

Notes From the DTS Kindergarten Admissions Director's Event 2014

Description



The other night, I attended the Determined To Succeed annual kindergarten [admissions director's event](#). I'd been to this event before, but I thought it was time to go back again for a refresher on the L.A. private school admissions scene.

The panel included two admissions directors I hadn't seen before and I'm always interested in hearing directly from the women who hold the [keys to the empires](#). The evening began with remarks from the talented students that Determined To Succeed helps mentor and support to prepare them for college.

After stopping to chat with Stacy Marks, the friendly, hardworking event lecture chairperson, I sat down in the room of about 75 parents to hear the panel answer pre-prepared questions posed by the moderator (Mimi Petrie of Curtis School).

Here's an overview of the key points made by the admissions directors:

- A "gift" letter is a letter sent to schools to families who have children with summer birthdays. It's a nice way of saying give your kid the gift of time i.e. he/she is too young. This is true even if he/she meets the cutoff date. But, since every school has a different cut-off date, he/she may be accepted at one school and wait-listed at another school, receiving a "gift" letter.

- Families who want robust arts programs for their kids will appreciate what many private schools offer. This is especially true in light of public school budget cuts that have reduced or eliminated arts programs.
- The “Dear Judy Letter” was joked about by the panelists. Every year, they said, one of them gets a letter of recommendation intended for an admissions director at a different school. They call the family and tell them they will be sending back the letter because it wasn’t intended for them. This makes the family look disorganized and unable to follow instructions (Brentwood School doesn’t take letters of recommendation!). This was somewhat of an inside joke since “Judy” refers to Judy Hirsch at John Thomas Dye.
- Parents who tell every school they are their “first choice” can be exposed as disingenuous when admissions directors talk to each other.
- Admissions directors are familiar with virtually every preschool in the city. Therefore, parents shouldn’t worry about selecting the “right” preschool based on elementary school matriculation. Families should select the preschool that is right for their child.
- One school, Westside Neighborhood School, welcomes parents who want to see the school again after being admitted, but before making their decision. Brentwood School frowns on this request because if a family has completed the extensive admissions process and still can’t decide, then maybe it’s not the right school. And, staff at Brentwood is too busy to accommodate those requests.
- Pay close attention to the culture of the school. You’ll be spending many years there as a parent and you want the fit to be comfortable.
- It is completely acceptable to apply to both progressive and traditional schools.
- Prepare for parent interviews with smart questions that show your interest in the school. Waiting for the admissions director to do all the talking shows a lack of interest and/or preparation on the part of the parents and makes the interview a lot of work for the admissions director.

- If there is something on your mind about your child or about the school, the parent interview is the best time to discuss it. If you plan to get into the school and then try to make changes, that doesn't typically work.
- The panelists agreed that preschool directors are a valuable resource for parents since they know the kids so well. Learning styles, readiness for kindergarten are key areas where preschool directors can provide valuable advice.
- Beth Behar ([Steven S. Wise](#)) told the audience that the philosophy of the kid's preschool does not need to "match" the elementary school type (progressive, traditional, etc.). Your child can move from a traditional preschool to a progressive elementary school or vice-versa. She says to pick the best preschool for your toddler and don't focus on whether it is the "right" preschool to get into elementary school. The panel agreed.
- Mary Beth Barry, Brentwood School's admissions director, said she gets a lot of clarity from wait-listed parents who call to say, "If admitted, we'll come." Then, when she goes to her wait-list, these are the first parents she contacts. Good to know!

Next year, DTS will feature a different panel of admissions directors. Every admissions director has [their own style.](#)

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