

Independent School Alliance For Minority Affairs: Interview With Keishia Gu, Exec. Director

Description



The Independent School Alliance For Minority Affairs (ISA) recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. What an accomplishment! The organization started with just a small group of committed school administrators, led by Margo Long, the head of Oakwood Elementary School. I like to think of the ISA as a full service educational consulting organization for minority families. The 30th anniversary gala event was held at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. In addition to 54 heads of school who were recognized for their contributions to the organization, it was a star-studded event that raised \$650K to fund ISA programs. In the spirit of the event, Beyond The Brochure contributed \$500 to help fund admissions fees for ISA families. Jessica Alba [presented an award](#) to Brian Lee (The Honest Company, LegalZoom), who bid generously on live auction items. Lisa Loeb sang and I spotted John Legend too! Jeffery Campbell, an ISA board member and his wife, Jennifer Fox, were gracious hosts who invited me to join them at the event. The kids who have benefitted from ISA admissions services were incredibly poised and articulate. They are students at Archer, Harvard-Westlake, Viewpoint and many more schools. I met Keishia Gu, ISA's Executive Director, an articulate and accomplished leader who I know we can count on to ensure there is a steady growth of diverse families in L.A. independent (private) schools. Here's my interview with Keishia:

1. You have a very impressive resume! Can you talk a bit about your background and what brought you to ISA?

Thank you!!!! I grew up as a nomad, and therefore I have a unique perspective on education and schools. My father is a retired Colonel in the US Air Force, and as a result of being a military brat, I

attended 16 schools from K-12. From my personal experience, I learned that not all schools, curriculum, or teachers were created equally. I attended some great schools, and I attended my share of “poor performing” schools, but didn’t have the sophistication to understand educational inequity. But I always knew that I would go into education because of the impact “school” had on my life. I started my career at my alma mater, Georgetown University and served as the Assistant Director of Admissions with a particular emphasis on multicultural recruitment. I moved on to graduate school at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education where I focused on education reform and policy. Bob Riddle, the Head of Crossroads for Arts & Sciences, gave me my first job in California at Crossroads where I did a seven year stint as an Academic Dean, English teacher, and college counselor. In 2010, in order to reach back to the communities who I felt needed my college planning expertise the most, I joined the award-winning KIPP LA Schools, and worked as the Director of the KIPP Through College program. I’m grateful to Lee Miller at Cal West Educators, who personally called me about the opportunity at the Independent School Alliance. I believe I was ultimately selected because of my experience in recruitment and admissions, working with families of color, knowledge of independent schools, and business acumen. I had the right background and new vision to lead this organization into its next incredible phase of growth. Personally, it is my life’s work to provide children with the opportunity to attend a school that best matches their passions and personality, so I feel like I’m helping all of the “little Keishia” of the world.

2. Who are the families ISA serves?

The Independent School Alliance (ISA) works to inform families of color across Los Angeles about the option of independent school education. Our families self-identify as African American, Latino, Native American, Asian American, and Multiracial/Multiethnic.



3. How do you help families find the right independent school in L.A. given the extremely competitive admissions process at many of the top schools.

At ISA, we understand that choosing the right school is by far one of the most important decisions that one can make for their child. We work with our families to help demystify the complexity of applying to independent school. We offer workshops and resources on educational philosophies, so that our parents understand the mission and vision of our 54 unique member schools. With our program, parents learn the differences between progressive, developmental, project-based, constructivist, and traditional approaches to education. Additionally, as parents consider their options, we perform an initial vetting of the children in order to understand the best fit for the child's strengths, personality, and learning style. When our member schools receive an application from ISA, they can know and trust that we have worked hard to ensure that it's a good match for all parties involved. Finally, we take the stress out of the paperwork because ISA families complete ONE common application and one financial

assistance application, which is honored by all of our member schools. We also offer fee waivers for the ISEE, FAST, and SSSâ€“making the cost of applying to independent school substantially lower than if families applied without the support of ISA. To see a complete list of schools where ISA helps families get in, click [here](#).

4. If a family wants to handle the admissions process on their own, but has a few questions, can the ISA help?

We are a small and mighty nonprofit, and have the resources and staffing to support the 150 -200 families who are a part of our program each year. Weâ€™re happy to take a call or walk-in consultation for a few people each year who are not formally a part of our program. But for the most part we reserve our program, advice, and expertise for those who are working with us directly.

5. Do ISA families have to demonstrate a need for financial aid?

No, actually, we are very proud to work with families of varying degrees of socioeconomic status. Many of our families may be considered low-to-moderate income, but a reasonable percentage of our families are able to pay 50% to 90% of their tuition fees. We provide information regarding budgeting and financial planning for independent school education, and we will work with our families to identify schools that are within the range of what they are able and willing to contribute.

For more information, visit, www.independentschoolalliance.org

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