



150 parents camp out for spot at coveted school

University Preparatory draws praise for arts, sciences and disciplinary standards

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VICTORVILLE

• In hopes of getting his 11-year-old daughter enrolled into University Preparatory for the fall, David Gray helped his wife, Marybel, set up a small tent near Seventh and Center streets on Friday afternoon.

The family joined roughly 150 parents who spent the weekend sleeping outside the school in Victorville to be among the first in line for Monday morning registration.

“My wife was stuck in a little puptent with blankets. One guy was sleeping in the middle of the street in his sleeping bag, and one guy looked frozen with just two blankets,” said Gray, 57. “It’s quite an ordeal to spend three or four nights in the cold.”

It’s the third year in a row that University Preparatory’s registration has been preceded by parents waiting through the weekend in tents and sleeping bags, University Preparatory Principal Valerie Hatcher said. This year parents started camping out a day earlier — on Thursday afternoon for Monday morning registration. And the school collected about 60 more applications than last year, Hatcher said.

Several of the Victor Valley’s most sought after magnet schools have similar registrations accompanied by parent camp-outs. Most of these schools rank among the highest in the Victor Valley for API scores, hold students to high discipline and attendance standards and offer specialized studies like performing arts or applied sciences.

“Depending on the year, we have had people start camping out as early as Monday and as late as Wednesday after school for Friday registration,” said Christi Ramos, secretary to the principal at Discovery School of the Arts.

At Endeavour School of Exploration, parents have camped out the last couple of years, but with more than 700 students Endeavour generally has more openings than other schools, said Renee Thomas, Endeavour’s principal.

As a charter school, t h e Academy for Academic Excellence must rely on a lottery system for registration and holds about three lotteries per year. Some parents will submit their 1-year- old’s name to make it on a waiting list that’s currently about 3,000 names long, said Chip Kling, the AAE’s principal.

Last year the Academy for Performing Arts garnered lower student interest when it

experimented with a similar waiting list system, so this year it's switching back to the first-come, first-serve process. The school has seen campouts that stretch as long as 10 days since 1993, said Diane Benedict, administrative manager for the Academy of Performing Arts and Foreign Language.

"We like it because we can get really involved p a r e n t s t h a t w a y," Benedict said.

Some parents actually prefer the campout method, too, because they have more control over getting their child's name on the list, Benedict added.

Hatcher said that she has considered a lottery or computer registration process, but her school has stuck with the in person first-come, first-serve basis so far.

"We discuss the (registration) process every year — what we could do to make it as fair as possible and as equitable as possible," Hatcher said. "We appreciate the commitment from the parents — we do."

On Monday morning University Preparatory collected about 160 applications for seventh grade and about 55 applications for eighth through 11th grade, Hatcher said. The school has 210 openings for seventh graders, 204 for eighth graders and 180 for 10th through 12th grade, but dozens of legacy students will have first priority over the parents who camped out. The school will review the rest of the applications based on order received and eligibility by May.