

## **FAME: I'M GONNA LIVE FOREVER POMONA SCHOOL OF ARTS & ENTERPRISE**

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*This case study takes us through the process the Santos and Rodriguez family must undertake in order to find out information about the Pomona School of Arts and Enterprise (SAE). This school is a state of California charter high school whose mission is directed towards education combining fine arts and basic business skills. The school is located in Pomona, a city to the east of Los Angeles and can accept students throughout the state.*

*The principal, Ms. Janice Smith, knows the school needs to grow, but isn't sure why it is not. Through the frustrations experienced by the Santos and Rodriguez family, many of the problems surface.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The 1980 motion picture "Fame," tells the story of the students and faculty at a New York Art School. It was their dream to sing, dance, act and play music. They are young, talented, and ready to take on life's challenges. They are going to give their best to finish Art School and become famous and rich. However, becoming famous is not easy, and the school is where they start to pay their dues.

The Pomona School of the Arts and Enterprise is a school similar to the one depicted in the movie Fame. It started in 2001 and the enrollment continued to grow each year. However, two years ago, in 2006, the student enrollment stalled at a high of 414 and no matter what they did to change it, the enrollment stayed approximately the same. In fact, for short periods of time, the enrollment dropped reaching a low of 355. The school can only handle 500 students, and the optimal number of students is 450 or above.

Janice Smith, principal of the School of the Arts and Enterprise (SAE) in Pomona,

doesn't understand why the school is unable to enroll more than 414 students, and she would like to know what needs to be done to improve enrollment.

### **THE SANTOS & RODRIGUEZ EXPERIENCE**

While getting out of her blue 2005 Toyota Corolla at approximately 2 p.m on Thursday, May 16, Sandra Santos, a middle-aged Latina wearing a clean, white, perfectly-pressed, nurse's uniform, paused for a second to speak with her neighbor. "Hello Jennie. How are you feeling? How is the pregnancy going?"

The neighbor, Jennie Rodriguez, a mother of three with another one on the way shakily rose from her lawn chair and started to walk over to Sandra Santos. Mrs. Rodriguez, a thin, small framed 32 year old Mexican female looked like a stick figure with the exception of what appeared to be a bowling ball strapped to the center of her body. "I'm doing fine, but it seems like I've been pregnant forever."

Sandra Santos laughed and said, "Ever since I met you fourteen years ago, you have been pregnant. Jennie, you know I'm a nurse, and if you don't know yet where babies come from, I'll be glad to tell you."

Jennie, changing the subject, said, "What are you doing home so early? You don't usually get home until after 6."

Santos sighed, "My daughter, Maria, got into another fight at school, and I had to see the Vice Principal. Maria is hanging around with the wrong group. She is headed for big problems if she stays at Pomona High School. I don't know what to do. We can't afford to pay \$10,000 a year to put her in the Pomona Catholic School for Girls."

"Sandra, my oldest son, Albert, is having problems too. Three weeks ago, after mass, my priest told me about another, new private high school in Pomona where the fees are paid for by the State. It won't cost you anything if the student qualifies," Jennie said.

Sandra lived in Pomona her whole life and never even heard that this school existed. Sandra said, "If you're joking about a new high school, it's not funny. And what do you mean if the student qualifies? How does a student qualify? We're not on welfare!"

"No, I am serious. Father Villafuerte said there is a new artists' high school located close to the big YMCA on Garey Avenue near downtown."

“I lived here my whole life. I drive by the YMCA at least three times a week. There is no high school around there. What is the name of the school? Father Villafuerte must be mistaken”, Sandra said in disbelief.

Jennie replied, “The Father said he didn’t know the name, but he said it should be easy to find by calling City Hall or the Pomona Unified School District office or just by asking people in the YMCA.”

Sandra said, “Have you ever heard or seen this school before? How can it be possible that we have lived here all of our lives and never heard that this school exists? And even if it did exist, your son and my daughter are not artists. They probably wouldn’t qualify to get into the school.”

“You’ve seen my son’s drawings. He draws really good cartoons, and I have gone to many open houses over the years where your daughter had pictures hanging on the walls. Her work is very interesting. I don’t care what it takes, my son is not doing well at Pomona High School, and I have to do something.”

“Jennie, I am going to call them right now, and get more information. I will let you know what I find out.”

Mrs. Santos unlocks the front door and enters her well kept, modest 1100 square foot three bedroom, one bath home. She puts her purse down on the kitchen table, and pulls out a Coke from the refrigerator. She gets a pad of paper and pen from the kitchen drawer. Then, she pulls out a chair, and sits at the small rectangular table in the kitchen and dials 4-1-1.

From the phone she hears “city please?” She answers “Pomona”. Then, she hears “state please?” She answers “California”. Then, a real person says, “What can I help you find in Pomona, California?” Mrs. Santos replies, “I am looking for the Pomona School for Artists.” After a few seconds, the operator said, “We don’t have a listing for the Pomona School for Artists.” A little sad, Mrs. Santos asked for the phone number for the Pomona Unified School District’s Main Office (PUSD). The operator replied, please hold for the number. The number is 909-555-1212.

Mrs. Santos hung up the phone, and then, she called the Pomona Unified School District. After a few rings, she heard, “Pomona Unified School District, how may I help you?

I would like the number to the High School for Artists on Garey Avenue. After a



few seconds, the school district employee said,” The number is 909-555-1414”.

Mrs. Santos called the number that she was given. “Hello, Garey High School, student speaking, how may I direct your call?”

Mrs. Santos said,” I am looking for the school for the artists”

The student replied, “Please hold while I direct your call.”

The phone rang and someone picked up and said, “Garey High School Art Department”.

Frustrated, Mrs. Santos hung up. She walked over to her refrigerator where there was a magnet from Pomona City Hall with a toll free number to call to get information. She called the number and heard, “Pomona City Hall, how may I direct your call?”

“Hi I need the phone number for the High School for artists on Garey Avenue”, Mrs. Santos said,

The city operator responded immediately, “The number to Garey High School is 909-555-1414”

“No, not Garey High School, I am looking for the Artists’ High School on Garey Avenue,” Mrs. Santos insisted.

In response, the City Information Operator said, “We don’t have a listing for the Artists High School.”

Mrs. Santos said, “Is there someone else I can call to find this school?”

The city operator replied, “You could call the Pomona Chamber of Commerce. Almost all the businesses in Pomona are members, and they would know if there was an Art School on Garey Avenue. The Chamber of Commerce’s number is 909-444-6212. You should ask for Alicia Morales. Ms. Morales is the Executive Director, and she knows everyone and everything about the businesses in Pomona. If anyone can help you find what you are looking for, it has to be Alicia Morales. Good luck.”

Mrs. Santos replied, “I will call right now. Thank you for your help.”

Mrs. Santos immediately dialed the Chamber’s phone number. A young female

with a Spanish accent answered the phone. “Hello, Pomona Chamber of Commerce.

“Is Alicia Morales available? Santos asked.

“One moment please,” replied the Chamber receptionist.

A few seconds later another person says, “Hi this is Alicia, how can I help you?”

Mrs. Santos replied, “Hi, my name is Sandra Santos, and I am looking for a new Artists’ High School on Garey Avenue near the YMCA”.

Mrs. Morales thought for a few seconds, and said, “Mrs. Santos, there is a small charter high school in that area. It is a state school. I don’t know much about it. Ever since it opened a few years ago, they have stayed to themselves. You rarely hear anything about them, good or bad, except that they take borderline high school students who are not doing well in other schools, and they use drawing and performance arts instead of teaching regular classes like reading and math.”

Mrs. Santos, “So, it is not a real high school? They don’t teach regular classes?”

Mrs. Morales replied, “I think it is a real school, but a lot of high students in Pomona can’t read, or they are on drugs, or they’re gang bangers. This high school tries to help students when everything else at the Pomona Unified School District has been tried.”

Sadly, Mrs. Santos said, “My daughter is not that bad. I don’t want her to go somewhere where there are drug addicts and people in gangs. That would be worse for her than staying at Pomona High School where she is going now.”

Mrs. Santos slowly put down the phone. Even after all the negative information that Mrs. Morales told her about the school, Mrs. Santos wanted to check it out for herself. Also, she was curious. She had a difficult time believing that she could pass the area where the school is supposed to be located three times a week for several years and never see it. She thought to herself, how is that possible?

So, in an attempt to find this mysterious school, Mrs. Santos got back in her car to drive around that area. She drove up and down Garey Avenue, and didn’t see any signs for a high school. In fact, there was nothing that looked like it could be a high school.

She drove around the area. She started near the center of Pomona where all the major government buildings and services were located. She passed the Metrolink Train Station and a major bus hub, and she drove up and down Garey Avenue where thousands of cars travel daily.

She passed the famed and historically significant Pomona Arts Colony, and she noted that this whole area is currently under major renovation by the city and local developers. In fact, the Fox Theatre, a famous historic Pomona landmark that she went to as a child, was also being restored. She noticed that there were a lot of parks and open areas, and in that area, there were a lot more contemporary murals painted on the sides of buildings than she remembered seeing in the past.

Run down and abandoned buildings were also common, and a number of homeless people stood or sat next to their shopping carts filled to the brim with all their possessions.

As she passed the Metro Station on a side street, she noticed a sign that said, “School of the Arts and Enterprise Downtown Campus”. Adjacent to the building there was a large and relatively empty parking lot. She parked the car and went up a few stairs through the front door. Upon entering the building, it looked like an art museum. There was no one in sight, although she could hear voices throughout the building. All the offices downstairs were locked, and there were no signs to direct people who to talk to get more information. Next to the elevator, there was a sign that said that all students need to take the stairs. Mrs. Santos felt uncomfortable walking around the facility without permission. So, she left without speaking to anyone.

As she was driving home, she was about to give up when she noticed a large group of teenagers walking out of the YMCA.

“Excuse me”, Mrs. Santos said. “Is there a school for artists around here somewhere?”

The students all laughed, and one young girl said, “See that white building across the street? That is the School for Arts and Enterprise. It is not a school for artists. The school has singing, dancing, acting, artists and musicians.”

“How do I find out more information? Is it just for students who can’t read or who are on drugs?” Mrs. Santos asked.

A little upset, the young Hispanic female student with bright red hair said, “No way! Who told you that? That’s terrible! We all go to that school. None of us are on drugs, and we can all read”.



Trying to change the topic, Mrs. Santos asked, “Why are all of you at the YMCA during the school day? Don’t you have classes now?”

The student replied, “We go to the YMCA for gym class because the school doesn’t have a gym.”

Then, the student pointed to a person in the group that looked like one of the students. “That is Mr. Leonard, she said. “He is our gym teacher”.

The student spoke loudly, “Hey, Mr. Leonard, this lady wants to get more information about the school.”

Mr. Leonard was a young, well groomed male wearing casual slacks, a Laker’s t-shirt, a brown ponytail cascaded from a ball cap, and he prominently displayed wide brown buttons embedded in the flap of both ears.

“Hi, I am Jim Leonard. What do you want to know about the school?”

Mrs. Santos said, “I have been having a difficult time getting information about the school. So, I would like to get more information about the school to see if it would be a good school for my daughter. What number do I call, and who should I ask for?”

Leonard replied, “The school is a great school. Most of our students go to college after graduating. It is very safe. We have a zero tolerance drug and gang policy. Compared to the other local high schools, our academic rating is better. But, to enroll in the school or to get more information, I don’t know if anyone is in charge. You should probably call the principal, Janice Smith. I am sure she can help you.”

Mr. Leonard pulled a business card from his wallet and said, “Here is my card. It has the name of the school, the address, phone number and website. This should help you to get more information about the school. If you have any problems, you can ask for me, and I will try to help you.”

Mrs. Santos said, “Thank you” as she took Mr. Leonard’s card.

Mrs. Santos thanked Mr. Leonard, and now she knew exactly which building was the school. She drove back around to take another look. It was a white building with a unique patterned design that looked like a reptile’s overlapping skin. There is an artistic metal fence around the building similar to a fancy barbed wire tattoo that is a common sight wrapped around the biceps on many sports figures. There was a banner hanging from the roof, but it had twisted from the wind, and it could not be

read. There was a little parking lot with only 15 available stalls. Every space was taken. In fact, she drove around the building looking for a place to park, but not only was there no parking in the little lot, there was no parking on any of the streets anywhere close to the building. The further she drove away from the building, the less safe she felt that her car would be to park and leave. After about several minutes of looking for a place to park, Mrs. Santos decided that she would just go home and look up the school on the internet.

It only took a few minutes to get home. Santos got out of her car, and her neighbor was still sitting out in front trying to stay cool as none of the houses in the neighborhood had air conditioning, and it was nearly 90 degrees outside.

Excitedly Santos said, “Jennie, I found it! I found the school! It is not the Pomona High School for Artists. I have a business card from one of the teachers.. It is called the School of the Arts and Enterprise. According to some students who go there and one of the teachers, the school is for more than just artists and juvenile delinquents. The school is a regular high school that specializes in helping students learn more about dancing, singing, art, acting, and playing music.”

Santos said, “The school has a website. Let’s take a look.”

Mrs. Rodriguez picked up her youngest, very cute and significantly chubby baby out of the portable playpen in the front yard, and waddled over to Mrs. Santos. “Let’s go on the Internet right now,” she said.

Mrs. Santos and Mrs. Rodriguez were very excited about getting the website address. They knew that they could get all the information they needed including admission criteria, contact information and most likely the enrollment packet that they would need to enroll their teenagers in the school.

They quickly entered the Santos house and turned on the computer. It took a little time because like most of her neighbors, Mrs. Santos still had a dial up connection to the Internet. Finally, the Google search screen appeared, and Santos typed in the website address: [www.SAEK12.us.edu](http://www.SAEK12.us.edu). An error screen appeared saying that this address did not exist. Typing slower and making sure that the website search address exactly matched the one on the card, she again hit the search button, and again the error screen appeared.

Mrs. Rodriguez said, “Let’s just call”.



Mrs. Santos dialed 909-622-0699. After two rings she heard the following message, “You have reached the School of the Arts and Enterprise. If you would like the attendance office, press 201. If you would like to speak to the school recruiter, press 202. For all other calls, press 0 to speak to the operator.”

As their children were not students at the school, speaking to the attendance office could not help. Neither parent had any idea what a school recruiter does. So, Mrs. Santos pressed 0 to speak to the operator.

After pressing 0, a male with a young voice said, “School of the Arts and Enterprise, Hector speaking”.

Hector graduated from the school last June. He was one of 83 students in the school’s first ever high school graduating class. He is a thin, lanky eighteen year old Hispanic male who was never trained to work in the front office. He started working as a volunteer in his senior year, and after graduation, the school hired him full time.

Mrs. Santos said, “I would like more information for my daughter to come to the school.”

Hector said, “The school is easy to get into. It is free. Everyone gets in. All you have to do is fill out some forms. There is no waiting, and it is a very simple process. No one is turned away.”

“My daughter has been getting into some trouble at Pomona High School, Mrs. Santos confessed. Is she still able to go to your school?”

In an excited and supportive tone, Hector said, “Of course your daughter can come to school here. Most of the students who come here were failing or were having problems at their school. We are like a continuation school for students who can’t make it at the regular high schools.”

“Is it safe there?” Mrs. Santos asked.

Hector said, “Yes, but wait a second, I have another call.”

The phone went silent. In a few minutes, Hector returned and said, “You will have to call back. I am too busy to talk right now. The phones are ringing off the hook.”

“Is there someone I can talk to right now about getting my daughter enrolled?” Mrs. Santos asked.

Frantically, Hector replied, “Yes, let me get Alice for you. One moment please.”

The phone was dead silent again for the next few minutes, and then, Mrs. Santos heard a dial tone. She had been disconnected.

She immediately called back. She got the answering message, and again pressed 0. Again she heard, ““School of the Arts and Enterprise, Hector speaking.”

“Hector, this is Mrs. Santos. We were disconnected.”

“Sorry about that,” Hector said. “Let me try again to connect you to Alice.”

Again, the phone went silent, and again there was a dial tone. After getting hung up on two times in a row, Mrs. Santos called back again, but this time she pressed 202 to bypass Hector and speak with the recruiter. In her experience, anything had to be better than calling the main number.

“After two rings, she heard. “You have reached Alice Jimenez. I am not available right now. Please leave your name, phone number with area code and best time of day to return your call, and I will call you back at my earliest convenience.”

Mrs. Santos was hoping that this was the Alice that she was supposed to contact to get more information about enrolling her daughter in the school, so she left her name and phone number. She did not expect a call back that day because it was already after 4 p.m.

A week later, Mrs. Santos still had not received a call back from Alice.

She called again. This time she pressed 201 to speak with attendance. A more mature person answered the phone and said, “Attendance”.

Mrs. Santos said, “I am trying to get more information about my daughter coming to this school. Who should I talk to?”

“You need to speak to Alice, and I will connect you” Santos was informed.

“Wait, I tried calling last week, and I didn’t get a call back. What should I do?”

“Wait! I see Alice right now. Let me get her on the phone.”

A few seconds later, a female said, “Hello this is Alice. How can I help you?”

Mrs. Santos replied, “Me and my neighbor are interested in getting more information about our high school kids coming to this school.”

Alice said, ‘Can I have your name please?’

“Sandra Santos”

“Mrs. Santos, what is your phone number?”

“909-444-3823”, Santos replied.

Alice asked, “When can you and your neighbor come to the school for a tour?”

“Mr. Rodriguez and I can come for a tour on Friday afternoon if that is ok?”

Alice said, “Sorry, this Friday is not good for me. I am taking my dad to the hospital for some medical tests. How about next Friday at 2 p.m? That would be better for me.”

Mrs. Santos replied, “Next Friday I will have to take off work because I only get every other Friday off, but this is important. I will talk to Mr. Rodriguez, and we will be there. Thank you. We will see you next Friday”.

Friday, the day of her appointment, finally arrived. After finding a parking spot three blocks away, Mrs. Santos walked to the front door of the building and timidly entered through the double glass doorway.

As she entered the school, in front of her stood a two story mural of the World artistically configured in a mosaic arrangement of vibrant colors and patterns. Several groups of high school students brushed past her talking, laughing, and singing a variety of songs everywhere from hip hop to operatic arias.

A slightly older group of students – or maybe they were teachers – were passing around embellished self portraits and discussing an upcoming art show. A young lady in ballet slippers and a leotard outfit burst through a door saying, “Oh no! If I’m late for dance class again I’ll get detention!”

The door through which the dancer came was marked “office” and Mrs. Santos made her way tentatively through it. The first person she saw was a bubbly, energetic, young woman with short dark hair who stated, “I’m Lynda Williams, Vice President



of Operations. Are you Mrs. Santos?"

Mrs. Santos nodded shyly, and Nesbitt replied, "Good! The other parent, Mr. Rodriguez, has already arrived, and we are ready to start the tour."

Mr. Rodriguez slowly stood up and extended his hand in greeting. The wiry Latino wore a brown and gold bus driver's uniform. He just came off a double shift, and he tried hard to stay focused. "Senora Santos is my neighbor, and she is a good friend of my wife. My son and her daughter have grown up together," he stated in precise, but heavily accented English.

Williams nodded, "Let's get started," as she briskly led them down a hall past stage props and artwork of all types. "Welcome to the School of Arts and Enterprise or SAE as we call it. As you know we are a charter high school, so all tuition is paid by the state. It will not cost you anything to have your children attend this school"

Excitedly, Williams continued, "With less than 500 students, the SAE is a small school as compared to the other local high schools which all have well over 2,000 students. In a supportive, family like environment, in addition to regular class work, we expose all of our students to acting, singing, music, dancing and art. The SAE emphasizes skill development, college preparation, creative self expression, leadership and entrepreneurship."

Williams, abruptly stopped speaking as an older, well dressed, woman approached them. The woman had a warm, friendly smile. She wore a dark professionally tailored pants suit and flat shoes open on the back.

Williams said, "Senor Rodriguez and Senora Santos, I would like to introduce you to Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith is the school principal."

As Smith shook their hands, she said, "It is a pleasure meeting you. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the SAE."

While walking down a long corridor with a polished wood floor and a unique two story, old fashioned, wood beamed ceiling with several skylights illuminating the way, Smith said, "As we walk, I will tell you a little more about how the school started. Fifteen years ago this whole area consisted of abandoned, condemned buildings and a transient homeless population. It was our dream to bring this area back to life and create a quality high school for the arts. This seemed like the perfect site to start the school because it is only a few blocks from the Pomona Arts Colony. The

Colony has a number of public and private art galleries that represent about 1,500 artists, including many who are professors and teachers of art. About 200 artists are currently in residence, many living in work-loft spaces in converted commercial buildings. There are several artistic type businesses, and about 20 creative content companies such as graphic arts, architecture and entertainment businesses. It is only a few blocks away from the historic and famous Fox Theatre. There are many areas where students can perform. In fact, almost everywhere within 10 blocks, you will see our students' murals painted on buildings and our students performing in the parks."

As they progressed down the hall, the group stopped at the first door on the left. As she opened the door, and everyone entered, Williams said, this is our choir room. In the room, a group of eight teenagers were standing in a semi-circle around an old piano. They were singing a song from *Fiddler on the Roof*. The instructor was working hard to get the students to sing together. as group. One teenager was singing louder than the others, and her singing abilities had not yet reached the point where she should sing in public. Regardless, all the students and the instructor seemed happy, vibrant and genuinely satisfied with their combined talent.

After a few minutes, Lynda quietly motioned to the group to head back into the hall. She held the door open, and waved at the instructor as the group left the room.

Smith said, "The choir director is Mr. Johnson. Like all of our teachers, he has the education, experience and the teaching credential that will give us the opportunity to offer the highest quality education.

An older, worn looking, unkempt Hispanic male wearing dirty overalls and carrying a mop interrupted the group. "Please excuse me," he said. "I have to speak to Ms. Smith for a minute."

Ms. Smith and the part-time school janitor, Jose Ramirez, moved to the other side of the hall.

"Ms. Smith I need your help to get a check for paint. There is some graffiti in the wall in the back area, and I there is no paint left in the storage area."

"Jose I am doing a tour right now. Please speak to Staci in accounting. She can get you a check."

"Ms. Smith, you know I report to you, and I need you to sign this request before I can go to accounting. Please sign here."

Ms. Smith signed the payment request, and walked back to the group. Within the next few minutes, Ms. Smith was interrupted three more times to handle another emergency that came up. On the third interruption, Ms. Smith excused herself and walked down the hall following closely behind one of the teachers.

For the remainder of the tour, Mrs. Santos and Mr. Rodriguez followed Ms. Williams in silence.

Ms. Williams said, “When we first opened the school, there was strong opposition from the local Pomona Unified School District (PUSD). With a declining PUSD local K-12 student population, every student that enrolled in the SAE took \$8,000 away from the local school district’s shrinking budget. Initially, the PUSD was trying to put us out of business by referring their more expensive continuation students. Over time, the relationship has gotten better, but it is still far from where we need to go.”

Ms. Williams continued, “This entire area is currently being redeveloped by the city and local developers. In fact, the Fox Theatre, a famous historic Pomona landmark, is also being restored, and the SAE is expecting to fully utilize the Theatre for the school’s performing arts students. There are park and open areas within a short walk that have been used as outdoor venues for SAE students. Murals, painted by SAE students and faculty, accentuate the walls of several businesses in the area.”

“Although located in the Pomona School District, SAE has a statewide charter. This relatively unique designation allows SAE to take students from anywhere in the State. With a much larger geographic area to pull from, it is important that Pomona’s largest mass transit hub for both trains and buses is located less than 100 yards from the SAE back gate. This hub is not only perfectly located to allow students easy access to come to SAE from areas outside of Pomona, but the station has a 24/7 police presence that offers an added safety component for all of our students.”

Williams said, “Every parent signs an agreement and is expected to volunteer 40 hours per year to help the school. However, right now, we don’t have a parent volunteer coordinator. So, most parents aren’t doing anything.”

Mrs. Santos asked, “How do I know that this is a good school for my daughter?”

Williams answered, “We are proud of our school. It has higher scholastic scores, and it has a better safety rating than the other local high schools. The SAE is one of just a handful of state charter high schools that combine arts and business education. The school uses project-based learning to teach teamwork and cross-disciplinary



skills needed to thrive in today's economy. The school helps talented students to learn how to manage their finances and better market themselves and their art."

At the end of the tour, Mrs. Santos and Mr. Rodriguez took the enrollment packets. They thanked Ms. Williams for giving them a tour, and told her that they would have to think about it and talk it over with their children.

#### **FINAL NOTE**

The SAE is an Arts-based college preparatory high school. Within the entire East side of Los Angeles County (3 million population) there is only one other school like it. SAE's only competitor in Los Angeles County, the Los Angeles School of the Arts, located nearly 20 miles away in East Los Angeles, gets over 200 student applications for every open seat. Another competitor in Orange County gets over 300 student applications for every open seat.

After five years in business, SAE has been unable to get more than 414 students, and they continue to fight to get every new student. With no waiting list, the school is obliged to take every student who applies. Thus, in any given classroom, there may be a symphony trained musician and a student who just started playing a particular instrument when they came to the school.