

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a CUP and why is it important?

A Conditional Use Permit is a zoning exception that allows certain land uses which may need conditions to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhood. Castilleja has operated under a series of Conditional Use Permits since the 1960s, the most recent of which allows for 415 students. The school is currently operating at 438 students with permission from the City of Palo Alto. Given unprecedented demand for Castilleja's exception all-girls education, the not-for-profit school has requested to raise the enrollment cap to 540 students over the course of 4 years.

Why is it necessary to grow enrollment?

We feel more responsible than ever to nurture educated, passionate, young women for whom their Castilleja education will open up opportunities to lead in all aspects of society. Every year, we are forced to deny admission to many bright and talented applicants. We believe modest growth is necessary in order to provide Bay area families with access to a nationally ranked school at the forefront of girl's education where their daughters' curiosity and intellect will be nurtured and their daughters will develop the courage to lead.

How many Castilleja students are from outside Palo Alto and why does Castilleja accept them?

25% of our students are Palo Alto residents. Among our non-Palo Alto students are those whose families cannot afford to live in Palo Alto and thus gain access to the excellent public education available here. Having girls from a variety of communities and socio-economic backgrounds adds to the diversity and authenticity of our student body. Educating all girls of promise, not just those who can afford access to superior education, is central to our mission and is the focus of our tuition assistance program. We have demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate, that car trips generated by non-residents can be kept to a minimum through the use of remote shuttle pick-ups, bus routes, and Caltrain.

What has Castilleja proposed in its CUP application?

Castilleja has applied for a new Conditional Use Permit requesting an increase in enrollment to 540 students over 4 years and incorporating transportation demand management measures to offset any potential incremental impact on the neighborhood. The proposal also includes rebuilding the campus to provide 21st century classrooms, reduce noise, and alleviate other environmental impacts.

What does the construction project include?

We plan to build an underground parking garage to bring more of our community parking onto campus and off city streets. We also plan to replace existing classroom buildings that are out of place in the neighborhood with new buildings that are more in keeping with neighborhood architecture, and that include flexible learning spaces that meet the needs of our educational program. Our plan envisions maintaining the same square footage above ground that exists today.

Why is it necessary to remodel the existing campus?

Castilleja has been operating in Palo Alto since 1907, and at our current location since 1910. The campus is composed of old, inflexible structures whose character is not in keeping with our neighborhood, and which need to be brought up to current sustainability and access standards.

When do you hope to break ground and how long will construction take?

We hope to obtain permits from the City of Palo Alto in the next two years. We propose to construct the Master Plan in two phases, with each phase concentrated on one side of campus and total duration for both phases of 30-39 months. The first proposed phase is the underground garage and below-grade pool. This phase is expected to take 12-15 months. The second proposed phase is classrooms and other student spaces. This phase is expected to take 18-24 months. Castilleja is committed to working with a contractor with a proven track record of completing projects on time.

Where will Castilleja operate during construction?

Castilleja's commitment to providing a quality education will not waiver during this time. We are exploring various options, including a portable campus village on-site similar to those established at other like schools. We are also considering how elements of the construction can provide educational opportunities for our students.

Have you considered alternatives to the renovation of the existing campus?

Over six years ago, Castilleja determined that it would need updated space and has been studying the issue. Numerous options were evaluated, including buying land and building elsewhere, splitting the campus, renting space elsewhere, and renting City-owned property. All other options were ruled out because they were either too expensive, detracted from the quality of the program, or were not feasible. The 1310 Bryant Street campus is the perfect location for Castilleja - close to other academic assets, such as Palo Alto High School and Stanford, as well as numerous non-profit partners, such as Building Futures Now and Ada's Café. This campus has also been home to the graduates of Castilleja School since the early 1900's, many of whom have made significant contributions to society and to our community.

Why doesn't Castilleja move?

Castilleja has been part of the fabric of Palo Alto since 1907. Over its nearly 110 years of operation, Castilleja has become an integral part of the Palo Alto community, and Palo Alto has become integral to how we educate girls. Long-term partnerships exist between the school and many other establishments in the area, such as Palo Alto High School, Stanford University, Ada's Café, Downtown Streets Team, and other non-profits. If the school were to move elsewhere, Palo Alto would lose a long-time fixture of its community, and the relationships upon which Castilleja and its partners depend would be strained.

How will the new campus be better?

The new campus will house flexible classroom space to allow for a 21st century learning environment. New space will allow us to better utilize our existing staff and resources to provide a more diverse learning experience. The new campus configuration will also reduce our impact on the neighborhood by relocating drop-off/pick-up; moving deliveries to below-grade; creating spaces that are sufficiently sized to allow us to consolidate campus events; and, in general, moving campus activity to the center of campus and away from the neighborhood.

What is the project's impact on traffic and parking?

Castilleja's traffic impact has been monitored since 2013 via bi-annual traffic impact studies conducted by Fehr and Peers, and analyzed by Nelson Nygaard. During this time, we have reduced trips by 22%. According to a forecast performed by Fehr & Peers, the 167 parking spaces provided for in our Master Plan would enable us to self-park. We also plan to implement additional TDM measures, such as shuttles and carpools, to maintain our recent levels of impact on the neighborhood.

Will the buildings be "green"?

Yes. Sustainable design is a high priority. Castilleja's commitment to sustainability has been demonstrated in recent practice: since 2012, the school has reduced resource consumption by over 30% and car trips by 22%. The construction of new buildings creates the opportunity to further the school's commitment to sustainability by incorporating green elements such as an all-electric campus, low water fixtures and landscaping, and additional sustainability curriculum within Castilleja's program. Ultimately, our goal is that our new building will achieve net zero or better impact. Our interest in sustainability extends to campus landscaping; we plan to add more drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, and other plants to an already green campus.