

## SPOTLIGHT ON: KINDERGARTEN TEACHER JAN WASSERMAN

*Jan Wasserman is one of the new kindergarten teachers this year, but she has more than a decade of teaching experience.*

**Where were you before coming to Clinton?** I taught first grade for almost nine years in Hillsborough, NJ, and then left to start a family. I have two girls, a fourth grader and seventh grader. When my youngest daughter went to kindergarten, I started teaching pre-school a few days a week, and when she entered fourth grade, I decided to go back to teaching full time.

**Have you always wanted to be a teacher?** I pretty much knew since high school. I always loved being around children. I babysat from the time I was 11, worked at camps since I was officially allowed to work. When I was a senior in high school, I participated in a program that bussed us to an elementary school, where I worked with a kindergarten teacher. I had a great experience with her and was sure that was what I wanted to do.

**What is special about teaching kindergarteners?** I love young children because I feel their innocence and their enthusiasm—they love to be in school. My favorite thing to see is the reading and writing growth, to watch them go from being a non-reader to a reader is amazing. They grow so much socially and academically in this one year.

**How would you describe yourself as a teacher?** I like to consider myself supportive and nurturing. But when I'm teaching, I like to be structured and organized and focused. I always try to give kids that extra push. I want them to grow to be the best that they can. But I can be silly and like to joke around with them too and I talk about my family, my girls, my dog, and my home, because I think it helps them feel more connected to me. The memories of the teachers I had are more personality-related than skill-related.

**Is there anything you've learned from being a mom that makes you a better teacher?** It probably has improved my patience in the classroom. I have an appreciation for all that goes on behind the scenes, what it takes to get them to school. I also imagine my children in school and I'm hoping their teachers are responding and treating them nicely, and I know I'm with someone else's children, and they have the same expectations.



**What's the biggest challenge you face as a teacher?** I'm trying to learn the curriculum and implement everything, get all the goals met but keep the creativity. I like to do art projects and role-playing. They're five, they should have time to play. Although it's important to meet the goals, it's equally important to develop them socially. The challenge is trying to do a lot of different things that are good for a wide array of children and do it well. I'm a little bit of a perfectionist and it requires me to be as organized and proficient as possible.

**Do you have a favorite teacher?** Actually, I didn't have a great early experience in school. My birthday was just at the cutoff and I was very young for the grade. I started kindergarten when I was four. Every parent teacher conference, my teachers would tell my mom what I was having trouble with, cutting, reading, whatever. I felt badly about that and I wouldn't want children that I teach to have negative impressions or feelings of themselves the way I did when I was young. I finally realized at some point that although things didn't always come easy to me, if I worked hard, I could succeed at it.

**What do you do in your free time?** I love being outside, I love to hear nature, smell fresh air and feel the breeze. If I could, I would go on a walk every day. I also love to travel. I spent a semester in Israel when I was in college and backpacked through Europe.

— Laurie Tarkan