Your Educational Options are Not Limited by Your Zip Code

By Heather Ferenc

Park Santiago boasts an array of amenities for its residents, ranging from pickle ball and tennis courts to a recently renovated park featuring multiple play structures and an amazing outdoor area.

A bike trail links us from within north Orange County to the beach, and our community enjoys a wealth of neighborhood events.

A common concern voiced by prospective buyers or renters of Park Santiago include the availability of quality educational options for children.
Allow me to reassure you: Santa Ana stands as the vibrant epicenter of exceptional educational opportunities in Orange County!

When it comes to educational options, the days of being bound to the school designated by your address are long gone.

Santa Ana's traditional public schools remain vital and many satisfied Park Santiago parents take advantage of these opportunities.

Depending on your residence within Park Santiago, you'll be assigned to either a traditional Santa Ana or Orange public school.

To check your assigned school:

Santa Ana Unified: https://www.schoolsitelocator.com/apps/santaana/
Orange Unified: https://www.orangeusd.org/our-schools/school-locator-maps.
Santa Ana Unified School District offers a unique chance to enter your child's name into a lottery for enrollment in one of its several fundamental schools.
Be sure to note the lottery deadlines by consulting the district's timeline on their website: https://www.sausd.us/Page/29410.

Santa Ana stands out as a desirable city for families seeking innovative educational experiences. Boasting the largest number of charter schools in Orange County, these free public schools are open to all students and offer both diverse and specialized programs.

Among the popular charters in our area are El Sol Science and Arts Academy, OCEAA, Orange County Classical Academy, Orange County School of the Arts (OCSA), Samueli Academy, Citrus Springs, Scholarship Prep, Magnolia Science Academy, TLC.

I strongly encourage parents to explore these options, as they provide exciting opportunities such as dual language immersion, hybrid learning, and focused curricula in arts, science, STEM, and engineering.

Always essential to note, charter schools can experience high demand. It's necessary to pay careful attention to the lottery application deadlines, typically falling in January or February for the upcoming academic year.

If you seek greater flexibility for your family, whether it's for travel, remote work, or global exploration, scouting online virtual or homeschooling options could be ideal.

Each school district typically provides its own online or independent study programs and several specialized schools focus on these offerings.
Also consider schools such as Springs Charter School (full disclosure, my employer), iLEAD Exploration, Excel Academy, Sky Mountain, and Compass Charter. This list is not exhaustive!

Many of these tuition-free public charter schools offer both in-person learning center classes and live virtual sessions. They also provide flexible homeschooling options, empowering families to actively participate in their children's daily learning journey.

For families seeking utmost control and influence over their child's education, filing a Private School Affidavit with the State of California enables you to legally homeschool your child, effectively establishing your own private school.
This grants you full authority to make educational decisions, offering unparalleled autonomy for both you and your child to tailor learning experiences as desired.
To learn more about this option, visit: https://www3.cde.ca.gov/psa.

Also available is a private school experience.
Several popular options in the area include St. John's Lutheran, Fairmont Preparatory, Servite High, Crean Lutheran, Mater Dei, Orange Lutheran, Waldorf School of OC, Spirit Christian Academy, Calvary Christian School Santa Ana, and Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa.
To explore these schools further, it's recommended to visit each institution's website for details regarding enrollment, fees, and distinctive offerings.

To help find the right school, parents will want to ask themselves a few pertinent questions:

- Do you prefer a full-time, five-day-per-week in-person experience?
- Are you prepared to invest in a private education?
- Does a hybrid learning model align with your family's needs?
- Are you seeking maximum flexibility, possibly considering homeschooling with or without support?
- Would your child excel in a virtual learning environment?
- Is a religious-based education a priority for your family?
- Is your child six years old? (Legally, enrollment is not mandatory until age six.)

Some reviews from Park Santiago parents on why they love their school!

"We send our daughter to **Fairhaven Elementary**.

When we were looking at buying our first home in Park Santiago, I checked the school ratings online and I definitely feel that those statistics can be misleading.
I've been very impressed with the teachers' engagement and communication, as well as availability of extracurricular activities like dance, cheer, singing and free on campus before and after school care.

They also have a school music program. We have since had our second child and would choose this school for him when the time comes."

-Jamia Sears

“We moved into Park Santiago when our children were approaching middle school. We were very happy with both **OCSA** for our daughter and **Samueli Academy** for our son. Both schools are 7th-12th grade free, public charter schools. Make sure to enter into the lottery and take a school tour. Although their experiences were vastly different in what they chose to study, both of our children received top notch education and the staff at both schools were available and supportive of their needs. During the pandemic, the school principal at Samueli showed up on our doorstep with a meal. The small school environment really makes children feel valued and as a parent, there is really nothing more important to me than that!”

-Heather Ferenc