



Funding Early Education For Local Children

Thousands of families in New Jersey cannot afford to provide their children with early education. Preschool Advantage is committed to changing this—one child at a time.

Annual Update

2020-2021



PRESCHOOL ADVANTAGE

Funding early education for local children
Since 1995

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Learning – Growing – Adapting: The Lessons of Preschool Guide Us through Crisis

Educational experts agree that true learning is the result of struggle. Our deepest understanding comes after we wrestle our way through a challenge. Think of the child working hard to button a shirt. At first, little fingers struggle to hold the button and line it up with the correct hole. But eventually, the task becomes second nature.

The past year certainly presented more than its share of struggles for all of us. It has also provided opportunities to learn, grow, and adapt. The Preschool Advantage community of staff, board members and volunteers struggled to find ways to share ideas and solve problems without being in the same room, then adapted to a world of physical distance and Zoom meetings. Amidst lockdowns, we struggled to find families we could fund, then adapted by expanding our reach through the digital universe.

Our tireless event committees invited donors to join us for a virtual gala that exceeded all expectations, followed by a wonderful outdoor welcome event for new staff (finally back in-person!) and an outstanding and fruitful day of golf. The incredible flexibility of our volunteers was especially evident in our Child Placement Committee as they learned to review files through a secure online platform, comparing notes about applicants in virtual meetings and shared documents. Meanwhile, outreach volunteers replaced outdoor festivals and library visits with food distribution centers and online Board of Education meetings, spreading the word about Preschool Advantage wherever they could. Together, these dedicated individuals opened the doors of preschool to one child at a time.

By early summer four new faces appeared in our office, and I count my own among them, having joined Preschool Advantage one year earlier. Each of us dove into our work with enthusiasm, and when faced with new and unfamiliar tasks, responded with our office motto: "I don't know how to do that...YET!" Our shared passion for the Preschool Advantage mission made these challenges a joy.


As the 2020-2021 school year came to an end, 82 local children had finished a full year of learning at our partner schools, growing stronger and more capable each day and adapting to their newfound independence.


As I reflect on the past year, I am struck by how much our Preschool Community gave, both in time and in treasure, to secure that first and most essential educational opportunity for these children. I am also in awe of the families I had the opportunity to meet. So many had entered the pandemic earning just barely enough to make ends meet, then found themselves unemployed - or underemployed - in its wake. These families never stopped searching for the best opportunities for their children despite their difficult circumstances. Several even found time to volunteer in the office and on our Parent Advisory Committee.

I treasure the thank-you notes I received from the children who enjoyed a year of critically important learning. The courage and tenacity of the families I met this year will stay with me always. I am forever grateful and more committed than ever to assisting them as they secure a better future for their children. I have been inspired, too, by our resilient board of trustees that has not only kept us financially secure but has stayed focused on our mission, always looking forward to a future when we can start even more children on a journey of growth and learning.

Of course, all of this is only possible because of the powerful partnership Preschool Advantage has formed with the individuals, foundations and corporations who support our work so generously, even in the face of world-changing events. Over the past year "equity" and "access" have been repeated in the national dialogue as never before. Our country and our world are awakening to what you already know. Your support has always meant more than tuition to the children who benefit from your generosity. It is the first step to a better life.


Nancy Bangiola

 **Mission:** To give children a fair chance to succeed in life. We raise funds to open the doors of preschool and unlock the possibilities beyond.

 **Vision:** That all children begin school with the skills they need to learn and thrive..

 **Values:**
Compassion and Understanding: We respect and appreciate the unique needs and talents of the families we serve, preschools, donors, volunteers and employees.

- Commitment to Quality: We maintain high standards in our preschool partnerships, communications, and day-to-day work.
- Integrity: We are guided by our responsibility to our partner preschools, our donors and the families we serve.
- Optimism: We believe our mission benefits the larger community.

To learn how
Preschool
Advantage
changes the
lives of
preschool
children and
their families
[Click Here](#)

Every year as summer winds down, we at Preschool Advantage conjure up visions of backpacks and lunch boxes while the children we have met prepare for their momentous first day of school. In August of 2020, Preschool Advantage students had a new item on their back-to-school shopping lists – facemasks.



Our 28 partner preschool directors and staff worked tirelessly last summer to plan for reopening in the wake of the spring lockdown. Well into August, 2020 schools awaited guidance from the State regarding the new safety measures that would make it possible for young students to resume their preschool journey. Masks, physical distancing and plenty of outdoor time (even on chilly days) became the new normal, but we all let out a collective cheer that school was back in session.

As October approached it became clear that 2020's fall fundraiser would have to be a virtual affair. Given the unrelenting march of the pandemic this was no surprise, but the silver lining of our "Rainbow in the Clouds" online benefit was the incredible show of support among the Preschool Advantage community. Donors, staff and volunteers tuned in from home and aimed their generous spirit at the task of funding preschool tuition for the many local families who were struggling before Covid-19, and whose path to financial recovery was not going to be easy.

We knew the need in our community had grown larger than ever, but with so many families riding out the pandemic at home, our traditional methods of outreach (houses of worship, doctors' offices and libraries) were off the table. Instead, our staff and volunteers relied on social media, personal referrals and food pantries to spread the word throughout the community that Preschool Advantage was here to support

2020-2021 : Perseverance in a Challenging Year

local families determined to provide a preschool foundation for their children but unable to afford the cost.

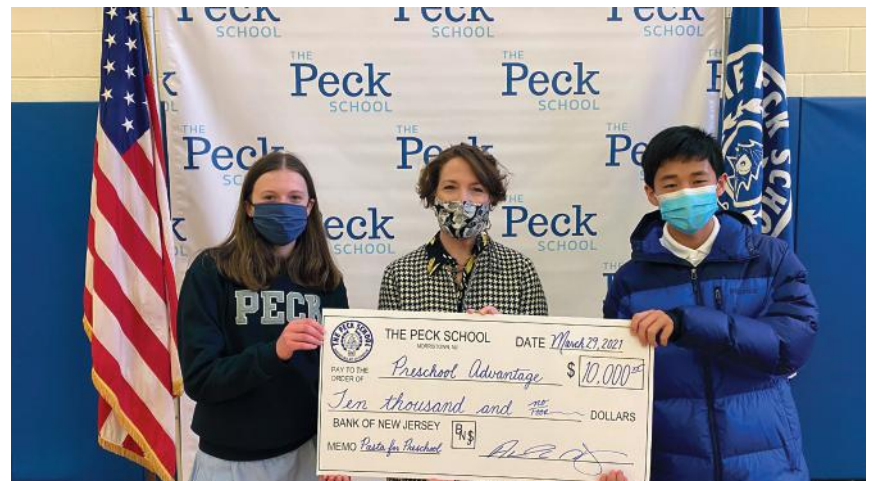
With fewer opportunities to be together, the past year challenged our community to stay connected in new ways. Instead of the annual Preschool Directors' Luncheon, we gathered online with our partner preschools for an uplifting and educational webinar, and we deepened connections with our families by forming the first ever Parent Advisory Committee. Through it all, we welcomed new staff and volunteers to our team, even when the office itself was operating remotely.

Volunteers are essential to so much of the work that goes on at Preschool Advantage, especially those volunteers on the Child Selection Committee who evaluate applications and help us make crucial decisions about which families we can fund.



Unwilling to let Covid-19 keep us from this vital collaboration, we moved our entire review process online and continued to work as seamlessly as possible through the magic of Zoom.

Speaking of magic - in lieu of their typical Pasta for Preschool dinner, our fabulous 7th grade partners at the Peck School in Morristown put on an amazing online show one chilly February night, combining fun lessons about pasta with a real-time cooking class. Participants at home transformed their pre-delivered ingredient kits into tasty gnocchi while raising a phenomenal \$10,000 for Preschool Advantage!



Events

On June 15, 2021 the Preschool Advantage Golf Invitational was back and better than ever. Golfers were thrilled to return to the beautiful Morris County Golf Club following 2020's unexpected but very successful virtual event. We could not have asked for more perfect blue skies under which to gather on the links and celebrate Preschool Advantage's long history in our community.

With record attendance of over 130 golfers and many new and returning corporate sponsors in the mix, the day began with sunshine and a gentle breeze as eager golfers gathered for lunch on the patio. All were happy to be back in-person after such a difficult year. Golfers competed for prizes but the famous "hole-in-one car" remained elusive.



The Return of Golf!

Preschool Advantage Trustee and Golf Committee Chair, Matt Mirett and the entire 2021 Golf Committee worked tirelessly to ensure the day would be a success. Thanks to all who joined us to play, participate in the clinic, purchase raffle tickets & mulligans and bid on great golf packages in the silent auction, the event raised enough funds to send 25 children to preschool!

VIRTUAL GALA

Preschool Advantage held its annual Turning Leaves fundraiser virtually in October, 2020 with the theme, "Rainbow in the Clouds." The abbreviated program featured guest speakers Dr. Holly Seplocha of Rutgers University, and Kristin Young, Peck School Kindergarten teacher, both of whom addressed the pandemic's effect on young children's learning and the importance of preschool for a successful transition into kindergarten. New Executive Director, Nancy Bangiola gave



tribute to retired Executive Director, Molly Dunn, highlighting her dedication to the Organization over her seven-year tenure. In a moving video testimonial from a current Preschool Advantage family, parents highlighted the impact the Organization has made on their child and on their family. Sponsors and donors helped make the event a huge success even by pre-pandemic standards, raising enough to fund preschool tuition for 40 children.

SIPPING CIDER FOR PRESCHOOL

On a balmy May evening following many months of pandemic restrictions, we felt so fortunate to gather outdoors to finally meet our Preschool Advantage community in person. Trustees, staff, and supporters mingled at a casual outdoor reception to welcome the new office team on Wednesday, May 12th at the Burnt Mills Cider Company in Bedminster. The beautiful location offered a perfect venue to socialize and connect in person with community members who had been working together virtually for much of the year. We enjoyed great conversation, live music, premium hard ciders brewed on-site, and delicious food truck fare. A Preschool Advantage mother shared remarks about the impact her daughter's preschool experience had had on their entire family. It was an important opportunity to come together to acknowledge and celebrate the hard work of the previous year and our collective success in supporting the families we serve.



Here's to the Heroes! A Tribute to our Partner Preschool Directors

"Hero" is a word we have been using a lot recently. But what makes a hero? Is a hero simply someone with superhuman strength who swoops down from the sky to save the world? No. A hero, as the Greek philosophers envisioned, is a perfectly ordinary person with one particular gift. A hero is a person who sees and understands the danger they are facing. The hero is even afraid. But the hero is unique because in the face of danger they choose to walk into the fire. In the face of danger, the hero creates new classroom routines for their young students who are too young to understand "social distance." The hero teaches those in their care to face danger with confidence by turning mask-wearing into a game, and creates outdoor classrooms where students can have a safe and nurturing place to learn and grow. And by confronting danger head-on the hero guides others through dangerous waters, making the world better for us all.

We are incredibly thankful for the courage and heroism of our partner preschool directors. Because of their efforts we were able to place 82 children in their classrooms during the tumultuous and confusing 2020-2021 school year. These are children whose parents cannot work from home. Many work on the front lines of the pandemic doing heroic work themselves, keeping grocery stores stocked and transporting the ill to hospitals. Others are home caring for younger siblings and know their 3 and 4 year-old children must prepare for their own journey with wise and experienced teachers. Their children need safe and inspiring environments where they can thrive and prepare for their future. Our Preschool partners provided these spaces and gave this care all year long. They opened the doors to Preschool and unlocked the possibilities beyond. What they accomplished was nothing short of heroic for the students in their care.

Preschool Advantage Partner Preschools, 2020-2021

All Saints Academy (Parsippany)
The Frances & Herbert Brody Preschool at Temple B'Nai Or (Morristown)
The Children's Circle at St. Andrew Lutheran Church (Parsippany)
Children On the Green (Morristown)
The Dogwood School of Chester (Chester)
El Primer Paso (Dover)
East Hanover Child Care Center (East Hanover)
Far Hills Country Day School (Far Hills)
Hearts and Hands Preschool (Parsippany)
Hillside Preschool (Succasunna)
Inspirekids Learning Center (Whippany)
Jefferson Child Care & Education Center (Lake Hopatcong)
Joyful Noise Nursery School (Morris Plains)
F.M. Kirby Children's Center (Madison)
Learning Garden Academy (Pine Brook)
Madison Montessori School (Madison)
Morris Plains Cooperative Play School (Morris Plains)
Mountain Lakes Country Day School (Mountain Lakes)
Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning Center (Budd Lake)
Rainbow Montessori School (Madison)
St. John's Nursery School (Bernardsville)
School of St. Elizabeth (Bernardsville)
Sunshine Preschool & Infant Care (Basking Ridge)
The Nursery School of the Presbyterian Church (Morristown)
The Preschool Place & Kindergarten (Bridgewater)
The Treehouse (Basking Ridge)
Union Hill Church Preschool (Denville)
The Westmont Montessori School (Mendham)

“

It is said that what doesn't bring you down makes you stronger. No doubt the challenges of this past year and a half have made us stronger, wiser and more thankful than ever to have the opportunity to play such an important role in the lives of our students.

Annie, Owner Learning Garden Academy

Weekly ZOOM meetings were another way we tried to stay connected with our students. The children loved seeing their friends and teachers again, and would spend the first twenty minutes of the meeting just catching up and conversing. It was a great way to keep in touch, but it was difficult to transfer our normal learning activities to a 40 minute video call.

”

Rachel, Director Learning Garden Academy

From the Inside

Friday, March 13, 2020 will always be known to us in the child care center community as the day the world changed. The public schools closed down and guidance about what child care centers should do was unclear at best. I reached out to local and state health officials for guidance. Recognizing that we serve many essential workers, we applied for and received an emergency license to keep our doors open. The most important step was to assess how each staff member was feeling. Were they uncomfortable, fearful, or needing to be with family members? Would we have enough staff willing and able to continue working? How many furloughs would be necessary?

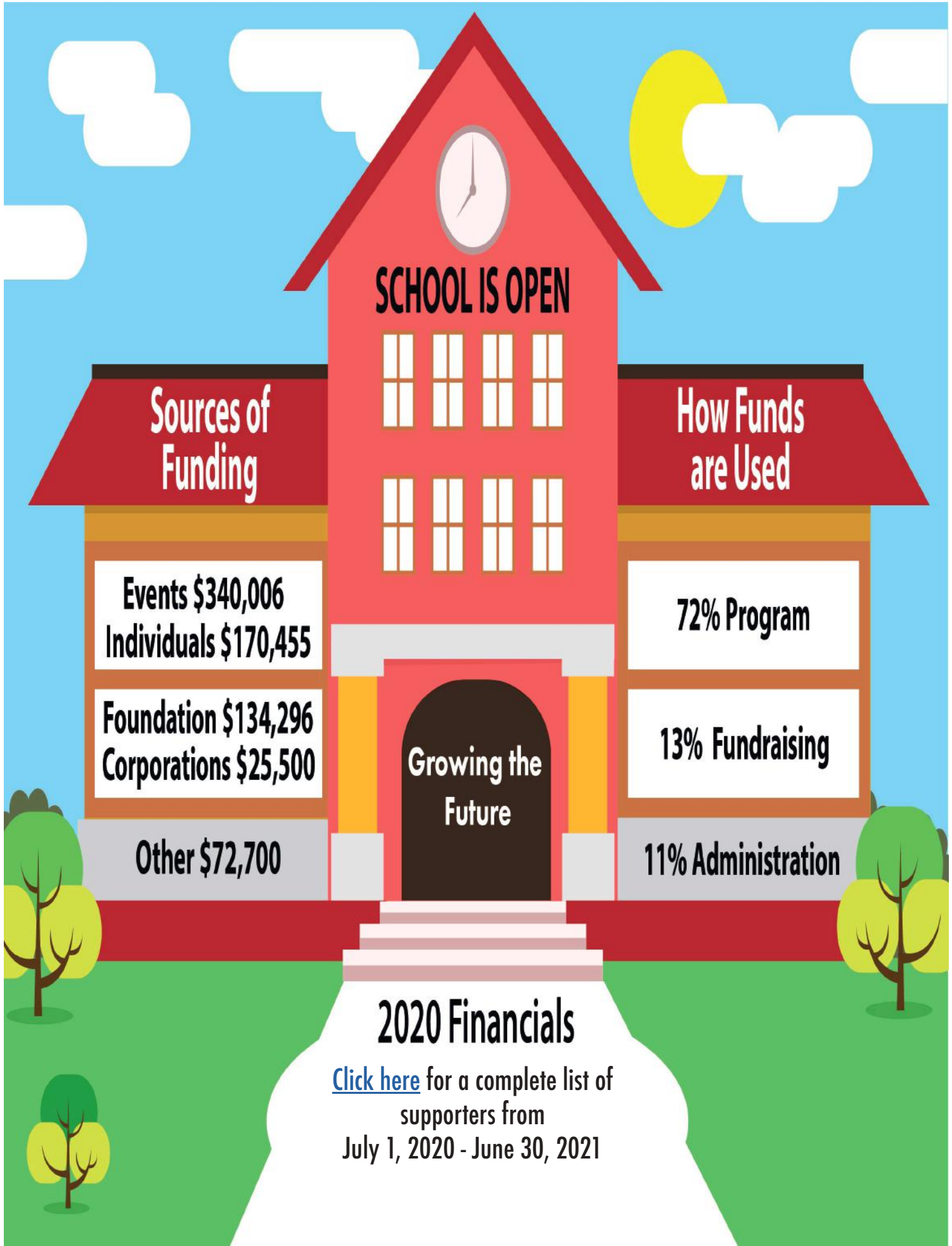
Between March and June, 2020 when only the children of essential workers could be served by authorized child care providers, we were in survival mode: getting through one day at a time and working together to maintain normalcy for the children who depended on us for safety and security. Parents often said "thank you for staying open." We kept them informed about all we were doing to keep children and staff safe, continually modifying as new information became available. Having the trust of the parents while many of them were under enormous stress themselves enabled us to remain positive.

Our main goal was to help each child stay busy with age-appropriate activities - to keep their minds occupied with normal concerns. Most children adapted readily to wearing masks, frequent hand-washing, and all the other safety measures we put in place. One child mentioned on a number of occasions that he was scared - that his parents were talking about COVID at home and he thought he would get sick. We talked with him, let him express his feelings, and then redirected his attention to his favorite games and activities. We shared many stories about fears, helping him and his classmates understand that we all have them and that we would take care of each other.

Our staff, too, needed frequent opportunities to express their concerns. As Director, my primary job was to listen whenever needed so our staff could feel reassured that we would come through this challenging time together. By taking care of each other we would be able to continue taking care of the children in a calm and optimistic manner.

When some of the restrictions were lifted, we remained vigilant. Even at the height of the pandemic our center managed very well through COVID and we wanted to continue doing everything we could to keep our whole community safe and happy.

Gail Reuther, M.A. ECE
Executive Director,
Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning Center



SCHOOL IS OPEN

Sources of Funding

**Events \$340,006
Individuals \$170,455**

**Foundation \$134,296
Corporations \$25,500**

Other \$72,700

How Funds are Used

72% Program

13% Fundraising

11% Administration

Growing the Future

2020 Financials

[Click here](#) for a complete list of supporters from July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021



Colleen Carey, Communications, Marketing & Events Manager.

Colleen joined the Preschool Advantage team in July. Prior to joining the staff at Preschool Advantage Colleen was a part of the Calling All Kids team at Goryeb Children's Hospital at Morristown Medical Center where she coordinated events, fundraising, and outreach. Colleen's first passion has always been education. Colleen began her teaching career at Children's Garden Preschool in Morristown and continued at Harding Township School where she taught for ten years. At HTS Colleen also coached track and soccer, and contributed to the development of the school's math and language arts curricula. A long time resident of Morristown, Colleen has dedicated her life to serving her community. She has directed various summer camps, creating an engaging experience for local children and providing meaningful volunteer opportunities for teen counselors. Colleen also directs Morristown's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) where she is responsible for recruiting and leading a team of volunteers who serve the residents of Morristown. Colleen holds a B.A. from Fairfield University in Fairfield, CT, and a M.A. in Education from Seton Hall University.

Jessie Lubow, Director of Development

Prior to stepping into the Development Director role in February, 2021, Jessie had been serving as a consultant to Preschool Advantage, focusing on writing projects including marketing materials, website editing, and grant proposals. Jessie is also a former trustee and volunteer with Preschool Advantage. During her tenure as a trustee, Jessie served as Co-Chair of Preschool Advantage's Child Selection Committee, and she was a member of both the School and Strategic Planning Committees. Jessie has worked as a freelance writer for Newark Academy in Livingston, NJ where she contributed articles to the Academy's alumni magazine and wrote marketing materials for the college counseling and summer enrichment programs. From 1995 – 2010, Jessie worked in admission & financial aid at both Newark Academy, and Kent Place School in Summit, NJ. She is a former trustee of the Westmont Montessori School in Mendham, and a former member of the Harding Township Environmental Commission. Jessie is a certified Bar Method instructor and has been teaching at the Bar Method of Bernardsville since 2010. Jessie holds a B.A. from Dartmouth College where she majored in English.



Wendy Anell, Administrative & Program Assistant

Wendy joined the office staff in February, 2021. She brings a strong background in administrative work, data entry, and patient/customer service to Preschool Advantage. Wendy, is a mother of two young children who hopes to make a difference in the lives of other children. Two years ago, she faced some of the same struggles as our Preschool Advantage families and sought preschool tuition assistance for her children. Now they are both off to a great start on their educational journeys. Wendy is fluent in both Spanish and English and has played a key role in communicating with the many Spanish-speaking families we serve. The impact Preschool Advantage made on Wendy's own family inspired her to become a part of the team. Wendy is delighted to bring her talent, hard work, and drive to make a difference in our community, one child at a time.



Officers:

Adrienne Kirby, President
Community Volunteer

Bette Simmons, Vice President
County College of Morris

Carolyn Simpson, Vice President
Community Volunteer

Ray Hawkins, Treasurer
AEPG Wealth Strategies

Gail Reuther, Secretary
Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning
Center

Trustees

Kyle Colwell
Private Advisor Group

Lauren Diemar
St. John's Nursery School

Jessica Padilla Gonzalez
Housing Partnership

Denise Lanza
Morris County Park Commission

Yvette Long
ASPIRE/Platinum Minds

Joshua Mackoff
Real Estate Appraiser

Ginger Michaels
Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Matt Mirett
Sherman Atlas Sylvester &
Stamelman LLP

Judith Pierce
Kindergarten Teacher (Retired)

Maria Vinci Savettiere
Deirdre's House

Rick Thoeni
Community Volunteer

Founders

Jill Lasser
Stuart Lasser

Staff

Nancy M. Bangiola
Executive Director

Jessie Lubow
Director of
Development

Colleen Carey
Communications,
Outreach & Events
Manager

Wendy Anell
Administrative &
Program Assistant



Board & Staff

Forewell

Over the past year we said goodbye to three dedicated board members, each of whom brought their unique skills and talents to Preschool Advantage, along with their shared passion for funding high-quality preschool education for young children in our community.

Eugene Huang served on the Outreach, Finance, Child Selection, Golf, and Governance Committees, and as Board President from 2017 to 2019. Eugene enthusiastically attended community events to share the mission of Preschool Advantage and he brought many new friends into the fold, encouraged by his contagious passion for the Organization. Upon his departure, Eugene was fondly recognized for his legal acumen, technical writing skills and keen ability to analyze issues before the Board.

Marc Cardone came to Preschool Advantage with a unique background in independent school banking and finance. Marc's insights during his years on the Finance Committee were extremely valuable, most recently as he helped to navigate our banking needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Marc has been an enthusiastic advocate for Preschool Advantage among his wide circle of friends and business contacts.

Bob Peterson first connected with Preschool Advantage as a volunteer following a long career in child psychology within the Rochester, NY public school system. Bob soon joined the Board, where his intuitive understanding of children and families were an enormous asset, particularly to the Child Selection Committee. During his tenure on the Child Committee, Bob and his wife, Julie, frequently and thoughtfully participated as a team to conduct family interviews.

Maria Vinci Savettiere, Esq. of Bernardsville, joined the Board in January, 2021. Since 2003, Maria has been the executive director of Deirdre's House, the child advocacy center for Morris County that provides forensic interviewing, medical examinations and treatment, and clinical counseling to child victims of abuse, neglect, or children that have witnessed violence. She is also on the boards of Blair Academy and the Greater Morristown YMCA and is the child advocacy center representative on the Governor's Child

Advocacy and Multi-Disciplinary Advisory Board.

Welcome

In July, Preschool Advantage welcomed **Jessica Padilla Gonzalez** of Long Valley, NJ to the Board of Trustees. Jessica is the executive director of the Housing Partnership and serves on the Morris County Executive Committee for the Continuum of Care and the Morris County Fair Housing Committee. She is on the board of the Garden Savings Federal Credit Union, and serves as vice chair of NeighborWorks America's National Homeownership Steering Committee. In addition to serving her community, Jessica enjoys reading, hiking, CrossFit and spending time with her daughters.