

Why I Give:

Kimberlee Orth

Kimberlee Orth and her husband, Robin, were seasoned parents by the time their fourth child Julie— affectionately referred to as “the fourth Orth”—entered kindergarten at Wilmington Montessori School. Each of Julie’s three older siblings had attended the school, all had shown interest in reading in either kindergarten or first grade, and the Orths knew the teachers and staff there well. So when Julie wasn’t interested in reading in kindergarten, they believed it would come in time.

Unfortunately, in first grade, Julie’s interest in reading didn’t improve, nor did her classroom experiences. By second grade, Kim realized that Julie was increasingly aware of what she was not learning in the classroom and that knowledge was beginning to affect how she saw herself. Even with tutoring and sessions with reading specialists, it was obvious that Julie was relying on memorization to get by. The Orths knew something had to change.

“We talked to the principal at Wilmington Montessori who has a Ph.D. in reading,” Kim said. “And she said if Julie were her child, she would send her to Benchmark.”

The Orths did not hesitate to take action. They enrolled Julie in Benchmark’s full-day summer camp program—a step they say they would encourage any parent to do if their child is struggling “even a little bit.” After the first week of camp, they were sure Benchmark was the right place for Julie and they applied for fall admission.



The Orth Family (from left): Elizabeth, Katie, Robin, Julie, Kimberlee and Michael

During her first year at Benchmark, Julie made significant progress under the guidance of Sherry Cress or “the goddess of reading” as Kim refers to her. Julie is now a 7th grader and flourishing at Benchmark, becoming what the Orths call “a curious learner.”

“We believe 100% in the mission of Benchmark School,” Kim said. “The gratitude and appreciation we have for this school is just tremendous.” This is why Kim and Robin, who are both professionals in the field of finance, have given to The Benchmark Fund every year since Julie enrolled. They also were pleased to give of their time to co-chair The Benchmark Fund in 2014-2015.

Kim believes strongly that the benefits of a Benchmark education stretch far beyond “just” learning to read. “We value the entire package [at Benchmark],” she said. “What school is teaching mindfulness? What school is teaching a child about what kind

of learner they are? What school is teaching a child how to advocate for themselves with an adult or person in authority? That’s Benchmark School.”

As Julie nears the end of her time at Benchmark, the Orths are confident in the school’s transition process and trust that the staff will help Julie find the next best school for her. “There’s so much of the methodology of this school that is tied to strong educational principles and proven research,” Kim explained. “It’s not just that Dr. [Irene] Gaskins came up with a good idea one day that Robb has expanded upon. It’s been tested. It’s been researched. It’s been refined. I believe that if they say that after 8th grade you’re ready to leave, then I trust that.”

“Every parent and every child at the school is so fortunate to have been directed to Benchmark,” Kim said. “This school is a gem.” 🌿

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