

Interview With Jaime Nissenbaum, Educational Consultant Extraordinaire

Description

Weâ€™ve received questions from several of our readers recently about the role educational consultants can play in helping families get into top LA private elementary schools.

I thought it might be useful to interview one of LAâ€™s top educational consultants, **Jamie Bakal** of [Jamie Bakal Consulting](#). Jamie is the co-founder of LA School Mates, an educator and a graduate of Oakwood School. For fall 2010, 26/27 of Jamieâ€™s clients have been accepted at their top choice schools!

Here is my interview with Jamie:

1. Who are your typical clients?

I have a wide variety of clients. Some of my clients are families with two working parents who just struggle to find the time to sort through the private school maze. Some of my clients are families who just arenâ€™t familiar with all of the independent schools in Los Angeles and want to know what their options are. Some of my clients are families who want more individualized attention than their preschools can offer and want some hand-holding through the process.

2. What services to you provide to your clients?

My services are completely individualized to meet each clients needs. Just like the independent schools in Los Angeles, my services are not one size fits all. I usually start with a general consultation with the parents to find out who they think their child is and what they are looking for in an education for their child. Based on that consultation, I come up with a list of schools that I think would be a good fit for the child and the family and create an individualized tour chart. Some families feel that the consultation was enough information to get them started and proceed on their own. Other families would like help through the whole process in which case I manage their schedules of tours, applications, and interviews, I help them with their applications, I prepare parents for their interviews, and I spend time with the child to make sure the chosen schools for each family are the best fit for the child. In the best case scenario, come March when letters go out, families have options and I help them choose the best fit for the child and for the family.

3. What are your fees?

There are two different fee structures. If families work with me hourly (meaning they only need an initial consultation or they want to call me for questions as needed), I charge \$350/hour. If I am managing the entire process for a family, I charge a flat rate of \$5000 (regardless of how early a client hires me).

4. What do private elementary schools look for in a family and how can you help schools get to know your clients?

While each school may be looking for something a little different, overall, they are all looking for good, inclusive families who make their children's education a priority. They want families who are going to be involved and they are looking for children who are going to be successful at their school. I think many families get caught up in wanting to send their child to a "popular" school but lose sight of finding a school where their child will thrive. I provide additional insight to admissions directors for the families with whom I work.

5. What do you think are the biggest mistakes parents make during the application process?

There are many mistakes parents make during this process. Many families apply to schools that are not a good fit for their child. Just because parents like a school, doesn't mean it is the best environment for their child. Parents also like to tell every school that they are their first choice hoping that they will increase their odds of getting in. The admissions directors do talk. And if they find out you have made every school your "first choice," it will likely result in the family not getting in anywhere. Parents also apply to too many schools. I tell all of my clients to think of each school this way "if this were the only school you got in to, would you and your child be happy there? If the answer is no, then don't apply. Lastly, make sure that the schools to which you apply are at least similar philosophically. Schools want to know that you believe in what they have to offer and if you are applying to very progressive schools as well as very traditional schools, the admissions directors might think that you either don't understand what their school is all about or you are just applying to increase your odds as you don't know what it is you want.

6. Have any of your clients been accepted from wait-lists?

Generally speaking, most of my clients get in to their top choice. That being said, I do have some clients that get wait-listed. It depends on the year and the school, but I would say about 75% of my clients that are wait-listed at a top choice end up getting in.

7. Can you tell us a few of the schools where you have helped place your clients?

I have placed clients at Archer, Berkeley Hall, Brawerman, Brentwood, Buckley, Campbell Hall, Carlthorp, The Center for Early Education, Crossroads, Curtis, Echo Horizon, Harvard Westlake, Hollywood School House, John Thomas Dye, Laurence, Los Encinos, New Roads, The Oaks, Oakwood, PS#1, Temple Israel, UCLA Lab School, Village, Westland, Wildwood, and The Willows.

8. Does hiring an educational consultant "guarantee" acceptance to a private elementary school?

Absolutely not. In fact, I have clients sign a contract that explicitly states that I cannot guarantee placement at a school. That being said, my clients do very well because I set them on a path towards schools that are a good fit and I help them present themselves in the best way possible.

For more information, please visit [Jamie Bakal Consulting](#)

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