



## COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

February 2026

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In celebrating 50 years of Wonders Early Learning and Extended Day, we have been sharing memories, stories about the early days, and thinking about the future. Last week, we held our first ever Community Conversation. This discussion was moderated by Rebecca Gale, a journalist who writes about child care policy and caregiving, and panelists Jennifer Arnaiz, Senior Administrator, Early Childhood Services, for Montgomery County, and I. The conversation opened with reflecting on the national landscape and public perception of child care and continued with discussing how the field has changed in the past 50 years.

Wonders has grown and adapted, while remaining committed to its founding mission even as policies, perceptions, and family needs have changed over the decades. For this newsletter, we have compiled highlights of the historical timeline of child care in our country. The history of child care intersects in interesting ways with the history of our country's social, political, and economic movements.

As we ended our Community Conversation, we were asked to think about what our field might look like 20 years from now - what would be different and what would be the same. The most impactful future difference would be the public investment in universal child care that enables families to afford the care they want and need, and child care educators have pay parity with public school educators. What will remain the same is the cornerstone of high quality care - the authentic and reciprocal connections between educators and the children in their care. Because when we get it right, child care can change the world.

Warmly,

Joanne Hurt  
Executive Director





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## Reflecting on the Past

The History and Evolution of Child Care

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To understand how Wonders began, and why our mission matters today, it helps to look at how child care has evolved over time. The story of child care is deeply connected to social change, economic realities, and growing understanding of how children learn best.

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## Early Foundations of Child Care

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**1500s–1865:** Enslaved African women were forced to care for enslavers' children, forming one of the earliest, and most painful chapters in the history of child care labor in the United States.

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## The Birth of Early Childhood Education

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**Early 1800s:** Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi opened one of the first schools for young children, emphasizing hands-on learning, emotional development, and care for the “whole child.”

**1837:** German educator Friedrich Fröbel introduced the concept of Kindergarten, meaning “*Children’s Garden*,” grounded in the belief that young children learn best through play, creativity, and guided exploration. His ideas continue to shape early childhood classrooms today through hands-on, play-based learning—an approach reflected in Wonders’ play-based programs, where children learn through exploration, social interaction, and child-led activities supported by responsive teachers.

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## Child Care Meets Public Policy

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**1912:** The U.S. Children’s Bureau was created, marking the first federal effort to focus on child welfare and child care standards.

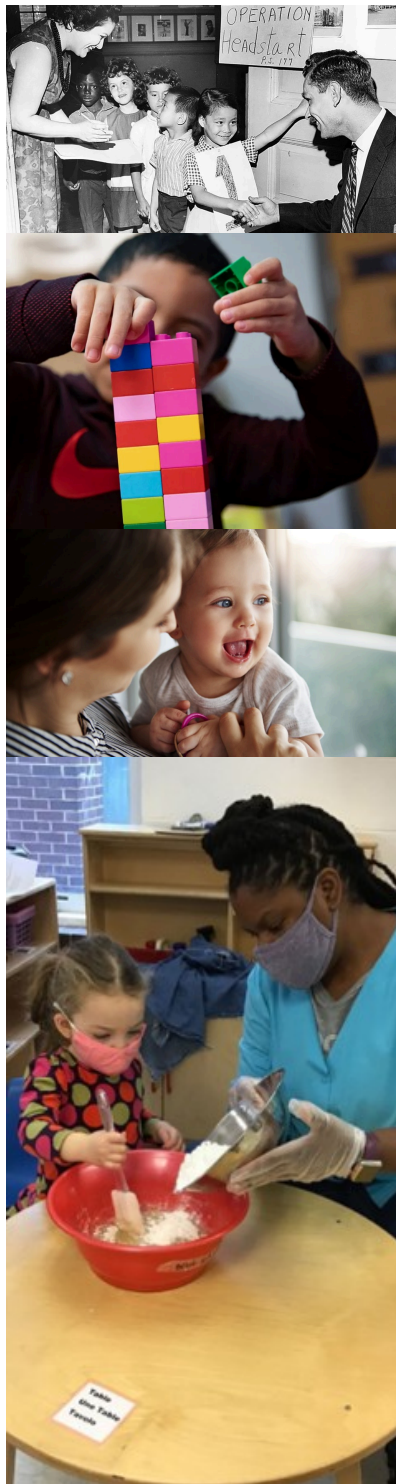
**1920s–1930s:** The nursery school movement expanded across the U.S., influenced by educators abroad and growing recognition of early education as a profession. Reformers and educators recognized the importance of structured afterschool activities in supporting child development. The Progressive Era saw an increase in the establishment of community centers and [Boys and Girls Clubs](#), which provided safe spaces for children to engage in learning and recreation. These programs were designed to offer constructive activities that deterred youth from delinquency while supplementing their formal education. ([The Origins of After School Programs in the United States](#))

**1940s:** World War II dramatically increased the need for child care as women entered the workforce. In 1943, Congress allocated \$20 million to create the nation’s first and only universal childcare program under an infrastructure law called the Lanham Act (1940). “War nurseries” enrolled an estimated 550,000 children over the course of the war. Though the program was temporary and did not reach every family who needed care, it represented an important milestone: the first time the US government acknowledged childcare as critical infrastructure. ([Child Care on the WWII Home Front](#))

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## Modern Challenges, Ongoing Need

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**1950s–1960s:** Federal policies addressed child care through tax deductions and workforce programs—often tied to employment rather than child development. During the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty led to the creation of programs like [Head Start](#), which provided early childhood education and extended learning opportunities for low-income families. Similarly, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 emphasized the importance of additional academic support outside school hours. ([The Origins of After School Programs in the United States](#))

**1971:** On Dec. 9, 1971, President Nixon vetoed a landmark bill, the Comprehensive Child Development Act (CDA), which would have created federally-funded public childcare centers across the U.S. ([Time Magazine](#))

**1990s:** Policies like the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Child Tax Credit acknowledged the challenges families face, while professional standards for early childhood educators expanded nationwide.

The Child Development Block Grant was passed by Congress to assist lower income families in affording child care. At the same time, afterschool programs had become a vital part of the educational landscape. [21st Century Community Learning Centers \(21st CCLC\)](#), a federally funded initiative that supports afterschool programming in low-income communities. These programs focus on academic enrichment, homework assistance, [STEM education](#), arts, and social-emotional learning. ([The Origins of After School Programs in the United States](#))

**2000s:** New research on early brain development innovates teaching practices in child care.

**2010s:** Congress reauthorizes the Child Development Block Grant and updates licensing requirements for child care programs.

**2020s:** COVID pandemic highlighted that child care is essential to the economy and is a public good. Federal investments through supplemental funding and the American Relief Plan demonstrate the power of public investment in child care.



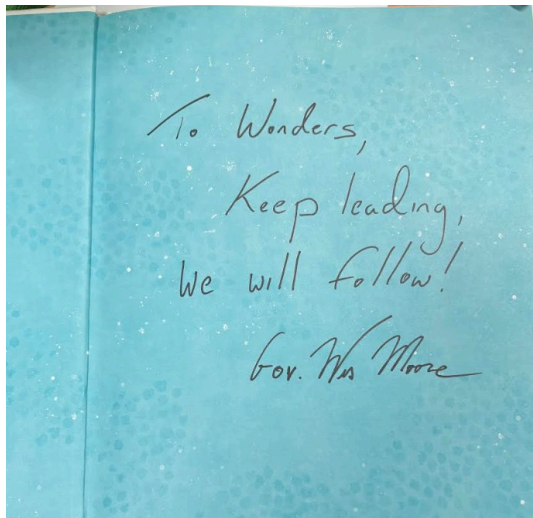
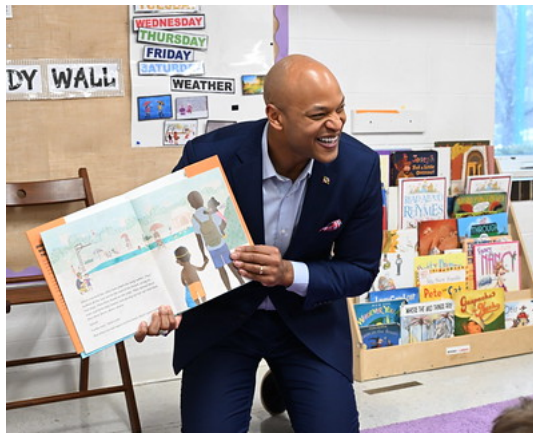


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## Why This History Matters—and Why Wonders Matters

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Despite decades of progress, the U.S. child care system remains fragmented, underfunded, and difficult to access—and the need for affordable, high-quality care has never been greater. Wonders Early Learning + Extended Day is a small part of this long history. Since 1976, Wonders has supported working families by providing safe, nurturing, and enriching early learning and out-of-school time programs across Montgomery County and DC.











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## Wonders 50th Anniversary Campaign

Strengthening the Foundation for the Next 50 Years

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As we celebrate **50 years of Wonders**, we are not only reflecting on our history—we are also looking ahead to ensure a strong and stable future for the children and families we serve.

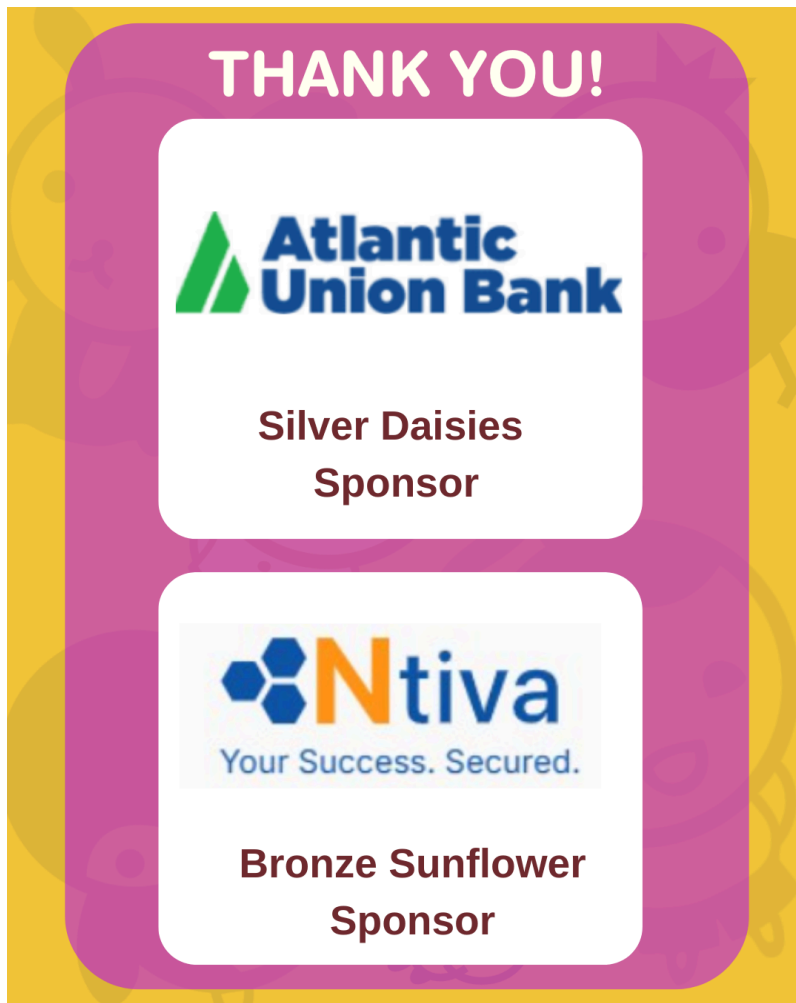
Through [Wonders' 50th Anniversary Campaign](#), our goal is to raise **\$150,000** to strengthen our Reserve Fund, a critical safeguard that helps ensure continuity of care during unexpected challenges.

This fund has already proven its importance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wonders relied on it—drawing down \$130,000 to remain operational and continue serving children and families during a time of profound

uncertainty.

We are grateful to share that, thanks to early supporters and generous sponsors, **\$26,625** has already been raised through pledges, donations, and sponsorships. This early momentum is encouraging—and it brings us meaningfully closer to our goal.





As a community, many of us share a connection to Wonders. You may remember its early days, have fond memories as a former student, have entrusted Wonders with your own children’s care, or simply believe that access to high-quality child care is essential to a healthy, thriving community. Your support at this moment can make a lasting difference.

**Contributions to this campaign help Wonders:**

Protect continuity of care during unexpected challenges and times of uncertainty

Invest in innovative programs that strengthen early learning and extended day experiences

Support and retain exceptional educators who are the heart of our mission

Expand access to high-quality programs for more children and families in our community

Strengthening our reserve also positions Wonders to confidently launch a new strategic plan in the coming months—moving from thoughtful planning to meaningful action and ensuring our mission remains strong for decades to come.

As part of this special anniversary year, we invite our extended community—especially Wonders alumni and longtime supporters—to help carry this work forward. Together, we can honor 50 years of impact while building a sustainable future for the next generation. We invite you to consider making a gift in support of Wonders’ 50th Anniversary Campaign.

growing stronger, shaping the future

50  
YEARS

wonders

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign

Give today and help secure  
Wonders' future—because  
the next 50 years start now

## Wonders Early Learning + Extended Day proudly celebrates 50 years!

Wonders is raising \$150,000 through our 50th Anniversary Campaign to strengthen our Reserve Fund—a vital resource that ensures long-term stability and bold forward momentum. For 50 years, this fund has allowed Wonders to respond proactively to challenges and opportunities alike, including sustaining operations during the COVID-19 pandemic when \$130,000 in reserves kept our doors open for children and families. As we look ahead, growing this fund will empower Wonders to confidently launch our upcoming strategic plan, invest in innovation, and move from vision to action—securing the next 50 years of impact. Your gift today is an investment in stability, growth, and the future of early learning.



### Your support helps Wonders:

- Protect continuity of care during unexpected challenges and times of uncertainty
- Invest in innovative programs that strengthen early learning and extended day experiences
- Support and retain exceptional educators who are the heart of our mission
- Expand access to high-quality programs for more children and families in our community

This spring, we're thrilled to invite our entire community to a very special milestone celebration, The **Wonders 50th Anniversary Garden Party**, taking place March 28, 2026. The Garden Party will bring together families, alumni, staff, supporters, and friends to celebrate the many "seeds of opportunity" that have blossomed at Wonders over the past fifty years, and the bright future ahead. Please note this is an adults-only event. [Tickets available now!](#)

# JOIN US IN MARCH!

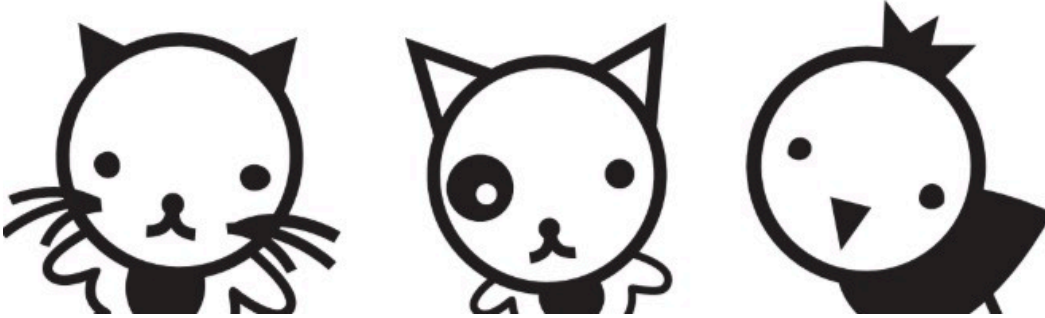
## WONDERS 50TH ANNIVERSARY GARDEN PARTY

**SATURDAY,  
MARCH 28, 2026**  
Imagination Stage  
4908 Auburn Ave.  
Bethesda, MD  
**6:30 - 9:30 PM**

### **Ticket Prices:**

Individual: \$125  
Couple: \$225

*Please note this is an  
adults-only event*



**Wonderspalooza** is more than just a carnival- it's a celebration of our community's spirit, values, and resilience. It's an inclusive gathering where families, friends, and neighbors of all ages can come together to connect, create, and celebrate what makes Wonders so special.

# WondersPalooza

**Community Family Fun Carnival!**  
We invite our entire community  
— all ages welcome —  
for carnival games, laughter, and fun!

**Saturday, May 2, 2026 | 10:30am - 2:00pm**

*Tickets on sale in March*

**Chevy Chase Elementary School,  
4015 Rosemary Street, Chevy Chase, MD**



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## Parent + Caregiver Workshops

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Join us for our virtual Parent/Workshop Series! We continue to partner with the Child Development Consultants for informative sessions for parents, guardians, and caregivers. Each workshop in the series highlights a different topic.

*We will no longer use Eventbrite for parent workshop registrations, but each session remains free and open to the public.*



**March Workshop Topic:** Wondrous 2's Formerly Known as Terrible 2's

**Date:** Wednesday March 11, 2026

**Time:** 1:00pm- 2:00pm

**Location:** ZOOM (Virtual)

[Register Here](#)

**May Workshop Topic:** Developing Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills in Young Children

**Date:** Wednesday May 13, 2026

**Time:** 1:00pm- 2:00pm

**Location:** ZOOM (Virtual)

[Register Here](#)

## Wonders Summer Camp 2026

Calling all campers,  
ages 5 - 12 years old!

# wonders summer camp

June 22 - Aug 7

Wonders Summer Camp will be here soon! Registration opens in December 2025. We look forward to an exciting, fun-filled, and memorable summer with campers at our Bethesda location!

**LEARN MORE**

[wonderslearning.org/summercamp](https://wonderslearning.org/summercamp)



Donate to Wonders

Teaching children through play and a nurturing and diverse community.

[Make a donation today to ensure access to quality care and education.](#)

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