

# Amber West Buller '84

## *Clinical Psychologist*

When Amber West Buller '84 first came to Benchmark in 1979, she was a struggling reader. "I remember being eight or nine years old when I finally read my first book, *Hop on Pop*, which was a K-2 level book," she said. Although her reading skills have increased significantly since that time, Amber never forgot where her journey began and has since made a career out of helping students work through and conquer their own struggles. As a clinical psychologist, Amber assists in diagnosing and treating mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, and learning differences.

While her interest in psychology initially began in high school, Amber did not consider it for a career until she took her first psychology class in college. "I actually went to college to be a math teacher," she said. "But as soon as I took my first psychology class, I was hooked." She began her career working as a psychologist in the public sector, but her interest in education never went away. Today, as associate psychologist at Germantown Friends School (GFS), Amber's position allows her to take her love of psychology and apply it to the education sector.

Although Amber has accomplished so much since her five years at Benchmark, her time at the School has never been forgotten.

"Besides my mother continuing to push me and believe in me, Benchmark is the sole reason I am where I am today," Amber said. "Benchmark laid the foundation for my success by offering different perspectives and tangible solutions to problems. Being at Benchmark also helped to instill my work ethic and taught me organizational skills that I think all kids—learning differences or not—could benefit from."

After Benchmark, Amber attended The Episcopal Academy, the University of Arizona where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, and then the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology (now called Palo Alto University) where she earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

"I remember leaving [Benchmark] feeling like a capable student," she said. "When I was faced with challenges, I could push beyond them—even after being told that I didn't have potential. Benchmark made me feel confident and competent and helped to show me not only what my strengths and weaknesses are, but how to circumvent those weaknesses."


With a background in pediatric neuropsychology, Amber's role today focuses on assisting school-aged children. Specifically she supports Craig Stevens, the head psychologist at GFS and a



former Benchmark School psychologist, meets with students individually, teaches life skills classes, goes into classrooms, and reads and summarizes psycho-educational reports. She enjoys her position because it is "fulfilling work with a blend of interesting kids who have interesting backgrounds."

While she is still amazed that she has earned a Ph.D. in spite of having been a struggling reader, she said one of her other greatest accomplishments is having found a way to strike a balance between her professional and personal life. Having just moved from Center City Philadelphia to a farmland setting in Unionville with her husband and two children (ages 6 and 8), she has embraced the outdoors and is enjoying riding horses, taking hikes and walks, and traveling.

Though it has been years since she was at Benchmark, Amber said the skills she learned at the school have remained relevant to her even as an adult. "It's been about continuing to understand who I am as a learner," she said. "I know that I have a strong work ethic, can recognize when I need to ask for help, and must keep things organized."

Her appreciation of Benchmark even led her to be a part of the school's recent Strategic Planning Committee. "It was a very fun process because I got to see where Benchmark was, is now, and is going," she said. "I love Benchmark and I want to see it last in perpetuity because it puts kids on the right trajectory." 

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