

# Great Beginnings

West Side Montessori School

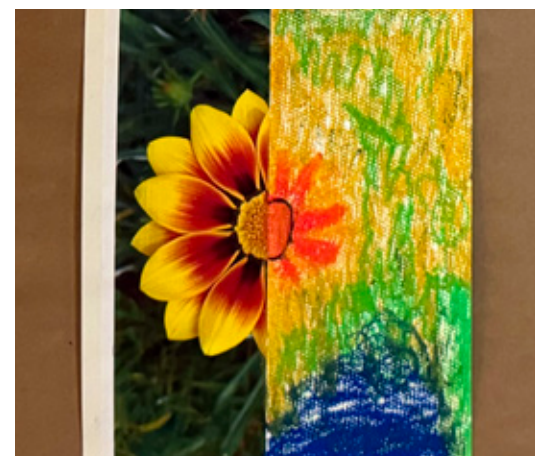
2024 | WSMSNYC.ORG



**60 YEARS AND GROWING**  
WEST 92 STREET + WEST 95 STREET



# INSIDE THE WALLS OF WSMS





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## IN MIMI'S VOICE

Dear WSMS families and friends,

This is a transformative moment for West Side Montessori School. With so much to celebrate from where we've been and where we are, we also look ahead to a bright future.

As many of you know, this is my last year at WSMS. I've seen this remarkable place grow and adapt through various eras, filled with triumphs, challenges, and meaningful memories. Watching young children transform from two-year-olds into five-year-olds, leaving as self-assured, kind learners who value school and friendship, has been a true gift. WSMS has felt like a second home to me, and I couldn't imagine a more special one.

While I may be bidding farewell, I'm leaving the school in trusted hands, with significant successes on the horizon. Our Infants, Toddlers, and Twos facility, the Great Beginnings Center—a long-held vision—has come to fruition through collective commitment, heartfelt enthusiasm, and attentive planning. Our WSMS world is expanding, and the youngest members of our community will benefit from a new space designed to fit and nurture their needs and support them through their earliest educational experiences.

A defining distinction of WSMS is that it is an incredible display of a collaborative endeavor. From our hands-on administrative, facilities, and leadership teams to our outstanding faculty, we all work together to make this place what it is. I am



thankful to our Board of Trustees under the leadership of Nikki Chase-Levin. I commend the Parents Association and our engaged families and caregivers. As this issue includes our Annual Report, I thank everyone for their generous contributions to the Annual Fund and our PA initiatives. I look forward to the Auction and other events this spring!

In this issue of Great Beginnings, you'll find articles that reflect where we stand, who we are, and our path forward. You will get a look at the beautiful Great Beginnings Center. You'll learn more about how it fulfills our values and the Montessori mission. Katherine Schneider, Director of Teacher and Learning, shares insightful information on fostering behavioral and emotional regulation in children. We also spotlight the generosity of a generational-spanning WSMS family, the Mullens. Additionally, you can find profiles of longtime WSMS leaders Judy Lyons, Melissa Mack, and myself as we all prepare to ride into the retirement sunset!

This has been a wonderful adventure. I am filled with gratitude for what we have all achieved and excitement for what's to come.

*Mimi Basso*

Mimi Basso  
Head of School

# A LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



Greetings, WSMS Community of Remarkable Parents, Alumni, Faculty, and Friends!

I am thrilled to welcome you back to another fun-filled year of teaching, learning, and growth at our beloved West Side Montessori School. My name is Nikki Chase-Levin, and I had the privilege of being voted in as Board Chair earlier this year. Serving this commu-

nity of incredible families, in partnership with our esteemed Head of School, devoted faculty, and dedicated Trustees, promises to be joyful, challenging, and rewarding all at once. There are exciting days on the horizon at WSMS!

Our family came to WSMS in 2012 with our first-born son, Max, who was later joined by his younger brother, Zach. My “baby boys,” who both stand taller than me as tenth and eighth graders, still have buddies from their days at WSMS. My husband, Dave, and I also had the good fortune of forging numerous friendships that withstood the passage of time. They say West Side is *where to begin*. Over a decade later, the Levin family is immensely grateful that our WSMS journey continues.

In the year ahead, our collective West Side journey finds us engaged in a search for a new school leader and preparing to expand programming. As we coalesce to tackle these history-making milestones, my thoughts drift to what I love about WSMS. **Put simply, it’s an authentically cohesive community with an intensely collaborative spirit!** These invaluable superpowers position us to successfully “friend-raise,” fundraise, and delight in the satisfaction of shepherding WSMS’ evolution.

Now, more than ever, we’re charged with fostering community as we embark on a thrilling new endeavor—opening our Infants, Toddlers, and Twos center in 2025 in a second building. Collaboration is paramount as we say goodbye to our highly regarded head of school, Mimi Basso, and search for an engaged, new leader to safeguard and build upon our WSMS legacy and its promise for a bright future. Community and collaboration are also the pillars upon which we’ll stand in seeking support from current families, former trustees, and our vast family of WSMS alumni as we tackle our most ambitious fundraising campaign in our school’s history.

Let’s move forward together to actively cultivate community at WSMS. Seeking motivation? It’s fulfilling to watch parents rally in support of their school communities, whether it’s for the Annual Fund, admissions interviews, or winter essentials drive volunteering. So, get involved. Find time to reconnect. Gather your crew of WSMS alums for a night of comradery,

## WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2024–2025

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cocktails (*or mocktails!*), and an epic evening of karaoke, and toast to your W. 92nd St. memories. Or be a loyal fan. Every moment and every memory is literally gold, so be a champion for WSMS.

Let us move forward together by collaborating meaningfully and enthusiastically. Seeking inspiration? Think about the heart and soul teachers and students pour into making their Auction Class Project to raise money for our Financial Aid Program. Pair up with a new parent to create a spectacularly random Fall Festival craft that will leave our WSMS littles clamoring for more! Or think back to the classic John Hughes film, *The Breakfast Club*, when students with such different challenges, desires, and personas ultimately click, realizing they see a little of themselves in one another. May we, as an intellectually curious community, bring this same growth mindset, inclusive spirit, and diversity of thought to our search for a new school leader.

In this year of growth, I want to thank you in advance for your care, contributions and thought leadership as we navigate the evolution of WSMS. At this moment in the life cycle of our cherished school community, I’m reminded of the team mantra from the TV show *Friday Night Lights*—“Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Can’t Lose.” We will forge ahead collectively, clear-eyed about the transitions on the horizon, and embrace them. We will approach consensus building and achieving our goals with full hearts and good intentions. We will rise on the tide of our winning spirit as a cohesive and collaborative community. We are West Side.

Nikki Chase-Levin  
President, Board of Trustees  
(Max, '14 and Zach, '16)



# 60 YEARS AND GROWING

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## A FRESH PERSPECTIVE: UNVEILING THE GREAT BEGINNINGS CENTER

As one door closes at West Side Montessori School, another inspiring one opens. The Great Beginnings Center, WSMS' new Infants, Toddlers, and Twos program facility, is slated for a spring 2025 arrival. Mimi's longtime vision—a place where WSMS can help shape and nurture its youngest learners—has become an exciting reality.

The Great Beginnings Center introduces a world of discovery for young minds that's both safe and full of adventure, engaging curiosity and exploration. Providing high-quality care and early education, the thoughtfully designed facility is meant to be a hub of support for passionate teachers, children interacting with their environment, and families fostering connection.

The space also introduces an on-site lab school for the Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP), supporting the training of the next generation of Montessori educators. The Great Beginnings Center is a true reflection of our values, rooted in dedication, purpose, and heart.

The Great Beginnings Center is coming to life at its home at 212 W. 95th St. and is set to feature:

- **75 spaces** for infants, toddlers, and twos across **seven environments**
- **Three floors**, including an entire floor for indoor play and gross motor activities
- **Library/Parents Room, Lactation Room, and Warming Kitchen** on-site





# 60 YEARS AND GROWING

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# GREAT BEGINNINGS TO NEW BEGINNINGS

**“The child, making use of all that (they) find around (them), shapes (themselves) for the future.” —Maria Montessori**

One of Mimi Basso’s long-standing aspirations has been “to expand the West Side Montessori School program to include a high-quality infant and toddler program to serve the youngest children and families of the community.” This vision is being realized in 2025 with the opening of WSMS’ new Infants, Toddlers, and Twos facility—the Great Beginnings Center.

WSMS’ Teachers Education Program (WSMS-TEP) has long served as a flagship highlight of WSMS programming and a cornerstone to the school’s growth. TEP has been offering Infant and Toddler instruction for over a decade. As the Great Beginnings Center prepares to open, it’s powered by the invaluable experience TEP provides to early childhood teachers. It’s the dawn of a new era at WSMS, bringing TEP’s distinctive expertise to the forefront.

WSMS recognizes that high-quality early care and education are critical to building a healthy and stable society. Designed in response to the needs of parents who wanted to start their younger children in school earlier, the Twos Program at WSMS was launched in the fall of 2013 as a two-year pilot for siblings and families already connected to WSMS’ Multi-Age Program.

Considered a resounding success with full enrollment in its first two years, the Twos Program grew exponentially as families discovered the unique features of a Montessori experience for this age group. Maria Montessori developed her approach to infant and toddler care while living and working in India in the 1940s. She wrote that from birth to three is a critical period of growth for a child as they take in everything in the environment with astounding detail. The adult’s role is to assist the child to aid the full development of life. The Twos Program at WSMS has consistently emphasized physical movement, play, manipulation of real objects, exploration, socialization, and personal autonomy to provide a high-quality experience that maintains fidelity to Dr. Montessori’s guidance.

The success of the Twos Program reiterated a critical need in society as a whole and addressed the specific desires of faculty and families eager to expand opportunities. It has taken nearly 17 years of dedication in the search for a superb facility that maintains the commitment to the Montessori approach, the strategic goals of the school, and the rigorous requirements of the Department of Health in NYC. WSMS is now poised to embark on this bold plan, recommitting to the belief that excellence in early childhood care and education must be expanded to serve all of our children better.



An original Twos teacher and administrator, Karen Deinzer, has returned to school this year to participate in the transition to WSMS’ next chapter. Karen states, “From the beginning of its program for the youngest children, West Side has been committed to high-quality care. I am more than thrilled about the new opportunities for families with children from three months to three years in a year-round program.”

During the same year that the Twos program began at WSMS, the Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP) was expanded to include an Infant Toddler level credential program. The TEP program set a strategic goal to develop an educational space for adult learners to collaborate, observe, and learn together. Adult learners at this level study developmental needs and milestones, practice keen observation, and discover how to demonstrate respect for the child’s evolving need for independence. Safety and health measures are reinforced to provide critical understanding for new teachers as they create safe spaces for children. Collaborative relationships with caregivers are the foundation upon which trusting relationships develop. The curriculum emerges from the analysis of observations of children’s unique skills and interests. Learning activities may include activities that help young children in all areas of development, including self-care, food preparation and food service, indoor and outdoor large-motor activities, fine-motor skills, language development, and social interactions.

For over ten years, the WSMS Twos program for children and the WSMS-TEP Infant Toddler program for adults has continued to grow as an increased need for exceptional Montessori environments has been acknowledged. Karen also shared that in the beginning, “TEP began with a small number of adult students, but as the need grew for teachers to learn more about the Montessori philosophy and method at this level, the program has grown substantially, and the new facility will provide a state of the art learning environment for adults in addition to providing excellence in caring for children.” Graduates of the program, including many of the current WSMS faculty, will have increased opportunities to work with children at the

full range of the credential program in which they are enrolled. The benefits of the new building space extend beyond the children and families and will be an essential model of support for the whole community.

Maria Rosado is a long-time Twos and Multi-Age teacher and instructor in TEP and believes that the new facility will provide a wonderful opportunity for TEP to have its own environment for adult classes. Going forward, WSMS will now have a space for these new Montessorians to see how to provide an excellent space right from the beginning. She shares, “In an infant room, the child IS the curriculum. These adults need to see beautiful environments and understand how to put theory in action, and with our own WSMS teachers participating in the program, the training experience will be eye-opening as they discuss and explore what they are doing and why.” Montessori Infant and Toddler teachers practice how to talk with parents and how to design high-quality spaces, and they learn how to work within classroom teams to benefit the very youngest children. Maria goes on to note how “WSMS teachers have observed the transition from the Twos environments to Multi-Age classrooms as positive, where the child is successful in multi-step activities, can regulate themselves, follow directions, and explore and be curious.” The Twos curriculum is based on forming solid relationships as children learn to become part of a community. This formation of the child’s personality translates to an early childhood group in a way that promotes an appreciation for what Dr. Montessori called “social cohesion,” in which children become aware that they are individuals within a collective.

Dr. Montessori often described the child as a “citizen of the world” and encouraged adults to unify themselves to collaborate in educating our children, who “are the best part of humanity.” What a gift this new program will offer to the WSMS community! How fortunate we are to be on this journey together! Let us all work together to support and develop a supportive environment to serve our families’ youngest children, meet the needs of our faculty and adult learners, and dedicate ourselves to the reconstruction of education Dr. Montessori wrote about nearly a century ago.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF WSMS-TEP

In 1967, Project CHAMP (Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents) was founded by Roslyn D. Williams to prepare parents to become active participants in their children’s education and to increase the pool of Montessori teachers in New York City. CHAMP was the first American Montessori School (AMS) Teacher Education Program affiliated in New York City and the first African American-established Montessori TEP in the US. WSMS faculty and administrators and faculty from other Montessori schools taught at Project CHAMP in those early years.

In September 1994, the WSMS Board of Trustees voted to move Project CHAMP under the umbrella of WSMS to ensure the legacy of Montessori teacher preparation in NYC. The name was then changed to West Side Montessori School—Teacher Education Program. For many years, WSMS-TEP offered a program to prepare adults to earn the AMS Early Childhood credential. In 2012, the Infant Toddler level was added in response to local needs. Crucially aware of the expanding worldwide need for high-quality Montessori educators over a broader range of ages, WSMS-TEP expanded to add the Elementary I (6–9), I-II (6–12), and II (9–12) levels in partnership with Metropolitan Montessori School. The first cohort of Elementary began in 2016. The Administrator program, which prepares adults for leadership positions in Montessori schools, accepted the inaugural cohort in 2017. WSMS-TEP was one of the first programs in the US to add the Montessori Inclusion Endorsement to prepare credentialed Montessori teachers to serve children with exceptional needs.

## WSMS-TEP LEADERSHIP TEAM

Lisanne Pinciotti, *Program Director, Early Childhood and Administrator Coordinator*

Karen Deinzer, *Infant Toddler Practicum Coordinator*

Melissa Freeman, *Early Childhood and Administrator Practicum Coordinator*

Sheba Kapur, *Elementary Coordinator, International Visa Coordinator, Social Media/Website Coordinator*

Maria Rosado, *Infant Toddler Academic Coordinator*

Katherine Schneider, *Montessori Inclusion Endorsement Coordinator*





# BUILDING BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL CONTROL

It's a Skill!

by Katherine Schneider

Preschool-aged children are just beginning to explore and develop their ability to manage emotions and behavior. This developmental milestone, known as self-regulation, is a vital skill that can be nurtured through consistent guidance and practice. Self-regulation involves managing emotional reactions, calming oneself when upset, adapting to changing circumstances, and handling frustration effectively. As children become more proficient in self-regulation, they gain greater self-awareness, preparing them for future collaboration and helping them consider different perspectives.

Before children can learn to self-regulate, they first need co-regulation. Co-regulation occurs when a trusted adult remains calm and provides emotional guidance while helping a child navigate their feelings. By staying attuned to the child, the adult fosters a sense of safety, allowing the child to process emotions and eventually return to a state of calm. This consistent support lays the groundwork for children to gradually manage their emotions independently.

It's essential for children to experience their emotions fully, learning that feelings are natural and temporary—they come and go. Teaching children that emotions are safe to experience is key to helping them build emotional resilience. In early childhood, when cognitive and emotional skills are still developing, co-regulation offers the structure children need to grow into emotionally resilient individuals.

Self-regulation is nurtured through observation, practice, and a supportive environment. Children learn by watching adult behavior, building self-awareness, adopting coping strategies, and practicing problem-solving. Consistent routines, familiar environments, and the presence of trusted adults all



play significant roles in a child's ability to develop and apply these self-regulation skills. A child's temperament, personality, and surroundings also influence how they acquire these abilities. Since there is a natural learning curve, each child progresses at their own pace, making patience and steady guidance essential for success.

It's important to remember that self-regulation, like any other skill—whether academic, physical, or social—requires regular practice. Parents and caregivers can provide a nurturing, consistent environment that supports a child's journey toward emotional independence. By encouraging positive coping strategies and modeling healthy emotional responses, you help lay the foundation for your child's emotional growth and long-term resilience.

## Help Your Child Develop Self-Regulation with These Practices:

- **Model Self-Regulation:** Children learn by watching adults. Demonstrate how to manage emotions and respond calmly to challenges by verbalizing your actions, such as, "I'm feeling frustrated, so I'm going to take a deep breath."
- **Teach Emotional Awareness:** Help children recognize and label their emotions by saying, "I see you're feeling angry" or "It looks like you're sad." Understanding their emotions is the first step in learning to manage them.
- **Offer Coping Tools:** Equip children with simple strategies like deep breathing, counting to slow down, engaging in physical movement to release energy, or using sensory items such as a stress ball or fidget toy. Encourage them to take a break and talk about how they feel.
- **Provide Choices:** Giving children choices, such as "Do



you want to play with blocks or read a book?” helps them feel in control, reducing frustration.

- **Encourage Problem-Solving:** Teach children to think through simple problems by asking, “What can we do to make this work better?”
- **Practice, Practice, Practice:** Self-regulation takes time and experience. Give children opportunities to practice these skills in real situations, offering guidance and support as needed.

### On the Go? Try These Tips and Tricks:

- **Prepare in Advance:** Explain an upcoming situation in simple, clear terms. For example, if you’re going to a new place, describe what they might see, hear, and do. Reducing uncertainty helps children feel more secure.
- **Visit the Location:** If possible, visit the new location before the actual event. A practice run will help children prepare and manage their expectations.
- **Explain the Purpose:** Help your child understand why they’re entering a situation. For example, “We’re going to the doctor to make sure you’re healthy,” or “You’re going to a new school to learn fun new things and meet friends.” Knowing the purpose can help children orient and prepare.
- **Involve Them in Preparation:** Let your child prepare for an experience by packing their school bag or choosing their clothing. This sense of control makes them feel more involved and confident.
- **Smooth Transitions:** Unfamiliar situations often feel less stressful when transitions are smooth. Plan extra time to avoid feeling rushed. A calm, unhurried pace helps children feel more at ease.
- **Reflect After the Event:** Once the situation is over, talk

with your child about how it went. Ask how they felt and what helped them manage any discomfort. This reflection builds confidence for future experiences.

### Set Your Child Up for Success

Being prepared is half the battle. Use this checklist to ensure your child is ready to face their day with emotional and physical stamina:

- **Is your child well-rested?**  
A good night’s sleep helps children regulate their emotions and handle challenges more effectively.
- **Is your child well-nourished?**  
Healthy meals and snacks can energize your child and stay in a good mood throughout the day.
- **Has your child’s routine been stable?**  
Consistent routines create a sense of security and help your child feel more in control of their day.
- **Has there been a recent life event, such as a new baby or a move?**  
Significant life changes can be exciting growth opportunities and help your child build resilience and adaptability. Significant changes can also feel overwhelming, so providing extra emotional support during these times can help your child manage stress.
- **Is your child encountering familiar situations or surroundings?**  
Familiar environments help children feel secure, which makes self-regulation easier.
- **Does your child have access to familiar adult support?**  
Trusting adults provide reassurance and guidance when emotions run high.

# WSMS SOFT SCULPTURES

Art is an incredible medium for children to explore and express themselves through various media. In the spring of 2024, under the leadership of art teacher Margot Mack, each classroom made a soft sculpture inspired by the work of artists Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Each classroom decided what object to create using newsprint, masking tape, and paint. Children worked together over several weeks to create a large-scale sculpture.

One of the fascinating aspects of Claes Oldenburg's work is his ability to transform everyday objects into enormous sculptures. This concept of scale, or the change in size, was a key focus of our project.

These incredible soft sculptures were displayed on the fence and in the library at 309 for the entire community to enjoy.

Claes Oldenburg, January 28, 1929–July 18, 2022, was a Swedish-born American sculptor, best known for his public art installations, typically featuring large replicas of everyday objects. Another theme in his work is soft sculpture versions of everyday objects. Many of his works were made in collaboration with his wife, Coosje van Bruggen; they were married for 32 years. Claes lived and worked in New York City, and is considered a part of the pop art movement, which created art inspired by popular culture.

Coosje van Bruggen, June 6, 1942–January 10, 2009, was a Dutch-born American sculptor, art historian, and critic. She collaborated extensively with her husband, Claes Oldenburg.







# INSPIRING IMPACT

## The Mullen Family's Unwavering Generosity

by Ankur Keswani, WSMS Board of Trustees Development Chair and Allison Kohrs, Director of Development

For over 60 years, West Side Montessori School has been the educational foundation for thousands of NYC children, creating opportunities for the future. Children learn how to learn at WSMS. One family who intimately understands this idea is Amanda and Don Mullen.

The Mullen family's history with WSMS dates back to the 1990s, when Don's three oldest daughters, Sara, Annie, and Isabelle, attended WSMS; Amanda and Don Mullen's son, Freddie, attended the Twos program just three years ago. Their longstanding relationship with the school is matched by their extraordinary generosity, donating \$360,000 in the last two years.



Freddie's 21–22 WSMS Yearbook Photo

As WSMS reflects on its history, we recognize our alumni community for their continued altruism and stewardship. Allison Kohrs and Ankur Keswani (our Director of Development and our WSMS Board of Trustees Development Chair, respectively) had the privilege of spending some time with Don Mullen and his daughter, Annie, who spoke about the importance of their philanthropic mission

and their experiences at WSMS and what makes WSMS so special. They were both struck by how the Mullens' love and gratitude for WSMS continues to shine through, even after all these years.

Annie, who from WSMS went on to Riverdale, Yale, and NYU, still cherishes the formative years she enjoyed at WSMS. In her words, "WSMS was a place to be a kid, a little sanctuary in New York City ... a special sanctuary for kids. WSMS is the place to be a kid and not realize that you are actually learning." Annie greatly appreciates the warm and wonderful educational foundation she received at WSMS, and how it prepared her for her ongoing school years. Don's fondest memories from WSMS were dropping off his daughters in their classrooms and spending time in the library getting to know our amazing parent community ... something he missed when Freddie attended in 2021–2022 with Covid restrictions.

In Don's view, the biggest impact that WSMS had on his children's lives was the foundation it built for their lifelong love of learning. He also feels WSMS is unique in the educational field for providing the essential combination of nurturing and learning in perfect balance. "Other schools are either nurturing, but you aren't learning as much, or there is learning, but it is not nurturing. It's that balance that really differentiates WSMS over all the other schools my kids have been to." WSMS has been the only school (pre-K and ongoing) where his family has experienced "the kids learning so much in a nurturing environment," and Don noted that, "frankly, I wish there were more schools, further along in a child's life, that were like that."

"In some ways," Don added, WSMS is also "a secretly demanding school. The kids don't realize how demanding the process is "as they learn math, reading, and other foundational skills while engaged in play. WSMS is making them learn without them feeling like they are learning—it's secretly demanding ... The school's process gives the kids a sense of respect and independence."

We asked Don and Annie about the Mullen philanthropic mission, which has also become a large part of their lives. As the family's fortunes evolved, Don said, "What became apparent to us is that we wanted to focus our philanthropy on institutions that have been an important part of our family's life or the community that we have raised our children in."

Annie spoke about how her father's journey shaped both his view and her and her siblings' opinions about the importance of philanthropy. According to her, Don views his journey as "deliberately lucky." Having worked hard to achieve his position in life, Don also acknowledges that he got to where he is today because of luck and all the help he received along the way. One aspect of that help was his full scholarship to Yale. Don's father, an elevator repairman, and his mother, a school teacher, would never have been able to send him to Yale without such assistance. Annie said that when Don arrived at college, he realized he was at a disadvantage; his peers had attended schools that prepared them for the rigors

## WSMS Yearbook photos from the 90s of Don's three daughters



Sara



Annie



Isabelle

and expectations of such an institution, and he had not. That experience at Yale made a strong impression on him, as he realized that the best education starts at a very young age.

The Mullen family became vested in supporting educational institutions and helping others have the same opportunities and experiences that they did. As Annie said, "We want to help open doors for others who didn't even realize such doors existed for them. At WSMS, children gain a love for learning and confidence while having fun. Our dad realizes how critical that was for us, and wants us to give back to the community that was there for us."

In line with their expressed values, the Mullen family has been a major contributor to the Annual Fund at WSMS; they annually sponsor four full scholarships at Yale, and are major contributors to the High Line in Manhattan.

In Don's words, "West Side is an amazing experience for the child and the parent. It is a New York institution; we want other families to experience this wonderful school. WSMS checks every box of our giving mission."

WSMS is committed to our robust financial aid program of \$1.5 million, supporting 20% of our families. Remarkably, 99% of students receiving aid continue to independent schools, where they are awarded financial assistance, opening doors to their next academic chapter. Our exceptional early childhood education prepares all WSMS students to thrive in new schools, equipped to think creatively and critically, engage with the world through kindness and empathy, and succeed academically.

We are so grateful to the Mullen family and our community of alumni families, grandparents, friends, and current parents who enable WSMS to be ... where to begin!

### Where the Mullen Kids are now

**Sara** (age 32) attended Riverdale after WSMS and is now

working as a veterinary technician at an emergency clinic in Maine.

**Annie** (age 31) also went to Riverdale after WSMS, followed by Yale for undergrad and NYU for grad school. She's currently part of the Business Development team at Pretium Capital and recently married this summer.

**Isabelle** (age 30) went on to The Brearley School from WSMS and completed her undergrad at Yale. She's recently graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and is currently an Internal Medicine Resident at Weill Cornell.

**Freddie** (age 5) is the youngest and is currently attending pre-K at The Cushman School in Miami.



A recent photo of the Mullen girls, clockwise: Katarina Mesarovich (their youngest sister), Annie, Don, Sara, Olivia Defechereux Dejah (an WSMS alum and life long friend of Annie and Isabelle) and Isabelle.





# AN ERA CONCLUDES FOR HEAD OF SCHOOL MIMI BASSO, BUT THE IMPACT ENDURES

**“We always put children first.”**



When Mimi Basso is asked what has stayed the same during her decade-spanning time at West Side Montessori School, she doesn't skip a beat. Children come first. They always have. They always will.

Mimi is the current Head of School at WSMS, a role she's taken on with zeal, dedication, and forward-thinking leadership

since 2007. She likens the multifaceted title to that of a conductor “leading the orchestra.” At the end of this school year, she'll be hanging up her baton.

Retirement for Mimi comes after a meaningful career marked by profound professional milestones. Becoming an active parent at her first son's school (she previously owned a book and record shop!) decades ago, she saw firsthand the unique impact of Montessori education. The approach to early childhood development and care not only resonated with her as a mother, it sparked a passion for teaching. The moment was a “combination of wow and ah-ha,” as Mimi—who comes from a long line of teachers—puts it. When an opportunity to become an assistant teacher at the school came up, she needed a Master's degree. She started pursuing a Master's in Early Childhood Education at New York University's inaugural Montessori program the very next week.

After opening a Toddler program at the same institution where she began her teaching career, Mimi assumed a Head of School position at another school in the same town. From

there, she helped Catholic Charities open a Head Start Montessori collaboration project for infants through five years old. These momentous experiences and immersion in Montessori management eventually led Mimi to WSMS, where she acted as associate head of school from 1995–2001. She then became director of school accreditation at the American Montessori Society until 2007, when she had the chance to accept her dream job—head of school at WSMS.

Over seventeen years later, in the same position, Mimi is still spellbound by WSMS' philosophy for early education. She applauds the engaged, thoughtful community of parents and notes an everlasting commitment to fostering an enthusiasm for knowledge in every child. When children step out of 309 West 92nd and into new classrooms at ongoing schools, they take with them true math and reading skills, intellectual curiosity, and a love of learning.

“I feel that we've done our jobs if kids leave here loving school and if kids leave here thinking, ‘learning is fun.’ If kids will take risks, academic and social risks, we've done our jobs,” she shares.

What is something Mimi is particularly proud of at WSMS? The teachers and how they can continuously evolve and improve as educators. The faculty's strength has remained constant in the Teachers Education Program, as well as the cultivation of professional development opportunities. Under Mimi's mentorship, teachers see children as individuals with specific needs deserving of mindful focus in real time.

She advises, “They say early childhood teachers make something like four thousand decisions a day. I counsel teachers



about this all the time. The way to make a decision is to ask what's best for this child right now... in the moment. It's not going to be the same for every child. Just worry about this child right now, and you'll never go wrong."

In addition to celebrating effective hallmark programs like After Lunch Bunch and the Late Afternoon Program that shape her enduring imprint, Mimi is also honoring the future of WSMS. The Great Beginnings Center, WSMS' new Infants, Toddlers, and expanded Twos facility, has been a dream since she entered the doors in 1995. While it's ironic the dream is being realized now, Mimi's legacy is undoubtedly cemented in its foundation.

"When I first came here, I couldn't imagine changing a thing. I thought the school was perfect the way it was. And by living here and growing with it and thinking hard about the possibilities, we've been doing really marvelous work. And I think the new leader will as well," she says.

Embarking on the next phase of life beyond the vibrantly adorned halls of WSMS, Mimi is embracing her other role—grandmother of six. Being around children every day for so many years has taught her the significance of taking time to slow down, to appreciate, and to wonder. As Mimi vows to relish this chapter to "see what's next," WSMS will forever hold a pivotal place in her story.

Here's to a wondrous journey ahead. We are forever grateful for your lasting contributions, Mimi! WSMS wouldn't be what it is without you.



# WHERE JOURNEYS BEGIN

## Director of Admissions Judy Lyons



Walk into the hallways of West Side Montessori School on any given weekday, and you're likely to be met by a friendly face offering welcoming words. As Director of Admissions, Judy Lyons is often the first person families encounter on their WSMS path. From that day forward, she remains a constant presence in their early education experience. Judy isn't just part of the administrative team; she's a guiding light for parents and children as they navigate learning's beginnings, from admissions to enrollment to the classroom and beyond.

A Director of Admissions plays many roles—family ambassador, knowledge hub, community connector, to name a few. Judy was made for all of these and whatever comes her way. With a



background in hospitality, combined with studies in sociology and education, she is a natural people person who innately makes children and their families feel at ease throughout the admissions process and at school. It is hard to imagine WSMS without Judy's inviting greetings and inspiring encouragement, but she will be retiring after the 2024–2025 school year concludes.

Before WSMS, Judy worked as a Head Start tutor and was interested in pursuing social work. She also served as a TWA flight attendant, traveling the world and making connections from all walks of life. Judy fell in love with West Side Montessori School while searching for a school for her son in 1984.

"My husband Jeffrey and I were amazed at the dynamic classrooms, inspired teachers, and, most of all, the diverse community. It was and remains reflective of the city we love," she fondly recalls.

After becoming an active parent and co-president of the PA, Judy was offered the role of Admissions Director in 1988—a position that, at the time, involved snail mail, index cards, and phone calls. Twelve years later, she retired for the first time. Head of School, Mimi Basso asked her to return in 2012, and she's been here ever since. Forty years after her profound WSMS introduction, Judy has established herself as a beloved community fixture.

"Once back, I couldn't leave. I often say my children had to go on to other schools, but I found a way to stay at WSMS," Judy muses.

For Judy, it's the people who keep things interesting. Watching children discover friendship, become independent, and turn into lifelong learners is why she does what she does. She knows parents and caregivers of small children have many demands on their time and resources. She takes pride in the fact that WSMS welcomes all levels of involvement and provides the support these families need. She's grateful that WSMS, its Board, and involved parents have followed the vision that began with Five Founding Families.

"I know that I can authentically tell WSMS' story and connect with families that share the same values and are eager not only for the best educational experience for their child but also to seek a community for themselves," Judy says of the rewarding admissions experience.

Having been exposed to different progressive pedagogies, Montessori education resonates with Judy. Understanding each child's unique developmental stage, regardless of age, and providing support and challenges tailored to their needs has always struck a meaningful chord. She treasures the emphasis on courtesy, friendship, responsibility, and the growth of kind and responsible citizens. She has witnessed the Teacher Education Program and professional development flourish under Mimi's care and observes that prioritizing what's best for children remains a primary focus for teachers and staff.





“Every day does matter, as does every child. I also know that as a parent, I learned so much from my children's teachers here at WSMS,” Judy says. “The early childhood experience benefits the entire family. I know our TEP program will continue to grow and thrive, training new teachers for the future.”

We will all miss Judy at WSMS, but what will she reflect on when she's no longer here? Visiting classrooms, greeting families, and gaining insights from the seasoned faculty and leadership are all daily moments she holds close to her heart. Aside from “reading the stack of New Yorkers and books” that have accumulated at her bedside, Judy is looking forward to spending more time with the important people in her life, especially her first grandchild, who will attend WSMS' new Infants, Toddlers, and Twos Center in 2025. As new generations emerge within her family and others, WSMS remains integral to her life. Families always remember Judy, and she remembers them.

“I love it when they come back to visit and still give hugs, although now very grown up at ongoing schools,” Judy says. “In these last years, I've admitted the children of several children I admitted years ago, now parents themselves.”

Thank you, Judy, for the years of dedication and warm wisdom. WSMS children carry a part of you in where they begin... and who they become.

## A HEARTFELT SENDOFF TO TINA CONNELLY



Tina Connelly has poured her heart into West Side Montessori School for over three decades, taking on a variety of meaningful titles throughout the years, including staff, parent, and Board member. Tina's four children—Katherine, James, Anne, and Molly—are all alums, with their years of attendance ranging from 1987 until 2000. She served as a member of the Board of Trustees from 1988–2002 and co-chaired the Head of School Search Committee in 2006, resulting in the hiring of Mimi Basso. Tina joined the administrative team in 2018 as Special Projects Administrator. After six years in the position, she retired in the summer of 2024. This year, she also welcomed her first grandchild! Tina will be remembered fondly for her many contributions. We wish her and her family a joyous future ahead!

## ADMINISTRATIVE LEAD MELISSA MACK REFLECTS ON 35 YEARS AT WSMS



Melissa Mack has been a staple of the West Side Montessori School administrative team since 1989. As Associate Head of School, Finance and Administration, she is a vital component of the community's dynamic ecosystem, working behind the scenes to direct and manage financial and administrative operations. Following over 30 years as a core WSMS staff member, she's

set to retire in 2025.

Melissa credits her father for making the WSMS connection. Gordon Mack, a consultant working with educators to provide guidance and multicultural workshops, had a long-standing career connection to Montessori education. After a workshop at WSMS, he informed his daughter about an open position. Melissa, looking for a professional pivot at the time, took a chance. Three decades later, the leap was more than worth it.

“I have seen quite a bit over the three-plus decades I have

been at WSMS, but what has changed about WSMS is also what has stayed the same,” Melissa recalls, noting that evolution and progression are central to the school's mindset. From her perspective, learning is a part of everyone's journey here. In that case, she's gained a wealth of wisdom after 35 years!

“This school has always been a place of growth. Complacency is not part of the culture. Children are not the only ones learning and evolving,” she explains.

Melissa isn't sure what she'll do after her WSMS departure, although she's excited to find out. Of course, she'll miss every part of what makes the school a remarkable environment to work, learn, and grow.

When asked what makes WSMS unique, she says, “Community, families, and staff from diverse backgrounds come together to create this special place. Lifelong friendships are made for children, as well as adults.”

We are grateful for your many years of service, Melissa! You've made an eternal friend in us all.

# WSMS FRESH FACES: MEET OUR NEW STAFF!

West Side Montessori School is pleased to introduce the newest members of the 2024–2025 administrative team.



## Alana Altmann, Director of Communications

“I’ll be handling all things communications for WSMS, from content strategy to digital and editorial management. I’m excited to immerse myself in this dream of a school environment to tell our story the best way we can in the most effective way possible. I’m a born and raised Upper West Sider who grew up three blocks away, returning

to home base after a 12-year stint in LA. I’ve worked as a writer, editor, and digital producer for over a decade, most recently at USC. You can find me listening to pop culture podcasts or judging the questionable NYTimes Connections threads. My son Ira is in 2E—we’re both thrilled to be here!”



## Sita McGuire, Special Projects Administrator

“After teaching Pre-K through Kindergarten this past summer, I joined WSMS due to my interest in working within the administration side of schools. I’m a recent Wesleyan University graduate who studied sociology and film, previously working as a communications scholar for a non-profit foundation. I will be assisting on various

projects WSMS is undertaking over the coming months due to the transitions the community is undergoing. Outside of work, I am usually cooking, reading cheesy romance novels, and watching pretentious movies.”



## Adis Sylvain, Associate Director of Admissions

“I’m thrilled to join the WSMS family as Associate Director of Admissions. In my role, I’ll work alongside Judy in all matters related to Admissions. I am committed to bringing families into the community who share the values of WSMS, appreciate your role as Montessori teachers, and come from diverse backgrounds. I was born and

raised in Switzerland, but New York City has been my home since adolescence. I enjoy long walks, short runs, modern fiction, politics podcasts, and fall foliage. My three children and I live on the Upper East Side. None share any of those interests. Thankfully, Netflix brings us together as a family. Thank you for the warm welcome.”





## OUR 2023–2024 TEAM

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 Melissa Silvestri  
 Gretchen Stack  
 Kamaria Thomas  
 Allison Toole  
 Megan Turmon  
 Huishuang (May) Wu  
 Yanjun Yao

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 Matthew Bloom  
 Alyse Camacho  
 Desiree Care  
 Nadine Carroll  
 Tina Connelly

Shawn Cumberbatch  
 Maura Duffy  
 Takira Foxe  
 Alex Geller  
 Vance Gordian  
 Allison Kohrs

Judy Lyons  
 Melissa Mack  
 Katherine Schneider  
 Amy Stoney

## WHY DOES WSMS NEED TO FUNDRAISE?

WSMS is a non-profit independent school, and in the simplest terms, the **school's annual expenses exceed its tuition revenue**.

**Simply put, our annual fundraising is vitally important to sustain WSMS. Only with your help can WSMS balance its annual budget, provide professional development for teachers, and budget \$1.5 million for the financial aid program.**

WSMS has a long history of excellence in early childhood education. Our longevity and success over the last six decades are a direct result of the support of our community and astute financial management. As a result of this strategic financial planning, the majority of WSMS expenses are related to teacher salaries and benefits. Our most recent audit shows a program spending ratio of 77%, outperforming the Better Business Bureau's recommended standard (at least 65%) for nonprofit organizations such as ours. Over the last few decades, WSMS has been able to build our financial reserves to a healthy \$11 million, and now relies on these invested assets to generate income that helps cover the difference between tuition revenue and operating costs.

This year marks our 50th Anniversary in wonderful building that we call our home, which was purchased in 1974. We have lovingly maintained and modernized this building over our tenure, however, it is now **118 years old**, with all of the wonderful memories, history, charm, and upkeep that entails. Our beautiful and inviting home has become the symbol of WSMS and a fundamental part of our community. It's been described by some parents recalling their first visit to WSMS as "walking into a warm hug."

This year also marks a year of exceptional growth for WSMS, with the opening of the Great Beginnings Center, located at 212 W. 95th Street, in the spring of 2025. The Great Beginnings Center will expand our capacity to 75, expanding our offerings to our youngest learners, infants, and toddlers across seven learning environments, including a library/par-



ent lounge, faculty lounge, warming kitchen, and a new gym designed for gross-motor development. This will enable the addition of a third summer camp session, creating a seamless 50-week program. Finally, the Great Beginnings Center will provide our Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP) with a dedicated, state-of-the-art lab school for aspiring Montessori teachers.

This year is exceptional in another way: for the first time we'll be asking you to **give twice this year**. In 2025, you'll be hearing about the Growth Campaign to expand our programming and serve more children at the Great Beginnings Center and enhance the physical infrastructure of our cherished and historic home at 309 West 92nd Street—the heart of our community and foundation of our Multi-Age programming. The Growth Campaign is a one-time solicitation that can be pledged over five years to support the long-term growth of WSMS.

It's important to remember, **"The Annual Fund powers our present. The Growth Campaign fuels our future."**

The importance of the Annual Fund can not be overstated. The Annual Fund is our yearly fundraising campaign to sustain our operating costs not covered by tuition revenue, enabling WSMS balance to its annual budget, provide professional development for teachers, and budget \$1.5 million for the financial aid program.

When we all come together we are greater than the sum of our parts, which truly embodies the **WSMS Gives Annual Fund** motto: **Give from your heart, give what you can**. Every contribution matters and makes a difference in the life of every WSMS child.

We are grateful for the support from our community, current and alumni families, and friends, which is at the core of our continued success.



# WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT OF GIVING

## WSMS Gives Fundraising Results 2023–2024

(audited)

Annual Fund..... \$797,510

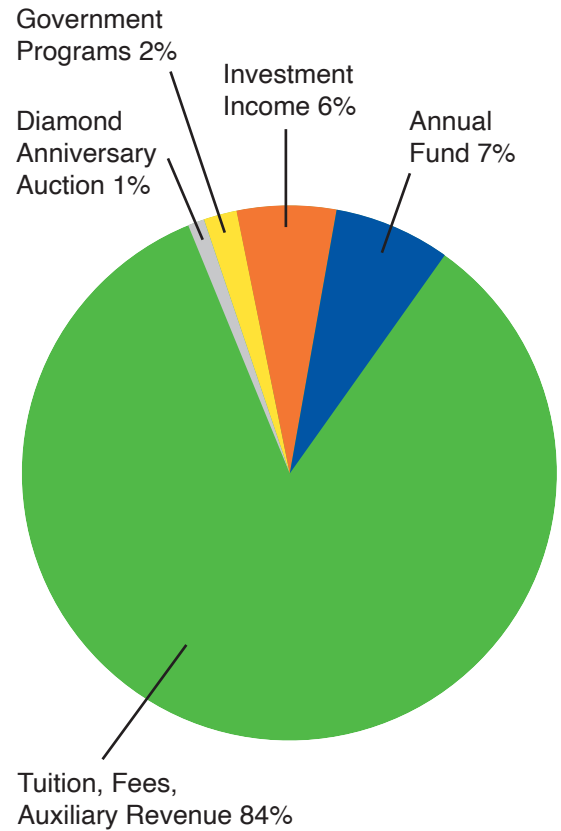
Diamond Anniversary  
Auction Gala..... \$192,862  
(net)

Fall Festival..... \$16,012

---

**Total Raised..... \$1,006,384**

## 2023–2024 REVENUE (audited)



## ANNUAL FUND

100%

Board of Trustees Participation

84%

Current Parent Participation



Raised \$83,000+ from 33 matching gifts

## ANNUAL FUND

The 2023–2024 Annual Fund was a huge success! We welcomed back Annual Fund Week and successfully increased current parent participation to 84%. Our entire community fuels our fundraising efforts. Every contribution matters!

Thank you to our incredible 2023–2024 Annual Fund Co-Chairs Min Jung Jung, Jahnavi Sawhney, and Nayun Shin. As always, thank you to our incredible community of current parents, alumni families, faculty and staff, grandparents, and friends. You are the driving force behind what makes WSMS thrive. We are immensely grateful for your ongoing generosity and unwavering efforts.



## ANNUAL FUND PARTICIPATION BY CLASS

### Garden

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 Gyna and Micah Uhrlass  
 von Euler Family  
 Geneveve Rodriguez-Avello and Evan Williamson  
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### 3E

The Dellolio Family  
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 Shanna Qiu and Ray Fu  
 Assiatou and  
 Gabor Harrach  
 Lina Sheng and  
 Yatao Liu  
 Alexis Young and  
 Amir Mansour  
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 Christine Hung and  
 Lloyd Nimetz  
 Tiantian Jin and Hao Qu  
 Liz and  
 Henrik Rutgersson  
 Karen Horstmann and  
 Jeb Winton  
 Christen and  
 Andrew Yaffe  
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#### T2

Shallini Sood and  
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 Leigh Hughes  
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 and Subash Iyer

Britni and  
 Samuel Jackson  
 Bianca Barboza and  
 Morris Keith  
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 Zeinab Bailoun and  
 Abdallah Saleme  
 Katherine and  
 Ted Schneider  
 Katherine and Paul Yun  
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#### T3

Rebecca and  
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 Stephanie Lee Griffin  
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Xan Young and  
Thomas Reardon  
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# DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY AUCTION GALA

Like a diamond, WSMS is forever!

On Friday, April 12, 2024, the Edison Ballroom shimmered with school spirit for the Diamond Anniversary Auction Gala. It was an evening to remember celebrating 60 years of WSMS. Featuring an Alumni Cocktail Party, Live Auction, Online Auction, and Raffles, 2024's milestone occasion was more than a fun-filled event sparking with fantastic food, music, and decor—it was a collaborative effort that brought the community together.

Thank you to our auction co-chairs—Jordan Blitzer, Hyokon Choi, Sooyun Hong, Kate Gaind, Yasmin Nozari, Megha Prasad, and Jessica Walton—and all the volunteers who made this event possible. You are the true definition of hands-on participation and purposeful action, and WSMS shines bright because of your contributions. A heartfelt thank you to our amazing teachers for their creative art projects and uniquely engaging teacher-time activities.

We express our profound appreciation to our generous sponsors, underwriters, donors, and all of the bidders and winners!

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### LIVE AUCTION WINNERS

**Ballet and Art**  
Christine Kim

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Yeon Hee Oh and Paul Choi  
Inyoung Hwang and Greg Feldman  
Kate and Amit Gaind  
Chen He and Max Neuman

**Oliver \* 2 & Cote + Meyers**

Jessica and Fox Walton

**4 Tickets to PAC**

Stephanie and Patrick Griffin

**Courtside with the Nets**

Sarah Pajji Yoo and Kenneth Yoo

### TEACHER TIME WINNERS

**Ultimate Kids' Overnight**

Molly MacPherson and Matthew Evans  
Donna Shin and Paul Han  
Ely Gonzalez Reyes and Aamir Mecklai  
Brea Bowen and Christopher O'Connor  
Soo Kim and Sidney Ouyang  
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**Tie-Dye Extravaganza**

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**Shawn for the Day**

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**In the Kitchen with Amy & Co.**

Kim Parker

**Twos Planting and Food Prep**

Leigh Hughes  
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Sumbo Ojikutu

**WSMS School of Rock**

Minjee Kang and Haewan Bae  
Yeon Hee Oh and Paul Choi

Inyoung Hwang and Greg Feldman  
Kate and Amit Gaind  
Ellie Burrows Gluck and Simon Gluck  
Chen He and Max Neuman  
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**Pizza Plus a Picture**  
von Euler Family

**Central Park Explorers**

Marina and Greg Olafson

**Twos WSMS**

**Olympic Games**  
Tiantian Jin and Hao Qu

**STEM Stars**

Maritza Dono and Mateo Chaskel  
Hyokon and David Choi  
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### RAFFLE WINNERS

**Broadway's Biggest**

**Hits:** Lynn Rasic

**Cohen & Dagon:**

Claire Botnick

**Play Both Sides of the**

**Hudson:** Gina Dizzia

**Skin is in with Rose:**

Leigh Hughes

### CLASSROOM RAFFLE WINNERS

**Little Scampers**

**Scavenger Hunt:**

Garden

**Rooftop Art Explosion:**

2W

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**Garden:** Kate and Amit Gaind

**1W:** Allison and Ken Kohrs

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**3W:** Marina and Greg Olafson

**4E:** Min Jung Jung and Tae Ho Kwon

**4W:** Anonymous

**T1:** Lina Sheng and Yatao Liu

**T2:** Mandy Zhou and Hao Day

**T3:** Qianwen Liu and Dai Shi

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WSMS School of Rock



Ultimate Kids' Overnight



STEM Stars



1W: Friendship Gems: Beading Together, Shining Forever



2E: Starry, Starry, City!



2W: Kaleidoscope



4E: 4E's Community Tapestry!



3E: 3E's Wooden MasterPEACE!



3W: Enchanted Crystal



4W: Forever Bouquet



Garden: Garden's Geodes



T1: Shine Bright



T2: T2 Pours Paint



T3: Lifelong Friendships!



## FALL FESTIVAL

October 21, 2023

Face painting, music, pumpkins—oh my! The 8th Annual Fall Festival was a lively day of memory-making fun. We wouldn't let a little bit of bad weather stop this beloved tradition from happening, and our volunteers are a testament to what WSMS can accomplish, rain or shine! Thank you to everyone who came out to help with activities, prepare delicious treats, sort merchandise, or set up and clean up. What a special way to come together and welcome the school year.

Fall Festival is a direct reflection of the dedication of our parents and community. We could not have done it without Fall Festival co-chairs—Megan Chan, Kate Dellolio, Maritza Dono, MinJee Kang, Alexis Kim, Annie Kim, Kate Gaind, Chen He, Dave Leslie, Matthew Lifshotz, Diego Tapia, Elizabeth Tyndell, Noora Salim, Randi Sienkiewicz, and Sue Yoo. Thank you to our donors for their steadfast support! To all the current and alumni families who came out to enjoy the festivities, your continued commitment means the world!





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# VOLUNTEERS: THE HEARTBEAT OF WSMS

Everyone at WSMS recognizes the Parents Association's profound impact on our community. The PA is more than just a parent-led organization; it's a chance for families to create a more unified and vibrant school environment. The PA tapped into their creativity and passion throughout 2023–2024, organizing experiences that forged connections and, importantly, made being a WSMS community member meaningful and fun!

Thank you to the 2023–2024 PA co-presidents Ellie Burrows Gluck and Charlene Su and everyone listed here for their openhearted generosity of spirit, time, and expertise. By joining forces and lending helping hands, we create lasting memories for our children and families.

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Charlene Su

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Note: **Bold** indicates committee chair



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Tashmin Ali  
Gina Dizzia  
Shira Drossos  
Kelly Hagen  
Inyoung Hwang  
Britni Jackson  
Sudeep Kamath  
Maren Messing  
Meredith Milstein Polivy  
Lynn Rasic  
Elizabeth Tyndell  
–  
*Auction Decor*  
Claire Botnick  
Gina Dizzia  
Maritza Dono  
Julia Emanuel  
Harroop Gulati Kaur  
Aditi Gupta  
MinJee Kang  
Alexis Kim  
Annie Kim  
Alexander Koshkin  
Sasha Koshkin  
Natalia Kubar  
Jessica Lee

Midi Lyoo  
Hanna Miller  
Yeon Hee Oh  
Olivia Oran  
Katy Orthwein  
Swarna Ravindran  
Christine Rivera  
Geneveve  
Rodriguez-Avello  
Noora Salim  
Jahnavi Sawhney  
Lina Sheng  
Donna Shin  
Michelle Tsang  
Elizabeth Tyndell  
Sue Yoo  
Kate Yun  
–  
*Auction Solicitation*  
Tali Dalbaha  
Britni Jackson  
Tosif Khatri  
Johanna Nielson  
Yeon Hee Oh  
Swarna Ravindran  
–  
*Auction Tech*  
Rebecca Arfa  
Jordan Blitzer  
Inyoung Hwang  
Laurel LeFebvre  
Roshan Leslie  
Dave Leslie  
Cristina Linclau  
Meredith Milstein Polivy  
Isabelle Phelps  
Swarna Ravindran  
Swati Sawjani  
Randi Sienkiewicz

### END OF YEAR

**LAWN PARTY**  
**Inyoung Hwang**  
**Rachel Kumar**  
Jodi Barnes  
Jordan Blitzer  
Mateo Chaskel  
Hyokon Choi  
Kate Gaind  
Laurel LeFebvre  
Molly MacPherson  
Yasmin Nozari  
Allie Obermeyer  
Katy Orthwein  
Swarna Ravindran  
Wencan Tang

### FALL FESTIVAL

**Megan Chan**  
**Kate Dellolio**  
**Maritza Dono**  
**MinJee Kang**  
**Alexis Kim**  
**Annie Kim**  
**Kate Gaind**  
**Chen He**  
**Dave Leslie**  
**Matthew Lifshotz**  
**Diego Tapia**  
**Elizabeth Tyndell**  
**Noora Salim**  
**Randi Sienkiewicz**  
**Sue Yoo**  
Sadia Afroz  
Ali Akbar  
Zainab Akbar  
Christian Arauz  
Benjamin Arfa  
Rebecca Arfa  
Haewan Bae  
Jodi Barnes  
Greg Beaton  
Adam Bernstein  
Cristina Blanco  
Jordan Blitzer  
Claire Botnick  
Nicole Breskin  
Michael Bretholz  
Zach Bubolo  
Juan Carlos Cabeza  
Thomas Carter  
Kinga Caturano  
Megan Chan  
Mimi Chang  
Shuwei Chen  
James Cho  
David Choi  
Hyokon Choi  
Paul Choi

Troy Clough  
Tali Dalbaha  
Marine Dalla Santa  
Aaron Davidson  
Hao Day  
Jeanne Dear  
Mariajose Delgado  
Patricia Delgado  
Ryan Dellolio  
Gina Dizzia  
Shira Drossos  
Maura Duffy  
Etim Duke  
Stephan Effert  
Brooke Ellis  
Julia Emanuel  
Carla Espana  
Meryam Farhat  
Greg Feldman  
Gina Fernandez  
Eric Feinstein  
Mugur Florea  
Jean Freebury  
Amit Gaind  
Kate Gaind  
Amrita Ganguly  
Joshua Glasser  
Mollie Glasser  
Simon Gluck  
Angel Gonzalez  
Arlim Gonzalez  
Ely Gonzalez  
Madison Greene  
Danielle Gregori  
Jamie Gresh  
Stephanie Griffin  
Sim Gulati  
Aditi Gupta  
Julie Hahm  
Aletha Haynes  
Chen He  
Alain Henry

Maya Henry  
Sooyun Hong  
Karen Horstmann  
Leigh Hughes  
Inyoung Hwang  
Candice Idehen  
Subash Iyer  
Sarah Jadin  
Tiantian Jin  
Claisian Jones  
Min Jung Jung  
Teddy Kaplan  
Jackie Kelly  
Ankur Keswani  
Rohit Keswani  
Annie Kim  
Philip Kim  
Klaus Koenigshausen  
Nitin Konchady  
Sasha Koshkin  
Natalia Kubar  
Rachel Kumar  
Sudeep Kumath  
Nigel-Ann  
La Qua Williamson  
Becky Laird  
Owen Laird  
Douglas Le Blanc  
Chee Lee  
Jessica Lee  
Laurel LeFebvre  
Matthew LeFebvre  
Roshan Leslie  
Sandy Liang-Ma  
Jeffrey Lin  
Qianwen Liu  
Ricky Liu  
Agustina Lucas  
Carah Lucas-Hill  
Hannah Lyons  
Midi Lyoo  
Jim Ma



# VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 2023–2024

## WSMS COMMITTEES 2023–2024 (continued)

### FALL FESTIVAL (continued)

Molly MacPherson  
Justin Marcus  
Liza Marcus  
Ish Masud  
Divya Mathur  
Kim Maxcy-Chang  
Aamir Mecklai  
Jean Claude Michel  
Hanna Miller  
Meredith Milstein Polivy  
John Mrkonic  
Kara Mungovan  
Max Neuman  
Meredith Nickie Bennett  
Johanna Nielsen  
Kaj Nielsen  
Alexandra Nimetz  
Allie Obermeyer  
Shalewa Odusanya  
Sumbo Ojikutu  
Neka Okafor  
Marina Olafson  
Veronika Omole  
Katy Orthwein  
Sajda Ouachtouki  
Sarah Paiji Yoo  
Kim Parker  
Ruta Pauliukaityte  
Isabelle Phelps  
Edie Philippe  
Sarah Phillips  
Lance Polivy  
Megha Prasad  
Richard Przekop  
Shanna Qiu  
Alexandra Rapaport  
Tahl Rapaport  
Lynn Rasic  
Christine Rivera  
John Roach  
Geneveve  
Rodriguez-Avello  
Henrik Rutgersson  
Eric Sadkin  
Abdallah Saleme  
Fay Sardjono  
Jahnnavi Sawhney  
Jamie Schragger  
Julian Seek  
Aashima Sethi  
Maruti Sharma  
Lina Sheng  
Thomas Sheridan  
Donna Shin  
Melissa Silvestri

Kelly Smercina  
Matt Smercina  
Ted Smith  
Kirti Sohal  
Shallini Sood  
Tim SooHoo  
Julia Spencer  
Charlene Su  
David Su  
Blake Sweeney  
Josephine Swinburne  
Wencan Tang  
Kamaria Thomas  
JF Thye  
Julie Toran  
Michelle Tsang  
Irene Tserkovny  
Gyna Uhrlass  
Micah Uhrlass  
Alexandra Vallis  
Jeremy Vandel  
Patricia Vaz De Almeida  
Kavel Visrodia  
Natanael von Euler  
Jordana Warmflash  
Tatia Williams  
Marco Williamson  
Jeb Winton  
Cherise Wong  
Kinyarda Wright  
Asa Yapa  
Nicole Yazdi  
Vesal Yazdi  
Stuart Young  
Xan Young  
Simon Yuan  
Kate Yun  
Paul Yun  
Chao Zhang  
Christie Zhou

### HOOKED ON BOOKS

**Megan Chan**  
**Roshan Leslie**  
Bianca Barboza  
Maritza Dono  
Meryam Farhat  
Swarna Kamlam  
Julie Kim  
Chee Lee  
Cristina Linciau  
John Mrkonic  
Susanna Terrell  
Nicole Yazdi  
Sue Yoo

### MERCHANDISING & POP-UP SHOPS

**Chen He**  
**Dave Leslie**  
Nicole Breskin  
Kate Gaind  
Ellie Burrows Gluck  
Danielle Gregori  
Aditi Gupta  
Maya Henry  
Jackie Kelly  
Laurel LeFebvre  
Qianwen Liu  
Ruta Pauliukaityte  
Lina Sheng  
Charlene Su  
Susanna Terrell

### SANDSATIONAL Aditi Gupta Hanna Miller

### WINTER COAT DRIVE

**Claire Botnick**  
**Laurel LeFebvre**  
Paul Choi  
Tali Dalbaha  
Kate Gaind  
Julie Hahm  
Sooyun Hong  
Midi Lyoo  
Neka Okafor  
Marina Olafson  
Nicole Yazdi

### YEARBOOK

**Yasmin Nozari**  
Zainab Akbar  
Jordan Blitzer  
Hyokon Choi  
Julia Emanuel  
Ely Gonzalez  
Andrew Haynes  
Sooyun Hong  
Inyoung Hwang  
Annie Kim  
Christine Kim  
Sophia Lee  
Laurel Lefebvre  
Madeline Merrill  
Zhanna Michaelcheck  
Shelly Reindeau  
Michelle Tsang  
Cherise Wong  
Nicole Yazdi  
Kate Yun







**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

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**WSMS  
AUCTION  
2025**

**EDISON BALLROOM | FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2025 AT 7:00PM**



**WSMS**

West Side Montessori School

# 2024–2025 WSMS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The primary responsibility of the Board of Trustees is to see that the School operates in the best interests of its students, teachers, and parents. The Board sets the purpose and policies of the School, ensures its financial stability, plans for its future, and hires the Head of School, who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the School.



**Nikki Chase-Levin,  
President**

Nikki Chase-Levin is a board member and former parent who served as the WSMS Events Director for five years.

A graduate of Michigan State University with a BA in Journalism, Nikki's 30-year marketing career started at an entertainment publicity firm in Los Angeles in 1995 and continues here in New York City. Nikki has worked for some of the most recognizable consumer brands in the marketplace, including Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum, Sony, Morgan Stanley, Discover Card and Miller Brewing Company. Her responsibilities included strategic planning for new and existing products, television advertising development, marketing communications, crisis communications, public relations programming and event planning. As the co-founder and president of Straight Line Marketing, Inc.—her independent consulting firm—she has counseled clients such as Pepsi, Smirnoff, Discovery Networks, and the lifestyle marketing agency, MKTG. Nikki and her husband Dave are the proud parents of Max (WSMS '14), Zach (WSMS '16), and three dogs ... Bubbles, Pepper, and Bear!



**Dana Bliss,  
Vice President**

Dana Bliss is Executive Editor at Oxford University Press, where he oversees a book publishing program in

social work, counseling and I/O psychology. Prior to joining OUP in 2012, Dana worked at Taylor & Francis, another scholarly publishing company in New York. Dana was born and raised in downtown Manhattan, and began his educational journey at a Montessori preschool in Tribeca, before attending Friends Seminary and then Colgate University, where he earned his BA in philosophy and classics. He is a Fellow of the Library of America, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the publication and preservation of the nation's cultural heritage through America's greatest writing. At WSMS Dana has served as co-chair of the Fall Festival, Class Rep Coordinator, and Class Rep, and has pitched in at the Auction and Hooked on Books events. Dana and his wife, Saya, live on the Upper West Side and are the proud parents of two WSMS alumni, Nami (WSMS '17) and Emi (WSMS '21).



**Iva Mills,  
Vice President**

Iva Mills is the mother of twin WSMS alumni (2016). Iva served as co-president of the Parents Association

for two years and assisted with the Annual Fund, Auction, Spring Fair and Admissions Committee. Iva grew up in San Diego, CA, and received her BA in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her JD from American University Washington College of Law. Iva practiced law for ten years, first at a law firm, primarily in the area of advertising and marketing litigation, and later in-house litigating intellectual property disputes. Iva is also a Trustee of Trinity School, Edible Schoolyard NYC, and Roundabout Theatre Company, and serves on the Acquisition Committee of the Studio Museum in Harlem.



**Tenille Skelton,  
Treasurer**

Tenille Skelton and her husband, Travis Skelton, are the proud parents of two WSMS alumni. During her time at

WSMS, she was an active parent volunteer, serving on many committees, including two years as Parents Association co-president. Tenille received her BS in finance and accounting at Tulane University. She has ten years of experience in real estate finance and capital raising, having spent her career at The Carlyle Group, Goldman Sachs and TPG. Tenille is a member of the board of Grand Street Settlement, a nonprofit organization that provides programs and services to over 10,000 under-served New York children, families and seniors, and serves on its Executive Committee and Ad Hoc Real Estate Committee. Tenille is also a member of the board of Rise Outside, a guiding organization that provides adventure programming for groups who have traditionally encountered barriers to the great outdoors.



**Geoffrey Karapetyan,  
Secretary**

Geoffrey Karapetyan and his husband, Jay Serpe, are the parents of two WSMS alumni. In addition to being a dad,

Geo is the Senior Vice President of Partnerships at NBCUniversal, where he focuses on Peacock and manages digital and new media partnerships for the Olympic Games. He earned an MBA from New York University, and a BA in Comparative Literature from Columbia University. He served as a Class Rep during his time as a WSMS parent, and is grateful to continue to serve the community. Geo and his family live on the Upper West Side.



### Michael Capilouto

Michael Capilouto and his wife Christine are parents of Cassis and Tristan, both alums of West Side Montessori School. Michael was an active volunteer while his kids attended WSMS, serving as a Class Representative and volunteer at many school events. Michael spent 30 years as a partner at the professional services firm EY, where he helped develop two service lines and served clients executing complex transactions including capital raising, acquisitions and sales. Michael also spent several years abroad working with non-US-based SEC registrants. Michael continues to stay involved with EY in a partner mentorship role. Michael and family are avid travelers and explorers.



### Kristin Crawford

Kristin Crawford is the Lower School Principal at Trinity School. She has spent four decades dedicated to the lives, wellness and happiness of young children. Kristin started her career as a teacher at Springside School in Philadelphia, an all girls school. She taught Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Second Grade, and Lower School Science and worked to change the environments of children's learning spaces. As a science teacher, she initiated a stewardship relationship to the woods adjacent to the school, teaching children about caretaking of the natural world and fostering the courage of young children to explore and take healthy risks. Her interest in learning spaces and science intersected when she co-designed a physics lab for four-, five- and six-year-olds. After teaching, she moved onto Admissions and worked as a Lower School Admissions Director of an all boys school. Missing the daily connection to children, she became the Lower School Principal at Westtown School, a day and boarding Friends school. Her work at Westtown focused on reversing a steep attrition pattern, and over her tenure, the Lower School rebounded with more robust enrollment. At Trinity, Kristin turned her attention to supporting families and faculty in order to build curious, empathetic relationships, as schools continue to be impacted by global events. In addition, she is the Lay Chaplain of Lower School. Every day she feels grateful for the work of helping children thrive—intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. She is the mother of two daughters, Kelsey (34) and Leise (31), and the grandmother of Alice.



### Julia Emanuel, MD

Julia Emanuel, MD, is a general pediatrician at Manhattan Valley Pediatrics, an independent outpatient pediatric practice on the Upper West Side. She received her bachelor's degree from Yale University and her medical degree from The George Washington University School of Medicine before completing her pediatric residency at Columbia NewYork-Presbyterian, Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital. Prior to medical school, Julia earned a master's degree in Global Public Health from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and worked for the international humanitarian organization, Doctors Without Borders, advocating for expanded access to medicines in developing countries and other health policy initiatives. Julia focuses her pediatric practice on helping children and their parents thrive in all aspects of their lives and communities. She and her husband, Eric Feinstein, are the parents of Noa (WSMS '23), Wesley (current WSMS student), and Mae.



### Gregory Feldman

Gregory Feldman is a Partner at Davidson Kempner Capital Management, where he's a member of the U.S. Corporates team overseeing global transportation and private investments. At DK, Greg has worked in New York and London. Greg also worked at Goldman Sachs on the bank loan investing desk. He is a sponsor of Airlink, a global humanitarian organization that provides airlift solutions to communities in crisis. Greg and his wife, Inyoung Hwang, live in the Upper West Side and are proud parents of Theo (1W) and Iris (T3). He's been an active member of the WSMS community, including as a volunteer at the Fall Festival. Greg is a native New Yorker and received an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and an A.B. in Economics, with high honors, from Dartmouth College. He's also been a part of Dartmouth's Young Alumni Campaign Advisory Committee.



### Steven Han

Steven Han has 20 years of investment experience across public and private equities and credit. He is currently a Portfolio Manager at Sypher Capital, which is focused on public and private growth investments. Prior to this role, he was a Portfolio Manager at Quent Capital, a global, small cap hedge fund, and

held investment roles at Hudson Bay Capital, Freshford Capital, and H.I.G. Capital. Steven began his career in management consulting for the technology sector. Steven holds a BA from Stanford University and an MBA from Northwestern University. Steven and his wife, Gee Young, currently live on the Upper West Side with their daughter, Lina, a WSMS alum.



### Avner Husen

Avner Husen and his wife, Tashmin Ali, are dedicated members of the WSMS community and proud parents of Sophia (Garden) and a son in fourth grade. Avner currently leads the Real Estate Credit business at Farallon Capital Management. Before joining Farallon, Avner was part of the Real Estate Group at Blackstone, focusing primarily on the Blackstone Real Estate Income Trust (BREIT). Prior to his tenure at Blackstone, he spent 14 years at Fortress Investment Group as a Partner and Investment Committee Member in the Credit and Real Estate business. Avner holds an AB in Economics with honors from the University of Chicago, where he remains actively involved with the Alumni Association. He also served as an advisor for the Francisco Park Conservancy, which recently transformed an abandoned reservoir in San Francisco into a vibrant community park. In 2022, Avner and his family relocated from San Francisco to New York.



### Ankur Keswani

Ankur Keswani and her husband, Rohit, are proud parents of current WSMS student Rishi, and alumni students Isha and Saavan. While at WSMS, Ankur has truly enjoyed working with our amazing parent community. She had the honor of serving as the Co-Chair of WSMS Gives in 2020 and the Co-Chair of the Annual Fund in 2021, co-heading the Gratitude Campaign in 2020, and being a Class Rep. Currently, Ankur serves as an independent director on the board of Kennedy Lewis Capital, a BDC, and a variety of nonprofit boards. Prior to focusing full-time on raising her family, Ms. Keswani spent over 20 years in portfolio management, credit investing, trading, research and risk management. From 2012-2020, she was the Head of Corporate Credit at Serengeti Asset Management, where she helped manage over \$1 billion in assets and led several successful turnarounds and post-bankruptcy workouts. Prior to joining Serengeti, Ankur spent more than nine years at Goldman Sachs, mainly as a High Yield and

Distressed trader. Prior to moving to trading, Ankur was a II-ranked High Yield Healthcare research analyst at Goldman. In 2017, Ankur was added to the Hedge Fund Journal's Top 50 Women in Hedge Funds. She received her BA with Honors from Oxford University in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Ankur grew up in India, Hong Kong and Singapore, but New York is where her heart belongs.



### Annie Kim

Annie Kim has been at Citi for almost 18 years working in a variety of functions. She is currently a Senior Vice President and Credit Officer for the Commercial Banking business, providing risk oversight for the Commercial Bank's derivatives and investment products portfolio. Because this role is part of a global office, Annie has had the opportunity to work with colleagues in the US, EMEA, Latin America and Mexico, and Asia Pacific regions. In this role, Annie is also a Risk approver for the small business banking portfolio for North America. Annie actively supports mentorship initiatives at Citi, including running the Global Risk Mentor Program for the Commercial Bank, serving as a mentor for the Risk Analyst Mentor program, and participating as a steering committee member of the Citi Women's Network New York chapter focusing on professional development. Annie received a BS in Finance and Economics at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University. Annie and her spouse, Jeff Lin, are current WSMS parents of Max, and have two WSMS alumni children, Samuel ('19) and Clara ('22).



### Scott Li

Scott Li is a partner with CRG, a healthcare-focused investment firm. Scott has been dedicated to the healthcare industry as an investor, advisor, and executive for over 20 years. Prior to joining CRG in 2015, he worked as an investment banker for the healthcare industry, and also previously served as the chief financial officer of a venture-backed health IT company. He and his wife, Vernaliz, have been committed WSMS volunteers; they co-chaired the WSMS Bulb Planting, and Vern co-chaired the Fall Festival. A New Jersey native and long-time resident of New York, Scott lives on the Upper West Side with his family, which includes two children who attended WSMS. He received an AB in economics from Princeton University and an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.



### Liz Martorella

Liz Martorella has been a part of the WSMS community since 2013. She was an active parent volunteer in the years that her daughters attended WSMS, including two years as co-president of the Parents Association, and as a co-chair of the Auction and Fall Festival. Liz has over ten years of experience in pharmaceutical marketing and advertising, including her time at well-known specialty agencies Sudler & Hennessey and LM&P. As an account manager, Liz was a key player in the strategic planning and conceptual development of promotional and educational programs directed at medical professionals and patients. Her marketing experience spans many therapeutic categories, including Parkinson's disease, osteoporosis, prostate cancer, antibiotics, antivirals and osteoarthritis. Liz received her BA in psychology from SUNY Geneseo, and her MA in psychology with a focus on cognition, perception and neuroscience, from NYU. She was part of a research team investigating the intersection of memory and emotion in the brain, and published findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a peer-reviewed scientific journal. Liz and her husband, Ben Swinburne, are the proud parents of Josephine ('16), Vivian ('19) and Isabel ('22).



### Kurt Miller

Kurt Miller and his wife Melissa are parents of two WSMS alumni. Over the years, Kurt has had the pleasure of serving as Auction co-chair, as well as volunteering at multiple other events, including the Fall Festival and the Auction. Originally from northern Virginia, he moved west for undergrad at Stanford. After graduation, he taught English in Japan for a year before pursuing a PhD in Computer Science at UC Berkeley. He and Melissa moved to NYC in 2011 for Kurt's job at PDT Partners, a quantitative asset management firm. From 2014–2018, Kurt was also an adjunct at the NYU Center for Data Science.



### Yasmin Nozari

Yasmin Nozari and her husband, Mike Lefferts, are the parents of current WSMS student, Kaveh, alum, Cyrus '23 and future student, Lucie. Yasmin has been an active volunteer at WSMS since her family joined the school in Fall '20. She has served as a Class Rep, is a member of the WSMS Admissions Com-

mittee, chaired the yearbook, and Auction events, and participated in numerous other projects. She loves being involved in our school community. Yasmin has worked in tech for over 10 years—in product roles and as an entrepreneur. Prior to working in software, Yasmin was a middle school math teacher in New York with Teach for America. She holds a BA from Connecticut College, and a MS in Education from Hunter College.



### Charlene Su

Charlene Su has been a part of the WSMS community since her family moved from California to New York in 2021. Charlene served as co-president of the Parents Association for two years, co-chaired the 2022 Auction, and assisted with the Annual Fund and Admissions Committee. Charlene was born in Los Angeles and received her degree in Business Administration from the University of California, Berkeley and her MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Charlene has over ten years of experience in management consulting and marketing. As a consultant with L.E.K. Consulting, Charlene advised media and entertainment companies such as Disney, Universal Studios and the Motion Picture Association. As a brand manager with the Clorox Company, Charlene oversaw the strategic planning and marketing execution of two business units. Charlene's priorities and interests changed when she learned that her first child was born deaf and began supporting the rehabilitation of her daughter's hearing through the use of cochlear implants. She is an advisor to families who desire for their deaf/hard-of-hearing children to communicate using listening and spoken language through her continued involvement with Weingarten Children's Center, Baker Institute for Children with Hearing Loss, and the Center for Hearing and Communication. Charlene and her husband, David Su, are proud parents of Natalie (10), Olivia (WSMS '24), and Claire (3), who will be starting her WSMS journey this year.



### JF Thye

JF Thye and his wife, Jessica, are parents to two children currently at WSMS (Loren and Lexi), and Julien, who is a '22 alum. They are active participants in the WSMS community, having had roles in the Fall Festival and as class rep. JF is Operating Partner at Alder Point Capital Management where he invests in farm and timberland via a climate and rural development strategy. Previously, JF co-founded

Deskpass, a company that helps decarbonize office properties and was merged with Industrious in 2023. Before, JF worked in engineering and finance for design, investment, and clean tech companies. He co-founded NIAM Expeditions, a conservation research group supporting the UN and Wildlife Conservation Society global oceans programs. JF is a board member of The Cumberland Forest Project, the largest conservation and rural investment initiative in the US. JF received a BS from Cornell University, an MBA from the Yale School of Management, and an MEM from Yale School of the Environment.



**Elizabeth Tyndell**

Elizabeth and her husband, Matthew Lifshutz, are the proud parents of a current WSMS student and a WSMS alum, Dorothy ('23). Elizabeth has been an active parent volunteer since joining the WSMS community in 2019. She has enjoyed partnering with other parents and supporting the school as a Fall Festival co-chair and Class Rep for multiple years, Annual Coat Drive co-chair, along with various other volunteer opportunities. Outside of her time at WSMS, Elizabeth serves as the Head of Talent Acquisition at New York Life, a Fortune 100 financial guidance provider. In this role she is responsible for creating an innovative and competitive enterprise talent acquisition strategy that promotes New York Life's employment brand and competitive position in the market. Prior to joining New York Life, Elizabeth spent 15 years at Goldman Sachs as a part of their Global Recruiting Leadership team, most recently as the Global Recruiting COO. Elizabeth graduated with a bachelor's degree from Hope College in Holland, MI.



**Christina Wang, MD**

Christina Wang, MD, is the Clinical Quality Director of Cancer Prevention at The Institute for Family Health, one of the largest community health centers in New York State, with a mission-driven focus of providing high quality, affordable health care, and addressing racial and ethnic health disparities in medically underserved populations. In addition, she manages medical partnerships with local organizations, including Care for the Homeless and the American Cancer Society. Prior to moving to New York from San Francisco in 2018, she worked at Kaiser Permanente, where she was a Physician Partner serving as Medical Director of Acupuncture for the East Bay region. She received her BA in biology from

Rice University, and her MD from Baylor College of Medicine. Christina and her husband Henry are proud parents of Preston, Thompson (WSMS '20) and Estella (WSMS '22). She has been an active parent volunteer, serving on many committees, including the Admissions Committee. She co-chaired the Auction, Fall Festival and Hooked on Books, and was the PA co-president in 2021–2022.



**Alex Wasch**

Alex Wasch serves as the Chief Operating Officer at Figure Skating in Harlem, a globally recognized and award-winning youth development organization dedicated to empowering girls through education and access to the sport of figure skating. Prior to her tenure at Figure Skating in Harlem, Alex held roles in Corporate Responsibility at JP Morgan, and served in various leadership capacities at the UJA-Federation of NY. Before transitioning to the nonprofit sector, she worked in marketing and global brand partnerships at leading companies including the National Basketball Association and JetBlue Airways. Alex has previously served on the Board of the Friends of Tranquillity Camp among other NYC-based nonprofits. At WSMS, Alex co-chaired 2023 End of Year Lawn Party and previously served as a Class Rep. Alex holds a BA in Rhetoric and Communications Studies and History from the University of Richmond. Together with her husband Evan, they have two daughters, Kaia ('23), and current student, Zoe.



**Jordan Blitzer,  
Parent Representative**

Jordan Blitzer is Director of Admission at Columbia Business School overseeing strategic projects across the various degree-bearing programs offered at the school. She also serves as a senior member of the admissions committee for the Full-Time and Executive MBA programs. Prior to her transition to higher education, Jordan worked in corporate human resources and talent acquisition for companies including BlackRock and Baked by Melissa. Jordan graduated from Brandeis University with a BA in Sociology and Anthropology and obtained an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University in Organization & Leadership with a focus on adult learning. Growing up on the Upper West Side, Jordan is a graduate from WSMS herself. She is extremely grateful to serve as co-president of the Parents Association this year, in what feels like a very full-circle moment. Last year, Jordan was co-

chair for the Diamond Anniversary Auction (2023), Class Representative for her son's class, and assisted with other activities, including the Yearbook, Admissions Committee, and Fall Festival. Jordan and her husband, Noah Blitzer, will have both of their two children at WSMS this year. Dylan, who is returning for his third year, and Olivia, who will be in the Twos Program starting on the WSMS journey!



**Ellie Burrows Gluck,  
Parent Representative**

Ellie Burrows Gluck is an entrepreneur, advisor, certified personal development coach, Vedic Meditation teacher, and the cofounder and former CEO of MNDFL. After graduating magna cum laude from Northwestern University, Ellie served as an executive in the film business. Over time her activities and interest evolved into a formal coaching practice centered on effective communication and interpersonal relationships. In 2014, she co-founded MNDFL, New York City's premier meditation company. During her tenure, Ellie also completed an extensive 2000-hour Vedic Meditation teacher training program. Now Ellie is focusing on new endeavors, including angel investing, providing advisory services for female founders and, most importantly, raising her daughters, current WSMS student, Luna, and Goldie with her husband, Simon Gluck. Ellie co-chaired the 2023 Groovy Gala, and is currently co-president of the Parents Association. She serves on the board of At The Well, which enhances women's well-being through ancient Jewish practices.



**Shayna Gatling,  
Faculty Representative**

Shayna Gatling started at WSMS as a teacher in the Twos program in 2017. In 2018 she moved to the Multi-Age program and became a head teacher in 2023. Shayna received her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Long Island University Post and is Montessori certified through WSMS-TEP.





# Great Beginnings 2024

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 **WSMS**  
West Side Montessori School  
Founded in 1963

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West Side Montessori School

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**Twos Program**

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