



The ACE Story

ACE Academy was created in the 1990s when founders Karen Langdon and Donna Hulsey sought appropriate education for their own gifted children. Looking for schools that would challenge and excite their daughters, Langdon and Hulsey explored public, magnet, private, parochial, alternative schools, and home schooling. No school was adequately designed to accommodate the needs of their gifted children.

The founders' experiences with their own children mirrored the problems identified through national education research: the needs of gifted students are not met in American classrooms. Classroom time is often an unsatisfactory educational experience for gifted learners, leaving gifted students unchallenged. Worse, as many as 150,000 gifted students in the United States drop out of school entirely each year. Gifted students think and process information differently from the average student and benefit from uncommon educational practices such as flexible pacing, compacted curriculum, intense individual exploration, and hands-on learning.

ACE Academy began as a summer camp for gifted kids called Summer Wonders where teachers employed teaching methods geared to gifted learners. The founders watched children race to get to camp and clamor for more class time. As the camp garnered more and more acclaim from the campers and the community winning *The Austin Chronicle's* "Best Summer Camp" award year after year, Langdon and Hulsey knew this new approach to gifted education was something special, something that could be translated into a year-long, academic setting. They began transforming their Summer Wonders teaching techniques into ACE Academy.

In light of the needs particular to educating gifted students, the failure of traditional educational systems in serving those needs, and with the overwhelming potential for gifted students to positively impact our communities, in 2005, with eight students, the founders opened the doors to ACE Academy. In 2014, ACE Academy welcomed 151 students. ACE Academy addresses the needs of gifted learners, providing a specialized learning environment for this underserved population that will help them achieve their full potential and contribute to the next generation of leaders and innovators in industry, science, literature, the arts, research, theory, and government.

ACE Academy is located in Austin, Texas, population 1.5 million. Austin reflects an accepting culture of artistic expression that maintains the city as a vibrant and eclectic creative center, intellectual community, and community of environmentalists, technology innovators, and philanthropists. Austin hosts a diverse mix of government employees (university faculty, law enforcement, political staffers), foreign and domestic college students, musicians, artists, high-tech workers, blue-collar workers, and businesspeople. In 2010, Austin was recognized as the number one performing metropolitan area in the US, affirming the city's national reputation as a thriving center of human capital and innovation. Austin's demographics reflect a highly educated population; 30% of the population has a Bachelor's Degree compared to the national average of 17%. 16% of Austinites hold graduate degrees, compared to the national average of 9%. The challenge for ACE Academy in this context is to serve an educated, diverse, and creative community. Austin celebrates innovation, individuality, and creative expression. ACE Academy provides individualized education that honors those ideals.

We believe that ACE Academy fulfills its stated purpose: we bring gifted students together with one another and with teachers who are passionate about giftedness and creativity. We teach and we learn with "no limits," our school motto. ACE Academy provides a learning environment for gifted students not found in most schools; ACE Academy is an incubator for innovation, cultivating our next generation of leaders. Summer Wonders remains a thriving summer camp for gifted learners. But now, gifted kids don't just rush through the doors during summer; their enthusiasm lasts all year.



ACE Academy Executive Biographies 2014-2015



DONNA HULSEY *Co-founder and Head of School*

As an undergraduate at Rhodes College and a graduate student at the College of William and Mary, Donna Hulsey pursued a strong foundation in the classical liberal arts, linguistics, literary analysis, rhetoric, and composition. Mrs. Hulsey has worked as a senior technical writer, publication editor, and project manager in business, a freelance writer in banking and healthcare, and an instructor in writing in elementary and college classrooms. Outside academics, she has enjoyed teaching in several realms, but her favorite challenge has been coaching teams in creative problem solving (Odyssey of the Mind and Destination Imagination) since 1990. Led by the needs of her own children into advocacy for gifted children, Mrs. Hulsey has trained in best methods for teaching gifted learners; she regularly authors articles on gifted education and speaks to professional and parent groups. A veteran of several startups, Mrs. Hulsey has been a found-

ing member of several professional organizations and publications.



KAREN LANGDON, M.ED. *Co-founder and Director of Admissions and Assessment*

Karen Langdon graduated from Emory University with a double major in Biology and Psychology and completed her Masters in Education at the University of Arizona with a specialty in counseling and parent education. Employment in several medical hospitals followed, where she did parent education and training, therapy, marketing, and served as a consultant and speaker on a range of medical topics. Mrs. Langdon completed all coursework for a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of South Carolina and finished her internship at Austin State Hospital. When she struggled to find gifted services for her own children, Mrs. Langdon changed direction. In 1999, she co-founded Summer Wonders, a summer program for gifted students, and completed an internship at the Gifted Development Center in Denver, emphasizing assessment of gifted children and counseling families on the social and emotional needs of this population.

She serves as a community resource and public speaker on the needs of gifted students, conducts teacher training, and helped found the Austin chapter of the American Creativity Association.

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Donna Hulsey

Co-founder and Head of School, ACE Academy

Karen Langdon

*Co-founder and Director of Admissions and Assessment, ACE Academy;
Executive Director, Summer Wonders*

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Fact Sheet

Our Mission is to teach, support, affirm, and nurture individuals in realizing their intellectual, emotional, social, and creative potential.

Our Vision is to provide a learning environment in which gifted learners can explore their passions, push their limits, celebrate their talents, and truly become citizens of the world.

Our Purpose is to bring gifted students together with one another and with teachers who are passionate about giftedness and creativity. We provide classroom flexibility, inquiry-based learning, and innovative, cross-curricular alignment. We encourage holistic development through formal emotional intelligence courses.

Five Key Programs

Summer Wonders, est. 1999—A summer program for gifted children Pre-K to 6th grade; Mind Games for 6th to 10th grade; two sessions each summer, up to 200 students each; draws participants from the Austin area, Texas, out-of-state, and out-of-country. Saturday Wonders is an extension of this program, offered to low SES students two Saturdays a month.

ACE Academy, est. 2005—A private, independent school for gifted children ages 3 through high school; grew from 8 to 164 students in 8 years (1,700% increase). Accredited through SACS/CASI.

Assessment Services—IQ and achievement testing available with behavioral observation reports.

Teacher and Parent Training—Seminars and other community resources available.

Research—Continuing data collection, study, and documentation of the social, emotional, and academic needs of gifted learners; welcoming graduate students, interns, and others researchers exploring best practices for gifted children.

Financials

2013-14 Budget: \$2.5 million

Income: 91% from tuition
5% from fundraising and donations
2% from assessment services
2% from additional sources

Limited financial assistance available for ACE and Summer Wonders students

Leadership

Donna Hulsey
Co-Founder and Head of School

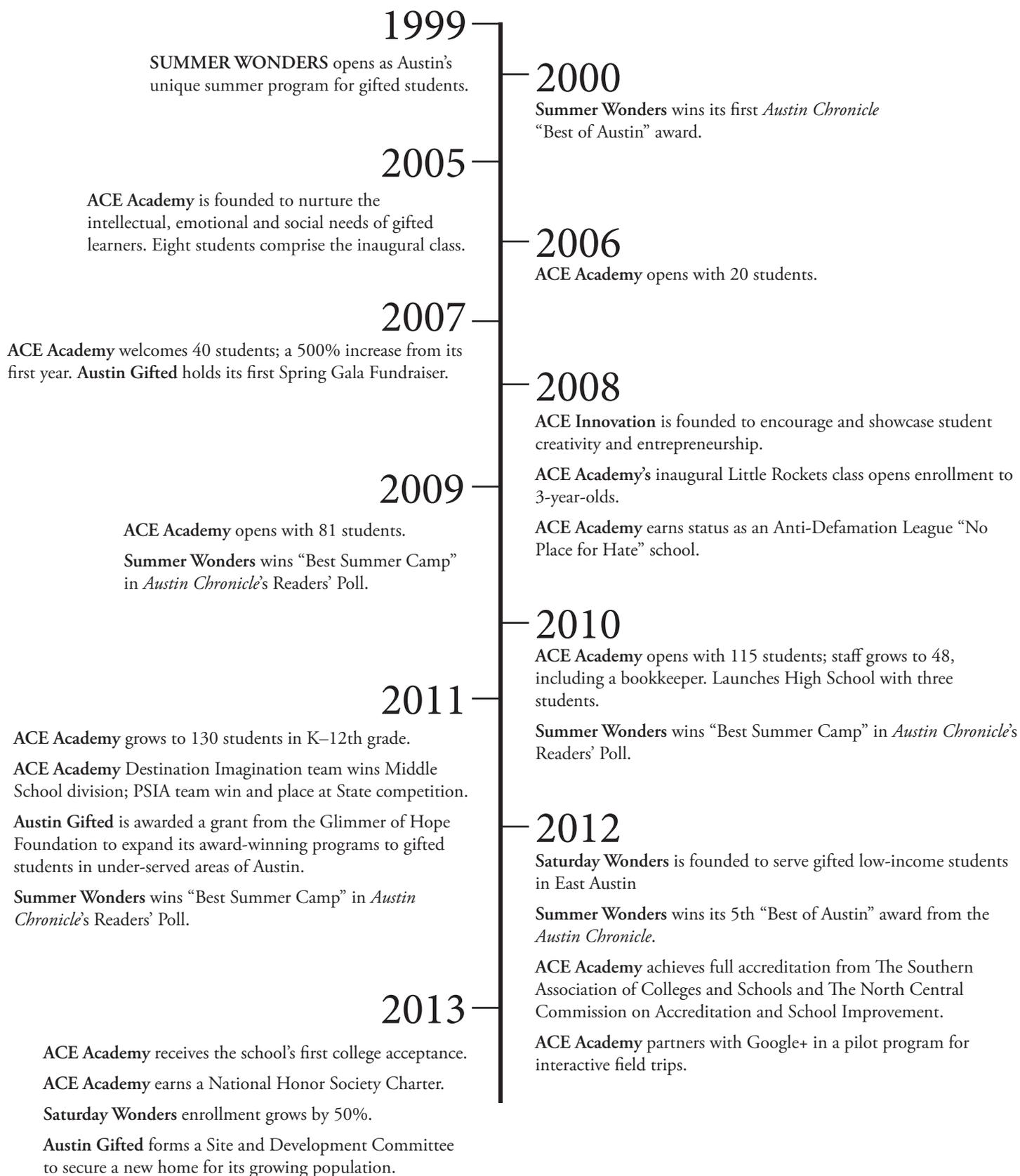
Karen S. Langdon, M.Ed.
Co-Founder and Director of Admission and Assessment

Board of Directors

Employees: 50 full- and part-time



History of Austin Gifted





AUSTIN'S FIRST SCHOOL FOR GIFTED LEARNERS
ESTABLISHED 2005

PART OF AUSTIN GIFTED, INC., A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION SERVING GIFTED LEARNERS OF ALL AGES

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About ACE Academy

All students at ACE Academy have been professionally assessed as “gifted.” Our students score in the top 5% of Intelligence Quotient tests. Gifted learners are qualitatively different from the norm; they develop asynchronously and may vary radically in specific abilities or areas. They process information differently and require flexible classroom pacing, compacted curriculum, intense individual exploration and hands-on learning. ACE is structured to serve these needs.

The needs of gifted students are generally not met in American classrooms. Regular classroom time is often an unsatisfying educational experience for gifted learners. Giftedness is misunderstood, and students are underserved for a number of reasons, including poor assessment services and a lack of education in schools about giftedness. What limited programs are available are, at best, pull-out part-time programs where students might enjoy special classes geared to their needs, but only for a few hours a week. The pedagogy and practices employed by ACE Academy represent nothing short of a paradigm shift in the field of education. We utilize flexible pacing, compacted curriculum, intense individual exploration, and hands-on, inquiry based relational learning.

We do not rely on age or “grade level” for student classroom placement; a child’s ability determines classroom placement.

ACE Academy’s primary, foundational goal is to serve the needs of gifted learners. Our hope is that our students leave ACE Academy having been challenged to their potential and supported in their individual talents. As we continue to grow, we will expand our reach so that as many gifted children as possible may benefit from the education practices they deserve.



Austin Gifted Events

ACE Innovation

Held in conjunction with the University of Texas at Austin's Idea to Product conference, ACE Innovation showcases the work of young inventors and entrepreneurs. Members of the community are welcome to visit the gallery of projects, hear our expert speakers, and participate in our sponsored hands-on activities for creative thinkers of all ages at this capstone ACE event.

ACE Science Fair

Students from Primary through High School classes present their independent research projects to the public and to esteemed judges. The gallery of projects is open for public viewing on the day of the event.

Annual Fund Celebration

This event is the culmination of our community's participation in our Annual Fund. Past Annual Fund Celebration themes included a Wine and Cheese Social and a Trivia Night. Look out for this year's theme and join us as we celebrate the generosity of the ACE community.

Field Day

Once yearly for our Primary students and twice yearly for all other levels, our PE instructors test ACE students' physical fitness with a series of outdoor games and activities.

Field Studies Days

On days when we do not have access to the Congregation Beth Israel education facilities, ACE students participate in multidisciplinary field trips inspired by our curriculum.

Fine Arts Department Plays

Each year ACE's Fine Arts Department produces between one and three plays. Our student actors have performed plays such as *Tartuffe*, *Peter Pan*, *The Crucible* and *Harvey*.

Gallery Night

Gallery Night celebrates the independent work of our middle and high school students in their Open-Door Interdisciplinary Modules. Students prepare TED Talk-style presentations and share their passions with the public.

Global Festival

Our winter get-together is part concert, part potluck, and completely ACE. Students perform globally-based songs learned in the Fall semester, cultural booths educate and celebrate the diversity of cultures within the school, and families have the chance to relax and socialize. The Global Festival's emphasis on cultural diversity is one way in which we show our commitment to the Anti-Defamation League's No Place For Hate campaign.

Google+ Virtual Field Trips

ACE is a proud participant in the Google+ virtual field trip program, a groundbreaking education initiative that facilitates communication between our students, experts, and classrooms nationwide through video conferences. Past Google+ Virtual Field Trips included The Smithsonian, The Birch Aquarium, and the Atlanta Zoo.

Information Sessions

The first step in becoming a part of the ACE Community is attending one of our monthly Information Sessions. These gatherings share information about giftedness, assessment, and our educational philosophy.

Inventive Thinking Week

This event is a part of our ongoing commitment to creative problem-solving and critical thinking. ACE students learn new strategies for approaching tasks, opening themselves up to strategies that lend themselves to innovation.

No Name-Calling Week

ACE students demonstrate their commitment to positive social interactions and take a stand against bullying in this weeklong event dedicated to the ideals promoted in the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate campaign.

ODIM

A special program for our middle school and high school students. Open-Door Interdisciplinary Modules (ODIM) is a weekly co-curricular course in which students pursue their passions by designing and leading their own classes, working together on projects, attending seminars on special topics, and attending classes by guest teachers.



Parent Education Seminars

Held quarterly, these classes are designed for our ACE parents looking for information about giftedness and education. Guest speakers are frequently featured and child care is provided.

Read-A-Thon

Organized by our Primary teachers to promote reading among our youngest ACE students, the annual Read-A-Thon entices children to read by setting specific goals. Funds generated by the Read-A-Thon go toward our Primary reading library.

Spring Gala

An adults-only evening of entertainment, music and mingling, the Spring Gala features a live and silent auction as well as a host of surprises. Held at different locations each Spring, the Gala is a featured fundraiser for ACE Academy.

Teacher Training/In-Service

Each year ACE faculty and staff spend two weeks during the summer and several days throughout the school year brushing up on the latest research and developments in gifted education.

ACE Academy *also hosts many of its own in-school events, including:*

ACE Spirit Week

Show your school pride through a different, school-wide activity each day.

Blast Off

Our beginning of the year kick-off event is a chance for students and parents to reconnect with each other and meet teachers for the coming year. Blast Off features a potluck, faculty introductions, and student-oriented activities for gifted learners.

Grandparents' Day

Grandparents and older friends are invited to accompany their ACE student to classes for the day.

End of Year Pool Party

Following our half-day "graduation" ceremony, students, staff and families retreat to a local pool for food and fun to mark the end of the year.

LAN Parties

Local area networking parties hosted by our Technology Department give students the opportunity to turn chaperoned video games into a social activity. Online battles take place as students are treated to pizza and fun.

Play Day & Lemonade Social

Our Play Day and Lemonade Social gives new and current ACE students and their families the chance to meet and socialize before the first day of school.

Teacher Appreciation Week

Sponsored by our Parent Council, this week-long event celebrates the efforts of our hard-working ACE teachers.

Affiliations, Partnerships and/or Memberships:

- The National Association for Gifted Children
- Consortium of Gifted Schools
- The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented
- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (AdvancED)
- Austin Private Schools
- SXSW Edu Conferences
- The Anti-Defamation League/No Place for Hate
- Austin Family Magazine Camp Fair
- National Honor Society



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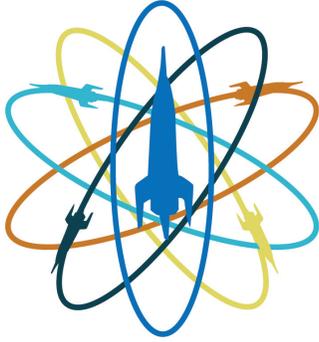
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ACE



INNOVATION

Each Spring, ACE Academy hosts ACE Innovation, a capstone event showcasing the ingenuity of Austin-area pre-kindergarten through high school students. The event is open to all local student inventors and entrepreneurs. Proclaimed the City of Austin's official event recognizing World Creativity & Innovation by Mayor Lee Leffingwell, ACE Innovation participants present their work to academics, community members, potential investors and entrepreneurs and have the opportunity to collaborate with other innovators to celebrate inventive thinking.

ACE Innovation brings together successful Austin entrepreneurs with Austin's aspiring young innovators. We are pleased to announce our partnership with UT's Idea to Product program, a collegiate organization dedicated to the journey from imagination to market. Idea to Product will hold its annual showcase in conjunction with ACE Innovation. Together these two events will allow young inventors and spectators to get their imaginations going and their hands dirty through several hands-on exhibits including robotics, forensics, and medical science.

ACE Innovation highlights keynote speakers who share their stories of successes and failures as innovators. Students share their ideas and create dialogue about paths to success, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship. Speakers have included Josh Baer of the Capital Factory; Danny Pernik, co-creator of Zaplings; Steven P. Nichols, Ph.D., J.D., Director of the Advanced Manufacturing Center; Kevin Koym, Director of Austin Tech Ranch; Brewster McCracken of the Pecan Street Project; Dr. Robert Metcalfe, Professor of Innovation, Cockrell School of Engineering; Patrick Terry of P. Terry's; and Luz Cristal Glangchai, Ph.D., Director of the Idea to Product Program.

Participants are invited to attend ACE Innovation Labs which pair students with mentors sharing their insights in getting creative projects off the ground. These labs are open to students ages 8-17 and present opportunities for brainstorming and actualizing projects. Labs investigate what it means to be "innovative," "creative," and "pioneering;" participants are also encouraged to engage in perspective-taking exercises to understand the ways in which others may experience the same situation differently. Students challenge each other to take on real world problems and come up with authentic solutions.

To develop opportunities for brainstorming and actualizing projects, ACE students attend workshops at Austin's TechShop. TechShop is a self-described "playground for creativity;" part fabrication and prototyping studio, part hackerspace and part learning center, TechShop provides access to over \$1 million worth of professional equipment and software.

"ACE Innovation is like a bunch of sparks merging into a flame," said Donna Hulsey, head of school. "The excitement kindled by the ideas popping around the school is palpable."

Please visit our webpage to find more information about ACE Innovation and ways to support this event.

WWW.ACEINNOVATION.ORG