

Guest Blogger Isla: What Do You Do When Your "Perfect" Child Has Difficulty Achieving In School?

Description



Park Century School, Culver City

At the age of 5, our daughter was eloquent, precocious, and seemed to have a photographic^{â€}like memory. My husband and I were in absolute awe and assumed, when she hit kindergarten, that she would be at the top of her class. But she wasn^{â€}TMt.

From the moment that I entered the room at our first parent/teacher conference, I knew something was wrong. Her teachers sat with uncomfortable smiles and explained that she was not meeting expectations in reading, writing, and math. Looking back, she did exhibit difficulties learning the alphabet and sight words. Homework seemed to take more and more time. Her teachers suggested that, perhaps, it was just a developmental thing. Most people ^{â€}redshirt^{â€} in the community where we live, and she was one of the youngest in her class. By first grade, however, she still had not caught up to speed, despite outside tutoring. We knew something was wrong.

We requested that the school test her for a learning disability. However, she was still making progress and had not fallen far enough behind for the administration to recommend testing. After reading several books on learning disabilities, I realized that we had no time to waste. My husband and I took her for private testing, and a reading disorder was diagnosed.

We agonized over whether to try and work with the public school system and advocate for an individualized education plan. After consultation with an educational specialist, we decided that the quickest way to get our daughter back on track was to move to an independent school that could teach bright kids with learning differences. Now she is in a diverse, multi-sensorial environment, Park Century School (PCS) that educates children, grades 2-8. She gets one-on-one reading and math and is soaring above grade level. Children in her school come from John Thomas Dye, Curtis School, The

Willows, Wildwood and more. All are unbelievably creative, smart kids that happen to learn differently.

Parents at PCS all have a similar story: failure of teachers to recognize signs of learning differences (LD), lack of support or resources in most schools (public and private), and dropping self-esteem/confidence/overall happiness in the affected child. The reality is that 1/5 kids have a learning issue and most of them are not identified. Parents (and, sadly, many teachers) may be unaware of the signs of LD and how to procure diagnosis and treatment. Early intervention is absolutely critical!

The previous stigma associated with LD is dissolving, as the flip side is so commonly observed: exceptional creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. As an example, Yale University has a Center to study LD and is highly supportive of recruiting and retaining these students. Like many other “elite” private schools in LA, the parents of children at the Park Century School are some of the most recognized names in the world and dominate the entertainment, financial, political, and medical fields. They are also unapologetic advocates for children with LD. Although it was a nerve-racking journey to navigate through, I can honestly say there is nothing about my daughter that I would change, and I am confident that her future is unlimited!

Isla Garraway, MD-PhD is an Assistant Professor of Urology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and mother of three children, ages 9, 6, and 3. She is President-Elect of the [Park Century School](#) Parent’s Association and also has a child at the Mirman School.

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Date Created

May 9, 2011

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