

## **Who am I and why preschool is so important**

I was born and raised in Oakland California and have always committed myself to the betterment of my city and the children within. My mother owned a childcare home in Oakland when I was a child. Growing up I was more into the arts and became a playwright, poet, musician, actor and performer. My art always dealt with youth and making my community a better place.

In the early 2000's I majored in Theatre and upon graduation I became a teaching artist for 5 years in Berkeley at Jefferson Elementary and at Cole Middle School in Oakland. This was a great experience that allowed me to see that I genuinely wanted to work with children as a career. Likewise, I saw the disparity between students who came from more affluent families and those who were from underprivileged families and communities. I made a vow that I wanted to work for the Oakland Public School District further and support the underserved Oakland youth.

A few years passed as I attended Cal State East Bay, I started a family and now have two amazing daughters. I graduated Cum Laude majoring in Liberal Studies with a minor in Theatre and African American studies. Afterwards I attended Cal State Teach through Cal State Monterey and earned my teaching credential. Shortly thereafter, I worked in my own children's amazing preschool for two years to see the ends and outs of a successful, large center and earned my Child Development Site Supervisor Permit.

After several years within the public and charter sectors, I saw many things that brought me to the decision to create my own preschool. Mainly, it was the diverse students that attended my transitional kindergarten classroom that came in with a stark achievement gap. Although my time with them boosted their skills, when I consulted with their 1st and 2nd grade teachers, I found out in many cases, the gap only furthered as the years passed. This is where I began studying the differences between equity and equality and what I formally called the "achievement gap" juxtaposed the "opportunity gap."

I asked myself, what is missing in the students who are excelling in my class compared to the students who are barely making it into kindergarten with the basic skills? How are some students able to skip kindergarten and go into first grade from my class and others are just on the cusp of the TK targets at the conclusion of the year?

Taking into account family life, hardships, attendance, and other basic needs that aren't always met; what else could I do to change the trajectory of the students who seem to fit the school to prison pipeline narrative?

*What else was missing?*

The answer was a healthy, loving, foundational-building preschool! A great preschool will give students the ***Opportunity to Achieve!***

Many of my affluent students attended great preschools and/or have families that read to them everyday and build their vocabulary and skills before entering elementary school. This is the missing piece; likewise this is how I can contribute and keep my vow. Ever since my teenage years I wanted to help Oakland youth, starting my preschool gives me the opportunity to give back.

I believe a strong preschool foundation is the key to a child's success in future education. My goal is to teach my preschoolers confidence and build their character. When they walk into elementary school they will be proud scholars who understands who they are and are ready to lead!

I recognize the difference that a loving preschool gave my own children, gave my mother's students, and I am determined to make that same difference for your child! My students call me Ahma, which means Mother in several languages (my reference is Hebrew). I am the "Ahma" at The Learning Forest...we love your child like our own.

### **The Learning Forest:**

*Together we will grow these beautiful seeds into the strong trees of the future!*

♥OWNER & DIRECTOR:

***Amaris Israel (aka Artemis Minor)***

*I give all praises to The Most High for giving me the vision, perseverance and ingenuity to create a school dedicated to my community. I am thankful for my family and foundation and for my rebirth. I am thankful for this phenomenal journey.*