

What You Can (and can't!) Control During The Admissions Process by Sanjay Nambiar

Description



We're thrilled to welcome guest contributor Sanjay Nambiar of [Nambiar Advising](#) back to Beyond The Brochure with a piece about making sure you don't overlook the things that you can control during the admissions process. Often, it's the details that make a difference! —Christina

Applying to Private School in L.A. is About Control

We understand on a very intimate level the stress involved in applying to private schools in Los Angeles. The process can be maddening, and sometimes parents can feel that the future hopes of the family (fairly or unfairly) lie in the balance.

But, there are perspectives to help you manage the craziness and maintain sanity.

One factor we focus on with our clients is *control*—i.e., what you *can't* and *can* control during the application process. Understanding the nuances here can help reduce stress significantly. Because ultimately, once we realize some things are simply beyond our ability to impact them, it's easier to

let the pressure around them go. We then can focus our energy on the things that indeed are within our purview.

What You Cannot Control:

School-specific needs for that particular year

It's random, and perhaps unfair, but some years are just more difficult than other years. Admissions officers must balance a myriad of factors when putting together an incoming class. With that, many factors can impact the applicant pool. These include:

- Legacy families
- Faculty applicants
- Siblings
- Boy/girl ratios

With such factors, not getting in often has nothing to do with the student or parents. Rather, it can be a matter of limited space and unfavorable timing. Sometimes, knowing these truths can put a rejection into a more understandable, and less personal, context.

Recommendations

A teacher or administrator recommendation is the product of several months, and sometimes years, of history with your child and family. At that point, there's not much parents can do to influence what is written. The recommenders typically are pros and have written numerous recommendations over the years. We have to trust that they'll put forth the best representation possible, while remaining truthful. We can't control this part of the process.

Transcripts

Similar to recommendations, transcripts are a result of your child's history. If there is a blip in a specific course or year, we can't do much about this historical outcome. If there is a significant anomaly in a grade for a specific reason, however, that often can be addressed in the application essays.

What You Can Control:

Interviews

Finally, something under your control! Interviews are the most important in-person aspect of the application. This is your chance to connect, shine, and learn more about the school (for both students and parents). Exercise control here by preparing prior to the interview. Read your application again to remember specific anecdotes. Review the school's website and talk about specific programs and classes. Research extracurricular opportunities. Also, mock interviews, sample questions, and a few practice sessions can help your child (and you) become more confident and polished.

School visits

Every time you visit a school, from interviews to open houses to tours, you have an opportunity to learn more about the community. These visits also let admissions officers and administrators learn more about you. Always be polite and courteous to everyone. We’ve heard many horror stories where parents or kids were rude to administrative or custodial staff, and as a result were not admitted.

Essays

This is perhaps the element which you can control the most. Take your time with the essays – start early and revise often (and always bear in mind the stated word/character count on the application). Read them out loud to catch typos. Send them to one or two trusted friends for feedback. You are in charge of how you describe your child and family, so it’s worth the effort to make it as strong as possible.

ISEE exams

This topic is controversial for many reasons. While many educators are not in favor of tutors or prep courses, there’s also an argument to how preparation can make a student more confident and relaxed. Whether you use a tutor or take practice exams on your own, studying for this standardized test can help not only improve scores, but also alleviate stress. Try to present a calm attitude – remind your child that the test is not a reflection of who they are or their potential. Also, remember that you can sign up to take the exam twice, just in case.

Submitting the application early

This is easy and under your control: submit your application as early as possible. Submitting early has multiple benefits: the season is new and admissions officers are fresher as they review the application; once you submit you can focus on regular life; students can focus on normal school and not application materials; and you eliminate the inherent stress of procrastination.

Keep It in Perspective

Yes, applying to private schools in Los Angeles is about crafting a strong narrative and doing everything you can to help admissions officers make a favorable decision. But, it is also about managing stress and not letting the details drive you and your child crazy. This is an opportunity to be authentic to your family as well as the admissions officers. And perhaps most importantly, the process is about finding the right match for your child, because happy kids are more likely to be successful kids!

As you understand what you can’t control, you can more easily devote your energy and focus to the application elements you indeed can control. Ultimately, that can help you keep your sanity as you go through the application process.

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.

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