

How Preschool Directors Can Help With Admissions: Interview With Veronica Cabello, Founder, Green Beginning Preschool

Description



Veronica Cabello



Veronica, first, let me start by congratulating you on the opening of Green Beginning Preschool in February. Iâ€™ve been to the school and itâ€™s absolutely amazing! The eco-friendly theme is very inspiring.

Question: As you know, preschool directors can play an important role in helping families with the private elementary school application process. If a family knows they will be interested in private school, how early should they begin this discussion with their preschool director?

Answer: The conversation usually takes place a year before the child graduates from preschool. When a parent has an older sibling already in elementary school, they know to initiate the conversation early. All families should start early. When the family is applying to schools (one year before the child will enroll in kindergarten), the discussion with the preschool director is as simple as letting the director know the name of the school that is the familyâ€™s first choice and then requesting a recommendation letter from the director. I have also had parents who request a recommendation letter from the childâ€™s teacher.

Question: As the former Assistant Director of Temple Isaiah (a preschool where a number of families apply to private elementary schools each year), youâ€™re very familiar with the competitive nature of LA private elementary schools. What specifically can a preschool director do to help families prepare for this process?

Answer: Personally, I like to be proactive in this process and I plant the seed as early as when the family enrolls in preschool. For families who start preschool when the child is 2 or 3, I let them know that this is something to keep in the back of their head and even recommend they start looking at different school websites to check out their educational philosophies. As children get older, a year before graduating, I let parents know about schools open houses, dates and times. I also meet with individual families and might make recommendations depending on the child's mode of learning, personality or needs, as well as the family's philosophy. I try to help families find the right school match for them and walk them through the process.

Question: How much parent-education do you plan to provide at Green Beginning about how the application process works?

Answer: I plan on providing information on an ongoing basis. There is the initial parent meeting where information is provided about elementary school options. There is also information sent via email so that parents are able to attend and make appointments to visit different schools. And there is the more formal panel with information provided by a guest speaker. Next year, I am hoping to have you, Christina, as a guest speaker so you can share your wealth of knowledge from Beyond the Brochure.

Question: What if a parent thinks their child should attend a very traditional school, but you think a more developmental school would be better for the child?

Answer: I always advocate for what I consider will be best for the child. In this situation I would discuss why I think a traditional school would not have the best-fit program for the child. In addition, I also have my teachers visit the different schools so that they can have a feel for the various private school programs and can offer feedback to the parents.

Question: In your opinion, what is the biggest mistake made by parents when they are applying to schools?

Answer: The most common mistakes I have seen are:

â€” Applying to a school based on "who goes there"! Many top private elementary schools have an elite group of parents, even when the school makes a strong effort to have a diverse body of students. I have known parents who apply to schools because of "perceived status" and not because it might be the best-fit program for the family. In the long run, this decision hurts the child and the family.

â€” Putting their eggs all in one basket or putting in too many applications. Believe it or not, there are parents (and I hope not to ruffle anyone's feathers!) who feel a sense of entitlement and apply to just one school because they are sure they will get in. Later, they are crushed with disappointment or anger when they get a rejection letter. On the opposite spectrum are parents who get a bit anxious and apply to as many schools as possible. In my experience as a preschool director, schools like knowing

they are the first choice of school for the family who is applying. Admissions directors have relationships with other fellow admissions directors and the word sometimes goes around.

â–ª Poor attitude during the parent interview. Schools like to have parents on board who are in alignment with the schoolâ€™s philosophy, and who are willing to volunteer and participate in school events. Parents who appear to be â€œtoo demandingâ€• can be rated poorly by admissions directors and can be viewed as uncooperative or trouble makers. A demanding attitude might work against the family and give the impression that the family will not collaborate with the school. Therefore, the school might pick a different family based on their willingness to be a part of the community.

Question: There is a form that preschool directors fill out and send directly to all the elementary schools where a family applies. Do you discuss this form and the particular child with the private elementary school admissions director? Note: a copy of this form is in our book.

Answer: Not all the time, the assessment form is self-explanatory. However, there are times where I have had to make a call or request a call from the admissionâ€™s director at a private elementary school. An example of this case might be: a developmental delay in a specific domain that might give the impression of the childâ€™s lack of readiness to move on to the next step. I might also call the admissions director if I know that the school for which I am filing out the form is the first choice for the family.

Question: Can a preschool director be an effective advocate for a family and their child help them get into a school (s)?

Answer: Absolutely! In general, preschool directors should establish relationships with local public and private elementary schools to learn about their programs and help families find the right match. When good relationships are established, preschool directors will go out of their way to help the family get into the school of choice by putting in a good word for the family, making phone calls, sending emails; and writing recommendation letters for the families.

Veronica Cabello, M.A., is the Founder and Executive Director of Green Beginning Community Preschool in West Los Angeles. She is the former Assistant Director of Temple Isaiah Preschool and has more than 25 years experience as an educator. She has a 12 year old child. To see a review of Green Beginning Preschool, visit The Twin Coach blog.

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