

# Eighth Graders Lend a Hand at the

**AT 7:30 A.M. IN “THE K”**, it’s totally acceptable to have cupcakes for breakfast and hot chocolate with extra chocolate and extra whipped cream. *Pretend* breakfast, that is.

A kindergartner serves an eighth grader an imaginary cup of coffee while another takes their breakfast order. Another serves cupcakes for an eighth grader’s pretend birthday. As other kindergartners arrive, they gravitate toward this bustling corner of the kindergarten’s “Big Room.”

Just like the kitchen is the heart of the home, so too is it the heart of the K at this early hour.

Five days a week, six eighth graders start their morning assisting in the kindergarten through the Eighth-Grade Kindergarten Helpers program—a leadership opportunity asking eighth graders to arrive early, help kindergartners out of cars and into the K’s Big Room, and transition into the day. As kindergartners arrive and choose between several centers (many focusing on fine motor skill development), from Play-Doh and painting, to colored pencils and mag tiles, from letter tracing to the creative play kitchen, their eighth-grade buddies are there, ready to play.

“The Eighth-Grade Helpers have made my daughter feel so welcome at Peck, creating such a sense of community for her,” said Shannon Karches, mom to kindergartner Claire. “She is excited to

see the eighth graders in the morning, but even more excited when she spots them in an assembly or walking around campus.”

Karches explains that her family moved to New Jersey this summer, and she was worried Claire would be nervous about starting a new school. “But seeing older kids be so kind to her, remember her name, and smile at her each morning has created such a warm and welcoming feeling for her, and led to a love of coming to school every day,” she said.

The older students not only assist the kindergartners at the centers each morning. They also become role models for Peck’s youngest students, modeling the school’s core principles of consideration of others and community responsibility.

“We’re setting an example for them of how to act,” said Alexa Cassanelli ’23. “By spending time with them each morning, we are also showing the kindergartners that they matter, they are important, and they belong in this community.”

“They get to see older people they know in a different space in the school,” added Maggie Rogers ’23. “It eliminates the intimidation factor.”

Being an Eighth-Grade Kindergarten Helper is a leadership activity that students voluntarily choose to participate in. It’s one of the few that requires an early morning arrival, something that might be a disincentive for sleep-deprived tweens. But these helpers say they had no reservations about the time commitment.

“I have been here since kindergarten,” said Rogers, “it’s fun to see that I was once that size. They feel so small to me now!”

It’s tough to say who enjoys this morning tradition more: the kindergartners or the eighth graders.

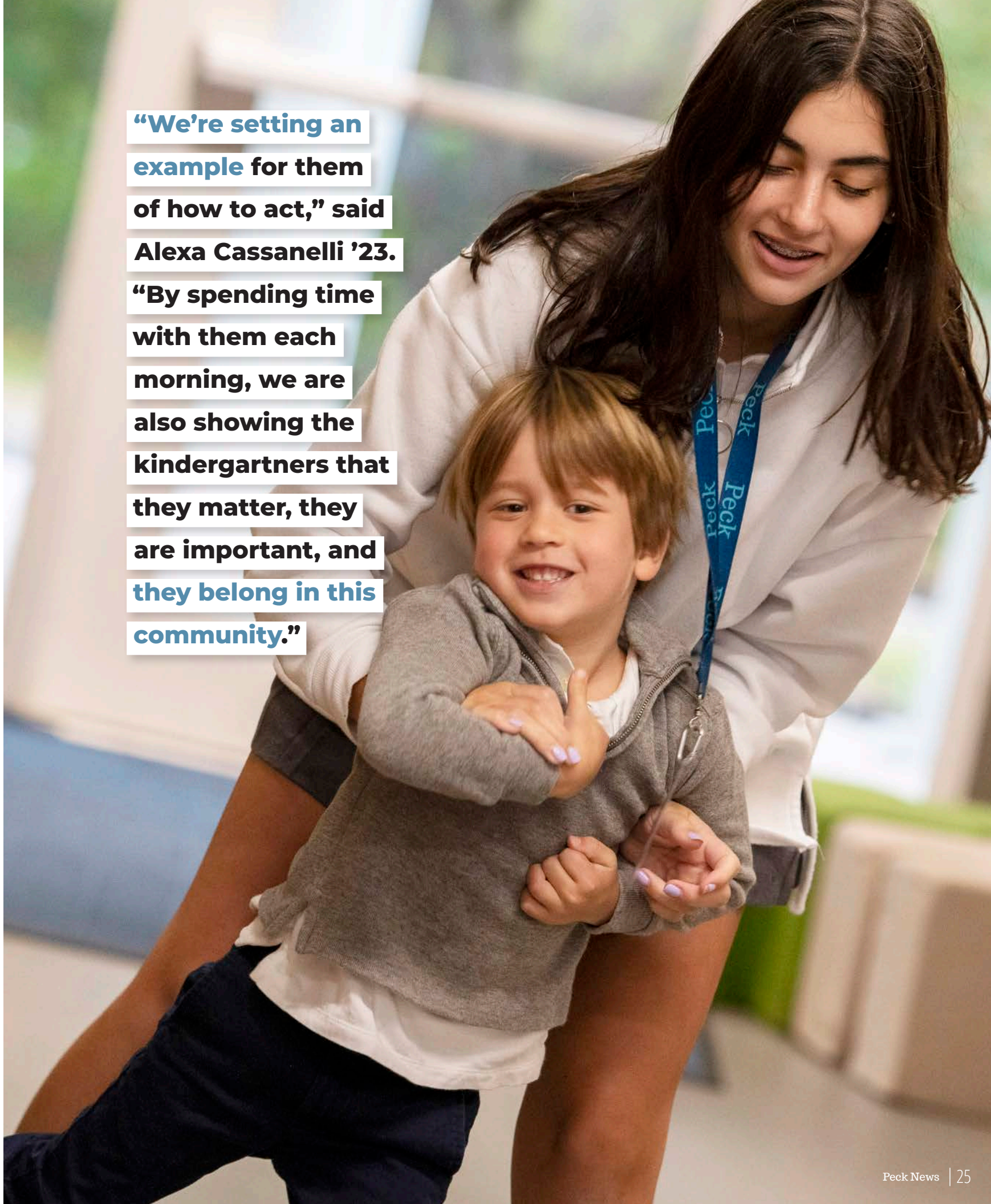
“It’s a lot of fun to hang out with them in the morning,” Cassanelli said. “We get to know them better and help them be more social, less shy, and more open.”

The feeling is mutual.

Kindergartner Luciana Paul said she really enjoys playing in the pretend kitchen with them.

“I like being with them because they’re really fun to play with,” she said. “They’re really sweet.”

“They look like the biggest graders ever!” exclaimed kindergartner Hannah Shen.



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