

Reader Question: How Do I Find Out What Families At A School Are Really Like?

Description



The Willows Community School Yearbook 2009-10

Finding out what families at a particular school are really like is one of the most challenging and elusive parts of the private elementary school process. Of course you want the school where you send your child to be a great place for your child and you. But how can you be sure that will happen?

If youâ€™ve been on a private elementary school tour, the tour guide may have been a parent at the school. Most likely, the school selected a friendly and knowledgeable person to lead the tours (this is a highly coveted volunteer job). But, not always. We went on one tour where the mom leading our tour was rude, snobbish, couldnâ€™t discuss the schoolâ€™s curriculum and wouldnâ€™t make eye contact with us. But, we did find out that her husband was an important plastic surgeon (who, it was obvious, had done work on her face) and she was wearing Chanel! Not exactly what we were looking for. We passed on that â€œtrophyâ€• school. It was hard to ignore her behavior and look at the school beyond the tour guide. If we had like the school more, we would have gone back for a second tour.

So how can you find out more about what the families at a school are really like? It can be hard to ever really know until youâ€™re actually a parent at the school, because you donâ€™t know which families will be in your childâ€™s class. But, here are a few tips to give you some ideas to sort it out:

Look at a school's yearbook. You can get a feel for the school from the yearbook photos, theme and style.

Don't be misled by the school's location. Schools in very affluent areas can be warm and down-to-earth and schools in less affluent areas can be extremely pretentious.

Look at the "feeder" preschool to the elementary school. This can give you a clue about the families. If the elementary school accepts a lot of kids from a co-op school or a temple school that might help you understand the type of families your child will go to school with.

We've said this before, but if possible, try to go to school events like Book Fairs and other events where prospective parents can mingle with existing families.

Ask people you know about the parents at a school you might want to apply to. Be specific. If you're concerned about a particular issue, ask a parent who is already there.

Each class and each grade is different. And, the economic cycle may impact who a school admits for financial reasons. Schools may change over the years and admit more families on financial aid in some years and wealthier families in other years.

If you want an ethnically diverse school and you don't see diversity when you visit the school, it may not be the right school for you. Don't assume it will diversify by the time you arrive; it takes years to build a diverse student body.

Sometimes you just know it's going to be the right school. That's a great feeling!

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1. Beyond The Brochure

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1. culture of a school

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Author
admin

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