

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book really began, to some extent, years ago, when I started collecting information on where to send my own young children to school. My husband and I looked at Honolulu preschools, real estate, and neighborhood DOE (Department of Education) schools, all at the same time. Like most young parents, my husband and I were eager to hear everyone's opinion about where to best educate our children.

What we quickly realized was that everyone in Honolulu had an opinion on schools—private, public, charter, and home school. My husband, a product of East O'ahu public schools—who earned a doctorate degree on the mainland—was slow to recognize that anything had changed in the years since he had graduated high school, moved to the mainland for college, and returned. Myself, a product of public and private schools and universities, both here and on the mainland, had heard so many varying opinions about schools that I was confused and I wanted to sort out the facts.

I became acutely aware that while many (and I am almost inclined to say *most*) parents believe that Hawai'i's private schools offered a far superior education than the public system in Honolulu, many of these same parents believed their children would never attend a private school. The reasons varied, but much of it boiled down to intimidation, uncertainty, and lack of facts.

I began by making a list of possible public schools—in our area. Both my husband and I had spent time at public institutions and I really wanted to believe that there were some good public schools still around.

I toured the DOE schools. I walked campuses, scheduled tours, and talked to mothers, fathers, grandparents, students, teachers, administrators, admission directors, librarians, and health aids.

Again, I wanted to believe that our public schools offered children the same opportunities as some of the more expensive institutions, because I have friends who are DOE teachers, librarians, principals, and curriculum writers. I know these people work hard and I know they care deeply about children.

I did find some good DOE schools. I found schools with well-stocked libraries, foreign language classes beginning in kindergarten, P.E. teachers, music classes, and full-scale productions of musicals. At some schools there were new playground equipment and new computers lined up in the computer lab. These schools felt safe, friendly, and fresh.

But what I found at some other public schools was appalling. Broken air conditioners, lack of books, lack of space, children attending school on a track system of various schedules to accommodate the overcrowding, and well-meaning teachers loaded down with mountains of DOE and NCLB (No Child Left Behind) paperwork. Some public school bathrooms lacked basic necessities such as paper products and soap and some computer labs were outfitted with technology that expired over a decade ago.

The better DOE facilities inevitably had these amenities because their very active, very vocal, PTA had fund-raised to pay for these extras. The well-stocked libraries came from parents purchasing "celebration" books to donate to the school. Likewise, school tutors were parents with the time to spend the day at the school. One gym teacher was a professional coach who volunteered at his son's DOE school. New computer equipment was usually donated by parents or businesses in the community owned by parents who have a child at that school.

I thought there must be good schools and not so good schools in the private sector as well and I made a list of private schools in the state of Hawai'i. I followed up by calling or e-mailing each and every one of these schools and requesting information packets. Then I began reading this mountain of information and attempted to separate fact from publicity.

As I researched further, I found that there is a lot of public information about the public school systems. Test scores, teacher's credentials, class size, and even economic information about the districts they are located in, can all be found in public records and in some cases online.

This was not necessarily true for the private schools. Parents have to dig up much of this information in the private sector. Some schools were very forthcoming; some were very tight-lipped. Some schools had teachers with advanced

degrees, others had one teacher with a college degree and church members helping out as teacher aids. Some schools published their test scores; others indicated vaguely that they were “good.”

I was determined to find out specifics. Soon friends were asking for my opinions and I was sharing the knowledge I had gleaned from appointments, interviews, and research.

That’s when I thought: Aha! What Honolulu needs is a well researched, self-help book on navigating the many private education options in Hawai‘i.

I quickly realized there wasn’t anything remotely like that out there. So I set about to write it myself, for all the parents who feel they are in the same situation.

I have personally visited each of these schools (sometimes five or six times) and I have mercilessly applied my own children (with their knowledge and permission) and followed the application process of friends, families, co-workers, and strangers to many of these schools.

To research each school I had phone conversations with admissions offices, I examined application packets, read all school literature, and browsed each brochure, web site, student handbook, and application packet. I have reviewed annual reports, handbooks, curriculum guides, and student publications. I attended open houses.

I spoke to admission directors, presidents, and members of boards of trustees. I gleaned information by talking with students, alumni, faculty members, and members of churches. I have been known to walk up to groups of uniformed school children, again as an interested mom, and ask about their school, sometimes learning the nicknames they have given to rival schools. I have researched information not published by the schools themselves including legal documents, newspaper and magazine articles, religious and historical archives, trivia and high school sportscasts.

This eventually led to “The Parent’s Guide to Private Schools in Hawai‘i—O‘ahu,” the only private school guide in Hawai‘i—and one that is not dictated by the schools.

I want to share my information with you.