



The Bridge Academy's 2016 Annual Report



Making a positive impact on our students,
their families and our community.



“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

As newly elected President of the Board of Trustees, I am impressed with how far our school has come in such a short time. We have 70 students coming to Bridge from over 30 school districts throughout the state of New Jersey and Bucks County, PA. While our students may come from different “home towns,” they share one common goal – to become successful learners. The Bridge Academy continues to deliver on its mission of empowering students to reach beyond their expectations and begin the path to reach their dreams. Through our dedicated staff, our caring environment and a solid multi-sensory method of instruction, they are finding success!

We are excited to welcome two new board members; David Couture and Joe Claffey. Joe Claffey is a long time resident of Lawrenceville, NJ and joins our board to help us with our development and fundraising capabilities. Joe has extensive success and expertise in rebranding efforts and driving capital and fundraising ventures. The Board of Trustees has a plan to move the school forward and extend our mission. Our goal is to enlarge our footprint so that even more students can benefit from a “bridge” education. We are fortunate that our successful educational program is enhanced through the solid partnership formed between the school, parents and the community. We welcome and encourage you to become involved in The Bridge by volunteering your time, participating in school events and by financially supporting The Bridge Academy.

We would not have been able to come so far without help from our supporters. But for us to bridge into the future and continue to thrive, we need to expand our network of friends and supporters. Please help us spread the word about the exceptional work that takes place every day at our school. Together we can build a stronger and far-reaching bridge.

Mark Reilly – President, Board of Trustees

Welcome Board Member David Couture

The Bridge Academy welcomes new board member David Couture, a Bridge Academy Alumnus. “I can still remember the parents and future teachers of Bridge sitting around our kitchen table discussing how to start a new school,” explained David Couture. “I was really excited to be one of the first nine students to start at Bridge in the fall of 2003. My mother was very proud of the accomplishments of this small dedicated group of teachers and parents.”

Thirteen years later, not only did David graduated from high school and college, but he recently joined the Board of Trustees for The Bridge Academy. “I feel like I have come full circle from seeing the seeds planted to form a new school to actually being involved in the overall governance of the school,” he said.

David graduated Magna Cum Laude and as a honors student from Johnson & Wales University. After college, Couture began working at Solebury Capital, LLC where he is currently Administration and IT Director. “We are delighted to have David join our Board of Trustees. It is a testament to the mission of our school that our students are capable of reaching any goal they put their mind to. Having an alumnus on the Board extends a different perspective to the governance of the school and ultimately it’s future success,” explained Board President, Mark Reilly.





Message from the Principal

As I reflect on the past year at The Bridge Academy, I am humbled by the progress our students make. It is amazing to me how each year outshines the previous one. Our students work very hard and continue to make enormous strides academically, socially and emotionally. This past year, our students increased an average of 1 1/2 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.

One of the highlights of this past year was the artist-in-resident programs that expanded our curriculum. The previous year, The Roxey Ballet presented an assembly that captivated our students' attention. We invited them back this past year to complete a residency program with our younger students on dance instruction and expression. Our older students participated with Howard Camden Broadway Ballroom on dance instruction and applied their new skills at our annual semi-formal dance. Both programs increased our students' physical activity and provided social skills development.

We partnered with The Artists in Education, a program co-sponsored by Young Audiences New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, for a residency program that combined the importance of recycling and musical education. We were delighted to be chosen as one of 16 schools statewide for this program. Artist Josh Robinson returned to The Bridge Academy and worked with students on a drumming program. Students then applied recycling efforts and musical appreciation into creating an interactive, outdoor musical sculpture on the school's campus.

We are proud of our students' accomplishments and are profiling the different paths our alumni have taken by including an alumni page in this newsletter. Please share their stories with your children and others as they continue to inspire all of us at school.

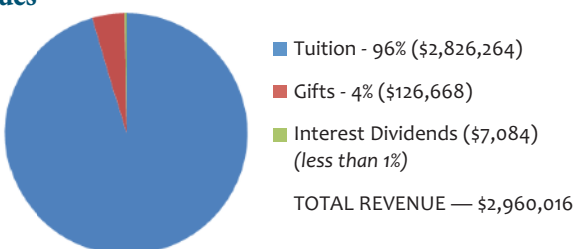
I want to personally thank all of you for supporting us in educating the students of The Bridge Academy. We are making a positive impact on our students, their families, the community, and each person they connect with in the future. As we move into our next year, our mission and commitment to effectively 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 at a future event in celebrating these remarkable students.

Susan Morris

Susan Morris – Principal

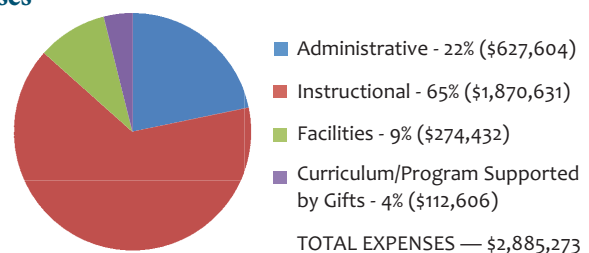
Financial Report

Revenues



Audited

Expenses





“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

Exceptional and Dedicated Teachers

Teachers are the heart of The Bridge Academy. When asked about their experience at Bridge, almost every student will answer with the impact of their teachers. *“They really know how to make the work fun while also teaching us to the best of our ability. The teachers’ goals here are to help us learn, but learn with excitement and enjoyment,”* explained Bridge alumnus, Jon C. The teachers at Bridge don’t confine their teaching to the classroom; the hallway, playground, field trips are all places where lessons can be learned. Failure is not an option and teachers will work with a student until they learn the material, but more importantly so the student feels good about his ability to grasp a concept or vocabulary word.

We place a high emphasis on professional development of our faculty. Our goal is to foster the development of our staff by providing them with ongoing training programs, Orton-Gillingham instruction methods, inviting expert educators to our school for teacher training, and enabling faculty to travel for educational workshops and conferences. This not only allows our staff to remain current on instruction methods and practices; but also allows us to ensure our students benefit from innovative and fresh ideas. This past year, Ann Marie Harshaw became an Orton-Gillingham Fellow in Training and Bonnie Adams completed her Associate level of OG instruction.

During weekly staff meetings, teachers are allowed to focus cross curricular strategies and content, strategies for individual student needs, and consistency of instruction. For the last two years we have been working with Dr. McCloskey on executive function operations and this past year we had a workshop by Carrie Strasburger on teaching students with ADHD.

Student Success

Our students make progress each year in their reading and math skills. But our greatest indicator of student success is our graduates. According to “The State of Learning Disabilities” on LD.org, the national percentage of students with learning disabilities in two year and four year colleges is approximately 26%. However, The Bridge Academy has maintained a steady average of 87% of our alumni either in college or graduated from college. We contribute this high rate of accomplishment to providing the proper environment for our students to learn, grow and develop their skills.

The Bridge Academy proudly graduated 11 students last June. Receiving their NJ state accredited high school diploma was a reward for a journey that began when they were very young. In keeping true to our tradition, the majority of the graduates will be pursuing their educational goals at a two or four year college.

While college pursuit is important, understanding your learning style and becoming a self-advocate are equally important for Bridge students. To help our students develop the ability to advocate, we use a multi-faceted approach and students are taught to “think about their thinking” called meta-cognition. It consists of self-monitoring of learning and adapting strategies. These include interactive notebook system, developing checklists, and self-coaching through difficult issues. Bridge students are successful after they transition from the school because of these important skills. “Being different could have made me less confident; however, I learned to take advantage of my uniqueness,” said Ryan P. “I learned strategies on how to emphasize my strengths and learned to use my strong reasoning skills. Because of my hard work, I will be attending the Rutgers School of Business.”



Giving Back to the Community

Many of our students have found their way to The Bridge Academy because someone helped them. Sue Morris, Director of Education, instills the importance of passing that help along to others in need. One way our students do this is to give back to the community through our Social House Program. The Social House program teaches compassion and the importance of helping others in need. But equally important, students learn leadership, organization, and presentation skills.

The Bridge Academy's program was recognized this year by the New Jersey School Boards Association for one of ten awards for its innovations in special education award. While this program has always been student led, last year we expanded it so students could become more active in their communication and leadership skills. Students visited different organizations to learn how they help citizens in our community. Each group then shared their knowledge with the rest of the school through presentation assemblies. Each of the organizations were supported during the school year which gave students a better understanding of how, and why they were working with these organizations.

Bridge partnered with HomeFront for their Thanksgiving Food Drive. Students have been providing Thanksgiving dinner and groceries to families in need since 2007 and last year they gathered enough food to feed eight families. In addition to the Thanksgiving drive, students also personally made over 100 scarves for a winter hat, glove and scarf drive.

Students visited TASK (Trenton Area Soup Kitchen) and saw first-hand the important job of feeding the hungry in our community. They made lunches that were given to children in need. And finally, students conducted a pet food and supplies drive for APAW – a temporary home for dogs while they are waiting to be adopted.

Another way that The Bridge Academy gives back to our community is by inviting the special people in our students' lives to share an afternoon at the school and learn what makes Bridge so special. Guests were welcomed with tea and refreshments while they gazed at student art work and writing samples. Guests were then treated to a poetry reading by students and a sneak preview of a dance routine to be featured in the winter performance. Our special guests were able to take home a personal poem and artwork designed by their student host. Students were thrilled to show off their school.





“You were able to turn that little boy, whose ability to read nothing more than a few three and four letter words, into such a tremendous reader who enjoys classic novels and is never without a book. I tear up when I think of it.”

- Bridge Parent

Alumni Update

So what do our graduates do when they leave Bridge? While most of them pursue higher education; college is not necessary for all professions and many of our alumni have started careers upon high school graduation. They have chosen a variety of industries and are demonstrating their lifelong learning skills advancing in their chosen profession. Some of these jobs include artist, teacher, culinary chefs and managers, firefighters/EMT, facilities maintenance and management, diesel and marine mechanics, photographers, cosmetologist and librarians.

Although it is very positive to be able to demonstrate our success with statistics, our real joy is when our alumni continue to communicate with their former teachers and return to visit the school to speak with current students, discuss transition steps, and arrange college tours for Bridge students on their own college campuses. The Bridge Academy may be a small school, but we are beginning to develop a large, successful alumni base.

Last year, Bridge alumna **Karen Donnelly '12**, organized a school supplies drive with Bridge Students for the Baas Educational Trust and the Diane Raj schools in India. Karen was participating in a study abroad trip with her college and wanted to incorporate a community service project with her trip. She reached out to The Bridge students and asked for help. Students collected over 70 pounds of supplies for the school. After her trip, Karen addressed the entire Bridge community with the results of their efforts and explained the differences between the two schools. Baas Educational Trust School has strong English skills with open exteriors with wooden desks; students wear uniforms but need to bring their own school supplies. The Diane Raj School was in a rural area of India and had very little English instruction, dirt floors, no desks, no windows and very little resources. The supplies Karen delivered were very much appreciated.



Congratulations to **Danny Elkins '05**, Bridge alumnus, for winning the Nature Valley NASTAR National Downhill Skiing Championship. Danny won an expense paid trip to the U.S. Ski Team's Speed Center at Copper Mountain, CO and was able to be a member of the team for a week. He had a front row seat to watch the best racers in the world prepare for the Olympics.

Danny grew up skiing the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania and he visited Steamboat Springs regularly on ski vacations. After high school Danny pursued his passion for ski racing at Colorado Mountain College in Steamboat Springs. The team was always competitive, finishing regularly in the top three at the USCSA college races. “Like any racers we had our good races where we placed well at nationals, and other national races where we had a few mistakes,” says Danny.



The college offered Danny a job after graduation as the assistant alpine team coach. He has held this position with Colorado Mountain College for the past four years and he has helped the school transition from a USCSA school into a NCAA division I ski racing organization. Danny's commitment to his team and to NASTAR was clear this spring. After winning the NASTAR National Championships, Danny jumped into his car and drove across the country to catch up with his team in New Jersey before heading to a race in Norway. “My life has been filled with a lot of travel and some of the best experiences I have ever had.”



Congratulations to Bridge alumnus **Alex Epply-Schmidt '07**, on his graduation from UNCSC last spring. Alex is currently in California pursuing his dream of working in film production. He was part of the production team for the teaser trailer for the film *The Man from Outer Space*. Check it out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXvFVlrB_ZI



Sarah Jablonski Moore was one of the first students at The Bridge Academy. She is excited to be pursuing her education with her recent acceptance into a Ph.D. program in the Department of Health & Behavior Studies at Teachers College, Columbia University. Sarah shared this message: *"Growing up I had severe learning disabilities and school was, at times, impossible. I never thought that this moment could happen, but tonight I received my acceptance letter to an Ivy League college Ph.D. Program. Dreams do come true. So wherever you might be in life just never stop. Don't ever give up on yourself. I wouldn't be here if my family and some wonderful teachers hadn't helped along the way."*

Marissa Warren '09, Bridge alumna conducted a community presentation to parents and students with dyslexia on what it was like for her to grow up with dyslexia and how she overcame her obstacles. When she was seven years old, Marissa was diagnosed with severe dyslexia and dyscalculia. When she was eighteen, she was officially diagnosed with ADHD. Despite these challenges, Marissa learned to read, went to a four year college, studied abroad, and graduated with a BA in History. Marissa is currently Assistant Outreach Coordinator at the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University.

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.



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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In honor of my wonderful Bridge
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 In honor of David Couture's
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 In honor of your students
 In honor of Weston and Bryce Brody
 In honor of Mrs. Kathryn Alzamora

In Memory of:

In memory of Alan D. Kampf
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 In loving memory of Bridge school nurse,
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The Bridge Academy's 2016 Reach for the Stars Gala was a huge success. The 13th Annual Gala, held on March 19, 2016, saw nearly 200 attendees present, including current and alumni parents, faculty, student alumni, family and friends. The program included testimonials from Bridge students sharing their inspirational stories about their journey before and after The Bridge Academy.

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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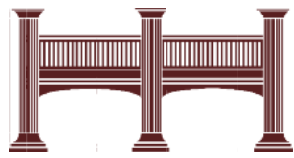
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Save The Date

Reach for the Stars Gala • April 1, 2017

6:00 – 10:00 p.m. at Greenacres Country Club



The Bridge Academy students participated in a number of experiential learning opportunities through field trips. They visited the Grounds for Sculpture, Philadelphia Zoo, Trenton State House and Barracks, Franklin Institute and even Boston, MA. These trips expand the curriculum, deepen students' education, and help develop social skills.

