

## Guest Blogger Janis: Straight Talk From Admissions Directors At L.A. Private Elementary Schools (re-post)

### Description



“Every kindergarten applicant is adorable,” I heard over and over as I interviewed over a dozen admission directors from the top Los Angeles private elementary schools.

“But what are they looking for?” I heard over and over as I spoke to nearly as many kindergarten applicant parents.

The answers, as you might have guessed, are simple—and complicated.

We all know there are only so many seats in each class. And most schools allot priority spaces for siblings, alumni, and children of faculty. However, even the most selective schools must fill at least half of the class with families not previously affiliated with their school. Families who are diverse, interesting, committed, and nice. Families who hold the same values and philosophies that the school does.

Here’s a roundup of advice for applicant parents from admissions directors from some of the best private elementary schools in LA (in alphabetical order by school name):

“At Brawerman we take in an entire family, not just the child. We seek families who are eager to join a school community. We have a very involved parent body. Jewish values also play an important role. We encourage families who embrace the teaching of Jewish and human values as much as the

academic content.â€• **Gillian Feldman, Director of Admissions, Brawerman Elementary School of Wilshire Blvd. Temple.**

â€œBrentwood School is eager to embrace new families. This yearâ€™s class came from 33 different preschools and we even had one child who never attended preschool.â€• **Mary Beth Barry, Director of Admissions, Brentwood School.**

â€œWe look for families who believe in our 4-Fold Plan of Education. Our curriculum places equal emphasis on academics, arts, athletics, and a strong moral foundation. We have a more traditional structure than is typically associated with schools, such as ours, that strongly emphasize the arts and creativity.â€• **Corrine Baker, Buckley School.**

â€œWe want parents who want to get involved in the school and who embrace our policies like student uniforms. We have an â€œopen doorâ€™ policy where parents are welcome any time on our campus or in the classroom.â€• **Alice Fleming, Admissions Director, Campbell Hall.**

â€œCarlthorp School looks for families who understand and appreciate our Code of Conduct, which emphasizes integrity, courtesy, and respect. We are also looking for families who are seeking a more understated social experience for their children. At Carlthorp, we try to keep activities simple and age appropriate for our students, not always easy to do in Los Angeles.â€• **Lynn Wagmeister, Admissions Chair, Carlthorp School.**

â€œCrossroads has a big commitment to diversity. We want a community of different ethnicities, different socio-economic groups and different family types. We also look for families who agree with our philosophy of educating the whole child through rich programs in academics, the arts, athletics, human development and outdoor education.â€• **Celia Lee, Admissions Director, Crossroads School.**

â€œOur school is looking for nice kids from good families. Family is very important for us as it forms the schoolâ€™s community.â€• **Josie Bahedry, Asst. Head of School/Lower School Director, John Thomas Dye.**

â€œAt Mirman, we do not offer priority spaces for sibling families, alumni, or children of faculty. We consider students who have a passion for learning, who need us the most, and will thrive in our school community.â€• **Becky Riley Fisher, Director of Admissions, Mirman School.**

“We look for families who uphold our philosophy of pluralism, diversity and inter-connectedness. We want families who will build a community that embraces diversity that is consciously inclusive.”  
**Andrea Roth, former Director of Admissions, PS#1 Pluralistic School.**

“St. Matthew’s encourages families who want a school with strong academics, a sense of community, and a focus on moral values and character development.”  
**Jane Young, Principal PS-4, St. Matthew’s School, Pacific Palisades.**

“At St. James we look for families who desire a solid educational foundation for their children in a warm, caring, and diverse community. We are a community where children, parents and staff demonstrate respect for oneself and others. Our strong and experienced teachers exemplify the joy of learning as a life long process. In sum, one of St James’s Core Beliefs says it all: Everything we teach and do is the curriculum.”  
**Adriane Rothstein, former Director Lower Elementary, St. James Episcopal School.**

“Wildwood is a community of collaboration. We want students and parents who will interact well with each other, who will take ownership in the learning process. Learning, like motivation, is a process.”  
**Chantelle Pierre, former Admissions Director, Wildwood School.**

Assuming you, too, have a nice family, and are polite and respectful, what exactly is the admissions committee looking for when they evaluate your child?

Across the board admissions directors talked about evaluating small and large motor skills, auditory and visual acuity, sociability, emotional readiness, ability to focus, ability to transition from task to task, and that all illusive term, “a good fit.” A good fit seems to vary a bit from school to school.

Josie Bahedry at John Thomas Dye says they limit the applicants to the first 70 boys and the first 70 girls. They are looking for kids who can transition easily, who have a mastery of some basic pre-school skills and who show their ability to learn something new. They have a group of 6-8 students meet one-on-one with all of their 6 K teachers and do a little work at each station. They also prefer the boys to be a little older.

At Viewpoint, Laurel Baker Tew, Director of Admissions, said they do a group interview of up to 10 students at a time and are evaluating, among other things, each child's ability to play together, focus, and have phonemic awareness, math awareness, and spatial awareness.

Nora Malone, Head of School at Village School, keeps the enrollment open until the deadline. "We don't want to miss anybody." She mentioned that the kindergarteners are evaluated on their social adaptability as well as their developmental ability. They should be able to relate to peers, adults, and make a friend. They must be "ready to engage."

Curtis School caps their applications at 200 for combined DK and K. Mimi Petrie, Director of Admissions, also looks for children who are ready to learn. They want students who will be able to "embody Curtis School's balance of academics, art, and athletics."

PS#1's Andrea Roth said they are not looking for any particular skill set in their applicants. They have had entering kindergartners who were on beginning phonics and some reading chapter books. They look for an ability to focus.

Mary Beth Barry, Brentwood School, stressed the importance of looking at the class as a whole and trying to balance the different personalities. They want a variety of personalities who will work well together. "After all, the class will be together for thirteen years," she said.

Crossroads looks at students with a broad range of cognitive skills, but they especially look for children with a strong emotional core. "Crossroads has a lively enriched atmosphere," says Celia Lee, Director of Admissions. "We look for applicants who are flexible and can think outside the box. We want a certain level of ability, but also children who are active and joyful."

Gillian Feldman tells us that Brawerman is looking for children who are developmentally ready to begin the work of a kindergartener. This includes the academics as well as the social, emotional, and problem solving components.

Carlthorp is looking for Kindergarteners with an "ability and eagerness to learn." Lynn Wagmeister, Director of Admissions, admits their school is looking for above average to highly gifted students, however, she was quick to add, they should be happy, fun loving, and kind as well. "We're looking for children who can work hard and play hard, who also have a twinkle in their eye!"

Wildwood School really tries to get a sense of who the child is. They use an internal assessment with basic letter and number recognition, but mostly they look at applicants who engage, rebound, and “are resilient,” says Chantelle Pierre.

Each of LA’s top private elementary schools has its own unique personality, with excellent websites to peruse. Prospective families should spend time on campus, see a play, go to a book fair or event, see a concert, get a feel for the campus, the current parents and kids. Timing can work for you so apply early.

Finally, it’s important to know that even if your child is not accepted to your top choice school, don’t give up. If your child is wait-listed, stay in touch, say the admissions directors. As many of the schools told me, “Things change.”

*Janis Adams has raised and educated 3 children who have attended some of the top schools in the country, including Village School, Harvard-Westlake, Loyola High School, Harvard University, UCLA, UC Berkeley, Harvard Kennedy School and University San Diego Law School. She is on the docent council at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the owner of Academic Achievers Tutoring and the popular [KinderPrep: Learning To Love Learning](#). [www.academic-achievers.com](http://www.academic-achievers.com). You can contact her with questions at [janis@academic-achievers.com](mailto:janis@academic-achievers.com)*

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