

Why We Give:

Patti & Michael Semerjian

"I was always so sorry that I disappointed my teachers." This statement brings Patti Semerjian to tears when she shares how her son Matt, then in third grade, said this to her two weeks after entering Benchmark in 2014. Fortunately, Matt continued by saying, "I'm not disappointing anyone here. They just want me to do my personal best." As Patti says, what more can you ask for in a school?

Matt and his brother were first graders at The Haverford School when Michael and Patti noticed that Matt was struggling with reading and keeping up with some of his classmates. Even with tutoring over the summer, Matt's struggles continued in second grade.

"We were relying on tutors even more, trying to really provide him with support, thinking he was just sort of lagging and somehow he would catch up," Patti says. "We had Matt tested, and as we were evaluating those results, the person who tested him talked about Benchmark. People at Haverford also talked about Benchmark...but we loved Haverford and really wanted to try to make it work. By the end of that winter, we started accepting the fact that Haverford might not have everything that he needed. We did a lot of soul searching and decided that he would go to Benchmark's Summer Camp and then to the school in the fall. I think it was the best

decision we could have ever made. I think we were apprehensive at the time...but he had a wonderful experience at camp. It was within just a week or two that we realized he was coming home with a smile on his face and was really happy about where he was and having people listening to him and wanting to help him."

Patti says that Matt is becoming very accepting of who he is, aware of his strengths and weaknesses, and learning strategies to compensate for his challenges. Matt's siblings now have their own Benchmark stories as well; his younger sister Nicole enrolled in 2015 and "absolutely loves school" her mom says. Matt's brother attends Benchmark's Summer Camp with his siblings because "Matt did such a good job talking about it," Patti says.

"We feel very lucky that we are able to have our children at Benchmark and benefit from it," Patti explains. "Part of the reason we support The Benchmark Fund is that we feel we are so fortunate to be able to send our children wherever they need to go that's the best fit for them. Not every family can do that, and we think the level of support that this school offers its students is something that should be supported.

"I've always realized that, as it relates to private schools, while the tuition may seem like it's a




The Semerjian Family

large amount, the funds are just so important to the financial stability to the institution," she continues. "I realize that the tuition dollars that are collected can't cover everything that the school is able to provide to the students. I'm a big believer in the fact that it doesn't have to be a huge donation - any amount is meaningful."

Patti is fortunate to have an employer that offers a great employee-match program, which allows their gifts to have an even greater impact.

As Matt's Benchmark experience progresses, Patti and Michael are able to see more every day how their investment is paying off. This year marked Matt's transition from Benchmark's lower school to the middle school. Patti admits that she wasn't really sure what the "self-advocacy skills" Benchmark always promoted would look like, but now, as Matt is maturing, Patti and Michael can see those skills in Matt and his friends.

"They have an awareness of themselves and what they're good at, what their challenges are, and what they have to work a bit harder on...and it's a sort of confidence that just because they have challenges doesn't mean they can't be successful in what they want to do," she says.

"We are just big believers in anything Benchmark does." 

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—Patti Semerjian

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