



THE FEELING IS MUTUAL

JENNIFER ISOM O'MALLEY, GED'98, AND MATTHEW V. O'MALLEY, GED'95,
SUPPORT EDUCATION TOGETHER

by Karen Doss Bowman

It was a passion for educating children that brought together Penn GSE Overseer and Education Alumni Association (EAA) Board member Matthew V. O'Malley, GED'95, and Jennifer Isom O'Malley, GED'98, nearly two decades ago, at a time when both were teaching in schools. We sat down with them to discuss how their shared commitment has made them a GSE alumni couple consistently supportive of the School, and parents who convey a firm belief in education to their children.

← Both past recipients of the School's Education Alumni Association (EAA) Awards, the O'Malleys celebrated Penn GSE and the newest awardees at the Alumni Centennial Celebration and EAA Awards Ceremony in May. Jennifer (right) received the Penn GSE Alumni Recent Alumni/Early Career Award of Merit in 2005 and Matthew (left), also a former EAA president, was awarded the William B. Castetter Alumni Award in 2007.

What role did education and Penn GSE play in your early years together?

Jennifer: When we met in 1996, I was working in an autism support classroom at the Pathway School in Jeffersonville, Pennsylvania, as a teaching assistant. I'm a California native and had been accepted to a graduate psychology program in my home state at Pepperdine University, my undergraduate alma mater. But Matthew convinced me to consider a change of plans.

Matthew: I had recently graduated from GSE's Teacher Education Program and was working as a middle school social studies teacher at West Windsor High School in Princeton Junction, New Jersey. I encouraged Jennifer to apply to the psychological services program at GSE, and the rest is history. We married in 1999 and today live in Radnor, Pennsylvania, with our eleven-year-old daughter, Kaitlyn, and eight-year-old son, Quinn.

What does Penn GSE mean to you?

Matthew: I was drawn to Penn GSE for its focus on improving education for urban children, and as a student, alumnus, Overseer, and EAA Board member, I have been consistently impressed with GSE's impact in Philadelphia schools. I am also inspired by the people of GSE—through my continued engagement with the School, I meet so many passionate people who are striving to make a difference in education. At GSE, I prepared to be a teacher skilled at developing interpersonal relationships and using creative methods to engage attention, abilities I still use today in my business career as head of environmental business for XL Catlin.

Jennifer: I am very proud of GSE's reputation as a leader in the field of education. The School opened so many doors for me, both personally and professionally. No matter where you go in education, Penn GSE commands great respect within the community. From the time I was a teenager, I had always dreamed of working with special needs children. GSE was the place where I deepened my understanding of psychological differences and prepared for my career as an independent behavior consultant for children with autism.

Why do you believe that education is important?

Jennifer: It is important to me that all children have the chance to reach their greatest potential and become the best they can possibly be, and education is the key to that.

Matthew: Education is critical to our country. It prepares our citizens to have a voice in how we are governed and enables us to compete in a global environment.



↑ A budding education supporter, Matthew and Jennifer's daughter, Kaitlyn, collected pencils, crayons, notebooks, backpacks, and other supplies to donate to the Henry C. Lea School in West Philadelphia as part of a recent school assignment.

Tell us about how your daughter, Kaitlyn, recently showed signs of following in your footsteps with a school project.

Matthew: For an assignment in her fifth-grade class at The Shipley School, Kaitlyn was asked to identify a problem in the world and create a plan to address it using her own skills. We're proud that Kaitlyn decided to address the need for all students to have school supplies.

Jennifer: Kaitlyn believes other students should have the tools they need to complete schoolwork both in school and at home. She collected donations from families at her school and area stores and gave them to the Henry C. Lea School in West Philadelphia, where GSE coordinates Penn's University-wide partnership with the school.

You have generously supported scholarship aid at Penn GSE by establishing the Mosi Foundation Endowed Scholarship Fund, as well as giving to the Annual Fund and the Andrew C. Porter Scholarship Fund. Why do you believe in supporting the School?

Jennifer: Our gifts are an expression of our gratitude for the education we received at GSE and our hope of helping future students receive many of the same opportunities. We want to help GSE make sure the most talented students are able to attend.

Matthew: Whether they are Ph.D. candidates presenting their latest work at a Board of Overseers meeting or teams of entrepreneurs competing with cutting-edge ideas at the Milken-Penn GSE Education Business Plan Competition, GSE brings together the best people across multiple areas of education, creating an excitement that is contagious. Scholarship support helps GSE continue to draw the best students, so that the passion that exists today will thrive for the next 100 years. ■