

## SOLVING THE OPPORTUNITY EQUATION

### Eric Schwarz: WSMS Alum, Author, and Founder of Citizen Schools

As a member of the very first class to attend West Side Montessori School, Eric Schwarz has educational innovation in his genes. His parents, Marian Lapsley Cross and Fritz Schwarz, were members of the esteemed group who sat around a kitchen table in 1963 and envisioned the educational beginning they wanted for their children. So it should be no surprise that, as an adult, Eric would identify an academic need and figure out how to address it.

Eric and a college friend, Ned Rimer, observed that middle school students in low-income communities suffer from an “opportunity gap”: on average, children in more affluent communities spend 300 more hours per year with adults and benefit annually from nearly \$8,000 worth of enrichment activities. In 1995 Eric and Ned partnered with a school in a low-income area of Boston to offer academic and enrichment opportunities to its students.

Eric and Ned’s success in that first school was the start of Citizen Schools, a non-profit organization committed to closing the opportunity gap. Last year they



had partnerships in 32 schools in seven states, serving 5,300 children, with 244 AmeriCorps teachers and some 4,700 volunteers. The model is clearly working: rates of attendance, proficiency, graduation, and college acceptance have gone up in the partner schools.

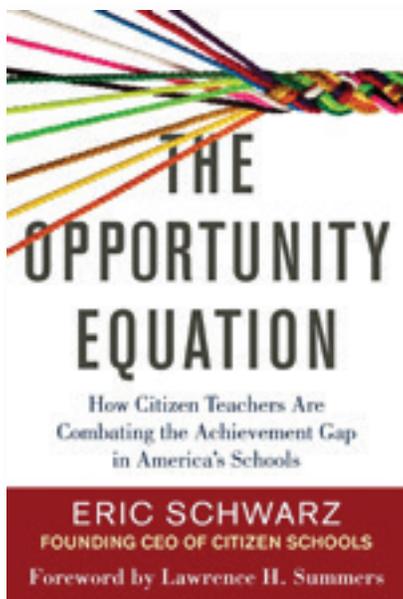
The focus of Citizen Schools is “Expanded Learning Time,” or ELT. Partner schools commit to having all students in grades six through eight stay at school for three extra hours every afternoon, Monday through Friday. The students receive academic support, primarily from AmeriCorps members, and enrichment opportunities from local volunteers with an array of skills and interests—as the Citizen Schools website describes it, “lawyers, engineers, carpenters, journalists, nonprofit leaders, and grandmothers who sew.”

This year Eric has published a book, *The Opportunity Equation*, to spread the word. As he says, the book is “part personal story, large part Citizen Schools story, and, most of all, a call to action

to citizens across the country to get active in addressing our nation’s growing opportunity and achievement gaps.” *Publishers Weekly* calls the book “an inspiring chronicle of scholarly triumphs and generous citizen activism, as well as a constructive blueprint for boosting achievement without abandoning public education.”

After a national book tour Eric plans to change his focus to higher education. As he told *Boston Business Journal*, “I’m proud of the foundation we’ve built, but I’d like to see Citizen Schools become the new normal in urban education here in Boston and across the country. That’s the big unfinished business of the organization. ... We’ve made a life-changing difference for tens of thousands of children, but we have a long way to go.”

For more information about Citizen Schools, visit <http://www.citizenschools.org>





William '07, Jay, Valda, Benjamin '13, Katherine '05, and Andrew '09



Clockwise from top: Benjamin, Valda, Andrew, William, Katherine, and Jay

## A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION—FOR A LIFETIME, AND FOR ALL The Witt-Hatfield Family

When Valda Witt and Jay Hatfield decided to move back to New York City in 2003, they were delighted that their first child, Katherine, had been accepted to WSMS. She'd had a stellar year at Southampton Montessori School, and the head of that school (not to mention Valda's own research) made it clear that WSMS was "where to begin..." in New York. Happily, there was an opening for Katherine ... and for a strong family connection that shows no signs of abating.

Quality education is a clear priority for Valda and Jay, both for their own children and for others who may not be as lucky, and this commitment started early.

Valda grew up in Philadelphia in a family of engineers, scientists, and teachers. "My parents were immigrants from Europe post-WWII.... English was not my first language. I have particular admiration for my grandparents, who understood that their sacrifices would benefit my parents and, even more so, their grandchildren. They had a big impact on my life and perspective."

Valda attended inner-city public schools and graduated from William and Mary with a BA in History. From there she headed to a job in creative services at Polo Ralph Lauren in New York, while debating whether to pursue an interest in medicine. Ultimately she returned to Philadelphia to pursue an MBA at Wharton.

Jay grew up in California, and earned a bachelor's degree in Managerial Economics from UC Davis. He came to Wharton after working as a consultant/auditor for Arthur Young and Company in Palo Alto, where he specialized in technology, biotechnology, and retailing.

After completing her MBA, Valda joined McKinsey, the eminent management consulting firm, in their Los Angeles office, focusing on managed care and corporate governance. A marketing position at Clairol brought her back to New York. Jay started his post-MBA career at Morgan Stanley, specializing in financing of public utilities. He and Valda married in 1998.

Katherine was born in 1999, and William followed in 2001. Valda continued to work, switching to a part-time schedule at McKinsey, and then opted to stay home after Andrew was born in 2004 (Benjamin arrived in 2007). Jay became the president and founder of Infrastructure Capital Management, which focuses on companies in the energy, real estate, and industrial sectors. And, now that the kids will all be in ongoing schools, Valda has decided to pursue her love of films, forming VMW Entertainment to explore film and television production.

Valda is well known among the WSMS community as a former trustee and board chair, and she and Jay are widely recognized as generous and enthusiastic supporters of the

## MONTESSORI MOMENT

One afternoon in July, Valda noticed that the voices she was hearing from the next room were unusually collaborative but excited ... Peeking in, she discovered her four children—ages six to 14—building with blocks in a very Montessori fashion: consulting with each other, deferring to others' suggestions, negotiating next steps, creatively using toy trucks and Playmobil pieces to create an environment and tell a story. "We're building an empire, Mom," they told her.

Valda credits WSMS with her children's creative independence: "They were—and are—always able to develop projects for themselves, to work independently, and to be supportive of each other." The recent block building is a prime example of children of varying ages working together, each contributing what he or she knows from past academic and social experiences: "The older children learned about empires in their history classes, and Ben is absorbing their knowledge."

Katherine, after nine terrific years at Marymount, headed farther crosstown this fall to complete high school at Brearley. Marymount was the "best match" for Katherine at age five: cozy but stimulating, with an emphasis on values. Like many children, Katherine eventually wanted a change. She had several options, including Stuyvesant, but ultimately decided she preferred the more intimate all-girls setting, where she would find role models and have the opportunity to mentor younger girls.

When it was time for William to leave WSMS, the family found his best match at Browning. William was quiet and serious, already reading at age four. Browning identified and valued his thoughtful and focused approach to school, and he thrived. Having his brothers follow him there was a no-brainer.

Andrew, now 10, is following in his dad's footsteps. He started his own investment portfolio at age six with a request for a share of Apple as a Christmas present, and now enthusiastically reads the financial pages of the paper to manage his portfolio. He inspired his siblings as well: they all have portfolios tailored to their particular interests.

Benjamin, the youngest, spent three years at WSMS, and became quite the expert on faculty pregnancies! He often asks about his teachers' babies, and can be overheard singing those familiar Montessori tunes. As the quintessential youngest child, he was quick to figure out how to catch up to his siblings. All the boys are enthusiastic basketball players (just like Dad); to keep pace, Ben learned early on how to manage regulation-size balls and play at regulation-height hoops.

All the children are passionate readers, with Ben more of a non-fiction guy. The boys are drummers, while Katherine plays piano and studies voice. They are fascinated by history and science. If you stop by some night, you'll find the four kids intently watching TV together, but it won't be *Modern Family* ... their favorites are *MythBusters* on Discovery Channel, *Brain Games* on National Geographic, *NOVA* on PBS ... and, for a break, *Worst Cooks in America* on the Food Network!

When you have four children in nine years, you need to have flexibility and commitment. The Witt-Hatfield family exemplifies both: the ability to juggle children, schools, and professional and charitable commitments while maintaining a vibrant home life. The children are thriving in an environment that values independent thinking and taking advantage of opportunities. And they are absorbing a family dynamic that fosters providing those opportunities to a broad spectrum beyond the family core.

school. But few in our community are aware of the extent and range of the couple's commitments to supporting educational and growth opportunities for children and young adults.

As Valda says, these commitments "began organically." Comfortable in his role as a third-year associate at Morgan Stanley, Jay wanted to do more with his skills and talents. In 1994 he joined the board of Greenhope Services for Women, an East Harlem nonprofit for women that houses parolees, women referred by the courts for alternative treatment, and those with substance-abuse problems. He began by analyzing their budget, and 20 years later he is still there. Meanwhile, Valda took on parent volunteer roles at WSMS and joined the Board of Trustees in 2005. She served as president from 2009 to 2013.

Valda stresses the importance of the board's role: "Governance is key to ensuring the health of the school—or any organization. All boards have their own personalities, but for any endeavor to succeed—whether that be a board of trustees or VMW Entertainment—it's a team orientation that will make it work." Valda's priority as WSMS Board President was ensuring the financial viability of the school—both short-term and long-term—and she emphasized the need for fiscal responsibility alongside sustained financial support from all constituents.

In 2005 Katherine moved on from WSMS to Marymount for kindergarten, and two years later William enrolled at Browning. Before long, Valda was on the Browning board and Jay was on the Marymount board.

As the product of inner-city schools, Valda is appreciative of the opportunities that a high-caliber education can provide, and only too aware of the particular frustrations that urban parents can face. Recognizing

how fortunate their own children are, she and Jay have made a conscious effort to support viable educational options for others. Jay is a member of the Board of Trustees of Future Leaders Institute Charter School on West 122nd Street; Valda joined the boards of Prep for Prep and the New York Academy of Art. In addition, they established a family foundation, which is focused on improving

educational opportunities for socially and economically underprivileged children. As Valda says, "Kids need to be trained to succeed in today's economy; they need motivation. And too many kids do not have the role models to make this happen. Our foundation works to provide that support."