

One Mom's Story: From Public to Private Elementary School For 4th Grade

Description

An Unlikely Private School Success Story

I guess I've given away any chance of a surprise ending to this blog post. Yes, unlike many private school admissions horror stories, this scenario has a happy ending.

There's really no reason why it should. As an applicant, my nine year old daughter wasn't any sort of shoo-in on the admissions front. Anna* was a public school kid, matriculating through the grades at 3rd St. Elementary pretty seamlessly. But the clock was ticking on the public school front. She seemed under stimulated. Funding for the school was in constant jeopardy, with programs under threat of extinction. And then, there was that dreaded "gap year" to worry about. It all finally came to a head when LAUSD was slow to test Anna for gifted status. I arranged for a private test, just to see what was what. And when the results came in, it seemed clear that private school was in her immediate future.

In retrospect, we were total idiots about the whole process. Completely negative. Because we hadn't reached this private school revelation until Anna was in 3rd grade, she'd missed that private school 3rd grade entrance year. Fourth grade would be harder. We are a divorced family, and while everyone is doing just fine, thanks, it's not like anyone's rolling in dough; there would be no school buildings with our names on it.

Nevertheless, we moved blithely onwards. Next step was picking the schools. We divided and conquered on this one, with my significant other helping as well. It was clear that Anna needed a lot of structure, since in a looser progressive environment she'd probably stage a military junta and start her own small country. We looked at St. James, which was lovely, but perhaps not academically challenging enough. We looked at Curtis, but we weren't sure it was a good fit for a number of reasons. We also looked at a school that was well-meaning, but was so gooeey and precious, we knew it wouldn't work for Anna. That was out.

Here's where we were idiots once again: we only ended up applying to two schools. No safety. This narrowed our chances for success even further. So Mirman and John Thomas Dye it was, based solely on what we felt was right for her: traditional, academically challenging, and small.

And then there were the interviews. It's probably stressful for everyone, but in a divorce situation you really feel like you're under the microscope. I think admissions directors are looking for any sort of tension between the ex-spouses, constantly checking for signs of trouble. It's hard to blame them, really. We get along just fine, but I did feel the scrutiny bearing down on us. As far as appearances for the interviews, I went for something slightly more conservative than my usual garb (I teach Pilates and write. My style can best be described as "fashionable slob"). So my t-shirts were traded for button downs, I kept the jeans but wore flats rather than Converse, and I added a lovely scarf. We wrote the ADs very correct thank-you notes.

There were some notable differences in the interview process at each school. Mirman was primarily interested in the child. She was interviewed solo; we were interviewed with her present. She spent a half day at the school, simply participating in classroom activities. She took a test, of course. The whole process was extremely child centered, which we liked since she's the one who would attend the place.

John Thomas Dye, on the other hand, was all about the family. We were interviewed together, which meant Anna clammed up. There was a huge stress put on the families engaging as a community, which sounded great, except that I couldn't get a handle on what sort of families belonged there. There was a lot of stress put on the divorced status, with the AD talking about divorced couples she'd interviewed who couldn't stand to be in the same room together. Obviously, that's not the case here, but I got the feeling that we were being tested as a "unit" the entire time.

Both schools were great, though. There was no question that each would keep Anna engaged, involved, and out of trouble. The kids at both schools seemed very nice. Anna liked the schools, although she was apprehensive about leaving her environment. We settled in to wait for the letters.

And then she was wait listed. At both schools.

Oh, boy. Although we knew that with only two schools in the running and a 4th grade entrance Anna's chances were slim, it was still a bummer. But, we did all the right things. Made the calls, stressed how interested we were, offered to build a science lab (kidding). And then we promptly forgot all about it.

The call from Mirman came in early July. It was a complete surprise. "There's a spot that's opened up in Room 4," the admissions director said on my voicemail. "We'd like to offer it to

Anna.â€• Needless to say, we jumped at it.

So how lucky is that? Admission for an off year, only applying to two schools, not offering millions of dollars, no reference letters from titans of business, initially wait listed, and then, finally, acceptance. Yes, we didnâ€™t do everything right. It was stressful and, as Iâ€™ve previously mentioned, we were idiots. But, somehow, the whole thing worked out.

I really wish Iâ€™d known about this blog when we first started this process. I would have been far more prepared for the private school admissions reality. And then, perhaps, I could have relied more upon wits than luck. But, thereâ€™s always middle school admission to worry about, so I guess thereâ€™s another opportunity on the distant horizon. Bleh.

** Name changed for privacy. Thank you to our guest blogger, Jenny Heitz, for sharing her story. Jennyâ€™s daughter attended preschool at Montessori Shir-Hashirim. You can find her blogging at www.findatoad.com a fabulous, well-edited site for adult and kids gifts under \$200.*

Next time weâ€™ll post a list of some of the recent private elementary school acceptances from public schools.

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