



ELLIS
EARLY LEARNING
WHERE ALL CHILDREN THRIVE

ANNUAL
REPORT
FY2025



ELLIS MISSION

Ellis partners with families to provide high-quality early childhood education in a warm, nurturing environment. A recognized leader in our field, we support children across the socio-economic spectrum, treasure diversity in all forms, and celebrate the joy of childhood.

ELLIS VISION

Every child thrives and every educator flourishes in an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

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A Message from the CEO and Board Chair



Dear Friends,

As we reflect on the past year, we're filled with gratitude — and excitement — for all we've accomplished together. Thanks to your support, FY25 was a year of bold steps forward, new ideas, and meaningful impact. We're proud to share some of those highlights in this annual report.

The 2024–25 school year marked a turning point. In September, we received the largest philanthropic gift in our history — a transformational investment helping us bring our vision to life.

With your partnership, we:

- ✓ **Established a Center of Excellence** dedicated to providing our educators with robust, on-the-job professional development and capacity building to further improve child outcomes
- ✓ **Launched the Ellis Family Child Care Network** to partner with licensed, home-based early childhood educators in Boston, providing administrative and quality-improvement support as we ramp up to serve at least 25 new children and families in its first year
- ✓ **Expanded our evaluation capacity** by welcoming Rosa Turco, Ph.D., as our first Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence to lead efforts to measure educator impact and child outcomes
- ✓ **Strengthened our family support services** by adding a bilingual social worker to our Jamaica Plain center to better serve Spanish-speaking families

Behind each milestone are children learning, educators growing, and families feeling supported — all made possible by you. Whether you give, volunteer, parent, or partner with us, you are a vital part of the Ellis story.

Thank you for being on this journey with us. We can't wait to see what we'll achieve together next.

With heartfelt thanks,

Lauren Cook

Lauren Cook
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Coleen Downs Dinneen

Coleen Downs Dinneen
BOARD CHAIR



WHAT SETS ELLIS APART

Ellis is a local and national model for inclusive, equitable, high-quality early education.

Ellis is one of the most socio-economically, racially, and culturally diverse organizations serving Boston's children.

70%

of **students** are children of color

90%

of **staff** are women of color

20%

of **students** have open cases with the MA Dept. of Children and Families

11%

of **students** are experiencing homelessness

TWO THIRDS

of **families** rely on government child care subsidies

Ellis is proud to be among just six percent of early childhood programs nationwide accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Due to its high level of quality, Boston Public Schools (BPS) funds four Ellis preschool classrooms as part of its Boston Pre-K (formerly Universal Pre-K) program.

Ellis partners with the New England Conservatory to provide weekly, developmentally appropriate music classes to all 22 of our classrooms, including those for infants.

Ellis has two STEM labs for toddlers and preschoolers, designed to look like children's playhouses, at our South End campus.

Ellis is beloved and has a waitlist of over 1,200 children due to our high quality, rich diversity, and warm learning environment.

Outgoing Board Chair Coleen Downs Dinneen



An Extraordinary Leader at an Extraordinary Time

Both modest and fearless by nature, outgoing Board Chair Coleen Downs Dinneen was the leader Ellis needed to navigate the pandemic and seize the growth opportunities that arose soon after.

Coleen discovered Ellis as a holiday volunteer from Natixis, and it was love at first sight. “All Ellis children are my children,” she later said. Coleen joined the Board in 2007 and became Chair in 2019, shortly after Ellis CEO Lauren Cook arrived. They became a closely knit team that overcame obstacles and brought Ellis to a new level.

Less than a year later, the pandemic struck. Though so much was uncertain and unprecedented, Coleen never hesitated. The state mandated a three-month closure, but Coleen helped keep Ellis teachers paid and parents and children engaged. When Ellis planned to reopen on July 1, 2020, Coleen helped with a steady hand. “There were no guidelines, no vaccines, and lots of fear,” Lauren recalls. “Coleen did so much to figure out how to run classrooms safely.” She helped ensure a smooth reopening, even running a test simulation the day before.

An attorney by training, Coleen knew how to navigate risks and requirements. She helped set the necessary but painful regulations preventing parents from entering Ellis when the school was open but in lockdown, and she stayed calm and measured as she helped staff and parents navigate this new world. “Coleen is the best advice giver,” Lauren says. “She is thoughtful and attentive, she never makes you feel inadequate or unprepared, and she always opens you to new possibilities.”

At the same time, Lauren was pregnant and preparing for maternity leave. Coleen saved the day. In August 2020, she offered to be the acting CEO, onsite three days a week. “This was the biggest gift she could give me,” Lauren says. “She came out of retirement to give me time with my baby, and as hard as everything was, she made it as easy as it could be.”

Patti Keenan, Vice President of Advancement, Community, and Equity, was a new employee when Coleen became Acting CEO. “Coleen provided seamless management when Lauren was out,” she says. “I had development but not child care experience. Coleen knew everything about Ellis and helped me learn how to do my best for the organization.”



“All Ellis children are my children.”

— Coleen Downs Dinneen

After this trial by fire, Coleen became invaluable because she knew more about Ellis than the typical Chair. When Lauren presented the opportunity to expand into Jamaica Plain, Coleen was quick to participate in the blue-sky thinking, careful planning, and close attention to compliance requirements. With Lauren’s vision and Coleen’s management, legal, and financial skills, the project was a success. Ellis JP opened in 2021, bringing its high-quality education and care to 61 additional infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Lauren and Patti agree that Coleen’s many achievements spring from her deep feeling for Ellis. This supremely well-organized lawyer and planner has super powers that come from the heart. When she stepped down as Board Chair in 2025, Coleen left a legacy of steady leadership, fearless problem-solving, and deep care for every child at Ellis. Her successor, Jim Geraghty, acknowledges his debt to her. “I admire all Coleen has achieved and look forward to building on her success,” he says.



L to R: Wes, Phenix, and Eyleen Aguilar. Baby Noell, bottom right.

The Aguilar Family Finds a Second Home at Ellis



In 2020, when Eyleen Aguilar saw signs announcing that Ellis Early Learning was coming to the neighborhood, she was overjoyed. “I grew up in the South End, so I knew about Ellis even when I was a child,” Eyleen says. “I knew what a special school it was.”

At the time, her oldest son, Noell, was in the fourth grade, and her second son, Phenix, was in a small Spanish-speaking, home-based child care program. Eyleen soon realized that Phenix needed more stimulation and learning in his day.

"I signed him up for Ellis, but we were behind more than 100 children on the waitlist, and I thought we'd never get in," she recalls. Then her youngest son, Eyce, was accepted into the infant room. Because Ellis works hard to keep families together, both brothers were able to start at the same time, at five months and four years old.

From the beginning, Phenix thrived. He loved his Thursdays with Phil Berman, "Mr. Phil," Lead Faculty and Program Coordinator for the New England Conservatory's Early Childhood Education music program. Mr. Phil visits every Ellis classroom to lead weekly music sessions where the children sing, dance, and build the broad developmental skills that music fosters.

"Mr. Phil is super popular in our house," Eyleen says, "Phenix sings many Mr. Phil songs at home."

She also applauds a six-week, social skills program that helped Phenix learn to identify and name his feelings. Eyleen knows this skill will serve him well as he starts kindergarten this fall.

The Aguilars' youngest, Eyce, is more reserved, but at Ellis he feels at home with his teachers.

"The infants are always active, with crafts, circle time, and music," Eyleen says. "I get photos, I get videos, I get detailed reports on eating, diapers, routines. I really feel on top of my boys' days."

Beyond the classroom, Eyleen values the Ellis community. She attended Ellis's Cheers to Community event at The Haven in Jamaica Plain. The event made a deep impression in some unexpected ways. "We are a low-income family whose children attend Ellis on vouchers," she says. "At that event, I understood for the first time how outside support from donors makes Ellis possible."

Eyleen and her husband Wes couldn't be more enthusiastic. "It's like a big family — of teachers, other parents, and other children. All the teachers know all the children, not only by name, but by their personal preferences. The staff encourages the parents to connect with each other. There couldn't be a more caring place."

"It's like a big family — of teachers, other parents, and other children. All the teachers know all the children, not only by name, but by their personal preferences. The staff encourages the parents to connect with each other. There couldn't be a more caring place."

— The Aguilar Family



Morgan and David DesPrez Make Ellis a Family Affair



“Our children are exposed to challenging concepts. We’re seeing curiosity all the time.”

— Morgan DesPrez

For the past decade, Morgan and David (above) have lived in the South End and are deeply committed to the neighborhood. When Morgan was pregnant with their son Jay, friends sang Ellis’s praises, so the two eagerly joined the waitlist. But the list was long, so they enrolled Jay elsewhere. Soon, the pandemic turned everything upside down. As child care centers closed and families left the city, Morgan and David got a call: Ellis had an opening.

The opportunity thrilled Morgan and David, but COVID-19 protocols prevented parents from entering the school. “We couldn’t see the classrooms,” Morgan says, “but we knew members of the community and Ellis’s reputation. David and I were happy to enroll Jay.”

They have never looked back. Since 2020, the two have fully embraced Ellis, enrolling all three of their children and supporting the school in every way they can. David joined the Board of Directors in 2024, and Morgan serves on Ellis event host committees and often chaperones the annual Swan Boat outing.

After a brief experience with another center, Morgan and David were quick to appreciate the stimulating educational programs that set Ellis apart. “Our children are exposed to challenging concepts,” Morgan says. “We’re seeing curiosity all the time.”

That curiosity shines through Ellis’s creative, play-based academics. Jay once participated in a cooking-themed unit that included making pizzas, setting up a classroom grocery store, and visiting a local market. The food focus has continued with Zoë, the youngest, who brings home vegetables from the Ellis garden. Morgan praises the “very unique programming — interactive, healthy, and educational!”



The DesPrez Family: David, Morgan, Jay, Antonia, and Zoë

“Our goal is to do anything we can to make Ellis as impactful for other families as it has been for us.”

— David DesPrez

Music is another favorite program. Daughters Antonia and Zoë have been so enamored with Mr. Phil that they refused to be picked up until his class ended. Morgan has learned to time her arrival appropriately.

Beyond the curriculum, Morgan and David treasure the sense of community that defines Ellis. “The entire staff is one cohesive team, from Lauren on down,” Morgan says. She and David marvel that, no matter which Ellis teacher or staff member is present for pick-ups and drop-offs, they always recognize their children by name, making them feel part of the community.

David’s service on the Board reflects that same commitment to the Ellis mission of high-quality early childhood education for everyone and support for educators. “I wanted to understand why Ellis has been so successful and contribute to its future growth,” he says. As a member of the Development Committee, he is focused on helping Ellis expand its corporate partnerships.

Even after their two oldest children have graduated, the DesPrez Family remains deeply involved. David plans to continue on the Board when Zoë graduates in 2026. “We are proud to be part of the neighborhood and the school,” he says. “Our goal is to do anything we can to make Ellis as impactful for other families as it has been for us.”



A Place to Stay, A Place to Grow

Honoring Ellis's Longest-Serving Educators



Early childhood educators are more than teachers; they are a second family to the children they serve. At Ellis, our educators make every effort to ensure that every child thrives through thoughtful, nurturing care. The teachers' consistency and compassion form the heart of Ellis's mission: helping Boston's children and families build strong foundations for the future.

Across Massachusetts, early education programs face annual teacher turnover rates as high as 30–40%, according to a 2024 report from the Boston Opportunity Agenda. The demanding nature of the work, low pay, and limited support make it difficult to hire and retain staff. Even at Ellis, which works to raise compensation, provide mentorship and professional development, and create a network of support so educators can build lasting, meaningful careers, those who stay a decade or more are truly worth celebrating.

In this environment, the dedication of our longest-serving educators and the extraordinary commitment of four Ellis teachers is a testament to the care they show the children

"Ellis has that family vibe. It's much more than just a job."

— Lisa St. Hill

and families they serve. Aletssandra (Sandra) Jesus, Lisa St. Hill, Jeannie Chalek, and Alevitssandra (Levi) Jesus (photographed to the left, listed in order of appearance) have each taught in the South End for more than a decade. For these longtime educators, Ellis isn't just a workplace, it's a community.

Lisa St. Hill, who has been at Ellis since 2006, explains, "Ellis has that family vibe. It's much more than just a job." Early in her time at Ellis, Lisa's mother died. With her father far away in Trinidad, Leo Delaney, the former CEO, stepped in as a father figure. "His door was always open, and he would always come and check in on me," Lisa says. "That kind of support makes all the difference."

Today, Lisa works in the Breakers Classroom with toddlers transitioning into preschool, but she treasures her time as a "float" teacher when she was just starting at Ellis. "I've worked with everybody! Anytime a classroom needed coverage, I would just go. It gave me the chance to really understand all the children and all the teachers."

Jeannie Chalek, who came to Ellis in 2012 after many years as an early childhood teacher, says that the positive classroom environment and supportive atmosphere keep her at Ellis. "With smaller classrooms and intentional teacher matching, we can give each child the attention they need," she explains. "The carefully planned structure benefits both the teachers and the students." More than that, Jeannie adds, "Ellis is your second family. You're not just a body here — you're valued."

Circle time is a highlight of Jeannie's days. "We gather as a group, check how we're feeling using the emotions board, sing songs, and read stories. It's a special time to connect. And the kids really make your day; they make you want to come in every morning."

Twins Levi and Sandra Jesus came to Ellis South End within months of each other, and both found a home and a purpose. Levi and Sandra always had a love for children. When Levi saw a volunteer opportunity at Ellis, she said, "I think that's for me."

Levi began volunteering in 2013, and gained valuable experience by floating to different classrooms, working with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers while she waited for a full-time opening at Ellis. She recalls a heartwarming moment when she realized her impact on the students.

A child in her classroom started screaming and crying when she was dropped off, distressed when she didn't see her teacher. "They had to bring the child to me before she finally calmed down. Seeing that bond tells you that you've made a real impact. That feeling stays with you," Levi says.



Sandra joined Ellis soon after her twin sister and now leads a classroom of toddlers in Pollywogs. She loves watching her students light up during music and hands-on STEM lessons. "It's amazing to see their personalities emerge and their independence grow," she says.

For over a decade, Jeannie, Sandra, Levi, and Lisa have shaped countless young lives. Their dedication and care exemplify the mission of Ellis Early Learning: to nurture the whole child and support families in building strong foundations for the future. As they continue to teach and inspire, their legacy is felt not just in the classroom, but in the hearts of the children who carry their lessons forward.

Living Well, Doing Good

Kate and Tom Kush's Lasting Gift to Ellis

At the start of the year, Kate Kush made a simple yet powerful resolution: to live well and do good. For Kate, living well means embracing life fully and finding joy. Doing good means giving back. Together with her husband, Tom, she turned that intention to do good into action. As the couple deepened their engagement with Ellis Early Learning, they chose to leave a lasting mark, designating Ellis as a beneficiary of a future legacy gift.

If you've ever read an Ellis newsletter story or team member profile, you've already met Kate. A versatile writer, she and Tom both earned their Ph.D.s in English from the University of Michigan. In 2019, Kate was introduced to Ellis by CEO Lauren Cook. The two had first met a decade earlier as regular early birds at a local gym.

When Lauren joined Ellis in 2018, she felt Kate might also be moved by its mission. She invited Kate to lend her writing expertise to Ellis's newsletters and annual reports. Kate was deeply inspired by what she learned through her writing. As Tom also came to know the organization, he was moved by the same mission and vision.

As Kate interviewed parents, teachers, and staff, she uncovered dozens of remarkable stories that revealed what makes Ellis unique. "At first, I got involved because I admired Lauren," she says. "But I stayed because Ellis was extraordinary." The first time they attended an Ellis benefit together, Tom, hearing these stories and witnessing the community alongside Kate, became emotionally invested as well.

Over time, the Kushes became a trusted part of the Ellis community. This summer, Kate joined the Board of Directors, as she and Tom deepened their commitment to the mission.

"We have been on a long journey together as Kate and Tom got to know us and the early education sector," said Ellis CEO Lauren Cook. "I was so honored that Kate felt she was ready to join the Board of Directors."

Through their involvement, the Kushes have seen Ellis's distinct impact: from the waitlists that prioritize children in greatest need, to the Jamaica Plain location where a 60% Spanish-speaking school body reflects the vibrancy of the neighborhood.



Kate and Tom Kush

HOW YOU CAN CREATE A LEGACY GIFT

One memory still makes Kate smile: “When I told my South End hairdresser about Ellis, she knew the school right away. She said, ‘When I walk by, I see parents and children from different walks of life, all carrying themselves with the same self-confidence and dignity. There’s some kind of magic that happens inside there.’”

That sense of magic and belonging inspired Kate and Tom to take their commitment further. Together, they chose to name Ellis in their estate plan.

“For a long time, I was reluctant,” Kate admits. “Charities would ask, but I thought I was too young, or that my future was too uncertain. The process seemed complicated, and I wasn’t ready to change my will in this way.”

After attending webinars through the University of Michigan and Fidelity, she realized how straightforward the process could be. Naming Ellis as a beneficiary of her retirement accounts was as simple as specifying a percentage of assets in an online form.

“That flexibility made it feel possible,” she says.

For both Kate and Tom, the decision was deeply personal. They share the belief that education is life-changing, and that Ellis opens doors of opportunity for children and families. Building on this commitment, Kate helped launch the Ellis 1885 Society, creating a way for others to make meaningful legacy gifts that will leave a lasting impact on the early education sector and on Boston’s children and families.

“We are so grateful that the Kushes are willing to stand as advocates for early education,” says Lauren.

“The thought of being able to support Ellis with a final gift after my death, to continue this work, is very positive for me,” Kate says.

For Kate and Tom, naming Ellis in their estate plan is the fullest expression of their shared resolution to live well and do good.

Name Ellis as a beneficiary

You can name Ellis as a beneficiary of almost any account — IRA, retirement, or non-retirement.

Primary vs. contingent beneficiaries

Primary beneficiaries receive funds upon your death.

Contingent beneficiaries receive funds after the death of the primary beneficiary.

Note: Some institutions may not allow contingent beneficiaries, so it is worth confirming.

Flexibility by institution

Some banks allow you to designate a percentage of your account value for each beneficiary.

Other banks may assign the same percentage to each beneficiary.

Percentages are typically the only option since account balances fluctuate.

Online setup

Most financial institutions let you update or add beneficiaries online. This keeps the process easy and under your control.

Other ways to give

You can also name Ellis in your will or as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.

To learn more about how you can name Ellis as a beneficiary of a plan or policy, contact your advisor or financial institution directly.

If you have already made Ellis a beneficiary of a plan or policy, we would love to thank you for your foresight. Please reach out to our Development Office:

dev@EllisEarlyLearning.org
857-341-0400

Jim Alexander

A Legacy of Leadership

When Jim Alexander was first introduced to Ellis Early Learning in 1988, he could hardly have imagined the 36-year journey that lay ahead, a journey that would help transform a small, little-known child care provider into a nationally recognized model serving over 300 children and families each year, all while keeping accessibility and inclusivity at its heart.

Jim's passion for early education began in Philadelphia. As a father, he experienced firsthand the challenges of securing reliable child care and the transformative impact of excellent early educators. He came to see teachers as essential for lifelong success, an insight that stayed with him when he moved to Boston in 1969.

An architect and preservationist deeply invested in Boston's South End, Jim connected with Ellis through Board Member Roger Tackeff and quickly became a committed leader. He played a key role in purchasing and developing Ellis's 58 Berkeley Street location, served as Board Chair and Development Committee Chair, and helped recruit talented leaders such as Coleen Downs Dinneen.

"Seeing children thrive in the diverse early education model at Ellis has been the greatest reward."

— Jim Alexander



Jim Alexander (R) with his partner of 54 years and now husband, Tom Stocker

On the Development Committee, Jim partnered closely with Patti Keenan, Ellis's VP of Advancement, Community, and Equity. "Jim went above Board expectations," Patti recalls. "He was a thought partner, always willing to share his expertise and invest his time to help Ellis grow," she says. "He truly dotes on Ellis, and he extends himself with such joy in everything he does for us."

A consistent advocate for educators, Jim champions fair pay, professional development, and the belief that strong teachers are essential to strong outcomes for children.

In 2025, as he prepared to retire, Jim stepped down from the Board, leading to the creation of the Emeritus Board of Directors — established to honor Ellis's most steadfast champions — with Jim serving as its inaugural president. Reflecting on his service, Jim says, "Seeing children thrive in the diverse early education model at Ellis has been the greatest reward."

Jim's legacy at Ellis is one of vision, stewardship, and an unwavering belief in the power of early education to change lives.

Representative Aaron Michlewitz



Championing Early Education Across Massachusetts

For Boston's children and families, Representative Aaron Michlewitz has been a steadfast champion. A lifelong Bostonian, he has devoted his career to strengthening the city's communities and ensuring every child has access to high-quality early education. From enabling critical state funding to advancing innovative policies, Chairman Michlewitz has been instrumental in shaping the future of early education across Massachusetts.

Elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 2009, Rep. Michlewitz serves the Third Suffolk District, which includes Ellis's South End locations. In 2019, he was named Chair of the Massachusetts House Ways and Means Committee, overseeing legislation affecting the Commonwealth's finances and working with fellow officials to create the state budget.

When COVID-19 struck, early education centers across Massachusetts were profoundly affected. Federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) helped stabilize the sector through the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants, but that funding was temporary. Driven by his deep commitment to early education, Chairman Michlewitz ensured the state could continue funding C3 grants beginning in FY2023, helping centers recruit and retain staff, increase compensation, and launch high-quality initiatives at no additional cost to families. He chose Ellis Early Learning as the backdrop for a press conference (pictured right) to announce this historic investment alongside House Speaker Ron Mariano.

A long-time advocate for early education, Chairman Michlewitz helped launch the Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission in 2020, to study the sector's funding structure and recommend initiatives to expand equitable access. The Commission identified a \$1.5 billion investment needed to stabilize the system and fully meet family needs. Chairman Michlewitz has leveraged the report to push for continued growth in early education investments, including the C3 grants, which he helped codify into statute — an important milestone on the path toward fully funding and stabilizing the early education system. Chairman Michlewitz has also been a consistent supporter of Ellis. He joined us to celebrate the launch of our South End STEM Labs and the reopening of the Ellis Early Learning Children's Park. Ellis has celebrated his impact: in 2022, we were grateful to mark his birthday while honoring his contributions to the sector; and he was named our Champion of Early Education at the annual fall benefit in 2023, *Celebrating Ellis and the Strength of Families*.



As we look ahead to the work still needed to expand accessible, high-quality early education across Massachusetts, we are deeply grateful for Chairman Michlewitz's tireless support, willingness to listen, visionary leadership, and advocacy for the investments that children and families need.

The Ellis Team

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT

Cameron Brillon
Lauren B. Cook, CEO, 5+ years
Lara Candadai
Patricia Cortes-Duran
Patricia D. Keenan, VP of Advancement, Community, and Equity, 5 years
Jay Dave, Chief Finance and Strategy Officer
Olivia Goodwin-Cook
Issam Heredia-Bitar
Gladys Jimenez Barboza
Daniel Lachar, VP of Accounting and Finance
Vanessa Luberto
Jill Patterson
Gaia Roverato
Frank Ryan
Nicholas Walther

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Liz Brot
Cherish Casey
Sami Greenberg
Frances Velazquez

NORTHEASTERN CO-OPS

Sofia Baiker
Genesis Bejarano
Helena McLaughlin
Ayana Montalvo
Liv Oyen

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Jeanine Audet
Molly Marchione
Ida Matuskova
Abby Morales
Nicole Pearson
Allegra Taylor, Director

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Yaskara Cruz, Director of Ellis Jamaica Plain (JP)
Ana Davis, Administrative Assistant of Infants and Toddlers at 58 Berkeley; STEM Exploration Educator
Yasmin Elliano-Anderson, Director of Education at 66 Berkeley, 5+ years
Tasha Jackson, Assistant Director of Ellis JP, 10 years
Cony Jiang, Assistant Director of Education at 66 Berkeley
Claire McNally, VP of Programs, 5 years
Kalia Sears, Director of Infant and Toddler Education at 58 Berkeley, 5 years
Tiffany Sheets, Assistant VP of Programs, 25 years
Cyrena Spafford, Director of Infant and Toddler Education at 58 Berkeley
Aiyauna Terry, Boston Pre-K and Preschool Program Director, 20 years
Rosa Turco, Ph.D., Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence

FAMILY CHILD CARE NETWORK

Christy Bortolotto, Director
Chris Loomis
Gloria Valentin

EDUCATORS

Fartun A. Abdi, 5+ years
Elena Acosta
Wilkania Aria Mendez
Jessica Arriola
Ramona Arroyo
Geraldine Ayala
Amanda Beland, 5 years
Ishani Benskin
Sarah Bukhari
Timesha Burton-Bacon
Jeannie Chalek, 10+ years
Jendriana Concepcion
Eglise Corchado
Katherine Crespin Tovar
Pree Dawn
Alejandra DelaCruz, 5 years
Alianys Delvalle
Monica Dinis
Michelle Doan
Nikaulie Domenech
Colleen Donovan, 5+ years
Ivone Dos Santos, 5+ years
Keira Echevarria
Robin Edwards
Alexis Elcan
Melissa Felizmelo
Larissa Fernandes Rodrigues Pinto
Sheila Foster
Destiny Gabriel
Richell Galvan
Sandra Guardado
Mariam Guerrero
Rosely Guerrero Gonzalez
Reema Gurung
Angela Guzman
Annabelle Hatsav
Nour Heredia-Bitar
Winter Hillegass
Georgia Hinds
Stefhania Huamani
Alexander Huynh
Lina Jaramillo Medina
Anna Leigh Jenkins
Aletssandra Jesus, 10+ years
Alevitssandra Jesus, 10+ years
Winter Jones
Alexandra Keenan Wolff, 5 years
Minyi Lin



Shaiana Little
Sabrina Lopez Ordonez
Juana Mateo Pascual
Gloris Matos Osorio
Niurka Mejia
Cesia Melchor Pineda
Carishmar Moore, 5+ years
Isabella Muyskens
Camila Nunez
Melida Oller
Ruth Ortega
Evelyn Ortiz
Andrea Osorio
Janely Pagan
Ariana Perez
Exavier Perry
Taina Pierre-Louis
Mayelin Pina
Sandra Pinales
Tiaja Powell, 5 years
Mavis Riley, 5 years
Maria Rodriguez Alvarez
Elizabeth Romero
Cynthia Rosa
Zenaida Ruiz
Rosa Salguero Sosa
Catherine Scannell
Candice Scott
Jasai Shakespeare
Jamalia Sheets, 5+ years
Sasha Sheets
Mandira Shrestha
Whitney Smith
Lisa St. Hill, 10+ years
Shirley Strickland
Jessika Supreme, 5 years
Wubalech Taglo
Villane Thermidor
Aniya Thompson
Jaedyn Alexis Venus Mills
Tannah Victor
Yessica Villar De Solano
Emani Villari
Matthew Wallace 5 years
Teickha Walters Reid
Maryan Yasin, 5+ years

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Abigail Paul, *PwC*
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Courtney Smith, *Boston Public Schools*
Amanda Whelan Johnston, *Sanofi*
Amy Zhang, *Bain Capital*

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Lauren Toth, *Murray's Cheese*
Keshav Vellodi, *Bain & Company*
Ashley White, *MA Department of Early Education and Care*

ELLIS EMERITUS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Past Ellis directors or friends who added particular value to the organization, and whom Ellis would like to honor by distinguishing as Emeritus Board members.

Jim Alexander, *Principal Emeritus, Finegold Alexander Architects*
Frank Davis III, *Bluestone Bank*
Leo Delaney, *Retired, CEO, Ellis Early Learning*
Suzanne Dwyer, *Massachusetts Capital Resource Company*
Martin Hall, *Hall & Diana, LLC*
Marta van Dam, *PanAgora Asset Management*



Transforming Early Education

Excellence at Ellis and Beyond

“Ellis has given us the opportunity to truly speak out for what children need, what teachers need, and what is really happening in early childhood.”

— Allegra Taylor, Director of the Center of Excellence

Continuing a trend of year-over-year growth at Ellis, FY25 was especially transformative. An extraordinary anonymous gift catalyzed three major initiatives that expand our reach and strengthen our mission of providing high-quality early education for all.

This restricted gift allowed Ellis to dedicate significant capital to expanding access to child care across Greater Boston, and creating the infrastructure to better support both teachers and families. Ten new positions were created to lead and implement this ambitious work.

THREE NEW INITIATIVES

Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

Led by Ellis's first-ever Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence, MEL builds centralized databases that track family support, educator growth, and child learning outcomes. These insights fuel continuous improvement across our classrooms and programs.

The Center of Excellence (CoE)

Ellis's in-house professional development initiative advancing best-in-class teaching practices and mental and behavioral health approaches to strengthen program quality, support educator well-being, and enhance child outcomes.

The Ellis Family Child Care (FCC) Network

The FCC Network expands Ellis's impact and reach by partnering with licensed family child care programs and providing administrative and business guidance, early relational health support, and professional development to serve more children and families in need.



EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE AT THE CORE

Ellis understands educator excellence is the cornerstone of positive child outcomes.

"Teachers saved me," says Rosa Turco, Ph.D., Ellis's inaugural Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence. "They encouraged me and lifted me up. Those interactions made all the difference in my life." Today, Rosa leads evaluation at Ellis in close collaboration with the CoE, translating classroom observations into a replicable model of excellence.

"Ellis has given us the opportunity to truly speak out for what children need, what teachers need, and what is really happening in early childhood," adds Allegra Taylor, Director of the Center of Excellence. The CoE team is spending time in classrooms, observing Ellis values in action, and developing shared language that defines and elevates excellence in early education.

To support excellence in family child care, Ellis FCC Network Director Christy Bortolotto leads the Network alongside Gloria Valentin and Chris Loomis. With more than 55 years of combined family child care experience among them, the team of three helps women entrepreneurs build thriving child care businesses while providing safe, nurturing environments for local children.

"When you're starting out as a family child care educator, you're running a business," says Christy, who owned her own family child care practice for 20 years. "You're the teacher, the nurse, the cleaner, the social worker, the chef — you're everything. Having support from Ellis can be life changing."

Through the FCC Network, Ellis leverages its expertise in family support, educator growth, and professional development to strengthen local family child care programs — most of which are run by women of color — helping with enrollment, billing, and business operations.

LOOKING AHEAD

Together, these initiatives mark a new chapter for Ellis: one where data, innovation, and teacher support combine to expand opportunities for children and families. By strengthening our educators, fostering innovation, and building systems of excellence, Ellis is advancing our commitment to give every child the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

Moments That Matter

FY25 Ellis Events

JAMAICA PLAIN EVENT: CHEERS TO COMMUNITY

The sun was smiling on Ellis at our first *Cheers to Community* event at The Haven on June 11, 2025, bringing together 65 friends and neighbors to celebrate our Jamaica Plain (JP) community. The gathering was both a celebration and an opportunity to share Ellis's mission of providing all children with access to high-quality early education.

Ellis JP opened in 2021 during the height of COVID-19, when CEO Lauren Cook saw opportunity in a vacant property and, with the support of donors, raised \$600,000 in just six weeks to bring the new school to life. Since then, Ellis has been proud to serve JP's children and families.



At the event, guests heard from JP Center Coordinator Issam Heredia-Bitar (above), whose journey from classroom support to leadership reflects the dedication and heart of Ellis.

Together, attendees raised \$1,200 to directly support children, families, and programs, showcasing the strength of community in fueling Ellis's mission.



L to R, top to bottom: Row 1—Lauren Cook and Wesley Aguilar; Row 2—Sami Greenberg, Sarah Bukhari, Tasha Jackson, Eyleen Aguilar, Marily Guardado, Veronica Ortega, Issam Heredia-Bitar; Row 3—Brendan Fogarty, Gladys Barboza, Yaskara Cruz, Eden Leonard

SPRING SOCIAL

On May 1, 2025, Ellis kicked off its 140th birthday celebration year with the annual Spring Social in the South End Music and Movement Studio. The hard work and vision of our Host Committee brought the celebration to life, including stunning floral arrangements by Ellis parent Morgan DesPrez. We are profoundly grateful for the Committee's dedication and continued partnership.



L to R: Jamalia Sheets, Dawn Hayes, Michael Cerruti, Chuck Carignan, and Fartun Abdi

More than 100 guests enjoyed an evening of food, music, prize drawings, and community. Highlights included remarks from event Co-Chairs Winston Bodrick and Ashley White, CEO Lauren Cook, and featured speaker Kalicia Sears, Director of Infant and Toddler Education at 58 Berkeley. Kalicia's inspiring story as an educator, leader, and mother captured the spirit of Ellis and its lasting impact.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the event raised more than \$30,000 and strengthened the community that fuels Ellis's mission.



L to R: Steve Krikorian, Carreau Ryder, and Barbara Cronin

ELLIS EARLY LEARNING FUND GRATITUDE BREAKFAST

On December 10, 2024, Ellis hosted a Gratitude Breakfast to honor Ellis Early Learning Fund donors, whose annual contributions sustain our mission. Held in the South End Music and Movement Studio, the intimate event welcomed 30 guests and Ellis CEO Lauren Cook for conversation, impact updates, and a glimpse of the "magic of Ellis."

STEM Exploration Educator

Ana Davis led a hands-on potpourri-making activity that showcased the curiosity and joy children experience daily in our classrooms. The breakfast was both a celebration and a heartfelt thank-you to our most dedicated supporters, whose generosity sustains excellent early education and inspires the next generation of leaders.



Catherine Rotman and Ben Crovella

We are deeply grateful to our Ellis Early Learning Fund members for their partnership and support. Together, we are building a brighter future for Boston's children and families.

Interested in joining the Ellis Early Learning Fund?

Please visit: EllisEarlyLearning.org/ellis-early-learning-fund
Or contact: dev@EllisEarlyLearning.org



L to R: Saskia Epstein (PNC Bank), Julie Asher, Dannielle Pinson (PNC Bank), and Elsa Gomes Bondlow

Looking Back on

Celebrating Ellis and the Magic of Childhood



On November 7, 2024, Ellis hosted its annual fall benefit, *Celebrating Ellis and the Magic of Childhood*, at the Cyclorama at the Boston Center for the Arts. More than 300 friends gathered in support of excellent early education for all.

The evening was led by returning Co-Chairs Sean Curran (photographed left), an Ellis Board member and alumnus, and Jerome Smith, whose energy and passion brought the celebration to life. Guests also heard inspiring remarks from Ellis CEO Lauren Cook and foster mother Pamela Schenck (photographed left), whose story captured the profound impact of Ellis on children and families.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the event raised nearly \$700,000 through a spirited auction and Fund-A-Mission for teacher salaries, ensuring our educators can continue to inspire the next generation.

That night, we proudly honored Natixis Investment Managers (photographed right) as our 2024 Champion of Early Education. U.S. CEO David Giunta accepted the Hero Award on behalf of the company, which has partnered with Ellis for over 16 years, contributing more than \$1 million and countless volunteer hours. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the event raised nearly \$700,000 through a spirited auction and Fund-A-Mission for teacher salaries, ensuring our educators can continue to inspire the next generation.

As we prepare to celebrate Ellis's 140th anniversary, events like this remind us that together we are building a stronger, more equitable future where every child can learn, grow, and thrive.



Lennie and Arthur Carver



L to R: Lauren Cook, Lauren Edmundson, and Brendan Fogarty



L to R: Wayne Ysaguirre, Jaye and Darin P. Smith, and Amy O'Leary



Camila Diehl and James Furnival

Public Investment in Play

The Ellis Children's Park Reopens



"This space is a great example of how individual, government, and corporate giving can come together to make something magical, and shows how important it is to have green, safe places for children to play."

— Lauren Cook, CEO

In April 2024, Ellis launched a much-needed renovation of the Ellis Early Learning Children's Park on Chandler and Berkeley Streets.

A beloved South End landmark since 2007, the park reopened on a bright September morning with a celebration honoring the partners who made the project possible: the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the Baupost Group, and Cathy E. Minehan, former President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. EEC Commissioner Amy Kershaw and Representative Aaron Michlewitz — champions of the Early Education and Out-of-School Time grant program that provided critical funding — shared remarks on the vital role of early education, calling Ellis a blueprint for equitable, high-quality child care.

The new Ellis Children's Park is specially designed for infants and toddlers, with refreshed turf and a vibrant mural of Boston's Orange Line by artist Sasha Kouzza. The redesigned space features natural wood structures, musical elements, and a platform overlooking the trains below; a view that fascinates our little explorers.

The renovation strengthens our mission to provide joyful, high-quality early learning experiences while enriching the broader community, as the park remains open to all.

CEO Lauren Cook expressed gratitude to supporters: "This space is a great example of how individual, government, and corporate giving can come together to make something magical," she said, "and shows how important it is to have green, safe places for children to play."

Ellis extends heartfelt thanks to our partners and community for helping this special space come to life once again.





Growing Curiosity

Introducing Gardening at Ellis

At Ellis this spring, our preschoolers dug their hands into the soil, dropped tiny seeds into the earth, and watched with wide eyes as green shoots appeared weeks later. Thanks to support from the Massachusetts FRESH Grant and PNC Bank, Ellis launched its first gardening program, bringing farm-to-school learning directly to our city classrooms in partnership with Green City Growers (photographed above at our onsite garden).

For many students, this program was their first opportunity to connect with nature and learn how food grows. They tasted new fruits and vegetables, explored the role of insects in the garden, and understood real-world connections to ideas they learn in class.

Aiyauna Terry, Director of BPK and Preschool Education, describes the Ellis Garden Program as an invaluable experience. Kalicia Sears, Director of Toddler and Infant Education at 58 Berkeley, adds that watching the students develop their understanding of the natural world is rewarding for educators: “When the students look at you and it clicks for them – that ‘I grew that’ moment – it really shows the impact of these classes,” she says.

More than gardening, this program grows curiosity, confidence, and pride, lessons our children will carry with them long after the harvest.

ELLIS GARDENING BY THE NUMBERS

4,466

total engagements hosted since April of 2024

297

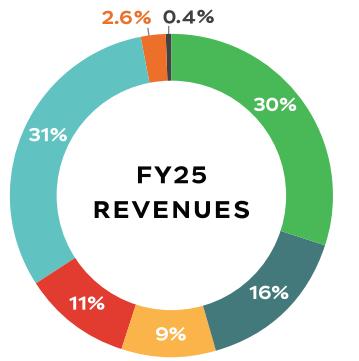
pounds of organic produce grown

68

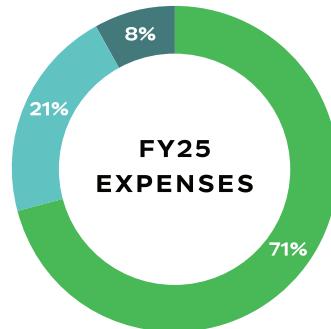
varieties of vegetables and flowers grown onsite



Ellis by the Numbers



- Government child care reimbursements
- Philanthropy (one-time restricted gift)
- Tuition
- General and administrative
- Government grants
- Fundraising and development
- Philanthropy (excl. restricted gift)
- Investment income
- Other income



- Program
- General and administrative
- Fundraising and development

REVENUE¹

Government child care reimbursements	4,941,071
Tuition	2,592,933
Government grants	1,565,417
Philanthropy excluding restricted gift ¹	1,770,874
Philanthropy: one-time restricted gift ¹	5,100,000
Investment income	428,050
Other income	71,820
Total	16,470,165

As of June 30, 2025 (\$)

% Of Total

30%
16%
9%
11%
31%
2.6%
0.4%

EXPENSES

Program	7,647,213
Salaries ²	5,503,935
Meal program	447,256
Other program expenses ³	1,696,022
General and administrative	2,325,265
Fundraising and development	860,586
Total	10,833,064

As of June 30, 2025 (\$)

% Of Total

71%
21%
8%

NET ASSETS

Net assets at the beginning of Fiscal Year	13,049,375
Net assets at the end of Fiscal Year ¹	18,686,476

1. Our assets and revenue grew significantly this year due to a one-time, restricted gift dedicated to new strategic initiatives: a Center of Excellence for supporting early childhood educators at Ellis, strengthened evaluation capacity, and the Ellis Family Child Care (FCC) Network to support licensed in-home child care providers in Greater Boston.

2. Includes all personnel cost (salaries, benefits, and payroll taxes) for educators and program leadership.

3. Other program expenses include professional development, classroom supplies, occupancy, repairs and maintenance, cleaning, etc.

CORPORATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

SUPERHERO

\$100,000+

Anonymous Family Foundation

The Baupost Group

CHAMPION

\$50,000+

Amazon

Liberty Mutual Foundation

Natixis Investment Managers

The TJX Companies, Inc.

United Way of Massachusetts Bay

Wellington Management

ADVOCATE

\$25,000+

Cummings Foundation

Dunkin' Joy in Childhood Foundation

Kirkland & Ellis

Mass General Brigham

PNC Bank

PwC

SUPPORTER

\$10,000+

Bushrod H. Campbell and Adaf F. Hall Charity Fund

Dean Foundation for Little Children

Eastern Bank Foundation

Highland Street Foundation

Kimco Realty

PURE Insurance

Ropes & Gray

Rubenstein Foundation

State Street Corporation

FRIEND

\$5,000+

Blue Cross Blue

Shield of Massachusetts

Brookline Bank

Delta Dental of Massachusetts

DHK Architects

Needham Bank

New England Patriots Foundation

Related Beal

Shawmut Street Charitable Fund

NEIGHBOR

\$1,000+

Cambridge Savings Bank

CAPTRUST Community Foundation

Cruz Companies

Deloitte LLP

Irenaeus Foundation

The Dorsey Family Foundation

The Steven Cohen Team

Thornton Tomasetti

PUBLIC FUNDING

Boston Public Schools

Community Economic Development Assistant Corporation

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission



THE POWER OF GIVING

The Ellis Early Learning Model

Ellis Early Learning provides exceptional early education with an emphasis on racial, cultural, and socio-economic inclusion. Our model meets the highest accreditation standards and delivers proven outcomes, but nearly 20% of our annual operating budget must be raised through philanthropy.

What Is Annual Giving?

Annual Giving is the ongoing financial support that sustains Ellis year after year. It is one of the simplest and most impactful ways to help advance our mission. Annual Giving provides critical support for Ellis's operating expenses, including nutritious meals for our little learners, competitive salaries for our teachers, and the maintenance of our three centers.

Why Contribute?

Your gift to Ellis helps create a more equitable future for children, families, and educators. Annual Giving ensures that we can continue providing outstanding programs and services to Boston's children.

Make a Gift:

EllisEarlyLearning.org/make-a-gift

The Ellis Early Learning Fund

Our annual program inviting and recognizing charitable support at leadership levels

SUPERHERO \$100,000+

Anonymous

CHAMPION \$50,000+

Anonymous

ADVOCATE \$25,000+

Arthur and Lennie Carver

Michael Cerruti and Chuck Carignan

Elizabeth Mendelsohn and Eugene Mann

Etta and Mark Rosen

SUPPORTER \$10,000+

Reuben and Christine Ackerman

Chieng-Yi Chang

Morgan and David DesPrez

Jim Geraghty

David and Wendy Giunta

Molly and Colin Gorman

Barbara and Amos Hostetter

Erin and Dean Hotaling

Jill and Stephen Karp

Abigail Paul and Daniel Lynch

Judith and John Remondi

Carreau and Jonathan Ryder

Lisa Sunwoo and Andrew Schneller

Will and Erin Tetler

Lauren and Christopher Toth

Eike Traina

FRIEND \$5,000+

Bridget and Timothy Carpenter

Margret Cooke and David Crowley

Sean and Kelly Curran

Tom and Shari Dicker

Fernando and Charlene Domenech

Catherine and Keith Farrow

Candice Galvez

Lauren and Paul Ghaffari

Emily and Tim Hughes

Kate and Tom Kush

Christine and David Letts

Martha and John Miller

Pia and Paul Miller

Kate and Max Pinto

Catherine Rotman and Ben Crovella

Chris and Jana Shumate

Biria and Elaina St. John

Sam and Allie Stolowitz

Emily Summit and Austin Cleary

John Thayer

Kristen and Derek Vicino

Mariann and Andrew Youniss

NEIGHBOR \$1,000+

Naomi Aberly and Larry Lebowitz

Benedicta Acosta

Joe Aiello and Mary Mitchell

Jim Alexander and Tom Stocker

Carolyn and Bill Aliski

Kenechukwu Anadu and Erin Birmingham

Anonymous

Elizabeth Bernardi and Shane Dunn

Jon Bernstein and Martina Albright

Warren and Renee Besser

Kathy Betts and Chip Lewis

Laima Bobelis

Rachael Bradley

Declan Byrne and Eimear Lafferty

Emilia Cannella

Carol and William Caporizzo

John Chany

Keri Charles

David Chavolla

Lauren and Andrew Cook

Barbara Cronin and James Scott

Kristina and Evan Davis

Jacqueline Deschamps and Steven Krikorian

James Deschamps

Camila Diehl and James Furnival

Jessica Donohue

Amy Donovan

Jacquie Dorrance

Tracy Duffy

Suzanne Dwyer

Tom and Gayane Ebling

Lauren Edmundson and Brendan Fogarty

Jesse Elton

David and Diann Frantz

Ellen Frechette

William Fris

Susan Furtado

Daniel and Jill Garrison

Matthew Garzone

Stephanie and Paul Giardina

Jonathan Greeley and Tali Cohen

Stacy and Brad Greene

Grace and William Gregor

Jean Gulliver and Matt Weiss

Marian and Winlow Heard

Donna Housman

Katherine and Ralph Hughes

Gregory Kanarian and Julina Rundberg

Heather Keaveny

Patti and Matthew Keenan

Molly King

Leila Kinney and Paul Summit

Emily and Brian Kolle

Benjamin Krass and Mary Holper

Joseph Labresh

Joseph and Rebekah Lahout

Erin and Garrett Larivee

Janet and Peter Lebovitz

Shenkiat Lim and Cynthia Schoettler

Meredith and Scott Lipnick

Stephanie Lucas

Ian and Teri Macduff

Jaime Marshall

Mary Ann R. and Peter H. Mattoon

Debra McConnell and Oriol Monfort

Paul Melvin

Elizabeth and Keith Morgan

Larry Moulter and Pamela Frechette

Amy O'Leary

Jo-Ann Ohlson

Steven Pomper and Blair Hewes

Carole and Casey Popkins

Norin and Fahim Razzaque

Gena Rhee

Marilyn Rosh

Jennifer Round

Duyum and Jerome Ryan

Stephen Sadoski

John Sanford

John Sgroi

Beatriz Pina Smith

Jaye and Darin P. Smith

Julia Tarnell

David Vallon

Ashley White and Jessyca Feliciano

Erika Wilkinson and Andrew Lynch

Michael S. Worhach

Maggie and Charlie Zambri

Interested in joining the Ellis Early Learning Fund?

Please visit: EllisEarlyLearning.org/ellis-early-learning-fund

Or contact: dev@EllisEarlyLearning.org



THE "LEND A HAND TO ELLIS" FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Engaging our families and creating a culture of giving back to Ellis

Beatriz Barata
Win Bear
Eleanor Celeste and Maxwell Sparr
Keri Charles
Barbara Cronin and James Scott
Nicole and Joel Curtain
Jacqueline Deschamps and Steven Krikorian
Amaree Deshield
Jeniece Deshield
Morgan and David DesPrez
Camila Diehl and James Furnival
Unasia Dorsey
Maritza Ebling and Matthew Hillard
Lauren Edmundson and Brendan Fogarty
Jesse Elton
Kelly and Zach Husid
Tasha Jackson
Michelle Laboy and Joshua Fiedler
Rebekah and Joseph Lahout
Lesley and Benjamin Levitt
Meredith and Scott Lipnick
Sophia and Cameron McCully
Melanie and Michael McDermott
Sisay Gidey Mebratu and Feven Desalegn Dibau
Elizabeth Mendelsohn and Eugene Mann
Nicole and Bryan Morrell
Deseanmoneek Myers
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Kate and Max Pinto
Steven Pomper and Blair Hewes
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Kayla Rousos and Jake Ramey
Julina Rundberg and Gregory Kanarian
Carreau and Jonathan Ryder
Kellie and Shane Sandoval
Emily and Christopher Sesno
Lina Sladkeviciute and Michael Scolamiero
Ashley Storms and Joao Santos
Yiomaritz Suazo and Gabriel Diaz
Emily Summit and Austin Cleary
Jessika Supreme and George Enehizena
Lauren and Christopher Toth
Jayme Van Oot and Luke Morse
Jeanne Yeh and David Ganzi
Sadie Wieschhoff



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LEARNING

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