

A Look at K-12 vs. K-8 vs. K-6: Options For L.A. Private Schools by Sanjay Nambiar

Description



Dear Readers:

Iâ€™m so excited to publish this excellent piece by Sanjay Nambiar. Along with his wife, Priya, Sanjay runs [Nambiar Advising](#) and they are parents at [PS1 Pluralistic School in Santa Monica](#). The decision to apply to K-12, K-8 or K-6 can be confusing and a lot of parents end up applying to more than one of these educational models. Thatâ€™s what my own family did. But what happens when you have to choose between a K-6 and a K-12 for example? What about leaving a K-8 or K-12 before graduation? Read on! Sanjay breaks it all down for you. â€”Christina

Tough Decisions! Should I Lock in the Next 13 Years Now, or Should I Allow for Change?

A Look at K-12 vs. K-8 vs. K-6 Private Schools

Youâ€™re ready to apply to private school. Youâ€™ve done your research regarding [traditional versus progressive pedagogies](#). You have a good idea of the type of setting where your child will thrive.

Now, should you apply to K-12 schools and be done with the process forever? Or maybe K-6 is a better strategy? And what about K-8? A few schools offer [Developmental Kindergarten](#).

As if worrying about tuition and application essays were not enough, we also have this K-12 vs. K-8 vs. K-6 debate. Itâ€™s enough to make any parent pull his or her hair out!

Okay, deep breaths. We can do this. We *will* do this.

When it comes the grade structure of a school, each option offers a bevy of pros and cons. Ultimately, itâ€™s about finding the right fit for your child and family. What works for Johnny might be the opposite of whatâ€™s best for Jennifer. There is no *right* or *wrong* strategy.

But there is solace in this. As long as we try our best â€” and do our research â€” weâ€™re doing right by our kids. And that is always priority number one (at least in our opinion).

So, letâ€™s jump in . . . Below is a check list of the some of the pros and cons for each of these school structures. This list focuses just on the nature of the grading groups. It doesnâ€™t delve into the specific academic approaches of any school, which often are the biggest determinants of what constitutes a best-fit for a child. Nonetheless, these are a few elements to consider as youâ€™re exploring various schools.

K-12 Pros

You donâ€™t have to do this again.

Applying to private school can be a grueling and anxiety-inducing process. From understanding the various school philosophies to the essays, interviews, school tours, and financial aid applications, itâ€™s often overwhelming for even the most prepared families. With a K-12 school, once youâ€™re in, you never need to do this again.

No ISEE

Starting at 5th grade, students need to take the [Independent School Entrance Examination \(ISEE\)](#) when applying to private school. (Think of it as the SAT for private schools.) But if you're in a K-12 school, your child doesn't need to take this test. Ever. That's a decent amount of stress and studying to avoid.

13 years of consistent families & friends

Many K-12 schools have a special sense of community. Your child can be with the same cohort for up to 13 years. It becomes like family, and those bonds can last a lifetime; some schools even call these kids "lifers". If the fit is right, this consistency through adolescence and the teenage years can be wonderful. But there's also another side to this . . . (see below).

K-12 Cons

Kids change

Developmentally, we often don't know the details of a child's learning style until about 3rd or 4th grade. Moreover, many kids change significantly during their tween years (10- to 12-years-old). As a result, the academic approach of the school you chose when your child was in Kindergarten might not be a fit when she is in 6th or 7th grade.

13 years of consistent families & friends

If you don't love your community in elementary school at K-12 school, you might be out of luck. Your child could be in a peer group that he or she doesn't connect with, and likewise you might not connect with other parents. And this varies from year to year. The classes above and below your daughter's might be delightful, but she unfortunately might be stuck with a crew that doesn't totally fit her -- even if new students join the school in 6th, 7th, or 9th grade. It's random and sometimes can't be anticipated. Moreover, as your child changes in the tween and teen years, he might want (or need) a new and different group of friends. Changing at 6th or 9th grade could be a refreshing move that leads to more success. Further, this change can help prepare kids for the big transition on the not-too-distant horizon: going to college.

K-6 Pros

A focus on elementary education

K-6 schools tend to be experts on elementary education. They know the pedagogy and philosophy incredibly well. They know this age group incredibly well. It's what they do, and all of their resources are devoted to this one aspect of education. There's no diversion of resources into middle or high school.

An opportunity to change

At 6th grade, youâ€™ll have a much better idea of how your child learns and in what type of setting he or she will flourish. That means you can apply to great options at 7th grade, both private and public, that could help foster your childâ€™s academic, creative, and social potential. And that school might be very different from your current K-6 school, and thatâ€™s okay. Also, a child can have a special opportunity to change his or her environment in 7th grade. Itâ€™s a time to learn key life skills: how to move to a new setting, how to adapt to new people, and how to cope with change, all with the benefit of parental support.

K-6 Cons

Youâ€™ll have to do this again

As mentioned before, applying to private school can be stressful on many levels. Also, your child will need to take the ISEE (or perhaps another entrance exam, depending on the school) as part of the application. If youâ€™re at a K-12 school, you get to avoid this process.

Change can be hard

Although learning how to adapt to new environments is an important life skill, for some children this type of change can be overwhelming. Combined with the typical trials and tribulations of puberty and early teenage years, switching to a new middle school can be a stressful experience, even if it results in personal growth.

K-8 Pros

Easier transition to middle school

K-8 schools enjoy the K-6 pros mentioned above. Additionally, they provide the benefit of a relatively seamless transition to middle school (7th & 8th grades). This can reduce the stress of changing schools and make those awkward early teenage years a little easier for students, especially those who may be a little shy or vulnerable. Also, 7th and 8th graders in these schools have an opportunity to be leaders, while delaying the move to another school simultaneously keeps them young. In fact, researchers in one study compared K-8 schools to traditional 6-8 settings and discovered that K-8 students earned higher SAT scores as well as higher GPAs in 9th grade[1].

K-8 Cons

Family attrition

K-8 schools also encounter the same K-6 cons mentioned above. Additionally, some families transition out of a K-8 school at 7th grade, for a variety of reasons. For example, some K-12 (and 6-12 or 7-12) private schools have [fewer openings at 9th grade](#) than at 7th. This results in 7th and 8th grade classes at K-8 schools that are thinner, [as families apply out sooner](#). The smaller class sizes can be a bonus, but

this attrition also can affect morale, change the culture of a class, and result in fewer resources for these grades.

Keep It in Perspective

No matter where you choose to send your child to school, success has a myriad of factors beyond the K-12/K-8/K-6 debate. When a student thrives, it's about educational philosophy, peer circles, access to creative endeavors, family dynamics, and so much more. Perhaps knowing this can make the research and decision about K-12/K-8/K-6 a little less stressful. Because, ultimately, the educational journey is a long one. And regardless of what type of school structure your children attend, they can forge a path that harnesses their potential and joy for learning.

Priya and Sanjay Nambiar run Nambiar Advising, a consulting practice that shepherds families through the private school admissions process, from helping clients find the best-fit schools for children to application support, essay editing, interview preparation, and more. Priya has spent more than 20 years in education and was the Associate Director of Admissions at the Brentwood School in Los Angeles. She earned a B.A. in Education from Brown University and an M.Ed. from Harvard University. Sanjay is an entrepreneur and professional writer who has written several award-winning children's books. He earned a B.A. in Economics and Neurobiology from U.C. Berkeley and an M.B.A. from UCLA. To learn more, please visit www.nambiaradvising.com.

[1]Look, K. (2009). The great K-8 debate. The Philadelphia Education Fund.
www.philaedfund.org/notebook/TheGreatK8Debate.htm

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