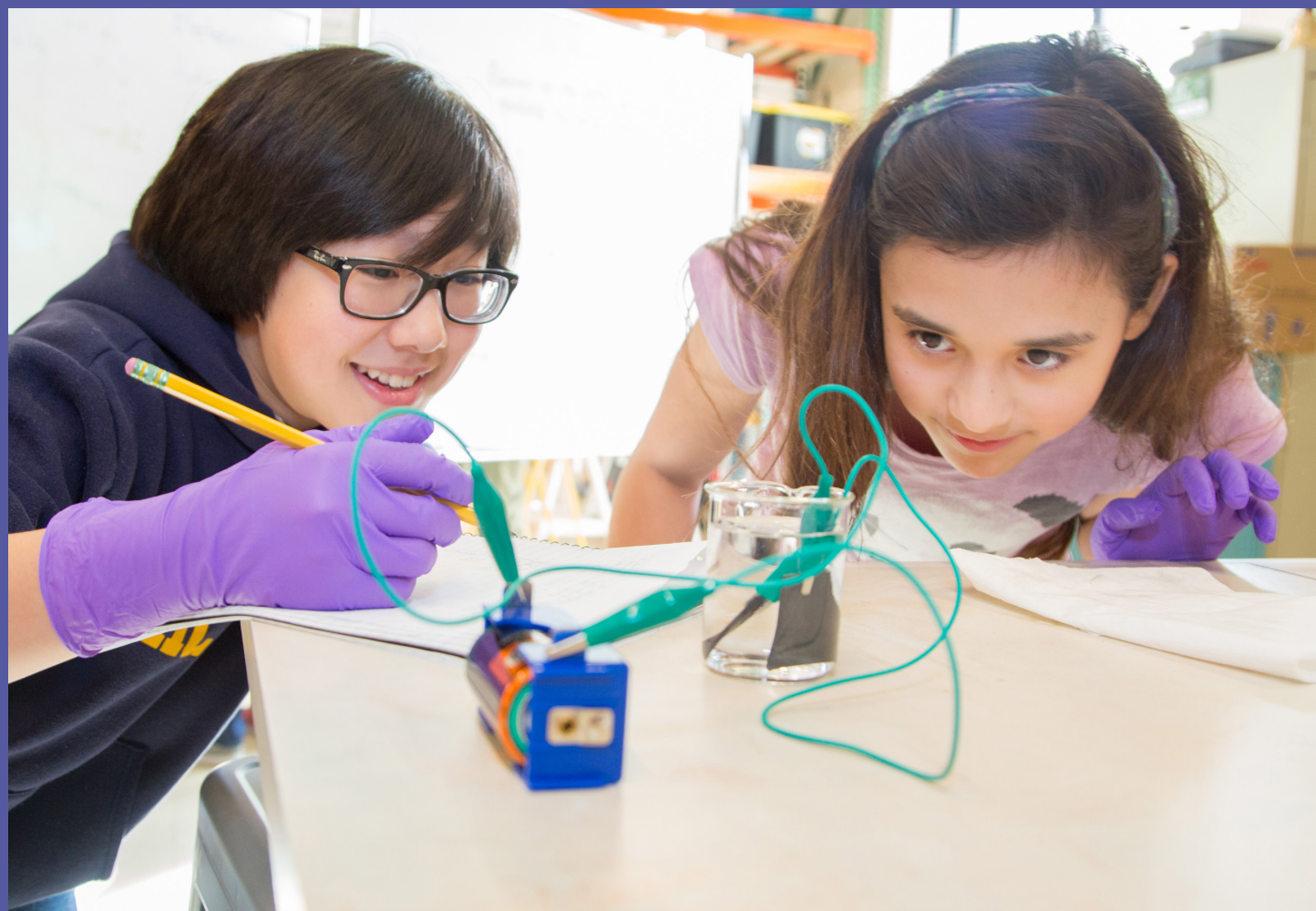


Acera School

Learning Without Limits





Where gifted kids ask big questions,
learn based upon ability, not age, and
become their best selves.

“Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for creating a one-of-a-kind school. At Acera, children get to fall in love with learning and find a community of unique thinkers. They are supported along the way and encouraged to explore beyond what’s “allowed” for that particular grade, age, or any other limitation placed by society ... Thank you for giving our kids an unparalleled advantage — the ability to question, create, reflect, wonder, share, inspire, care, lead, and so much more!”

Acera Parent

Choice Fuels Deep Engagement and Meaningful Learning

Acera gives voice and choice to students along their learning journey, so they can engage in passion-fueled projects that bring the fire back and reignite a love of learning.

Each student’s unique abilities and interests shape individualized learning paths that fit their potential within a community of voracious minds. In this dynamic and supportive environment, rigorous thinking and creative problem-solving manifest in many ways — from classroom simulations to the use of Arduino microcontrollers to the creation of podcasts and performances. Work that is highly interesting and relevant makes Acera students *want* to go to school every day. Acera is a community where kids develop into thinkers, leaders, and citizens who are confident and eager to change the world.

Our approach to education includes:

- Passion-powered learning plans
- Ability-based math classes
- Early and deep exposure to STEM, linked to real-world applications
- A focus on systems thinking, problem-solving, and leadership



“Consciously cultivating a community of belonging and purpose completely changes students’ experience of school. This is why, each year, anonymous student surveys show that 93-97% of our students are happy to be at school every day.”

Courtney Dickinson, B.A.
Founder & Head of School, Acera



Safeguarding the Innate Curiosity of Each Child

Gifted kids soak up content quickly, ask questions, and apply what they learned to make something new. We cherish this spirit of inquiry. Through classroom discussions, hands-on projects, and simulations, learning comes alive and students connect with things that matter to them. This inspires students to engage as problem-solvers, innovators, creative thinkers, and leaders, practicing thinking and communication habits today that will make them true contributors tomorrow.

Ability-Based Learning

We know gifted kids can understand big ideas, so why make them wait? Acera is an intellectual candy store where students can learn and explore without limits according to their abilities and interests.

Ability-based learning occurs across all disciplines, even when students are substantially above grade level. Each student has an individualized learning path that includes start-of-year assessments, hand-off from prior teachers, parent conferences, opportunities for electives and creativity station selections, and placement into an ability-based math class.

The School of YES!

If a student has something they want to launch, do, or learn, we support them to make that happen — whether that means writing and producing a play, teaming with an adult mentor to launch a free peer math tutoring program in public schools, building a neural network library for an artificial intelligence project, or even launching a Model UN Conference! Students initiate without fear, get back up when things go awry, and bloom into leaders.

Purpose-Filled Learning

Our learning approach fosters intrinsic motivation, inspiring a sense of purpose in school. We rapidly move from knowledge acquisition to conceptual thinking and applying ideas to broader, real-world problems and projects. Learning is satisfying, meaningful, and joyful.



Individualized, Hands-On Curriculum

Our interdisciplinary, project-based, and hands-on program is created by our core classroom and specialist teachers. Year to year, different essential questions become thematic jumping-off points.

Questions are complex and engaging and have included: What makes us human? What is the origin of life? How do we design and redesign our environment to solve problems? What defines a civilization? An authentic inquiry approach in classroom discussions opens students' minds and creates a sense of purpose in learning.

Based on the interests and profiles of each particular class group, teachers initiate and evolve their program through the trimester or year to ensure growth in academic skills and the development of core capacities. Sample past units have focused on:

- The role of law in the formation and evolution of society, and ideas that changed the world
- Energy and Newton's laws of motion
- What makes us human, with deeper focus areas on governments and the human body as a system
- Ancient Egypt, the emergence of culture, and the foundation of democracy
- Oceans, piracy, and trade, with inquiry about how people define and create value
- Structural engineering, Haiti, earthquakes, and questions of global health



Classroom experiences and projects showcase and expand students' learning across both core and specialty academic areas, taught by specialists with deep expertise and training in these fields. In the lower school (kindergarten - grade 5), specialist topics relate to core classroom themes for the year (visual and performing arts, lab sciences, engineering, computer science, applied technology and microcontrollers, physics, wood shop, maker space, fiber arts, and electronic arts). In upper school (grades 6-9), specialists design and lead elective offerings across myriad subjects on a trimester basis.

Porous Walls to the World

Teachers take a porous walls to the outside world approach, with pertinent field trips, bringing thought leaders into classrooms, and leveraging our long-term partnerships and resources to deepen learning in ways that make it relevant and timely. We function as a Lab School and often work with researchers and thought leaders to design and pilot test new learning approaches that expand students' exposure to innovators and experts and provide a platform for learning that can be brought beyond Acera, through our separately funded education innovation outreach arm, AceraEI.

Long-term Acera partners and collaborators include: Tufts Center for Engineering Education Outreach, Arduino, Tami Lieberman Microbiome Lab at MIT, Boston University Social Learning Lab led by Peter Blake, and One Brave Idea led by Calum MacRae.

Immersive Elective Courses

Students in grades 6–9 have the opportunity to select from dozens of high-engagement electives across sciences, engineering, social sciences, and humanities. These courses are developed and refined by our intellectually charged and creative educators who align the curriculum to students’ interests and strengths, as well as to current events and innovations. By incorporating primary source material and focusing on real-world applications, these elective courses emphasize the development of core capacities and academic skills while maintaining high school-level content and rigor.

Examples of past electives:

Ethics and Contemporary Issues

This elective explores philosophical questions that challenge the ways we think and act. We will engage in discussions that allow us to challenge our moral commitments.

Psychology and *The Iliad*

This class examines the relationship between psychology and literature, exploring the complexities of human nature, emotions, and behaviors as depicted in the *Iliad*.

History - The Cold War

By comparing artifacts, we trace the developments of Cold War cultures as they touched upon science and technology, the home and family, gender and race, and other important facets of life.

U.S. Government

We delve deeply into the Constitution to understand the essential structure of the federal government, then use that as a jumping-off point to trace the development of our government over time.

Classical Physics - Kinematics and Dynamics

We explore the fundamental concepts of kinematics and forces, which form the foundation of classical physics. Students gain insights into a wide range of applications, including sports, biomechanics, robotics, and engineering.

Intro to Digital Audio, Mixing and Sound Design

Students will learn the basics of the DAW (digital audio workstation) using Soundtrap and Ableton Live. We will also explore hardware such as programmable piano and drum controllers, microphones, and audio interfaces.

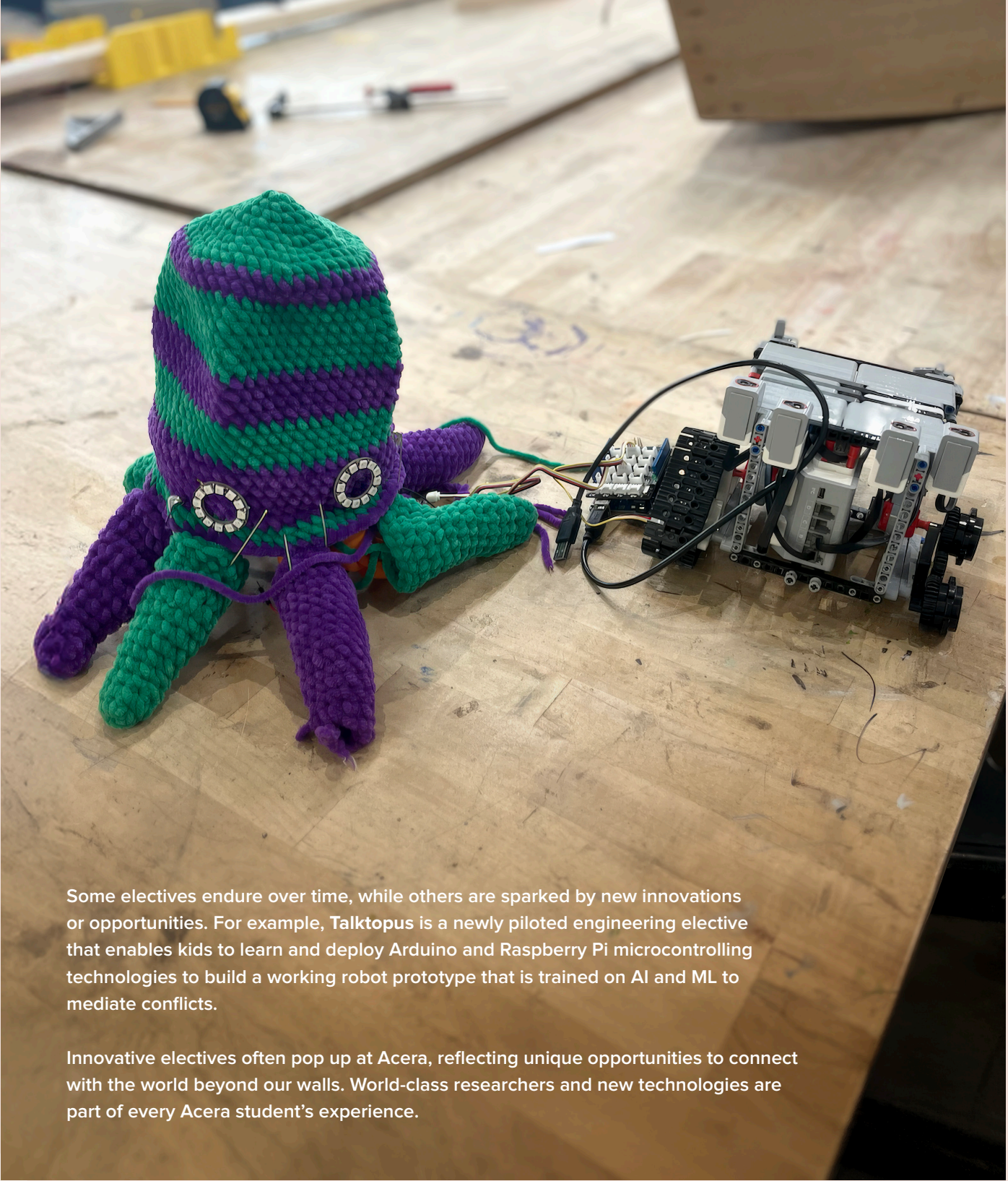
Mathematical Biology

This elective is a mathematical exploration of biological systems, including cardiovascular circulation, animal cell volume control, neuronal action potential, genetics, infectious diseases and population models, and more.

Social Impact of Artificial Intelligence

The rapidly increasing use of AI is transforming our world with all sorts of financial, social, and ethical implications. While learning a little about the creation and function of some current tools, we will examine their impact at levels ranging from the individual to the community.

Feel free to request a current course guide of electives.



Some electives endure over time, while others are sparked by new innovations or opportunities. For example, Talktopus is a newly piloted engineering elective that enables kids to learn and deploy Arduino and Raspberry Pi microcontrolling technologies to build a working robot prototype that is trained on AI and ML to mediate conflicts.

Innovative electives often pop up at Acera, reflecting unique opportunities to connect with the world beyond our walls. World-class researchers and new technologies are part of every Acera student’s experience.

Math Without a Ceiling

Gifted and highly gifted students often demonstrate extraordinary potential in math, making it one of the most challenging subjects to effectively differentiate within heterogeneous classrooms. Why would we ask an 8-year-old who wonders about negative exponents to wait until higher math to engage in their inquiry? At Acera, we create a runway for learning that fits our students' potential.

Assessments at the start of the year as well as hand-offs from prior teachers help us understand what each student is ready to learn. Some Acera students are at grade level and may even feel reticent about math. Most Acera students are one or two years ahead of what is typical, and many are three, four, or more years beyond what is expected of a student at their age. Acera's goal is freedom, not pressure. It is not about vertical acceleration, nor is it a race to calculus. Instead, it is about a love of mathematics and joy in the satisfaction of balancing an equation and solving a problem.

At Acera, we empower students to excel in ways that honor their potential, while fostering essential organizational, critical thinking, and resilience skills. We address the knowledge gaps that often arise with gifted math students, without holding them back.

Students learn in small groups with peers of similar ability, focusing on building mathematical fluency. They gain multiple approaches to problem-solving and learn to derive solutions from first principles, rather than simply applying formulas. Our goal is to cultivate mathematical thinking, deep understanding, and real-world application.

Ability-based math classes (averaging eight students per class) go beyond typical middle school math, covering topics such as geometry, algebra 1 & 2, number theory, discrete math, pre-calculus, and advanced calculus. We also host national math competitions to provide students with opportunities to showcase and celebrate their achievements.

Frequently, new students express excitement at finally being able to demonstrate their true capabilities in math and to engage with material that matches their readiness in a hands-on, applied way. This is both satisfying for them and a relief, as they no longer feel unchallenged. Our math teachers often share stories of students who reach out over the summer, seeking feedback on multi-page math proofs they've completed. We understand the deep satisfaction that comes from solving a challenging problem.

“Acera is a place where you can be the person you want to be. We get to do fun activities while we are learning, and everything is about what we are interested in, not what we’re being told to learn. I love being here because I know this is a place that will help me grow into a person who will be able to learn forever and will help others love to learn as well.”

O.K., Grade 3 Acera Student

“I love the engineering here! I’ve been able to design, build, and even create a habitat for fish and other aquatic creatures. I’ve learned to collaborate with other kids on projects, and I get to work in big groups, small groups, with a partner, and by myself when it’s the right time. The teachers are so helpful; I can always ask questions, and they help me find the answers.”

N.S., Grade 2 Acera Student

“We have a lot of different math levels. There’s an understanding and encouragement here that everyone continues to learn at their own pace, with no ceiling, and accommodating to all learners. Math at Acera is very fun, with lots of math problems and projects, which I find exciting. There’s a focus on each student as an individual, meeting them where they are and helping them continue to learn at their own pace.”

J.S., Grade 8 Acera Student

“I have to say, overall, this community is nice! It’s nice to know people who share interests with me and I think that’s very valuable. I have friends who I can talk with at my level. I love the math here and how you can continue to learn and grow ... however high you want to go. IMpP (Inquiry Maker Passion Project) is a unique opportunity to do an independent project that is substantial, in a school setting.”

L.H.K., Grade 7 Acera Student

Our Team of Expert Educators

100%

of our core classroom teachers hold an advanced degree.

85%

of our full-time specialist teachers hold an advanced degree in a related field.

100%

of our full-time specialist teachers have specialty training and experience in the subject that they teach at Acera (physics, engineering, arts, and math).

100%

of counseling and literacy specialists hold advanced degrees or specialty training in the field they practice at Acera (psychology, counseling, therapy, and literacy).



1:1 coaching builds authentic relationships and deep understanding of every student.

Acera brings together a team of creative, intellectual, expert educators who have a shared mission: Do what is right for each student to help them become their best selves.

Our teachers inspire, facilitate, and empower—not lecture. They have deep knowledge in the subject areas they are teaching and show up excited and passionate each day, ready for high engagement and to perpetuate curiosity. Acera teachers hold degrees from leading institutions such as Columbia, Harvard, Williams, MIT, and Tufts.

Student-to-Teacher Ratio is 7:1

This ratio varies through the school day, based upon student needs and the topics being taught.

1:1 coaching is frequent, particularly for writing instruction and Passion Projects mentoring

Math class sizes average 8 students, typically with a class size range from

2 to 14

Writing and reading class times generally have a student-to-teacher ratio between

4:1 to 7:1

Counseling and cross-classroom teachers are deployed in flexible ways to best assure support for each student and a community of learning that meets the needs of all.



“Astronomy Part 1: The Night Sky” enables students to build and use astronomical tools, learn to navigate and tell time, and reflect on the historical development of humanity’s understanding of their place in the universe.



Creativity and arts stations enable all students to choose from visual, musical, movement, culinary, and engineering arts programs. Students focus on long-term projects that culminate in a showcase event (“Museum Walk”) open to families at the end of each trimester.

“...as I’ve been looking at other schools, I’m realizing how rare the amount of autonomy and creativity I had was. That was a really beautiful gift that you gave me for the last 6 years! I just wanted to say that I really loved the school you created ... I knew it was a special place for kids ... but I’m also really reflecting on what a special place it was for teachers ... the gift of being able to be fully responsive to my kids. I never had to fight to do what I thought was best for a kid.”

A.C.
Former Acera Teacher



Living our Values: Community, Openness, Innovation, Curiosity, Integrity & Leadership

Communities Served and Outreach Beyond

- 26+ Massachusetts communities are represented at Acera, including the Greater Boston area, North Shore, South Shore, and Central Massachusetts.
- Every year new families move from out of state — or even out of the country — to come to Acera.
- 500+ families are served yearly in our after-school, vacation, and summer programs.
- Through our public school outreach initiative, Acera Education Innovation (AceraEI), we served 8000 students during the 2023/24 school year alone. Our public school programs include whole-school-change projects in Lowell, a professional development series currently serving 40+ school districts, and our Acera as a Model program, which hosts and trains educators and school leaders from Brazil, Denmark, and Kazakhstan.

Acera Diversity Scholarship

Founded in June 2020, the purpose of Acera’s Diversity Scholarship Program is to make Acera’s core school day program more accessible for students of underrepresented groups who qualify for gifted education.

Reed Hollett Scholarship

In honor of a treasured young teacher who passed away, the Reed Hollett Scholarship provides funds for low income students to attend Acera Enrichment Programs free of charge.

Financial Aid

Acera recognizes the sacrifices families make to send their children to independent schools. We continue to offer a limited number of need-based financial aid awards that can cap tuition at approximately \$17,000 / year.

We partner with School and Student Services (SSS), part of Community Brands, in our financial aid process. Awards are based on demonstrated need. To be considered, new and returning families must complete and submit all required SSS paperwork including a financial aid application, most recently available tax return, and recent pay stub(s)/ paycheck(s). Families must reapply each year. As of 2024, we have been able to offer financial aid stipends to 100% of families who apply by the deadline and who have demonstrated financial need.

For questions about admissions, scholarships, or financial aid, please email admissions@aceraschool.org.



Bioluminescence lab linked to a year-long theme of Biomimicry and Adaptation.



Cultivating Community and Driving Change

Acera Parent Partnership (APP)

APP is Acera's parent-led community support organization. Founded in 2016, the APP aims to celebrate, advocate for, and bring together all the members of the Acera community. Parents volunteer to lead family events and partner closely with the school on parent education and whole school events, such as Field Day. You'll also see the APP helping to cheer on and lift up the amazing teachers and staff.

Collaborations

Collaborations with leading area thinkers, entrepreneurs, and educational institutions are the heart of our model. As a lab school, Acera has the unique opportunity to research, try, and tweak new approaches to education. Acera curriculum partners and collaborators include the Social Development and Learning Lab at Boston University; MIT Media Lab; MIT Center for Microbiome Informatics and Therapeutics; Tufts Center for Engineering Education and Outreach; Music & Neuroimaging Lab at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital; Arduino; and many more.

Inspiring Change Beyond Our Walls

Aiming to drive change in education, we share lessons learned from our evolving school model and make engaging STEAM education available to the community in a variety of ways. We offer an open enrollment enrichment program after school and during vacations and summer months. Annually, we hold an Innovator Symposium at Acera, where hundreds of children and adults engage with scientists, inventors, and their groundbreaking work. And, through our public school outreach arm, Acera Education Innovation (AceraEI), we partner with public school districts for Whole School Change programs, teacher development workshops, and custom observation and workshop experiences for visitors who come from all over the world to see Acera in action.

High School and Beyond

Acera’s 9th Grade Bonus Year Program is an excellent option for students who wish to stay at Acera and extend their high school level coursework, ability-based math classes, close teacher-to-student relationships, and sense of belonging in our community.

Where Do They Go After Acera?

When transitioning out of Acera into high school, Acera students consistently succeed; students report that the critical thinking and problem solving, writing and organizational skills, and ability to self advocate set them up for success in high school. This is true across myriad programs, public and private.

In the last six years, 100% of students who apply to independent high schools achieve acceptance at a high school they have chosen. Most families prefer a day program proximate to their homes, so they look at schools within, north of, or west of Boston. Year to year, 35-50% of our students choose to go to their public high school.

Of those seeking independent schools, most frequently students are accepted into and enroll in one of these Boston area schools, driven by fit with the program: Boston University Academy, Cambridge School of Weston, Commonwealth School, Concord Academy, Gann Academy, and Newman School.

Acera Alumni have also been admitted to many other day and boarding school programs, including: Bard’s Academy at Simon’s Rock, Belmont Hill, British International School of Boston, Buckingham Browne & Nichols School, Buxton Academy, Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall, Dana Hall, Dublin School (NH), German International School, Governor’s Academy, Groton School, Meridian Academy, Minuteman Vocational Technical, Milton Academy, Northfield Mount Herman, Phillips Andover Academy, Phillips Exeter Academy (NH), Pingree School, Putney School (NH), St. John’s Prep, Waring Academy, and Winsor School.



In the last six years,

100%

of our of students who applied to independent high schools achieved acceptance.



Our adventure and nature playground enables kids to build, invent their own games, and work as teams. The playground evolves as kids envision and initiate new components to add, making our outdoor space yet another place where Acera gets to be a school of YES for students' ideas and leadership.

We invite you to take a deeper dive and consider how Acera can keep your child's curiosity alive and enable them to become their best self. We are committed to ensuring that all families who engage in Acera's admissions process will have a valuable experience and learn more about gifted education and new educational options.

The application process:

- Attend an Acera Parent Information Session Presentation & Tour
- Submit the Acera application for admission
- Provide current and past year report cards
- Provide two recommendations
- Submit one of the following: WPPSI Assessment, WISC Assessment, or FULL Neuropsychological Evaluation Report
- Attend a student visit day
- Schedule a parent interview

We invite you to join us for our events and programs open to everyone:

- Innovator Symposium (October)
- Annual Open House for families including hands-on activities (November)
- Math Festival (November)
- Girls in STEM (spring)
- Enrichment Programs (after school, February & April vacation, summer)

To learn more or register for an info session, email admissions@aceraschool.org or call 781-729-3489.

Does your child ask questions and engage in complex concepts with a sense of passion and drive?

Acera, a K through 9th-grade school serving gifted students in Greater Boston, keeps your child's curiosity alive through individualized learning pathways, purpose-filled projects, ability-based math classes, and engaging electives that remove the ceiling of what is possible at school.

Members of the Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education and the National Association for Gifted Children. Affiliated AISNE Member.

