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To me, fall is the most exciting time of year: we celebrate new beginnings and, most importantly, the return of children to our classrooms. From now through mid-June, with the love and support of the dedicated adults in their lives, they will surprise and delight us all with their curiosity and their amazing capacity for joyful learning. Our promise is to provide these children, who will grow exponentially in these early years, with the best possible preparation for a lifetime of successful learning.

Our teachers returned to school in late August, eager to begin the new year. As their energy filled the building, I reflected on the many individual and collective accomplishments of our faculty, and I felt proud to be part of a whole-school effort focused on making sure that every school day matters for every child. Working in the wings, our multi-talented and dedicated administrative staff makes sure that every aspect of our school is running smoothly: anticipating faculty and classroom needs, helping with systems and record keeping, supporting the safety and security of each child, and more and more.... And, we are fortunate to have as trustees current and former WSMS parents, who generously provide invaluable strategic advice and counsel to ensure that our school will evolve and continue to thrive to serve future generations. Collectively, this committed community of faculty, administrators, and trustees ensures the present and future health of the rich learning environment that we treasure and protect.

This edition of Great Beginnings includes our Annual Report of Giving, in which we have the opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the participation of our donors and volunteers. Also featured are several articles, which I hope you enjoy. Take a look at the profile of the Witt-Hatfield family in our Alumni feature; their commitment to education is an inspiration to all. And, speaking of alumni, Eric Schwarz, son of founders Marian Lapsley Cross and Fritz Schwarz and a member of our very first class, recently published a book addressing the “educational opportunity gap.” His hands-on commitment to education is a worthy read.

This issue also introduces two new recurring features: “Teacher Talk,” in which we learn about our faculty (their interests, expertise, and background); and “Teacher Tips,” in which teachers share some of the skills and techniques that they use in working so successfully with our children. Many of our teachers mastered these skills over the course of their training in WSMS-TEP, our teacher education program. I am delighted to welcome Lisanne Pinciotti, MEd, as the new head of WSMS-TEP. In this issue Lisanne talks about what’s new, and what’s to come, in the program.

In closing I want to highlight some administrative changes. I wish Lorén DeNicola, a highly respected member of the WSMS faculty, tremendous success in her new role as Director of the Brownstone School. I also wish our outgoing Chief Financial Officer, Mike Moran, all the best. Mike has been a valued member of our community for more than a decade as the parent of WSMS alum Skyler (’07) and as a former trustee. I extend a warm welcome to Matthew Bloom, our new CFO, who has hit the ground running.

And, on behalf of the WSMS community, my heartfelt thanks to everyone mentioned in these pages for your openhearted support and your continuing commitment to our mission. For 51 years and counting, our community of current and alum parents has helped WSMS become the exceptional place that it is. I am deeply grateful to each and every one of you.

Mimi Basso
Head of School
A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Dear members of the WSMS community,

As many of you know, I have a long history with WSMS—as a student in the ’70s, as the parent of three recent alumni, and now as Board president—and I have seen many changes over the years. The Annual Report of Giving featured in this issue of Great Beginnings celebrates your generosity, but it also reflects the way we always have our eyes open to meet the challenges of our dynamic world, be they programmatic, environmental, financial, or cultural.

Having established an excellent academic beginning for children of the Upper West Side, the WSMS community has never rested on its laurels. Instead, with the support of the Board of Trustees, it has worked hard over the years to expand access for families from a broad socioeconomic spectrum; to continually improve the physical environment; and to supplement the traditional Montessori focus in creative ways. Last year’s innovative entree into a slightly younger cohort—the Two’s Program—was a success and has led to our expanding our Montessori teacher education program, WSMS-TEP, to address training for that younger group. We are also providing the opportunity for our faculty to obtain their early childhood master’s degrees on site, through collaboration with Concordia College.

We are fortunate to have in Mimi Basso a leader with clear and thoughtful vision. We have a Board of Trustees with wide-ranging expertise and the shared consistent goal of keeping WSMS poised to meet every opportunity and challenge. And we have a faculty and administration whose first priority—as we can never say often enough—is to provide the highest quality educational start for all our children.

The other thing we can never say enough is thank you: to the members of the Advancement Committee, especially committee chair Myles Amend and Annual Fund Chairs Cecily Denny, Sarah Lowenstein and Stell Pennay; to Parents Association Co-Presidents Aima Raza and Joanna Hagan Rego; to Auction Co-Chairs Katie Cameron, Nikki Chase-Levin, and Jason Santiago; to Spring Fair Co-Chairs Allen and Angela Lamb, Jessica Mendelowitz, and Elisabeth Zeche; and to Advancement Director Patricia Luciani.

And our deepest thanks to you for your ongoing generosity and commitment to WSMS.

Alexander H. Southwell ’76
(Madeline ’07, Lucas ’11, Gemma ’14)
President, Board of Trustees
FUNDRAISING RESULTS 2013-2014

ANNUAL FUND $278,246
AUCTION (NET) $213,947
TOTAL $492,193

2013-2014 REVENUE (unaudited)

Tuition, Fees, Gov't Programs 91%
Annual Fund 5%
Auction (net) 4%

2013-2014 OPERATING EXPENSES

Instructional Expense 54%
Administrative Expense 21%
Building Maintenance 13%
Financial Aid 12%
MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Charged with the responsibilities of supporting and overseeing the head of school, setting the school’s policies, providing strategic guidance, and ensuring fiduciary and ethical integrity, the WSMS Board of Trustees plays a critical role in ensuring the long-term health and well-being of our school. Consisting of current and former WSMS parents, distinguished individuals from other educational institutions, a faculty representative, and three ex officio trustees (the head of school and the current PA co-presidents), our board spans a broad range of backgrounds and areas of expertise. This diversity of experience enables the trustees to effectively carry out a wide variety of projects, among them the purchase of our current building in 1974; the hiring of our current head of school, Mimi Basso, in 2007; the “greening” of our classrooms and kitchen in 2009; and the addition of a program for two-year-olds in 2013. We are deeply grateful to our current and former board members—every one of them a volunteer, and all of whom have given of themselves so willingly and generously in helping to cement the future of our school.

Please join us in welcoming the following new members of the WSMS Board of Trustees:

NIKKI CHASE-LEVIN

Nikki is the mother of two enthusiastic little dudes: Max, a kindergartner at Collegiate and an alumnus of classroom 4E, and Zach, a second-year student in Garden. Nikki is also an active WSMS parent volunteer who served as Auction 2014 co-chair.

Nikki received her BA in Journalism from Michigan State University. She has worked in various capacities—television advertising development, marketing communications, public relations, and events programming—for several consumer brands, including Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum, Sony, Morgan Stanley, Discover Card, and Miller Brewing Company. Nikki is the founder and president of Straight Line Marketing, Inc., an independent consultancy serving such clients as Smirnoff Vodka, Discovery Networks, and the experiential marketing agency MKTG. Nikki was elected to the New West Condominium Board of Managers in 2010 and currently serves as board Vice President.

LINDSAY FORBES

Lindsay was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. She has a BSc in Forestry from the University of British Columbia and a JD from the University of Toronto. Prior to starting her family, Lindsay practiced commercial real estate law in Vancouver and New York. She is now developing the U.S. East Coast market for EAB Tool Co., a power tool accessory company founded by her father and marketed in over 2,700 retail outlets in North America. Lindsay and her husband, Ali Dibadj, are the proud parents of Cameron (5), who graduated from WSMS in 2014, and Ava (3), who started her second year at WSMS this fall.

IVA MILLS

Iva is the mother of twins Dashiel and Morgan, who both excitedly began attending WSMS last fall in the new Two’s Program (1W) and are now in 4Eam. Iva has been an active school parent, participating in the WSMS Annual Fund drive and volunteering with the Auction and Spring Fair committees. She received her BA in Political Science from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her JD from the Washington College of Law at American University. Iva practiced law for 10 years: at a law firm, primarily in the area of advertising and marketing litigation, and in-house, litigating intellectual property disputes. She is married to Scott Mills.

For more information about all WSMS Board members, please go to http://wsmsnyc.org/home/community/governance/.
They want. Two-year-olds will be loud; they will yell and scream and run around. We tell our students, “Relax, be happy, that’s who they are.” You really have to stop and think: What are the children doing? What are they learning and discovering by doing whatever it is that they’re doing? It’s crucial that we not rush in and “correct,” that we allow kids to use their imagination, to move, to create things, to problem-solve, without the intervention of adults.

What advice do you have for parents dealing with the infamous “terrible two’s”? I don’t consider the two’s terrible! The most important thing is to know your child: take the time to sit back and observe her/him. Remember that children at this age can be unpredictable. Never assume that just because they do something one way today that they’ll do it the same way tomorrow.

Language is important. Pay attention to your tone of voice and your volume; you can get a point across without yelling. Children listen, and they watch everything you do. We recognize that it’s hard being a parent, and we’re here to help. Parents are always welcome to come into the classroom to observe, and when they do, they tell us, “I never knew that. That’s a great way to handle that situation.” It’s a partnership: we’re all here for their children.

Can you give an example of a situation that you handle differently for two-year-olds than for older children? One of the activities our kids like to do is to visit the kitchen at WSMS, to say hi to the chef and watch the food being prepared. Sometimes one child will suggest visiting the kitchen, and then more and more of the kids want to do it too. We don’t tell a two-year-old, “You can’t go now, because it’s not your turn.” Instead, we say, “Let’s all go see the chef!” Another thing to remember about children this age is that there’s such a broad range of what’s age-appropriate, and you have to anticipate that. It’s about role modeling. The kids watch, and eventually they do, but not because I told them to do it. By the end of the year they know what’s right and what’s wrong.

What brought you to teaching, and to the Montessori approach? When my daughter was two and a half, I always wanted to see what was going on in the classroom. I was amazed by how intuitive and natural the approach was. All my daughter wanted to do was paint, and now she’s 30 years old and she’s just opened her own art gallery. I always wanted to see what was going on in the classroom. I was amazed by how intuitive and natural the approach was. All my daughter wanted to do was paint, and now she’s 30 years old and she’s just opened her own art gallery. I always wanted to see what was going on in the classroom. I was amazed by how intuitive and natural the approach was. All my daughter wanted to do was paint, and now she’s 30 years old and she’s just opened her own art gallery.
What keeps you inspired?
WSMS-TEP always shows me a different side of what goes on in the classroom. It’s so rewarding to see these people coming in new and eager to learn how to work with infants and toddlers. The kids in the Two’s Program are a steady source of inspiration. They truly accept us teachers for who we are, regardless of age, etc. And then there’s WSMS. Mimi has such a fabulous way of supporting her teachers. I feel a real sense of belonging here. I love being in the classroom and watching the children thrive. 

What brought you to Montessori?
My entry into the world of Montessori was a bit of a happy accident. After graduating with a BA in Psychology, I knew I wanted to work with children, but I wasn’t certain about the capacity in which I would do this. I applied for an after-school teaching position at a school that happened to be Montessori-affiliated, and they offered me a full-time teaching job instead! I had the good fortune to be mentored there by a wonderful Montessorian named Mary Rockett. Her practice was truly inspirational: her interactions with children, her language, and her manner were exceptional. I found that the way that I believed children should be treated and taught had a name: Montessori. I was encouraged to take my training through Northeast Montessori Institute in Massachusetts, and here I was taught by a group of lifelong Montessori educators whose words and lessons still remain in my mind daily. I feel so fortunate to have begun my Montessori journey with them.

What brought you to WSMS?
Six years ago I planned to move to New York from Maine in order to be closer to friends and family. I was directed to look into West Side Montessori School by a number of colleagues, one of whom, Megan Cahill, was working there at the time. When I went for my interview, I was delighted by the faculty and the facilities. It was a beautiful space, and it was obvious from the start that children were taught with tremendous love and care. It didn’t take long for me to make my decision to join the WSMS community!

What keeps you inspired?
I stay connected to the ideas and people that inspire me. This comes in various forms: catching up with friends I trained with, or past or present colleagues at WSMS; or reading excerpts from Maria Montessori, Rachel Carson, or Catherine McTamaney. I try to keep my practice fresh by attending workshops and conferences, but I take out the notebook I filled during training when I feel like I need to get back to what was, and remains, most important to me. And, of course, the community of unique children with whom I spend my days is a constant source of inspiration!

What have been some of your particular successes with students?
Every day there are hundreds of tiny successes. Some are academic: the child who struggled with writing her name mere...
months before now representing each letter clearly, or a third-year student composing a springtime poem on the chalkboard. Others are perhaps less noticeable, though no less profound or meaningful: the child who spills a drop of milk and, without reminder, retrieves a towel and cleans his space; the comfort an older child offers to a new student who is crying for her parent; the ushering of an ant to safety outdoors; the care and creativity placed into a small flower arrangement to decorate the classroom. While I take great pride in all of the children’s academic accomplishments, observed moments of kindness, wonder, curiosity, and independence are, to me, greater successes.

As a head teacher, you have had the opportunity to mentor student teachers. What are the ways in which you benefit from this role?

The relationship between supervising teacher and student teacher is so much more reciprocal than one might imagine! The student teachers I have had the opportunity to work with have been so motivated and inspired, and I have certainly gained from them an equal or greater quantity than what I offered! Their energy, despite going through what is truly a grueling training process, is absolutely infectious, both for the children in the classroom and for the team of teachers with whom they work. It’s wonderful to be a part of an institution like WSMS that is so deeply involved with the training of future Montessorians.

Has the experience of teaching in WSMS-TEP changed your perspective and/or your practice? If so, how?

It’s been such a wonderful part of my own Montessori journey to work in the training of new Montessori teachers. I began teaching five years ago in the Language component, and I also designed and implemented a Peace Education workshop that was added to the Philosophy component. My own understanding of the philosophy and practice has become so much deeper in the years that I have been involved with TEP. It has also been highly motivating to gain a deeper understanding of language and literacy development in the young child, leading me to classes and workshops that presented strategies foreign to the Montessori language approach. How much richer my teaching of both children and adults has become for this expanded perspective!

The WSMS community bids a fond farewell to our beloved teacher Mingma Ukyab, who has moved back to her long-time home in Nepal. Here, she reflects on her lifelong commitment to Montessori education.

After graduating from college in my native country, India, I saw an advertisement for Montessori teacher training. Although I wasn’t familiar with Montessori, I was intrigued, so I signed on for the course. I have been a Montessori teacher for almost 30 years, including 14 at WSMS.

Montessori training changed my life! Every day is an inspiration because I am continually learning—from the children and from my colleagues. Montessori teachers are guides, not content experts focused on rote learning. We use our knowledge of child development, our skills of observation, and the proven materials developed by Maria Montessori to help our students experience the joy of understanding and the sense of competence associated with acquiring new skills, absorbing new concepts, and gaining factual knowledge. We encourage questions, foster independence, and emphasize that there are many ways to learn and to solve a problem.

Now that I am back home in Nepal, I plan to continue working in Montessori education. I have visited more than a dozen schools here that call themselves Montessori, but they lack the proper training and materials. I’m hoping to collaborate with Mimi and WSMS–TEP to bring some seasoned Montessori faculty to Nepal to help raise the standard here. I love WSMS; it is an outstanding school for children, for faculty, and for families. I want to retain my connection with the WSMS community for the rest of my life.
SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO TRY AT HOME

GROUND RULES: SET THEM ONCE, REFER TO THEM ALWAYS

Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Gentle. These statements shape just about every action taken in our classroom community. We remind children to treat every material with care and every person with respect. We offer reminders to remain safe while traveling up and down the stairs: walk slowly, eyes forward, and keep one hand on the railing at all times.

We also offer precise language for gently resolving a conflict. We consistently insist that children “use their words” when they encounter a disagreement. We begin by introducing “I statements” such as “I feel sad when...” or “I am frustrated because...”. Our goal is to keep children’s self-esteem intact by having them explain their feelings and offer a resolution for the conflict (for example, “I am frustrated because you took my paint brush before I was finished using it. I can show you where you can find another one, if you like”).

These strategies can easily be adapted at home. Have a family discussion about what ground rules are essential to creating a strong and supportive family unit. Have your child help you create a poster that depicts them. Place the poster in a prominent place in your home—the fridge door may be the place. And, refer to them consistently and often.

OK, KIDS, LET’S CHECK THE CALENDAR

We have an activity calendar in our classroom to let children know in advance what to expect, and to help them make transitions more easily from one activity to another. The calendar is composed of photos of children with captions: Arrival, Work, Group, Gym, Lunch, Roof, etc. By checking the calendar, a child can orient herself to where she is in the day, know that she’s doing what’s expected of her, and see what comes next. This strategy helps foster a sense of competence and builds some great habits for understanding sequencing and time. Creating a simple calendar at home with your child can make it easier to establish routines at home and gain your child’s cooperation in the bargain. Your child can help make the visuals for the calendar: photos, drawings, or collage. And he can help with creating the captions (Wake Up, Brush and Wash, Home from School, Bed and a Story, etc.), pasting letters cut out from magazines to make the words, or using his newly developing writing skills.

GRETCHEN AMBERG, HEAD TEACHER, GARDEN

In the Garden classroom a handmade illustrated poster describes our basic ground rules:

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CHELSEA PETROZZO, HEAD TEACHER, 3WAM

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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
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
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.”

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.

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.
THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF WSMS-TEP
A Masterful Approach

This year WSMS is delighted to welcome Lisanne Pinciotti, MEd, as Program Director of WSMS-TEP, our on-site teacher education program. Lisanne has been involved in Montessori education since 1985, serving in a wide range of capacities, including teaching, administration, curriculum design, and policy planning. Here, Lisanne offers an overview of how she got to WSMS-TEP and a snapshot of what's in the pipeline for this exciting and ever-expanding program.

What brought you to teaching, to Montessori, to teaching teachers?

When I was growing up, my mother always told me I would be a teacher. Many of the women in my family worked outside the home, and they were mainly nurses and teachers. I was determined to become someone “different” and follow a less traditional path. I earned a BS in Business Administration at the University of Dayton, which I found challenging and exciting. “Learn, Lead, and Serve” was the motto of UD at the time, and it was fostered in and out of the classrooms. Once I graduated and started working, however, I really missed the routine and the powerful interactions I had felt within a learning environment.

I “discovered” Montessori several years later while pursuing a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education at Rutgers University’s Graduate School of Education. One of the early courses required us to observe in a variety of early childhood settings, including at least one Montessori school. That first visit was the typical “aha!” moment that many Montessori teachers—and parents—describe. I found children and adults working harmoniously, both independently and in small groups. There was a focus on organization of classroom and curriculum that seemed unique to me. I remember thinking, “This is how it should be,” as I watched the joyful approach to learning in that room.

Fast forward 20 years, and I’d finished early childhood training at the Center for Montessori Education (CMTE)/NY, completed my master’s at Rutgers, my husband Dino and I had three daughters, and I was working at Children’s House Montessori in Highland Park, NJ. Besides being a mother, I wore many hats: teacher, financial administrator, curriculum coordinator, and parent education presenter. CMTE/NY invited me to join them as a field consultant for interns. I worked in the New Jersey satellite for nearly 20 years, eventually serving as Academic and Curriculum Coordinator of the New Jersey location until it closed last year.

And what brought you to WSMS-TEP?

I have been fortunate to meet and work with many wonderful people throughout my Montessori career; one of the people I met along the way was Mimi Basso. The TEP position is an exciting opportunity to use my broad experience and love of Montessori in a new way. And I am grateful to have this chance to work with the dedicated and enthusiastic faculty of both the school and the training program. I look forward to WSMS-TEP’s ongoing growth and improvement as we continue to build a “master”-ful approach to Montessori teacher education.

What programs does WSMS-TEP offer today?

WSMS-TEP currently offers two programs: one leading to an American Montessori Society (AMS) Early Childhood (ages 2.6 to 6 years) credential, and one leading to an AMS Infant & Toddler (birth to age 3) credential. WSMS-TEP is affiliated with AMS and is accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), the international standard-setting and accrediting body for Montessori teacher education. Because of the deep reflection and inquiry that the accreditation process entails, adult learners who graduate from our programs

WHAT IS WSMS-TEP?

Only four years after WSMS was founded, the school administrators recognized a clear need for formalized training in Montessori early childhood education in the New York area. The Montessori approach was not widespread in the ’60s, although it had a strong and successful foothold in Europe. There were few places in the U.S. where credentialed early childhood teachers or individuals interested in early childhood education could learn the Montessori method.

Founded in 1967 as Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents (CHAMP), the West Side Montessori School–Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP) is a program that prepares adults to become effective, responsive Montessori teachers capable of helping young children reach their full potential. Taught in WSMS classrooms on weekends and during school breaks, WSMS-TEP offers a supportive learning environment in which adult students work together with experienced, highly qualified Montessori educators, some of whom are graduates of WSMS-TEP themselves, while others bring additional perspective from training programs around the country.

WSMS STUDENT TEACHERS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN WSMS-TEP

Rebecca Estomago, 4W
Akwanza Gleaves, 2E
Amanda Hopson, 4W
Claire McGinley, 2W
Rachel Milano, 3Wam
Divya Narang, 4Eam
Lauren Sprouse, 3E
Nicole Valenti, 3Wpm
Cara Zelas, 4Epm
Nicole Zerafa, Garden
WSMS TEACHERS CURRENTLY TEACHING IN WSMS-TEP

Mimi Basso, Head of School  
Infant Toddler, Philosophy, Pedagogy, Observation

Karen Deinzer, Head Teacher 1W  
Infant Toddler: Environmental Design, Child/Family and Community

Katherine Fordney, Head Teacher 3E  
Mathematics, Cultural Subjects

Melissa Freeman, Associate Head of School  
Philosophy, Observation, Practical Life, Sensorial, Classroom Leadership

Thana Khouli, Assistant Teacher 4W  
Cultural Subjects

Donna Longdon, Head Teacher 4W  
Student Teaching Seminar

Margot Mack, Head Teacher 2E LAP, Art  
Specialist Art

Robyn Mernick, Head Teacher 4Eam  
Language, Peace

Marcia Polanco, Assistant Teacher 3Wam  
Cultural Subjects

Gelsey Steinbrecher, Head Teacher 4Eam  
Mathematics

are not only well prepared to work in infant, toddler, and early childhood environments, but their credentials are nationally and internationally recognized, allowing them to work in Montessori programs worldwide.

Last year was an exciting one for WSMS-TEP, as the inaugural cohort of eight Infant/Toddler adult students graduated in June and are now working in area schools. This year we have 10 students in the Infant/Toddler program and 42 students in the Early Childhood program.

How does WSMS-TEP benefit current students at WSMS?
WSMS-TEP provides a steady supply of excellent, qualified teachers for the children of our school. Many people enrolled in TEP do their student teaching in our classrooms, and some graduates are hired to fill the openings we have for new faculty each year. A number of seasoned WSMS faculty members teach in the WSMS-TEP program, thus gaining an opportunity to hone their Montessori skills in their role as TEP instructors, and ensuring continuity in style and approach in the student teachers. Truly, this is a case of everyone benefiting from the program, but ultimately it is the children who benefit the most.

Beginning this fall, WSMS-TEP students (48 of whom are doing their internships in classrooms at WSMS and other schools) will be able to apply the credits they obtain for their Montessori certification toward a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education. How does that work?
The Montessori/Concordia dual master’s degree in Early Childhood & Special Education is designed specifically for Montessori teachers who have earned a bachelor’s degree and who are seeking state certification in order to qualify for a head teacher position in New York State. Concordia College (located in Bronxville, NY) has agreed to accept up to 15 WSMS-TEP credits toward its 46-credit master’s degree. As a result, credentialed Montessori teachers are eligible to apply for the program and need to earn only 31 additional credits toward their degree. Better still, the program offers a significant per-credit tuition reduction for those remaining credits. Courses will be taught by Concordia College faculty at WSMS, making it easier for our interns and faculty to participate.

This new opportunity is a real benefit for 11 of our current WSMS teachers, who want to grow professionally and enhance their state teaching credentials. In addition, the program defines WSMS-TEP as a collaborative partner and resource within the wider Montessori community.

What are the plans for the future of WSMS-TEP?
Besides continuing refinement to our curriculum and programs, and the new partnership with Concordia College, we are working on a professional development program for Montessori-credentialed teachers. AMS now requires that teachers earn a minimum of 50 hours of professional development within 10 years in order to renew their teaching credential. I believe that high-quality opportunities are needed to ensure continuing competence in the classroom, enhanced understanding of Montessori materials, the needs of today’s children, and the importance of building partnerships with families. WSMS-TEP is in a position to share the expertise of our faculty and administration with teachers and schools in the metropolitan area to meet these goals.
Why We Give

“Why We Give

Our twins attended West Side for three years. In each of those years, we made a gift to the Annual Fund—we were so grateful for the wonderful beginning education they were receiving. Now that our twins are in third grade, we support their current school, and we continue to give to the WSMS Annual Fund—not only because we are grateful for the excellent preparation that they got at West Side, but also because we want to ensure its future for generations to come.”

West Side Montessori School’s promise is to provide each student with the best possible preparation for a lifetime of learning, and we are fortunate to have the involvement of our entire community in fulfilling that promise. We are proud of the dedication, inspiration, and expertise of our faculty and our administrative staff. We have an outstanding group of current and former WSMS parents on our Board of Trustees. We are privileged to have so many current and alumni families, grandparents, alumni, and friends as donors and volunteers.

This universal support helps us carry out so many tasks that are central to our mission: providing tuition assistance to one out of five students; securing competitive compensation and outstanding professional development opportunities for our faculty; operating our on-site Montessori teacher education program; and ensuring the school’s excellence and financial stability for today’s students and for generations to come.

Whatever form a donation takes—a monetary contribution to the Annual Fund, a gift in kind, a donation of time and talent toward one of WSMS’s many committees and events—and whatever the size, the underlying spirit of giving is the same, and we are deeply grateful for every single gift we receive. Our heartfelt thanks to all of the individuals mentioned in the following pages for your continuing generosity and support.

The Gonzalez Family, Ella and Esme ’11

We have made every effort to be as accurate as possible in compiling our lists of donors and volunteers. If we have inadvertently omitted your name or made errors in spelling, please call the Advancement Office at 212-662-8000 or e-mail seson@wsmsnyc.org.
THE ANNUAL FUND 2013-2014

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FUNDRAISING EFFORT

Every single gift to the Annual Fund makes a significant difference to our school. Each contribution helps us to make continuous improvements to our program and our facilities to enhance the education we offer our students. Recent examples include the creation of our visiting scholar program; the upgrading of our gym equipment and our rooftop play area; the transformation of our Parents Room into a beautiful children’s library that doubles as a room for parents; and the implementation of a performance-based compensation program for faculty. Your contributions also enable us to continue to offer financial aid to 20% of our students.

THE IMPORTANCE OF 100% PARTICIPATION

We encourage all members of the WSMS community to contribute to the Annual Fund. Achieving a high percentage of participation is essential to our continued success. It builds a strong culture of giving in which everyone shares in the important work of supporting the whole, and it sends a powerful, positive message to prospective families, potential donors, and outside funding sources that our mission is compelling and worthy of support. Our sincere thanks to all for getting us closer to our goal of 100% participation.
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WSMS PARENTS ASSOCIATION

Composed of the entire WSMS parent body, the Parents Association carries out multiple missions, all of which are vital to the life of our school:

• Raising funds for the school’s financial aid program by producing two annual fundraising events, the Auction and the Spring Fair

• Serving as a voice for parents’ views on policy and program decisions at WSMS

• Building and maintaining a strong school community by promoting understanding and friendship among WSMS families through close communication and a wide array of school events

We are awed by the amount of time, talent, and goodwill bestowed so freely by our parent community this past year. Our dynamic PA co-presidents, Aima Raza and Joanna Hagan Rego, assembled and led an energetic, creative, and hardworking group of committee chairs and class representatives, whose names you see here. This list of volunteers constitutes only a small percentage of the many parents who contributed to the success of the PAs endeavors. To all of you, our heartfelt thanks.
PARENTS ASSOCIATION 2013-2014

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Last year’s 50th Anniversary Celebration was a tough act to follow, but co-chairs Katie Cameron, Nikki Chase-Levin, and Jason Santiago outdid themselves by creating a fresh new approach for this year’s Annual Auction and finding the perfect new venue for it: the Loeb Boathouse in Central Park. WSMS dad Dave Levin was the Master of Ceremonies for this fun and creative “Walk in New York,” while other WSMS parents, teachers, and friends added to the festivities with terrific musical performances and a rousing sing-along. In all, the Live and Silent Auctions, the Raffle, and the Online Auction raised $213,947 for the school’s Financial Aid Fund.

Our sincere thanks to Katie, Nikki, and Jason, to the committee chairs, to our presenters and performers, and to everyone who donated their time, talent, financial resources, and so many wonderful auction items, all for the benefit of our Financial Aid Fund. A special thank you to the WSMS faculty and to our children, who worked so hard to create their beautiful classroom projects. Special thanks also to those teachers who donated their time and creativity to this year’s Teacher Time projects, and to the administrative staff for all their help and support.
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Restaurants
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Yarden Wines
SPRING FAIR

MAY 3, 2014

Children, parents, teachers, and neighbors came together on Saturday, May 3, for a great day of games, food, and entertainment on 92nd Street. Kids had a wide array of fun activities to choose from, including sugar cookie decorating, bracelet making, wriggling through the tunnel maze, and taking a ride on the beloved trolley. Grown-ups and kids alike enjoyed the live music and the terrific food, from the burgers and hot dogs to the delicious international buffet to the always popular bake sale.

Our heartfelt thanks go to co-chairs Allen and Angela Lamb, Jessica Mendelowitz, and Elisabeth Zeche; to the stellar group of subcommittee chairs they assembled, whose teamwork made every aspect of the Fair run smoothly; and to all who so generously donated their time, talent, and financial resources to help make this annual WSMS family tradition such a success.
SING FAIR CO-CHAIRS

Allen Lamb
Angela Lamb

Jessica Mendelowitz
Elisabeth Zeche

SING FAIR COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Deborah Rothman

Bracelet Making
Katie Barra
Tomomi Friedman

Cotton Candy
Josephine Kuo

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Bradley Honan

Tunnel Maze
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Yearbook Photography
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WSMS
Mimi Basso
Barbara Grant
Melissa Mack
…and all of the WSMS faculty and staff

Great Beginnings
FALL 2014

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www.craigwarga.com/

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