

Our Guest Blogger's Daily News Op-Ed Re: Gifted Testing

Description

Jenny Heitz: How to get the school GATE to open in LAUSD

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My daughter, Anna*, was accepted (miraculously, in fourth grade and off the wait list) to The Mirman School. The Mirman School is a private school on the Westside that has an extra requirement for entry: an IQ score in the "highly gifted" range.

Such a score, of course, requires a test. And although it sounds simple "you just schedule the test, take it, and see the results" the process is far more serpentine. There are tests, and there are tests. And when it comes to trying to get tested through the LAUSD, the process gets sticky and drawn out.

Anna completed kindergarten at her preschool. Upon entrance into first grade at Third Street Elementary School in Hancock Park, an LAUSD school, there were signs of trouble. Anna had no difficulty with the work. But she drove her inexperienced first year teacher crazy with questions and queries, to the point where the teacher humiliated her for it. Never have I been so angry with a teacher. Her standardized STAR tests, however, were excellent.

Second grade was better. A very experienced teacher took Anna in hand, gave her extra responsibilities and she seemed to flourish. He recommended testing so that she would receive "Gifted and Talented" status, something that might not do much for her at Third Street, which has almost no extra programs for GATE, but would help her in the public system later on in terms of magnet and other specialized programs.

She was tested the weekend after school let out for summer break. And it wasn't a true IQ test. It was something called the Raven's Progressive Matrices, which is a non-verbal intelligence test

given (at least by LAUSD) in a group setting. Anna is a very verbal kid. We found out later that she left the test early. Repeat: She blew it off. And they let her.

Timeliness is not LAUSD's strong suit. After waiting for the results for months and calling the headquarters repeatedly, we decided to get her an independent test. Independent tests, by the way, are not recognized by LAUSD. One of its own psychologists would have to administer an IQ test to have it count. Good luck scheduling that. At this point, Anna was in third grade, finishing her homework in 10 minutes, and apparently having "listening" problems in class. She didn't have Attention Deficiency Hyperactivity Disorder. Her grades were great. So what was up?

An IQ test is given one-on-one by a psychologist, and we found Beth Levy through a friend's recommendation. She tests kids out of her very cozy home office. There was absolutely nothing stressful about the test process. Levy was warm and friendly, a mom herself. She told us to go on a walk, and she and Anna got down to business.

Upon completion, Anna was sent into the yard to play and Levy sat down with us to go over the results. There are two IQ tests commonly used: Stanford Binet and the WISC IV. There's a slight difference in the scoring. Levy uses the WISC IV. The test's total score is divided into categories like verbal, performance, working memory and processing speed, which in turn are divided into subtests. There are no math problems or anxiety-provoking scenarios. Anna enjoyed the test and the individual attention. And her score was pretty high. In fact, I was surprised. Then again, it's nice to know exactly why she's always been such a pain in the neck.

Of course, once the cat was out of the bag, it's hard to jam it, hissing and clawing, back in. Levy almost immediately recommended a private school situation for Anna. She pushed Mirman, a school I always thought was for scary smart kids (not my kid, I thought), as being a good choice for her. We went from being merely curious about a test score to full on shopping for private schools.

Ironically, after getting her IQ tested, her Raven's score came back. LAUSD decided she was not gifted or talented. I guess that's what happens when you let the kid leave the test. We would either have to push for a second, LAUSD administered one-on-one IQ test, or scream, yell, and get her teachers to write letters attesting to her working at least two levels above her grade. We went with that option, she ended up in the GATE program. But, as there are no GATE programs at Third Street, it did her no good at all. Then came the last-minute acceptance to Mirman, and suddenly it was no longer relevant.

So, how beneficial is it to get your kid IQ tested? Even after the debacle with LAUSD, I still think, that it's absolutely worth it for public schools. There are good magnets out there and some schools do have specific programs. If nothing else, it gives you some extra leverage with your child's teacher and gives them some perspective on your child. For private school, in most cases, it's really not necessary, since most private schools will work with your child on a much more individual level anyway.

Anna will start at Mirman this week. She has no idea what kind of school it is, only that it's going to be more of a challenge. She's about to go from academically skating to possibly flailing for a while, until she gets her bearings. But that's OK. I'd rather have a kid who's challenged and often surpassed by her peers than going through life thinking everything's going to be easy.

* Name changed for privacy. Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

Congratulations to our wonderful guest blogger, Jenny, for being published in the *Daily News*! Dr. Beth Levy can be reached at 310-487-2206.

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