

Why ARE Private Elementary Schools In LA So Hard To Get Into?

Description

I stumbled across this post by a mom on *Urban Baby* recently:

“LA private school process sucks, and there are fewer schools than NY (at least within reasonable driving area of wherever you live) so there are fewer choices. They are full of siblings and celebrities and then a few diversity admits. If you are white and unconnected, good luck with the most popular schools. On the next tier, you can find spaces”

This mom writes what many parents in LA think: that it’s impossible to get into LA’s top private elementary schools unless you are a celebrity, a minority family or your kid is a sibling.

What this mom underestimates is the sheer number of white families in LA private schools who have family money, but not necessarily “connections”. Some may be legacies, others are not.

While there is no doubt LA private schools are uber-competitive, it’s not impossible to secure a spot for your kid. Every year, all types of families get into the best private elementary schools in LA. We wrote *Beyond The Brochure* to help parents navigate the admissions process and understand what really happens behind the scenes, how decisions are made and what you need to do to get your child into a great school. Your positive attitude and a sense of optimism are an absolutely necessary component to getting in. A belief that your child will get into the best school possible will help sustain you through the process. And, it will certainly come across as you interview at the schools.

The biggest problem is there are not enough spaces for families who want their kids to attend the top private elementary schools. So, schools must choose among applicants based on subjective and objective factors. Subjective factors can be as subtle as a family’s perceived commitment to private school, family wealth, a strong letter of recommendation or a good “fit” between child and school. Objective factors mean things like an equal number of boys and girls in a class.

My co-author Porcha and I recently spoke at 10th St. Preschool in Santa Monica. The question about whether wait-list letters are “real” or just a polite way of saying “no” came up. We know families who have kids accepted off wait-lists every year. But, some schools don’t send rejection letters. They use wait-list letters as their way of saying “no”. We understand that Crossroads, PS#1 and Echo Horizon don’t send rejection letters, but only acceptance and wait-list letters. This is a polite way of trying to avoid alienating families. And, some schools send out wait-list letters but have such a high acceptance rate that their wait-lists rarely open up.

During our talk at 10th St. Preschool, panelist and former education consultant Kim Hamer, brought up the issue of celebrities. “They are really not your competition”, she said. She pointed out that many schools don’t want to deal with the high-maintenance demands and security concern of famous families and their children. And, being wealthy does not mean famous families are always financially generous to schools. Of course, celebrities DO get their kids into private schools. They just aren’t the real competition for most families.

Diversity is a priority for many private elementary schools in LA. They seek diverse families, both socio-economic and ethnically diverse. However, not all diverse families get in. I know of one diverse family who tried to get into The Willows for several years, to no avail. The same considerations about a good fit between child, parent and school still apply for diverse families. The admissions criteria don’t go out the window just so diverse families can be seen on campuses.

Financial aid is another confusing issue. Kim Hamer points out that schools are seeking middle class families who can pay some, but not all of the tuition. For example, a family who takes home \$80K after taxes could qualify for financial

aid. The schools can find plenty of families who can't pay any tuition. They also know there are families who can pay full tuition if they adjust their lifestyle.

It's our belief that the admissions process is an "insider's game" for most families. But, anyone can play the game if you understand its rules!

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

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