

Guest Blogger Adine: Staying Sane During The Private Middle School Admissions Process

Description



This morning, with tears running down my cheeks, I have finally achieved closure on the lengthy, yet exciting, middle school admissions process for my son. It was a process that my husband and I decided we would embrace with gusto and enthusiasm, and we were determined that all of us, even my daughter who is years away from the process, would have fun with it, or as much fun as could be humanly possible. We would all learn very quickly that there are many excellent choices in middle and high schools in Los Angeles – including some public schools that no one seems to be factoring into the mix.

We started the process in August by meeting with our Principal at [Brawerman Elementary Of Wilshire Boulevard Temple](#) and discussing options, thoughts and goals—even long-term dreams. And, then we waited. And we waited until that very first Open House – this one for both parents and kids, where almost the entire 6th grade from every private school in West Los Angeles descended upon the school that put itself out for the sacrificial first rite.

The process repeated itself over and over again, some with the kids, some without. Each one brought more excitement, comparisons, and lots of banter and new acquaintances, too (‘oh, weren’t you at the open house last week?’). We saw the new gym here, the new auditorium there, the plans for the 2011 build out, the new science labs, each reaching out with great attraction. We saw excited teachers, engaged students and lots of active learning. There were special ‘meet the coaches’ practice sessions, coffees for girl and boy parents, and arts and media show and tell. Some schools even bragged about their lunch program.

I must say, most (and, I mean most) of the parents, both at our school and at other ones, were much less competitive and sly than I had heard I would experience. They discussed their feelings – good and bad – as we marched through school after school, drinking weak coffee and eating mediocre bagels, and filling out some applications along the way. Lots of fun chatter mixed with a little gossip, taking the edge off of the finality of it

all. And some Girls Nights Out with lots of alcohol didnâ€™t hurt.

There was also the â€œdreadedâ€• ISEE Prep Classes and In-Home Tutoring Services. We decided to keep our stress-level in check and found the one that seemed the most mellow and fun. And most of all, I adored Valerie, the owner of [Learning Encounters](#). I wasnâ€™t sure my son would be into the classes, but he really enjoyed it. Even now, heâ€™ll talk about how fun it was and how the homework wasnâ€™t too much. He met new kids, and reconnected with old buddies from probably every city recreation league in town. The class was kept fun and light by some fabulous instructors, and the plethora of flowing snacks didnâ€™t hurt eitherâ€¦along with the red licorice that they grabbed on the way out the door. Some parents came early to chat/whine/complain/brag with others about schools and the process, and that was also mildly engaging, at times, as well. And, the test was the testâ€¦kids came loaded with number 2 pencils, the new and improved erasable pens, and a mountain of snacks and water, and gave it their all. Lots of energy at test sites, and then the dreaded waiting for scores, which rolled in with unexpected, expedited, rocket speed for those that paid the extra \$30 to get them via email.

And, then, it all stopped at the end of February. The applications were filed away, and coffees, tours and interviews completed. Quiet. Deadly silence. Most parents did all they could and/or wanted to do. But, of course, it is the Westside of LA, and some did more â€œ to be clear, we did not. Well, except for the letter from his Club Soccer Coach, which some schools seemed to want, or at least list as â€œoptional.â€• The calls to well-connected friends on the Boards of the schools, friends of friends on the Board, friends of distant relatives, friends of a friend that stayed at the Kea Lani with another friend, or some chateau or villaâ€¦you know the type. Basically, anyone they could find that knew someone, somewhere, on some Board. It was â€œgame onâ€• for some, and for others, it was time to just have yet another lemon drop martini and relax.

And then, Saturday morning â€œ Decision Day, 2011 finally arrived. Home phones, cell phones, texts, iChats (for the kids)â€¦they all lit up like a raging inferno. Incredibly, the servers didnâ€™t crash and trunk lines didnâ€™t go down all over the Westside. Some were so happy that you could peel them off the ceiling, others got the expected, and others were crushed. A few got into their pre-designated first and only choice, and postcards were completed by 5 P.M. on Saturday night; others cried and cried and then started the next step in the processâ€¦settling or strategizing, and still others got into decision-making mode.

We were lucky enough to get into our top choices, and it was decision time. We had an early favorite and stood by our choice through the process until we unexpectedly found another love. It was back and forth, and back and forth, but deep inside, we knew. We started the pro-con lists, over and over again, with calls into parents to make sure our first love was still as shiny gold as it had started. And, it wasâ€¦even more so.

Yesterday, I filled out the postcards, listed our selected school: [Windward](#). Then I got to the dreaded task of writing letters to the schools our son wonâ€™t be attending. Heartbreaking.

We loved so many of them, for so many reasons. Some oozed passion for learning and the arts; some demonstrated that they could challenge our son at levels we didnâ€™t conceive possible; and still others had sports and electives programs that were mind-blowing. Really, we asked, how could anyone go wrong at any of these schools? In the end, we picked a school, Windward, that seemed like the best fit for our son and our family. But, I cried when I wrote that letter to our almost first choice. I never thought I could get that attached to a school, but I did. I even called them and cried when I told them we werenâ€™t going. But, in the end, we know we were fortunate to have a choice.

And, most of all we kept the process light. Saying he was â€œgoing on tourâ€• like a rock band, and finding his new home away from home. We laughed at some of the craziness together, made him feel like he would do great anywhere he went, never put pressure on him with the interviews, and just joked about whether he attended more

than half of the first semester of 6th grade at his school. And, of course there was his lucky interview polo shirt with his favorite soccer team logo on it. I donâ€™t think heâ€™ll ever part with that shirtâ€”he even wore it out to our â€œcelebration dinnerâ€• on Decision Day.

The process is as easy or difficult as you makeâ€”keep it stress-free for yourself and your child, and have fun with it! Any other way, and it is a pressure cooker waiting to explodeâ€”and now, only a couple of years until we start it all over again. Oy.

Adine Forman grew up in Chicago and is an attorney who works 30 hours a week at a non-profit, while her children are in school. Adine has been married to Dan, also an attorney, for 15 years, and has two children who play a combination of club soccer, travel basketball and lacrosse, school sports and musical instruments. Adine spends all of her free time driving to gyms, and turf and grass fields throughout the Southern California Region.

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