

Guest Blogger Audrey: My Roller Coaster Ride Applying To L.A. Private Elementary Schools

Description



The admissions process is like a roller coaster

The roller coaster of applying to Los Angeles private elementary schools is not just hype. From the moment you decide to tour schools to the day decision letters arrive, you can confront such an array of emotions that by the end of March you find yourself at times not caring about the outcome anymore.

I was amazed to face intense fears, doubts, financial concerns and consternation of friends and family (who believe children will do fine in public school and cannot fathom spending so much money on Kindergarten). I figured I had until college applications for all of that. Sure, there had been fear and doubt over potty training, pacifier use and the typical parental dilemmas, but this felt like the first significant decision that could affect my daughter's path for years to come.

A year ago January I heard about a private school with a pre-K program one week before the application deadline. Hoping I could get my daughter accepted before the Kindergarten rush, I applied without looking at any other schools. When she was accepted, I panicked and declined after realizing how much more research I wanted to do.

I had no idea what other schools looked like or what they offered and I certainly wasn't well versed in all things private school. I didn't realize that I would have to pay our following year's deposit before hearing back from other schools to which we may have wanted to apply. I didn't realize that private schools might not want to accept a child who already has a "spot" at another private school. I didn't realize that almost every other school I visited would diminish the "wow" factor I had experienced at this first school. At the end of the day, what I did realize was that I needed

to learn how to do the dance.

Applying to and getting accepted at L.A. private schools is in fact a well-orchestrated dance. There may be multiple partners on the dance floor with your family such as your preschool director, preschool teachers, each head of school and/or admissions director (oftentimes one in the same) and influential friends with ties to that school. In addition, there are ways to enhance your dancing like how involved you are in your child's preschool, how powerful a career you or your spouse possess and how much wealth or influence the school perceives your family as having.

This past fall after copious research, I was ready to tour schools. I looked at schools big, tiny, progressive, artsy, highly academic, old school/old money, religious, one where the kids play sports in the parking lot, and ones that have every state-of-the-art facility possible. You name it, I looked at it. I felt I knew which would be a good fit for my daughter, but for comparison's sake I wanted to see even those I felt would not suit her. This proved to be invaluable confirmation of the philosophy and environment in which I wanted my daughter.



Our family applied to three private schools. I told my husband that I only wanted to submit applications to schools we truly felt would be a good match for our daughter and our family. I did not want to apply to a large number of schools, simply to increase our chances of getting accepted.

I spent days anguishing on application answers and nights tormenting my poor husband on re-writes. We parsed every word, second-guessed each thought process, and tried to imagine what the ADs would think of how we approached our daughter's strengths and weaknesses. Each school asked slightly different questions and there was no use trying to copy and paste. Reaching my breaking point I shut down, telling my husband the answers were as good as they were going to get.

The interviews caused the most tension between us. Not only was I concerned about my own appearance and answers, but also I found myself scrutinizing my husband's choice of attire and worrying about what he might say. These interviews ranged from down-to-earth conversations about college football and potty training to a family interview where my daughter on her own drew a

lovely picture and wrote each of our names before handing it to the AD as a gift.

Our last interview was the most bizarre with multiple conflicting remarks and unusual questions such as the last, *“Would you like your daughter to be considered for admission?”* I wanted to love this school because it was very close to our home and seemed in line with what we wanted for our daughter. However, with each interaction its appeal diminished and with our interview, any desire to enroll her disappeared.

The day acceptance e-mails and letters were arriving found us sitting in a restaurant refreshing e-mail on our phones. Exactly at noon our first e-mail acceptance appeared. Tears immediately flowed as my husband and I became choked up over our daughter’s accomplishment. Several minutes later another acceptance arrived via our Inbox. A few more hugs and we were beaming with pride. Pride over our daughter, who of course we think is exceptional, and I actually allowed myself a small moment of joy over any part I may have played in her success.

When we returned home our mailbox was stuffed with two large envelopes and one small. We were waitlisted by the school that had lost all attractiveness. In fact, they did not accept any family from our preschool save one sibling and even our preschool director was confused and disappointed. Multiple families had similar, peculiar experiences and interviews. We have since heard that any family who did not communicate to the school that it was their #1 choice was either waitlisted or declined. I feel confident that I could have gotten my daughter admitted. However, recognizing that this school was not our first choice, I did not utilize every resource, did not indicate it was our first choice and intentionally fell short of saying those five necessary words: If accepted, we will enroll. I can live with that.

In my heart I knew which school I wanted my daughter to attend. I could picture her on this campus, thriving and spreading her wings. With each visit I found myself wanting to volunteer or work there due to the uplifting and positive environment. The combination of a beautiful setting, state-of-the-art facilities, strong academic reputation, solid administration and so many opportunities was tremendous. Think again, though, if you concluded that our choice was straightforward.

In spite of all that, we struggled until the deadline over which school to choose. One was an easier commute and more likely to have families living closer to us. The other had better facilities for sports, science and the like. The former seemed more laid back and was several thousand dollars less. The latter had an impressive, well-rounded curriculum with a strong academic reputation.

In the end, we decided on the latter school. Asking ourselves *“If money was no object where would we send her?”* we had our answer. Nonetheless, for us money is a consideration. We are not a

wealthy, prominent family. However, we are willing to do whatever we can to give our daughter an opportunity to receive the best education.

We had no letters of recommendation. We had no friends who attended these schools to put in a good word. At our preschool I have been a room parent, past co-chair of both the Fundraising and Silent Auction committees and am currently a board member of our parent association. Not one application asked about my husband or me and I chose to answer their questions without inserting self-accolades. In our interviews no one inquired about our preschool involvement, what we could bring to their school or if we intended to volunteer or donate money. Still, many private schools do put great emphasis on these details and as part of the dance moves I learned, I was prepared for all of the above should they have occurred. This is all to say that while I learned the formal dance steps, sometimes all it takes is a little rhythm and your own style.

*Audrey Young has a background in Healthcare Compliance where she performed detailed research and analysis. She is a native of Los Angeles and attended public schools and universities. Her private school admission experience set in motion a desire to help guide parents through this process and ease any confusion, fear and anxiety. She is launching an admission consulting business, **The Admission Team**, and will be available to families applying for the 2013-14 school year and beyond. Audrey can be reached at theadmissionteam@gmail.com. Her daughter will be attending Kindergarten at [Viewpoint School](#) in September.*

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