

Who's Nervous? Your Child's Private School Kindergarten Testing Day

Description



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It was early and I was nervous. With my daughter in the car, we drove to the 8 a.m. "visiting day," one of the requirements of the private school kindergarten admissions process. The school, Oakwood, was more than 30 minutes from our house, traffic was bad and I mistakenly went to the high school rather than the elementary school. Frazzled and arriving with a minute to spare, I arrived at the correct location, a progressive school on a rustic campus.

After a brief time in the school library with our kids, parents were asked to go into a conference room for a meet and greet with the Oakwood head of school. At the same time, our kids were taken into classrooms with teachers for various for visiting day. This was the aspect of the admissions process that filled me with anxiety, since a lot depends on how your 4-5 year-old is feeling the day of the visit and how he/she acts when you arrive at the school. As soon as we got there, my usually shy daughter turned on her biggest, most charming personality (one I had only seen at home). Feeling very comfortable in the library, she pulled some books off the shelf and began reading in a loud voice. The admissions director turned to look at her, clearly impressed. Now that she had an audience (the best possible audience, I might add), my daughter continued reading other parents and kids turned to watch.

Relieved, I went with other parents into the conference room for what turned out to be a chance to ask questions of the head of school. This, you should note, is a time to ask smart, well-formulated questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the school. *It's also a good time to find something nice to say about the place you want to accept your kid.* The room was filled with parents who already had older kids at the school, so they were confident about the process and even joked about their chances of getting in. There were also parents there applying for the second time, after being wait-listed the previous year. The competition for spots Oakwood is no joke, I learned. After about an hour, my daughter emerged from the classroom bursting with enthusiasm. We thanked the staff and left. I didn't have to ask my kid if it has gone well. I knew. She'd nailed it. The look on her face told me everything. In March, we received our acceptance letter from the school.

Beyond The Brochure co-author, Porcha Dodson, has administered numerous [testing days](#) at Curtis and St. James schools in Los Angeles. Her advice to parents is from the perspective of the teacher/administrator. Here are Porcha's tips:

• Many private schools use the terms "visiting day," "testing day" or "play date". This is the opportunity for the school to observe your child in a mock kindergarten setting with other applicant kids.

• Telling your child the day will be like a fun play date or a visit to kindergarten with teachers and other kids can help them understand what to expect.

• Some schools prefer to visit applicant kids at their preschools and observe them in a setting familiar to the kids. The preschool director will let parents know ahead of time to make sure the child is at school that day.

• Don't over dress your child! They should wear comfortable clothing that they can move around in. A suit and tie is too formal.

• Some families hire tutors to prepare their kids for written tests, but this isn't required by schools. Helping your child learn to recognize basic letters, shapes and colors can help ease anxiety.

â€¢ If your child is having a bad day when you arrive at the school, try to gently encourage him/her to separate from you and participate in the activity. If he/she refuses, politely ask the teacher to help. If that doesnâ€™t work, as a last resort, ask to come back another day. This happens occasionally and schools expect kids to have bad days.

Visiting/Testing Day usually includes some or all of the following activities:

o **Circle Time/Story Time.** Listening to a story read by a teacher and answering questions about the story. Schools are not expecting kindergarten applicants to read, but many kids are early readers. Many schools also give kids a snack.

o **Written Tests.** Written tests can include questions about shapes, colors, letters, lower case and upper case letter and fill in the blank (see sample test questions in our book). Schools will be looking to see if kids can answer the questions, as well as use fine motor skills to hold a pencil to write their name or ABCs.

o **Play time.** Outdoor play time on the school yard. These activities can include playing games, unstructured play with other kids and activities designed to give kids a chance to use gross motor skills to climb, run and play. Schools will watch to see which kids actively play and who takes more time to participate, who shares the ball or play space and who can follow directions. Schools are interested in which kids demonstrate readiness for kindergarten and those kids they believe will be a good fit for their schoolâ€™s educational philosophy. In order to determine a childâ€™s readiness for kindergarten, schools want to observe a childâ€™s motor skills, language skills and a range of other developmental indicators. For example, the school will be looking to see whether kids raise their hands to answer questions when asked, if they can sit still, if they demonstrate patience by listening to the teacher, whether they will allow other kids a chance to talk and whether or not they can follow basic instructions.

Remember, this day is only one aspect of a multi-faceted admissions process. The amount of emphasis placed on [visiting day](#) varies by school.

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