

THE BRIDGE ACADEMY

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The Bridge Academy proudly graduated eight students; (L to R) Alex Tessein, Ryan Butcavage, Dana McMillian, Elliot McGlew, Susan Morris (Director of Education), Justin Minittee, Sarah Kotlan, Justin Robles, and Matthew Pacchiano. As our graduates have demonstrated in the past, 90% of the students will be pursuing future studies in a 2 or 4 year college or technical program. We are very proud of our graduates and as Ryan Butcavage said it best in his graduation speech: "Most graduates our age have never had to overcome the challenges we all faced that brought us to the Bridge Academy. But now look at us; we overcame those challenges and make up the 2017 graduating class of the Bridge Academy. We have learned that our disabilities do not limit us; they are what make us who we are today. Strong, resilient, and confident young men and women ready to take on a future that looks bright."





The Bridge Academy's 2017 Annual Report



Planting Seeds for the Future



“We are fortunate that our successful educational program is enhanced through the solid partnership formed between the school, parents and the community.”

- Mark Reilly, President Board of Trustees

Message from the Board President

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to thank you for your continued support of The Bridge Academy. Our school has made great strides in educating children with learning disabilities; but this would not be possible without the support of our entire Bridge family – Board of Trustees current/alumni students, faculty, staff, current and alumni parents, grandparents and friends. There is a cause and effect that happens at our school when our entire family supports our students and they in turn rise to the occasion with their success. This report is an expression of our gratitude and a celebration of the successful year we have shared at The Bridge Academy highlighted by our students’ and our school’s success.

Everyone at The Bridge Academy is dedicated to providing an exceptional educational program that focuses on our students individual needs, provides a nurturing environment where students are free to be themselves and an supports an exceptional staff dedicated to helping them bridge the gap between potential and performance. But our ultimate goal is to find a larger and permanent home for The Bridge. This past year we planted the seed to make this dream a reality.

With your help and past generous donations, we have been able to purchase the property adjacent to our existing location. A new school will bring the security of ownership and the ability to enhance our educational programs and increase our enrollment so we can help more children with their educational needs. We are excited as we begin this next chapter in The Bridge Academy story by laying the foundation for our capital campaign fundraising. It was with your help that we were able to take this step and we hope you will join us on this journey through your continued support of the school.

Your participation supports the kind of education Bridge Academy students can’t receive anywhere else. I hope you enjoy reading about our students’ and our school’s accomplishments. Together we can build a stronger and far-reaching bridge.

Mark Reilly – President, Board of Trustees

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Student Dancers

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Max Kaiser
Megan Bruthers
Nicole Kilbane
Julisse O'Neill
Matt Warzaniek

Student Speakers

Erin Schobel
Santina Wrona
Ethan Jonas
Xavier Sanchez

Special thanks to our Reach for the Stars Gala committee and for everyone that attended this wonderful evening of celebration. Our student speakers were inspiring and the student dancers were amazing! This special evening raised over \$60,000 for our school. We thank the following supporters, donors, volunteers and committee members.

Reach for the Stars Gala Donors

The Bridge Academy would like to thank everyone who attended and/or supported our mission, as well as the countless volunteers who helped make the night possible and the event so memorable. Special thanks to our sponsors, advertisers and donors to the event:

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Message from the Principal

From the first day The Bridge Academy was founded, our objective was to create a school that was unique in providing a high quality, effective educational approach critical to children with language-based learning disabilities. We created a unique curriculum based on Orton-Gillingham principals including a multi-sensory approach with nurturing, student centered instruction and teaching methods. Fourteen years later it still works! Our students' results continue to grow and amaze all of us. We witness frustrated, confused children transform into confident, self-assured critical thinkers resulting in successful citizens of the world.

While The Bridge Academy is recognized for its strong academic program, the lessons we hope our students take with them go beyond those measured by test scores. We had a very successful year. Not only did our students continue to increase in their reading and math skills, we also graduated eight seniors and the majority of them have decided to pursue post-secondary education by enrolling in a 2 or 4 year college or technical program.

And word is spreading about The Bridge Academy! Our enrollment continues to grow each year. While we maintain committed to our small class size, our building is bursting at the seams. We started this year at full enrollment of 72 children with a waiting list that is breaking my heart as we cannot fill it quickly enough. But with growth comes opportunity. We have finally found the location for a new and larger Bridge Academy. We are so excited to begin to make our dream a reality.

Thank you for helping to make The Bridge Academy the wonderful school it is. I want to personally thank all of you for supporting us in educating the students of The Bridge Academy. We are making a positive impact on our students, their families, the community and each person they connect with in the future. As we move forward, our mission and commitment to effectively educate our students remains at the heart of our school. I am proud to share these successes with you and I invite you to join us a future event in celebrating these remarkable students.

Susan Morris

Susan Morris, *Director of Education*





“Creating an environment that helps a child to be joyful in learning is the astounding feat that The Bridge Academy has accomplished. Challenges [are] no longer viewed as defeat but welcomed with various skills at their disposal to overcome.”

- Bridge Parent

The Year in Review

As we reflect on the past year at The Bridge Academy, we realize we are planting the seeds for success with our students, both as future scholars and citizens of the world. Our students fully embrace the Orton-Gillingham approach to reading and have grown as a result. This past year, our students increased an average of 1 ½ years in their language arts skills, reading and vocabulary development. To promote independent reading, our Reading Challenge was enthusiastically embraced by all students. Collectively, they read over 100,000 pages. In addition to their reading accomplishments, our past year was filled with wonderful experiential learning opportunities, collaborative teaching projects and guest artists, teachers, and speakers. Thank you for helping to make this possible with your support of our school. Some of the past year's highlights were:

★ **SOCIAL STUDIES:** 2016 was a presidential election year and our social studies teachers used that as the basis for lifelong learning opportunities. The school hosted an “elected official day,” with Lawrence Mayor, David Maffei, and New Jersey Assemblywoman Elizabeth Maher Muoio. They each explained why they wanted to become an elected official and both the challenges and rewards of their respective office. Students continued their governmental studies by visiting the Constitution Center in Philadelphia, PA. These activities combined with the current event of the election gave our students a better understanding of our country's constitution, government structure, and their responsibilities as citizens.

★ **SCIENCE:** Environmental science was the theme for the science classes last year. Students focused on water issues, especially the sources for our water in an urban and suburban area. Bridge students visited the Fairmount Water Works in Philadelphia, PA, a national historic landmark, a civil engineering landmark and a national mechanical engineering landmark. Students learned it was designed and constructed to provide safe clean drinking water to a city on the cusp of remarkable growth. During their visit, students were able to learn about its past, present and future impact of water and its connections between daily life needs and the natural environment. Students were able to compare the urban water needs outlined in the Fairmount Water Works to those same needs in a suburban environment by visiting the Stony Brook Millstone Watershed.

Students continued their environment science studies by participating in The World of 7Billion video challenge. As part of the Population Education, a national program that focuses on human population issues, students planned and executed a short video on one of the three topics; overfishing, coral bleaching and urban sprawl. Not only did they learn about specific scientific issues, but this project required them to apply teamwork, critical thinking, and organization skills to complete the project.

★ **PEEC:** Students spent two days at the Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC). PEEC is one of the largest and longest running residential environmental education centers in the northeastern United States. PEEC sits in the midst of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and utilizes the natural and cultural resources to develop experiential learning



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Thanks to our many supporters, The Bridge Academy had another successful year and raised just over \$55,000 in unrestricted and restricted gifts to the school's Annual Fund. Thank you to our Board members, staff, parents, alumni and friends of the school.

Annual Report of Giving

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The Year in Review

opportunities. A visit to PEEC provided instruction that was project focused and tailored to hands on learning. It taught our students how to take care of the world by understanding where they live and taking action in their own backyards and communities. Students participated in an outdoor classroom to observe and learn about forest communities and habitats. In addition to the environmental science program, students took part in team building exercises to strengthen their skills in working in groups and decision making.

★ **STEAM:** Working together, the teachers of Bridge wanted to take the environmental education a step further and deepen our students understanding and engagement. With the help of a grant from the Young Audiences of New Jersey and NRG Corporation, our teachers designed a STEAM program incorporating science, technology, engineering, art and math in the creation of an outdoor sculpture. Working with artist-in-residence, Ben Prangler, students designed wind powered sculptures and then used a 3D printer to create some of the design components.

★ **ART:** Bridge parent and pen maker, Phil Weiss, taught all the students how to create their very own personalized writing instrument. Students were able to choose the outside casing of their pen from a variety of pre-made wood blocks designed by Mr. Weiss and his sons and Bridge students, Ian and Ethan. After selecting the perfect casing, students used a lathe to shape the pen to appropriate size. Many of the students have never built anything with their hands and this was the first time they had used machinery of any kind. After shaping the size of the pen, students used 12 steps of sanding to smooth the wood and applied an oil finish. The entire process taught patience, machine skills, concentration and a pride in ownership and accomplishment. Mr. Weiss was accompanied by a friend and co-worker, Guy Rind. Thanks to corporate support from their employer, Dell Technologies Give Back Program, they were able to take a day off from work to work with the students.





“The Bridge Academy taught me that no obstacle was too difficult and that my learning disabilities do not define me, they just make me a more aware and compassionate educator.”

- Karen Donnelly

From One of Our Graduates

At one point in my education, this speech would have been too difficult to write. It would have been too difficult to write because when I entered The Bridge Academy in eighth grade with four learning disabilities, I could not read a book by myself. I was well below grade level and I hated reading. Along with my poor reading ability, my level in mathematics was at a long-standing low. In eighth grade I was at a second-grade level in math and was learning how to multiply.

Years of struggling with my education had left me with a low self-esteem, a fear of flipping burgers for the rest of my life, and undeniable frustration. The Bridge Academy would change that for me. My teachers challenged me, believed in me as a person and student, and taught me how to be a better person and citizen. At The Bridge Academy my self-esteem flourished and I discovered that no obstacle was too difficult for me to conquer. My teachers believed in my aspirations and so did I.

I graduated The Bridge Academy in 2012 and went on to attend Rowan University where I studied abroad twice, held several executive board positions in campus clubs, and hosted my own art thesis exhibition. I graduated Rowan University in 2017 with a degree in Art Education, and with certification as a Teacher of Students with Disabilities. I graduated Summa Cum Laude from the Honors Concentration, first in my major, and in the top eighteen in my college.

This school year I started my teaching career in a temporary art teaching position at Grice Middle School in Hamilton Township. What I see in my students is myself; tremendous potential to succeed and grow as individuals and as students. I encourage them each day to appreciate the opportunity of education and to value themselves as individuals.

I will only continue to help students visualize their potential. Just this month, I received a job offer for a permanent tenure track position. Out of eight applicants, I am delighted to say that in January I will be the new ceramics and sculpture teacher at Lawrence High School. I visited my new classroom this week and was astonished by not just the opportunity that lay in front of me, but by the fact that my new art classroom is literally the same size as the entire Bridge Academy.

Me, a girl who could not read a book by herself in eighth grade. Me, the girl who could not multiply and went through four semesters of remedial algebra in college. Me, the young girl with aspirations of becoming an art teacher - has made that dream a reality. This all happened because a humble school believed in my potential. The Bridge Academy taught me that no obstacle was too difficult and that my learning disabilities do not define me, they just make me a more aware and compassionate educator.

Thank you Bridge Academy!

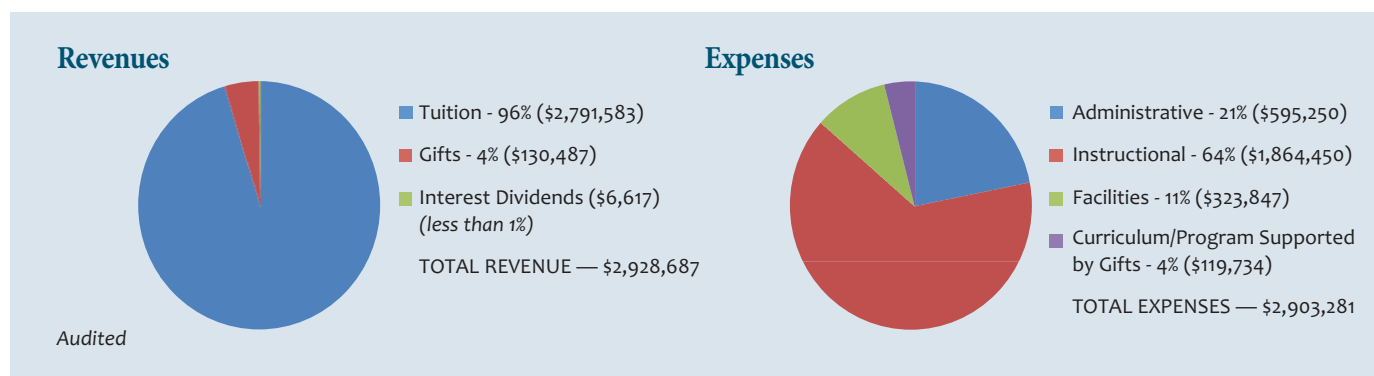
Karen Donnelly, 2012 Graduate





Financial Report

The Bridge Academy continues to grow in our reputation, student enrollment and financial security. The 2016-2017 fiscal year resulted in another year of solid growth for the school and we have the highest student enrollment since the school opened. Interest and demand has been increasing each year and as a result we will have a “waiting list” for the 2017-2018 school year. We appreciate the support of our families, friends, community and corporate sponsors for your financial contributions and support of The Bridge Academy’s mission to help students bridge the gap between potential and performance.



Planting the Seeds for the Future

Since The Bridge Academy began, our goal has always been to have our own school. We have been leasing space and as tenants of leased space, we face constraints to our ability to grow and thrive. A new school brings much; the security of ownership, the ability to enhance our educational programs, and the ability to increase our enrollment so we can help more students.

Now is the time to make our dream a reality by creating the campus environment that we know will best serve our students. We have a plan! We want to create a multi-building campus for our students and have decided the best way to accomplish this is through a phased approach. Phase I is the purchase of new property. And we are excited to announce that Phase I is complete! Thanks to the generosity of past donors, The Bridge Academy purchased the property adjacent to its current location.

Phase II is the renovation of the existing building that will bring our administrative offices from two separate locations into one, saving the school additional rental expense. This space will also include a new, upgraded student art studio and additional student spaces, such as a new nurse’s office and counselor’s office. This new building will also provide room for student, parent, and professional development meeting space.

Phase III is the construction of the new building that will include state-of-the-art classrooms for language arts, math, social studies, science labs, a music room, a library and a student activity room. We are excited to begin this new chapter for The Bridge Academy and we invite you to join us on this journey!



Save the Date - Bridge Alumni Reunion Saturday, January 21, 2017

Please contact Ms. Karen Savar ksavar@banj.org to place your name on the mailing list and to learn more. Also check our facebook page www.facebook.com/The-Bridge-Academy-285508417325/ for more information.