

Who Gets In? Who Doesn't? Some Observations About L.A. Private Schools

Description



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If someone had asked me who gets into the most competitive L.A. private schools before I went through the admissions process, I would have probably said, “celebrities!” Now that I’ve been

immersed in the private school world for the past 9 years as a mom and 5 years as a writer on the subject, I know thatâ€™s just part of the short answerâ€”and really not the most important part. Celebrities, while highly coveted by some schools, are avoided by others, considered too high maintenance and disruptive to a school environment. And, there arenâ€™t nearly enough celebrities to explain the cutthroat private school admissions process in L.A. So, what else is going on that causes some kids to get in everywhere and others to be declined admission? As my co-authors and I have said before, itâ€™s about [your family](#)â€”your child and you. Especially when youâ€™re applying for kindergarten.

Here are 3 categories to attempt to explain who gets in and who doesnâ€™t. A family usually has *one or more factors* in a category working for/against their application:

- **Gets in everywhere**

- Family has a prominent last name (Disney, Annenberg, Spielberg) and/or a large trust fund
- Kid scores very well on kindergarten entrance tests
- Family adds ethnic diversity without needing financial aid
- Kid is extremely bright, articulate and the kind of kid who appeals to every admissions director (think of a mini Barack Obama)
- Kid has a unique ability in music, art, math or some other area
- Very high ISEE scores for middle and high school (8 and 9)

- **Gets into some, but not all schools (this is most families who apply)**

- Parents are well connected at one or two schools, but not all the schools where they apply
- Follows the â€œrulesâ€• of the admissions process
- Has a similar family profile to a lot of other families, making it more competitive for their kid
- Kid attends a [â€œfeederâ€• preschool](#) to a certain private elementary school
- Kid has been tested as highly gifted
- Extremely bright kid from disadvantaged background
- Good ISEE scores for middle and high school (5 and 6)
- Family is philosophically at odds with some of the schools where they apply
- Admissions director has a strong preference for a certain type of family/kid

- **Does not get in anywhere**

- Family only applied to one very competitive school
- Needs financial aid, but didnâ€™t apply for it
- Parents (or sometimes kid) seem very difficult and demanding
- Kid has undisclosed behavior or other issues
- Family is â€œoutsiderâ€• applying only to â€œcountry clubâ€• schools
- A negative recommendation from preschool director
- Family appears to prefer public school
- Family/kid does not have support of head of school for middle and high school admissions
- Very low ISEE scores for middle or high school (scores of 1 and 2)

- A contentious divorce or custody battle that isn't adequately explained (or resolved)
- Admissions director doesn't think the kid will succeed at their school (academic or social reasons)

There's nothing scientific about the categories above. These are simply my observations after 9 years of being a mom at two private schools and 5 years of [writing about the topic](#) and talking to tons of parents, admissions directors, heads of schools, educational consultants and preschool directors.

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