

When Middle School Looms by Anne Simon

Description



The issues surrounding application to private middle schools in the Los Angeles area are at once similar and different from those that parents face when seeking to enroll their child in a private elementary school. The similarities can be summed up in a few words: a lengthy admissions process and decisions to make about where to apply. What is different is that for middle school admissions, your child has already developed a history as a student and he/she will need to be more involved in both the process and the decision regarding this next important step in their education.

If you are applying with a child who attended public elementary schools, you may not be as familiar with either the culture or the expectations of LA's private middle schools. When this is the case, I think it is important to follow many of the same steps as are outlined for elementary parents (and discussed in depth in our book). For example:

“ Define your family's educational values “ what are your priorities when it comes to your child's education? Are you looking for a school that focuses on traditional educational excellence, or does your child need a school where the culture will nurture and support their need for educational motivation in a less competitive academic environment?

“ Contact as many schools in your geographic area as possible and ask to visit and tour the school. The program for admission to secondary schools is not as orchestrated as for elementary because a majority of their students come from the private schools in their area or from their own lower school division. An important question will be to determine how many actual places there are for new students at the grade level you are seeking. Points of entry for many secondary schools are 7th grade, with fewer openings for 9th grade. Some schools also have openings for 6th grade if they have an elementary school. This takes effort on your part to find out this information from school websites or by calling the school.

“ Consider the annual tuition for each school. Secondary schools are expensive, with some as high as \$30,000 per year per student. Others are less expensive, particularly some of the parochial schools. Schools do offer

financial aid, which also requires an application process.

If you are facing the decision about middle school following years at a private elementary school, the process is a bit different. Your child's school will have a history of trends toward secondary placement. You should also expect support from your school with the secondary school admissions. Your job, along with that of your child, will be to sort through these patterns and decide which is best for you and your family. If you have felt that the fit at your child's elementary school has been just right, then seek out the schools that most seem to continue in that tradition. If you feel your child has outgrown the school culture and would benefit from something different, that feeling may guide you in a different direction than the mainstream of schools their classmates will attend.

One thing that is the same, no matter where you are coming from, is that most middle schools require students to take the [ISEE \(Independent School Entrance Exam\)](#) as part of the application process. Some schools rely heavily on the scores from these tests and some do not. This information is something you should try to gather in your search, but the bottom line is that it is a very good idea to help your child prepare by taking a prep course. This will assist your student in gaining confidence and competence, regardless of the weight your chosen school places upon these scores.

Other factors that bear on the application might include your child's special interests, talents, and extra-curricular activities. If your child is an accomplished musician or a competitive ice skater, be sure that you find a way to communicate these things to the schools where you apply. There is a piece of this process that is "selling" your child and your family to the school. Student interviews and written materials, combined with parent interviews, teacher recommendations, test scores and grades all factor into this equation.

The biggest single difference between elementary and secondary admission, whether you are coming from public or private school, is that your child will need and want to participate in the process and have a voice in the decision. Secondary schools traditionally tour students "sometimes with and sometimes without their parents, and many have students visit for part of a day. It is most important for there to be an active dialogue between parents and children as this decision is made. Schools will be assessing your child's interest in their school as well as their fit with the school culture. The role of the admissions staff becomes a bit more like that of a guidance counselor, getting to know the student and family to see if there is a good fit between the school and the child.

Start your conversation with your child early. What kind of school does he/she think is best for him/her? What are her interests and goals for her education? To the extent possible, formulate a consistent [family message](#) that you and your child will present to the school. This will help the admissions folks feel the cohesion of your family and see how it will fit with their school and its mission.

And, make sure to apply to more than one or two secondary schools. The top schools are competitive and you want to ensure your child has options to choose from!

Finally, there are very good [educational consultants](#) who place students in top LA secondary schools.

Anne Simon is the co-author of Beyond The Brochure. She is the former dean of the Crossroads Middle School and the former head of Wildwood Elementary School.

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