

Reader Question: Are Private Elementary Schools For Working Moms Too?

Description



Question: Great blog, I love reading it! We are currently applying for private school kindergarten, and one thing I haven't been able to muster up the courage to ask about, is what life is like for two-parent working families at the schools. Do you have any sense?

We began our preschool experience here in LA (after transplanting from the Midwest) pretty miserably when we landed in a school that was largely stay-at-home moms. It was a great school, but it wasn't the right environment for my son, who was one of only a handful of children who stayed at school beyond 12PM. We are now in a preschool that is nearly 75 percent two-parent working families, where my son stays with her classmates for most of the day, and feels right at home.

In many of the presentations at private elementary schools, it seems like some of the private schools still work off the assumption that there will be a mother who stays home and is freely available. I got worried when they started talking about how they transition kids into school, expecting the child to go to school for just an hour for their first day, maybe an hour and a half the second, gradually going up to staying for lunch by the end of the first week. I just don't know how I could handle doing this and keep my job!

But is this my own misperception? What has your experience been? Thanks for any insight!

Christina's Answer: I think its a great question! At all the schools, there are moms who work full-time, but its a question of whether they are in the majority or not. I've found that starting K is a transition point where you may want to take a few days off (vacation, sick, etc.) because most of the schools have early days for the first week. And, its a big transition for your child, so you want to be there. After the initial transition period, the regular schedule begins and there are no more early pick-ups, no more hanging out at school to see how your kid is doing, etc. The school expects parents to leave after the transition is over.

In general, I've found that most working parents have nannies/babysitters who pick up their kids since they can't get off work in time and there are a lot of school holidays. However, if that's not an option, most schools have enrichment programs that go until about 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. for parents who work and for kids who want to stay to take cooking, sports, crafts, etc. My kids used to love those programs.

I have been a full-time working mom, a stay-home mom and now a work-at-home mom so I've experienced it all! For working moms, volunteering can be fit into your schedule since it is after all, volunteering. The social scene at some schools is dominated by stay-home moms and its hard to make friends and do play dates when you work. But, its always possible to arrange get-togethers on the weekend or school holidays (these are always great for play dates and if you're not home, a babysitter can help out). All this gets easier as the kids get older and can go home with a friend and that sort of thing.

My advice would be to try to choose a school that seems more like your preschool. If you're not sure, talk to current parents at the school and your preschool director to get an idea of the culture of that particular elementary school (that's really what we're talking about). You can have a good experience as a working parent at a school where most moms don't work outside the home, assuming the moms are friendly and flexible with scheduling, understanding that you work full-time outside of home.

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