

Guest Blogger Jenny: A Public Elementary School Shunning In Calabasas

Description



A Group Of Parents Petitioned The School Board To Have A 5 Year-Old Removed From Class
At Bay Laurel Elementary In Calabasas

Editorâ€™s Note: *Beyond The Brochure is a blog about private elementary schools. But, when we learned about this issue, we felt compelled to write about it.*

If youâ€™re a parent of a school aged kid, youâ€™ve doubtless had to deal with problem kids. Sometimes theyâ€™re your kidâ€™s friend, sometimes just a classmate, and sometimes simply the subject of amusing dinner conversation.

But what happens when a small group of parents at a public school decide they donâ€™t â€œlikeâ€• a particular kid, start a petition for the kidâ€™s removal from the classroom, and then take the matter to the press? Thatâ€™s precisely whatâ€™s happened at Bay Laurel Elementary School in Calabasas. The child in question is barely five years old, and is in a transitional pre-K program to help evaluate whether younger kids should be kept an extra year in kindergarten or moved forward at yearâ€™s end to first grade. The child has been accused of numerous types of â€œviolence,â€• ranging from throwing chairs, kicking teachers, and screaming fits, all of which is hearsay and all of which is reported quite freely as fact in *The Acorn*, a Calabasas area newspaper.

The result of this is a modern day version of villagers storming the castle and demanding the â€œmonsterâ€™sâ€• head. Mind you, there have been no injuries, the child in question is being evaluated for behavioral disorders, and the school district is trying to refute the allegations, especially since itâ€™s installed two aides to help the child adjust. Indeed, the district has no choice but to try and accommodate the child, since the obligation of the public school system is educate everyone, not just those without problems.

So how could this have been handled differently? First off, it could have been handled internally. These sorts of issues are best handled by the individual schoolâ€™s administration, not by petitioning the School District at a public meeting and then giving the information to the press (the organizing parent for the petition was particularly quotable in the article; this is *not* a compliment). Usually, problems with a single child can be reasonably handled by having the teacher, parent of the child, principal, and

school psychologist meet and discuss strategies.

I had a similar situation happen in my daughter's second grade year at Third St. Elementary. There was one child in the class who was so disruptive, even the 17 year pro of a teacher couldn't handle him. After countless incidents, including this child whacking mine in the middle of class for coughing, the child was switched to a different classroom. In this case, it was, of course, a stop-gap measure: the mother refused the free assessments the school was offering, instead citing racism (the child was African American) as the reason for the complaints. Under the circumstances, the situation was handled fairly gracefully; the one who truly missed out was the "problem" child, since his parent refused to have him evaluated for behavioral issues.

While I understand the instinct to try and "protect" your child from violence or disruption, perhaps demonizing another person's child in a public forum is taking instinct too far. Many parents seem obsessed with the idea of equality and "fairness," but the public system is a far more complex balancing act. If these parents in Calabasas are so anxious to protect their progeny and handpick classmates, perhaps a private, rather than public, school might be a better fit. In the meantime, The Las Virgenes District School Board now not only must deal with angry, scared parents, but a potentially costly public relations problem. And in these times of tiny budgets and dwindling resources, that seems like a real waste of time and money. In the end, all the kids, including the one being thrown in the stocks in the town square, get nothing.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School last year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News and on Mamapedia, The Well Mom, Sane Moms, Hybrid Mom, The Culture Mom and A Child Grows In Brooklyn. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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