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8 NYC preschool consultants and experts to know to get your child into a prestigious program

Robin Madell 2 hours ago





From left to right: Taryn Siegelberg, Roxana Reid, Dana Haddad, and Wendy Levey.

Courtesy of Taryn Siegelberg; Kevin Sturman; Courtesy of Dana Haddad; Courtesy of Wendy Levey; Samantha Lee/Insider

Navigating the NYC preschool landscape takes strategy, luck, and often the right connections.

Insider compiled eight professionals based on recommendations and referrals from industry experts.

They have the expertise and strong ties with admissions directors to help your kid get accepted.

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The [private-preschool scene](#) in New York City is not for the faint of heart. It takes tenacity, gumption, luck, and often the right connections for families to land a spot on an elite school's short list for admissions.

"It is important to understand that private-school admission in New York City — including at the preschool level — has now reached a critically competitive level at all points of entry," Amanda Uhry, CEO and founder of [Manhattan Private School Advisors](#), told Insider.

She said that [550,000](#) children under the age of 5 live in New York City — and while only a fraction of them are private preschool and K-12 applicants, there are only about 10,000 spots available in the city.

Parents can explore several avenues to get their child into a top NYC preschool, including knowing a family whose child recently graduated from the school in good standing, knowing a board member who can speak on your behalf, and having a skill or resource that could be helpful to the school.

But another perhaps more reliable path involves working with an insider who understands the entire process.

Based on recommendations and referrals from industry experts, Insider compiled a list of eight prominent figures who offer specific expertise in NYC preschool admissions. Those selected have strong ties with admissions directors at many of the city's top nursery schools, as well as expertise on what it takes to get kids into the best

schools. Many also boast long legacies in New York's preschool community.

The following influencers are listed in no particular order.

Alina Adams, founder of NYC School Secrets.com and author of 'Getting Into NYC Kindergarten'



Alina Adams. Courtesy of Alina Adams

Based in New York City, Alina Adams told Insider she got her three children into "various combinations of public, private, religious, single-sex, co-ed, and gifted New York schools."

She said that after going through each rigmarole, she realized just how convoluted and opaque the process was and decided to launch her own [website](#) to provide parents with access to free podcasts, videos, and blog posts, taking families through every step they need to know, including interviews with admissions officers, preschool directors, and teachers.

For those with further questions, Adams also offers public workshops and private one-on-one consultations.

Adams starts working with parents whose kids are as young as 6 months old — years before they need to even think about preschool. "I believe that there can be no true school choice until everyone knows all their choices — and how to get them," Adams said.

Read her blog posts on [New York School Talk](#) and her book "[Getting Into NYC Kindergarten](#)," or contact her at alinaadams@gmail.com.

Wendy Levey, the founder of Wendy Levey Consulting





Wendy Levey. Courtesy of Wendy Levey

Wendy Levey founded Epiphany Community Nursery School on the Upper East Side in 1975 and ran it for several decades before founding [Wendy Levey Consulting](#) in January 2020.

Over the past year, she's successfully helped families get their kids accepted into multiple high-ranking preschools throughout the city, including the [92nd St Y](#), [First Presbyterian Church Nursery School](#), Garden House, International Preschool, The Town School, and [The Brick Church School](#).

"My relationships with schools and admissions directors, ability to know children and schools from preschool through high school, and my tenacity and passion for school placement are hallmarks of my consulting business," Levey told Insider.

In addition, she helps families improve their interview skills, edits parent essays, performs child assessments, helps parents with school choice, and provides resources on educational books, articles, and toys.

Read her [blog posts](#) on her website or contact her at wendy@wendylevey.com.

Roxana Reid, the founder and CEO of Smart City Kids, Inc.





Roxana Reid. Kevin Sturman

Roxana Reid started her Manhattan-based educational consultancy, [Smart City Kids Inc.](#), in 1999. Over the past two decades, she's led the firm, helping families in New York City identify public- and private-school options for their children.

"We have supported close to 30 nursery schools in admissions," Reid, who works with preschools in placing students into ongoing schools when they see a need for support, told Insider. She also offers workshops for nursery schools to support admissions.

Some of the elite preschools that Reid and her team have helped place kids at include Barrow Street Nursery School, Columbus Pre-School, [the Jewish Community Center](#), and Tribeca Community School.

Erica Papir, an educational advisor at Smart City Kids who works on placing students into nursery schools, told Insider that Reid prioritizes deep understanding of a family's values, goals, and

educational objectives.

"Roxana and the Smart City Kids Advisors have extensive experience and are constantly in touch with schools throughout New York City and the country," Papir said.

Read the [Smart City Kids newsletter](#) and contact Reid at roxanareid@smartcitykids.com.

Amanda Uhry, CEO and founder of Manhattan Private School Advisors





Amanda Uhry. Courtesy of Amanda Uhry

Amanda Uhry launched her educational-advisory firm [Manhattan Private School Advisors](#) in 2001. For the past two decades, she's devoted herself to helping parents understand and reach top-tier independent schools in NYC — which she calls "the bastion of admissions competition" — and other parts of the country.

According to Uhry, her firm has now successfully placed almost 16,000 families in top-tier preschools, K-12 independent schools, boarding schools, special-needs programs, and specialized public schools.

"We do not have enough private preschools in New York," she said, noting that this is true for one simple reason: supply and demand.

This, Uhry said, is why MPSA exists — "to make every attempt to facilitate the best possible school choice and placement for your child, whether he or she is a 1-year-old applying for a toddler preschool program or a 16-year-old applying to boarding school and preparing for college admissions."

Contact her directly at mpsa7777@gmail.com or call MPSA at 212-280-7777.

Dana Haddad, CEO of New York Admissions



Dana Haddad. Courtesy of Dana Haddad

"Gaining admission into New York's elite schools, even as early as preschool, can be a daunting process for any parent," said Dana Haddad, who before becoming an educational consultant was an admissions director at Horace Mann School and Claremont Preparatory School and a teacher in New York private and public schools.

She explained that her extensive knowledge of the educational landscape as a teacher and admissions officer, combined with her deep desire to help others, led her to start [New York Admissions](#) in 2009. She's since helped thousands of families find the right school for their children.

Haddad told Insider she's worked with more than 250 families for preschool, and she shared a list of 75 top preschools in NYC where she's placed children.

"My specialty is working with families to chart an educational journey for each child, starting with preschool all the way through high school," Haddad said.

For preschoolers, she focuses on setting up practice playdates, getting students and parents ready for interviews, providing timelines, compiling parent statements, responding to questions on applications, and advocating for each client.

Contact her at dana@nyadmissions.com.

Taryn Siegelberg, the director of nursery and kindergarten admissions at Admit NY





Taryn Siegelberg. Courtesy of Taryn Siegelberg

Taryn Siegelberg oversees preschool admissions and application support for the NYC educational consultancy Admit NY, which she joined three years ago as an admissions specialist.

A New York native with two children of her own, Siegelberg told Insider that she became an expert on the process of evaluating a school's methodology, academic rigor, and ethos after going through the process with her own children.

According to Whitney Shashoua, the founder of Admit NY, Siegelberg

has a keen eye and perspective on the NYC preschool landscape.

"Each year, Taryn tours and visits preschool and nursery-school programs across the city, serving as the primary contact for preschool directors, deepening those relationships while learning the ins and outs of each school's community, academic program, educational philosophy, and unique admissions policies," Shashou said.

Shashou added that Siegelberg has supported countless families through the preschool process, and, given her extensive background in school admissions, she learned exactly what admissions officers are looking for and how to help families evaluate their perfect schools.

"Above all else, Taryn is focused on finding a family's right fit school and efficiently supporting families through a complex process that can often feel high-stakes," Shashou said.

Read Admit NY's [blog posts](#) and contact Siegelberg at taryn@admitny.com.

Nikki Geula, the founder and CEO of Arete Educational Consulting and The Classroom Door



Nikki Geula. Courtesy of Nikki Geula

More than 25 years ago, Nikki Geula founded her educational consultancy, [Arete Educational Consulting](#), in New York. Since then, she's trained teams of more than 100 certified teachers who exclusively help with pre-K and kindergarten admissions.

"We help with playdates and interview prep, from guiding parents and students on proper interview etiquette to how to choose the right-fit school in the end," Geula said. Today, her firm operates in New York and Florida and specializes in admissions counseling and

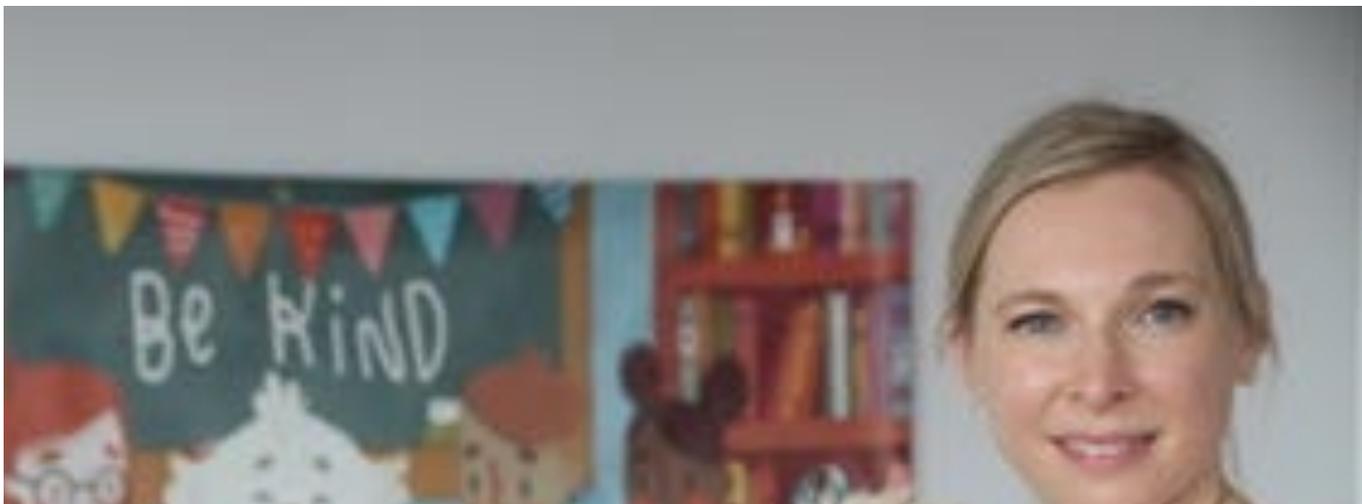
tutoring for students in the US and around the world.

Geula told Insider that she and her team of top educators have worked with a roster of clients, including children of Fortune 500 CEOs, renowned entrepreneurs, celebrities, professors, and more, advising them through the admissions process to top schools, including nursery schools.

"Students of Arete consistently gain entry into top preschools, such as the 92nd St. Y, First Presbyterian Church School, Horace Mann, Beginnings, Garden House, and Hollingworth," Geula said. She's also launching The Classroom Door, a tutoring and advising service, this month.

Contact her at nikki@areteeducation.com.

Cara Zelas, founder, author, and educator





Cara Zelas. Courtesy of Cara Zelas

Early-childhood expert Cara Zelas has deep roots in teaching preschool in NYC, including three years spent as a teacher at [West Side Montessori School](#).



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curriculum and book series, "[Big World of Little Dude](#)," which Zelas told Insider teaches children how to be "self-aware and socially aware little citizens."

Zelas evolved her offering through the pandemic after witnessing families' need for a [homeschool curriculum](#), which she launched in August 2020 featuring 120 hands-on activities to help parents promote learning at home. The program equips children as young as 2 years old with the social and emotional skills that she said are highly sought after by the most elite NYC preschools.

"Good manners and kindness are two stand-out attributes that schools look for in a child, and the 'Big World of Little Dude' curriculum introduces these and related themes in fun, engaging ways," Zelas said, noting that it provides an efficient way to introduce and reinforce these themes well before the admissions and interview process.

Read her [blog](#) and explore her [preschool curriculum](#).

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