

Why I Give: *Jami Wintz McKeon*

When Jami Wintz McKeon's daughter, Benchmark alumna Samantha McKeon '98, first started at Benchmark School in 1992, she was similar to many other Benchmark students in that she was a bright child who struggled with reading.

"After just a short time of Samantha being at Benchmark, her reading struggles practically went away," Jami recalled. "Benchmark certainly helped to unlock Samantha's potential and gave her the tools she needed to succeed in school. Since leaving Benchmark, Samantha has received compliments on her study skills and the fact that she can articulate what she understands and what she needs help on. It's empowered and enabled her to succeed in education and in life."

Today, at age 29, Samantha is certainly successful. Working in New York City as Public Relations Manager for fashion designer Veronica Beard, Jami said that she is definitely in her element. "She is doing exactly what she has always wanted to do. She has a great work ethic and has been flourishing ever since she moved to New York City in 2006."

Although Samantha has not been a Benchmark student for 13 years, her continued success is part of the reason why Jami still gives to Benchmark each year.

"I first gave to Benchmark [in 1993] because we were so delighted with the education Samantha received while she was there and because we agreed with the philosophy of the School," Jami said. "After Samantha graduated



[in 1998], I decided to keep giving to Benchmark because of a combination of gratitude for all of the opportunities Samantha got while she was there, and because I believe that you have to invest in places that offer the kind of support that Benchmark does."

Jami believes that Samantha's overall experience at Benchmark was a remarkable one. "Benchmark is certainly unique among all the schools that Samantha has attended," Jami said. "Although the education was of key importance, I loved how there was always great sports and theatre at the school, too. I felt like just because she was at a different school, it didn't take her away from being exposed and involved in extra-curricular [activities]."

To those parents who are hesitant about making the transition to Benchmark for their child who is experiencing difficulty in school, Jami's advice is to not wait or be fearful about making the change. "I was lucky enough that Samantha could start at

Benchmark in first grade before she had experienced a lot of struggles in her traditional school," Jami said. "But I can't tell you how many parents told me that they wished they had transitioned their child to Benchmark sooner so that they could avoid their child feeling a sense of failure or affecting a sense of self-worth and confidence. They don't need to go through that."

Although Jami mostly admires the work of Benchmark from afar these days because she is busy as Chair of the law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, she said she continues to give confidently because she believes in the mission of the School and how it is run. "I've seen first hand the approach teachers take, the quality of the education, and that—most importantly—it works." 

Photo: Jami Wintz McKeon and her family. Back row: Samantha '98, Maggie, Jami, and daughter-in-law Heather. Front row: Payton, Jami's husband John Hollway, and Jake

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