coordinator for South Sutter Charter School. “We work very hard to make sure that we’ve got A-G and college rigor courses available for them so they can have a selection as to how they do it based on their needs.”

In addition to offering mandatory core subjects required by the UC and CSU systems, students can get an early start building a strong college transcript through concurrent enrollment in community college courses, for which they can receive high school and college credit at the same time.

A personalized education solves the “homework issue” for star student

BY ANNE STOKES

All Leo Granados-Gersalia needed was a little extra time and attention – things that can be hard to come by in many classrooms. Struggling with a form of dyslexia, he took longer to complete reading, writing and math problems than his peers. And while his grades were consistently high, the cost was hours and hours of homework every day.

“It built up my dislike of school because it felt like I was just doing homework nonstop,” he says. “It really felt meaningless, the work, because it just felt like I was cranking out paperwork.”

After negative experiences with other private and charter schools, his family decided home schooling was the best way to give him the personalized attention he needed. South Sutter Charter School provided his family with the support and resources they needed to make it work.

“I was able to get the help I needed, either through my mom or through the [educational specialists],” Leo says. “The curriculum was always very easy to get, they were always making sure I was staying on top of the work and they would help me as much as they could. I felt like I had more support being with South Sutter because the ESs were always available.”

According to his mother, Sabrina Granados, that extra help made all the difference to his success, in and out of the classroom. With help from their educational specialist, Granados was able to find the right curriculum and methods that worked with her son’s learning style, not against it.

“He had more of a social life home-schooling than he ever had when he was in a formal brick-and-mortar school,”

she says. “He was able to explore other things ... like baseball, guitar, he did fencing. ...

He got to do a lot of things that I know he wouldn’t have been able to do in public school because of the homework issue.”

Not only was Leo successfully passing his high school coursework, he enrolled in concurrent college courses. Before graduating in 2015, he had already earned 36 units and completed several prerequisite courses. Granados credits her son’s success to the personalized attention and support the family received from South Sutter Charter School.

“They [are more than] teachers, they have become really good friends,” she says. “You definitely feel that connection and you definitely feel that your child is cared for and they want him to succeed.”

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“You definitely feel that your child is cared for and they want [them] to succeed.”

**Sabrina Granados
South Sutter Charter
School parent**

**“It’s different
for each
child because
they’re different
children and learn
differently.”**

Jennifer Hernandez
Educational Specialist, South Sutter
Charter School



HOW INSTRUCTIONAL FUNDS WORK

Like traditional schools, charter schools are state-funded based on student average daily attendance. IEM schools strive to provide as much instructional funds to families as possible. Currently this is over \$2,000 per student per school year, with higher funding available for high school students. At South Sutter Charter School, parents get to choose how instructional funds are spent, selecting from a wide variety of learning materials, programs and classes through thousands of approved vendors. Textbooks, dance classes, French lessons or chemistry labs — families are given the freedom to tailor their child's education with options that may not be available in a more traditional school. Educational specialists and parents determine together what best suits students' needs and learning styles.

“It’s so customized, I’ve seen so many different ways that parents, students and teachers have used instructional funds. It’s really customized to help them succeed,” says Shawna Bohn, assistant director of teacher support services. “We really take a look at our spending and we try to give as much as we can to the kids and their learning curriculum.”

The Freedom to Personalize Education

Helping students find their own paths to success

BY JENNIFER BONNETT

Even though education specialist Jennifer Hernandez was working for South Sutter Charter School, it wasn't until her son was several months into kindergarten at a public school that she realized he would be better served in a home-school program.

“I saw how great it was with my school families, I kept feeling I should be home schooling,” she says.

Today, Hernandez's third child just finished kindergarten at South Sutter, a home-based personalized learning charter school that gives parents the freedom to do things differently and personalize their education with what works best for each child. The goal is, with the help of an educational specialist like Hernandez, to find an individualized path for each child through a flexible curriculum.

Parents have the choice of curriculum and supplemental resources, including flashcard apps, printed worksheets, textbooks, DVDs, even home-schooler classrooms. There are dozens of English language arts and math courses that serve as the core for most home-school families, such as Saxon Math, the Critical Thinking Co. or the Art of Problem Solving.

“It’s different for each child because they’re different children and learn differently,” Hernandez says, turning back to her own children.

Her daughter doesn't particularly enjoy schoolwork, so Hernandez found what works for her. She likes Reading Eggs, an online tool that rewards correct answers and completed activities with “eggs” the user can take to spend on games or their avatars. Her son, on the other hand, uses textbooks more often because he enjoys reading. And as her fifth-graders study U.S. history, she will be able to teach lessons around the U.S. presidential race.

For both her children and the 11 families she works with, Hernandez tailors lessons to areas they score weakest on during their annual math and English assessments. “It’s very individualized because I go off those assessments,” she adds.

Hernandez, who left the state for a year and came back, said she appreciates the nontraditional school even more than she did before. “When we throw everyone in the same box and have them learn out of the same box or book, it may work for three or four children in a classroom, but not all of them.”

See what kind of opportunities South Sutter Charter School has for your learner, visit www.sscs.cc or call 800-979-4436.

Leading Students on Their own Paths to Success

A Q&A with South Sutter's Educational Specialist of the Year Charlene Bastian

BY JENNIFER BONNETT

Charlene Bastian, South Sutter Charter School's 2015-16 Educational Specialist of the Year, comes from a family of teachers three generations deep. At age 13, she got her first taste of home schooling from a family she baby-sat for. She went on to become a teacher and worked mostly at the preschool level, although she substituted for grades K-8 for the Diocese of Sacramento. It wasn't until her third child was born in 2005 that she looked into IEM and six years later was hired as an ES.

? **How do you feel about receiving this award?**

They started reading off [nomination] letters parents had written. I've gotten to know my co-workers so well they're like family, so I kept thinking, this could be any one of them. When they announced my name, I was overwhelmed.

? **What does an ES do?**

[We] provide oversight for mentoring to both the parents and students in their independent study home-school journey.

It's really many hats – it can be very businesslike when you help them fill out forms and choose curriculum that will help them with their individual needs. You provide a lot of support academically, emotionally and financially with their budgets.

? **How does the practice of working with the same students year after year benefit them?**

You really establish a good relationship with them. I feel like I'm part of their family.

? **How do you ensure their needs are being met?**

We have ongoing check-ins. We are required to meet every 20 days, but oftentimes I do it more often.

? **What do you feel are the benefits to working with home-schooled or independent learning students?**

One of the biggest rewards and benefits is being able to tailor a student's [educational plan] to their academic needs.

? **How is this different than working in a brick-and-mortar classroom?**

Every day is different. You have some days that are really quiet and some days there are a lot of emails and phone calls. In a brick-and-mortar, I was also limited to just one age.

? **Do you have any examples of students who have flourished under this program after struggling in a traditional classroom?**

I had a student in high school here, I got him as a brand new junior. He said he was only going to do this for a year. He liked that he had a say in what he could study and the peak times of the day he worked best. One of his worst classes in the brick-and-mortar [classroom] was history, but in his senior year he wanted to do an elective on the Holocaust. He read everything on the topic and watched every documentary. He ended up meeting a survivor at the library.

His mom and I were in awe; here was a kid who, before joining South Sutter, was going to drop out and now he wanted to go to college. He decided he really liked learning.

Charlene Bastian, South Sutter Charter School's 2015-16 Educational Specialist of the Year, works to fit the personalized educational needs of her students as well as those of her three daughters.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



“One of the biggest rewards and benefits is being able to tailor a student's [educational plan] to their academic needs.”

**Charlene Bastian
South Sutter Charter School Educational
Specialist of the Year**

Giving Families the Power of Choice

South Sutter Charter School is where parents choose and students succeed. For nearly 20 years, they have been supporting parents with the resources they need to give their children an education that best suits their strengths and interests, while at the same time giving students the freedom to follow their passions.

Over 4,000 vendors provide ample choices for parents to find the best fit for their student's learning style and interests, from traditional book-based curriculum to hands-on labs that bring

lessons to life. And as a public school, enrollment is free to any student who lives in Sutter or its adjacent counties.

"Our purpose is to offer a personalized learning model of instruction to anyone whose family decides this is how they want to educate their child," says Cynthia Rachel, director of education support services. "We really are able to say, 'Here are all of your options, let's see what works best for your child.' I think that's really powerful for parents."



To see if South Sutter Charter School is the right choice for your family, visit www.sscs.cc or call 800-979-4436.

LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

Innovative Education Management has charter schools across the state to help families create enriching learning environments for their students.



Innovative Education Management

4535 Missouri Flat Road, Ste. 1A
Placerville, CA 95667
800-979-4436
www.ieminc.org



Sky Mountain Charter School

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www.skymountaincs.org
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South Sutter Charter School

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Placerville, CA 95667
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www.sscs.cc
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