

We Applied to 26 L.A. Schools for Kindergarten by Mia Sable Hays

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Hear me out. I had more “reasonable” plans during the winter of 2020 for our Los Angeles kindergarten search, but the unimaginable happened, and Covid-19 upended our world.

First, the tours were all canceled and the schools were closed to the public for the rest of the year. Anything we hadn’t already seen would remain a mystery hinging on the technical, marketing, and communication savvy of each school (and the health department). Then, amidst the lockdowns we decided to sell our open floorplan condo in Playa Vista and temporarily rent a house with more space to better navigate homeschooling and work-from-home for both my husband and I. The best option for us ended up being on the complete other side of town, in the historic north hills of Glendale. “Great now we can consider more schools! We can apply everywhere and pick a school, then buy a house!” this optimistic mom naively said to herself!

Cut to “a literal color-coded spreadsheet of information and dates, and SO many Zoom events” like over 100. Preliminary midnight website-reading had me crossing off the ones for which my summer birthday baby would not make the cut-off (Brentwood, Laurence, Crossroads; the universe has predestined we were not meant to be). In the end we chose to hold a place for our preschool ([Exploring Minds Montessori](#))’s older group, put our name in the **lottery for 17 charter & magnet schools**, and apply to **8 private schools** across the westside and San Fernando valley; **The Willows, Wildwood, Turning Point, Buckley, Children’s Community School, Oakwood, The Wesley School, and Campbell Hall**.

Right off the bat, it was a cyclone of qualitative data. Not having the normal impressions of the campuses, nor the social opportunities to mingle with our fellow prospective parents, we were locked into what I can best describe as The Bachelor meets Match.com meets college applications meets doing your taxes. It was intimate, it was awkward, it was “dating” them all as if we might get married, never knowing how they really felt about us. We knew a great education was the baseline at ALL of these schools. So what ELSE mattered? My gut said we were also looking for the trustworthy third caregiver, the curator of our community, the unified captain and crew of a pandemic cruise ship; the right people would be the right place.

Then I had this moment where I lost it. Near the end of the Zoom kindergarten assessments I started to freak out. I had half the schools telling me Zooms with 4 year olds were developmentally inappropriate and they would forgo any such thing, and then **The Wesley School** required TWO. In my defense I was coming off another school’s ill-fated attempt during which my normally happy-go-lucky kid frowned at the chaotic group of Zoom strangers and laid down on the ground for the duration. I felt horribly guilty like a toddler pageant mom trying to convince her the next one *might* be fun.

I wrote to Wesley politely asking if there was another option they would consider rather than a second Zoom. The reply was essentially, No “that this was the way they made their decisions. I was tortured and borderline offended to be in the position” but something unexpected happened. Wesley’s teachers brought some other magic with my kid “she lit up! It was like easy (dare I say breezy)” BOTH TIMES. Later, in the parent interview, we addressed my erm, little panic. I listened, and I felt heard. They told me what they had noticed of my child. It was spot on. And I knew for a fact that no other school had truly SEEN her the way they had. I was taken aback by how respectfully the matter was resolved, that instead of making me feel like an insurgent jerk or pandering to my request, there was a sincere and transparent conversation. Was this love? Did I screw it up?

On that fateful day at 5pm in mid-March the decisions hit my inbox. To my surprise! I was surprised. I had to quickly process a confusing mix of emotions for schools I'd been SURE we'd connected deeply with, schools sending us their cool-toned "Waitlist" offers, and others we'd felt less certain about sending their warmest proposal. As of deciding time, the public and charter schools were still virtual-only, and it felt like too much of an unknown leap if we had a good private option "and we thankfully had several.

Among our private acceptances were 2 of our top 3 choices! **The Willows** on the westside (our long-time "progressive" dream school), and **The Wesley School** in NoHo (the late discovery "traditional" which had stolen a piece of our hearts). For you Bachelor fans: The Willows had our first-impression rose, but The Wesley School sent us a curveball when it won over the family during hometowns.

Turning from our hearts back to our heads for final answers, another factor (and long story) was that we had applied for financial aid, and not received any. This little detail put greater pressure on our house hunt as we realized that it would be financially risky for our family to pay full tuition AND invest in the kind of home we needed back on the westside. Choosing Wesley meant we could probably swing it if I got another part-time gig, plus a larger selection of affordable homes nearby. These were grownup facts that could impact our family life for years, and I suppose my point is that, if other BIG things like buying a house or affording tuition, or you know, getting through a global crisis "intersect with your school search, then you've got to look at the big picture and not get too wound up in the romance.

We knew what we had to do, and crossed off our westside offers, including The Willows. It was a dramatic season finale of the most massive blind school search ever, but we are relieved and excited to enthusiastically say "Yes" to [The Wesley School](#) and to finding our new village in the valley.

Mia Sable Hays is a writer, producer, and host of [The Motherbird Podcast](#) and founder of [Motherbird](#), a curated community and newsletter for Los Angeles parents.

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Date Created

April 8, 2021

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admin