

Donor of the Day - Wednesday, July 27, 2011

CEO Bets on Education

By [MELANIE GRAYCE WEST](#)



Steven B. Klinsky

Steven B. Klinsky believes that education doesn't end with the school day.

The 55-year-old founder and chief executive of New Mountain Capital, set out nearly 20 years ago to create an after-school educational program for children attending public school. He did so in honor of his older brother, Gary, who died in 1978.

Gary, who was seven years older, would tutor Mr. Klinsky as a child every day. The two would do workbook drills and read together. "He was a huge, positive influence in my own life and education," he says.

And so when Mr. Klinsky reached adulthood and wanted to give back, he decided to do something in early childhood education.

Mr. Klinsky wasn't sure where to begin, but started working with the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, now known as Brooklyn Community Services, to develop a program. Initially he was shown new schools in Brooklyn, but the schools were nicer than the ones he attended as a child. He wanted to see places where students really needed help and he was taken to East New York. He knew nothing about the neighborhood then, except for what he'd read.

In 1993, says Mr. Klinsky, "it was a rough time for East New York."

He set up the first Gary Klinsky Children's Center at P.S. 149 in an empty classroom that would serve as a clubhouse of sorts. The program has been replicated in four other Brooklyn schools and reaches about 800 to 1,000 children annually during the academic year. The centers focus on reading, math and language skills, and children meet in groups of 20 with a teacher and a teaching assistant.

Mr. Klinsky has expanded his interest in education—he founded Victory Education Partners, an advisory firm for independent charter schools and urban school districts—but he continues to be involved in the Brooklyn after-school centers, contributing some \$1 million over the years to support them.

He also believes in betting big, literally, on the centers and will host his annual Texas Hold 'Em poker tournament Wednesday. Participants don't play for money; all of the poker chips purchased for the evening serve as donations to the program.

"It's competitive in the sense that you have some really great, very, very senior high-caliber leaders of firms," says Mr. Klinsky. "Luck will dictate in any given evening, but let me say people are doing their best."