

The Bridge Academy

Helping Children Bridge the Gap Between Potential and Performance



2004-2005 Annual Report

New to this year's annual report are the Bridge Kids student profiles. They describe the impact The Bridge Academy has had on students' lives—as detailed by their mothers. The children profiled in this series personify the struggle that both our students and their families face every day. At The Bridge Academy, we strive to empower them to succeed in any endeavor they choose when they leave our doors.

Bridge Kids – Sarah

Sarah was in the public school system until the fifth grade. She is a gifted child, with a high IQ, but had learning disabilities in reading, writing and math. “Her school district did not know what to do for her,” said her mother, Cindy. “She did not meet the criteria for their gifted program or the model for services.”

The district reluctantly placed her in the gifted program and provided Sarah with her own teacher, Cindy said. “Other kids didn’t really understand this, and other parents seemed to be upset. This was very disruptive to Sarah.”

Sarah’s math scores began to drop. They hit the 20th percentile. “She was getting B’s on her tests, but had a short-term memory problem,” Cindy explained. “She didn’t understand time, and didn’t understand money.”

When she attended The Bridge Academy, the math team worked with her on processing problems, sequences and steps. “It was like they put the key in the door, turned the key and opened the door,” Cindy said. “Here she could understand time, money, and other concepts and move on from there.”



Scott E., Abstract

In Language Arts, the Orton-Gillingham method enabled Sarah to make great advances in reading and writing. When Sarah was retested by her doctors, Cindy said, her IQ increased 24 points—to over 150. “While this is not supposed to happen, her physicians confirmed that the remediation done at Bridge actually was responsible” for her improved performance on IQ tests.

Today, Sarah has chosen to transition back to her home district. She’s in the gifted program, on the Varsity Debating Team, the Key Club and the Unity Club. “She’s more organized, enabling her to be successful academically,” Cindy explained.

“She also learned to be very culturally aware and open minded at the Bridge,” Cindy added. “Because the Bridge philosophy is to be very supportive and accepting of everybody, she is.”

“Sarah also has been taught to think for herself,” Cindy said. “She’s more accepting of herself and more confident in speaking about her learning experience. She has a comfort level now which she did not have before because she knows other kids have trials and tribulations as well. It takes effort and that’s part of life.”

The Bridge Academy “taught Sarah how to be comfortable knowing she’s gifted and learning different. She now feels confident and can be an example for other students. She tries hard and makes it work.” The school gave her strength, her Mom said. “They saved her self esteem.”

Sarah hopes to be a psychologist specializing in studies about hearing impairment. She is currently studying sign language.



Enrollment reached 57 during The Bridge Academy's 2004-2005 school year.

About The Bridge Academy

Our Priority is the Students

The Bridge Academy was founded in September 2003 to help students with learning disabilities **bridge the gap between potential and performance**. Whether of average or above-average intelligence, our students all have learning disabilities that have impeded their ability to succeed in a traditional school setting.

To address their needs, we have strived to create an environment that is uniquely student-centered—one which empowers students to succeed beyond our doors. Founded by parents, educational professionals and members of the community, The Bridge Academy is staffed by highly trained educators and professionals who provide a comprehensive, effective program in a nurturing, homelike environment.

The focus is on the student at Bridge, and our goal is both to **remediate student weaknesses and encourage independent learning strategies**. With a culturally and economically diverse student population, Bridge fosters a **culture of respect** throughout the school.

We use positive behavior modification methods and a multigenerational approach. Older students serve as role models and mentors for younger ones. With a **3:1 student-to-staff ratio**, our curriculum is tailored to meet the specific needs, learning style and Individual Education Program (IEP) of each student enrolled.

The Bridge Academy is a private school certified by the New Jersey Department of Education. All content areas are aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. This helps our students prepare for successful transition back to district public schools or other private schools. The Bridge Academy is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit corporation.

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On the cover: Ryan and Nadia at winter camp in Blirstown.

The Board Report

The overall theme chosen for The Bridge Academy's second year of operation, the 2004-2005 school year, was "*Reach for the Stars*." It was established



Ken M. Radziwanowski
President

at an early planning session when members of the Board, along with Advisory Members, the Principal and the Business Operations Manager, were discussing ways to keep the momentum going after completing such a successful first year. Collectively, and with the help of the teachers, parents and friends, we accomplished what many

thought we couldn't do. The energy and spirits of the group were high. Yet, the dialogue among us appropriately moved to the question.... "How do we sustain and build upon what we started?"

We responded by formulating a three-prong approach that I believe will help to secure the school's mission and future for many years to come. Involving both short and long term goals, we laid the foundation of a strategic plan that provides for (1) Continuing to provide a high quality education for our students, (2) Building financial stability, and (3) Enhancing our administrative and operational processes. And, as you'll see in the accompanying pages of this Annual Report, we immediately began *Reaching for the Stars* by executing on that plan and further demonstrating our commitment to our students and their families.

Academically, we continued to add to our dedicated staff as well as provide them with developmental opportunities in support of skills development. We made a significant investment to enhance the academic program by upgrading the technology and tools available to the students and staff. We celebrated the eighth grade promotion of eight students, the bridging forward of two students and the graduation of four students—with two of our graduates going on to out-of-state colleges—one on a sports scholarship.

Financially, we finished the year "in the black" and have all but eliminated our

start-up debt to parents and friends who helped secure our beginnings. Our steady growth in enrollments and the ability to show consistent financial stability has enabled us to establish solid relationships with several local banks who have courted us for business. And, because of the continuing support we receive from donors, as demonstrated by their contribution through the Annual Fund Drive and Gala Event, we have formally created an allocation spending plan to ensure that our investments are in line with our strategic priorities.

Operationally, we continue to look at implementing "best practices" in all of our methods and procedures. We have and will continue to work hard to maintain and enhance the positive relationship between the staff and Board and enjoy a collaborative relationship throughout the organization. To meet the demand for more space and to address the fact that we are at full capacity, we have begun a broader facilities study. We're looking at both expansion and purchase options so we can ensure that our staff has a productive work environment and our students have an environment that is conducive to learning.

Of course, none of this could have been accomplished without the support of many people. The Bridge Academy staff's unwavering dedication to their students is apparent to anyone who's been to the school. Their efforts, along with the students' hard work and the additional support provided by the parents, volunteers and other friends, contributed to what can surely be described as another successful year.

As both a parent and Board member, I think there's much that we have to celebrate and acknowledge. I especially enjoy participating in the many school related events such as the Annual Gala, Community Appreciation Day, Holiday Shows, and our Graduation & Bridging Forward Ceremony. I invite all of our supporters and friends to join the staff and families at future events such as these as we continue to *Reach for the Stars* and, more importantly, so that you too can experience the sense of community that is...The Bridge Academy.



Team building and navigational skills are honed on our corn maze outing.

The Academy's Mission

The mission of The Bridge Academy is to mentor, guide and orient students with learning disabilities, empowering them to reach their fullest potential through a comprehensive program designed to meet each child's individual needs.

Our Teaching Methods

At The Bridge Academy, we utilize teaching methods that are research based and classroom proven to ensure our students benefit from the most effective state-of-the-art techniques. Our staff strives to use innovations in educational research that have proven to be effective in actual classroom experience.

- ◆ A 3:1 student-teacher ratio is used for Reading instruction, and varied small group instruction is utilized in other areas.
- ◆ Speech therapy, counseling and related services are available to all students.
- ◆ A structured, enriched Math program is guided by the research of Mahesh Sharma, PhD, President of Cambridge College in Massachusetts and internationally recognized expert in the psychology of mathematics learning.
- ◆ Visual Arts/New Media instruction has been designed to enhance reading and writing skills.
- ◆ Multisensory instruction in Science, Social Studies and Health stimulates critical thinking and boosts comprehension.
- ◆ The Literature curriculum utilizes a multicultural collection of classic and modern literature including the 'Junior Great Books' series often used in gifted and talented programs in other schools.
- ◆ A comprehensive Career Orientation program prepares students for future success.

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Director of Education Report

Our second year of The Bridge Academy was permeated with enthusiasm and expansion in numerous areas bringing our vision into reality. The successes we



Susan K. Morris
Director of Education

achieved our first year served as a solid foundation to build upon in 2004. Our student population expanded as we welcomed 18 new students bringing us to 57. The teaching staff grew as well with the addition of one language arts teacher and three content-area teachers.

The influx of so many new students brought additional challenges.

Veteran students were instrumental in helping to orient our first year students to both the academic expectations and school culture. To support our climate of respect, we instituted a “think before you speak” strategy: “Is it kind, necessary and true?” We included the parent community in helping to foster and reinforce this strategy.

Expanding our mission of empowering students, the kids learned about, advocated for, designed and implemented several community service projects this year.

After a representative from Womanspace visited the school, students organized a school-wide collection of Thanksgiving food items for the crisis center. Following the devastation of the tsunami in December, our students learned about the natural disaster and in response, developed a variety of fundraising activities to support tsunami victims—raising \$1,029 for the American Red Cross! These activities reinforced empowerment and responsibility for the members of the Bridge Academy community.

As in our initial year, we continued to operate from the premise that student learning, always our primary focus, is directly tied to teacher learning and delivery of instruction. The Bridge Academy has an empowering, successful school environment which by design

links these two elements as the foundation of an **integrated professional culture**. We continued to expand our knowledge of Orton-Gillingham philosophy through on-site work with an Orton-Gillingham fellow and participation in a variety of workshops. Throughout the year, teachers attended various workshops, with a strong focus on technology. *The Eileen Sartori Professional Development Fund* was established through a generous donation and allowed our teachers to continue critical curriculum work over the summer.

The Bridge Academy continued to reach out to the larger community by sharing our effective methodology and understanding of students with learning disabilities. The Bridge Academy cosponsored with Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Mercer County a two-day conference with Dr. Ed Hallowell, a senior lecturer at Harvard Medical School and founder/director of The Hallowell Center. We offered our first professional open house to give attendees an overview of The Bridge Academy history, character and purpose; curriculum and courses; and student profile—the critical elements that make us different and successful. Dr. Candice Bray presented an interactive workshop on phonemic awareness that was open to all educational professionals. Three of our staff wrote workshop proposals that were accepted for presentation at the International Dyslexia Association conference and Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped conference.

Finally, The Bridge Academy students and staff invited the community to celebrate our successes with two original presentations, a “Snow ‘n Tell” performing arts revue and “TV Land Celebrates with The Bridge Academy”—an art show and musical comedy.

As we move into the current school year, our commitment to effectively educate the students of The Bridge Academy remains steadfast. Each child’s success academically, socially and emotionally is our success as a community. Thank you for all of your support and confidence.

Our Specialized Curriculum

Teachers at The Bridge Academy utilize the **Orton-Gillingham** multisensory teaching method of language arts instruction and adapt its core principles to all areas of study. This unique approach unifies our curriculum and fosters a deeper level of understanding in all academic areas.

Orton-Gillingham is a language-based method that builds on a system of sounds, syllables, words and sentences. The Bridge Academy adapts this sequential strategy to all subject areas, breaking down abstract concepts into their most basic components, and mastering them before moving on.

The Bridge Academy has a highly individualized approach to teaching children with learning disabilities. We continually assess each child's learning style and academic level, and adapt our instructional methods to satisfy each student's requirements. During the 2004-2005 school year, the Academy

implemented a comprehensive plan for assessing our curriculum, school environment and the progress our students make.

Beyond providing intensive remediation in language arts, our curriculum includes well-designed courses in mathematics, science, social studies, literature, art, music, physical education, health, computer applications and career orientation. Through frequent consultations, our staff tailors the program to meet each student's needs.



Dissection was part of the life science curriculum this year.

Bridge Kids – David

"David came to Ms. Morris and her team when he was entering the fourth grade. At that point, he could not write a four word sentence," according to his mother, Sue. David's reading was below grade level as well.

"What they did for him at Bridge was miraculous," Sue said. "What they did for us (as parents) was show us that given the right teachers and the right tools and strategies, children with special needs can be successful. David felt very successful at Bridge."

From his first day with the staff, "David said they talked about respect and cooperation," she added. "He felt respected, that his opinion counted, and that he could learn."

"The summer after eighth grade, for the first time in his life, David asked me to buy him a book," Sue said. "This is a child who had despised and detested reading. He actually wanted to read a book for pleasure. That was outstanding to me."

"There's no doubt in my mind that these educators saved my child's life. He was depressed, suffering from low self

esteem," she said. "He knew he was different from everyone else. What he found at the school was an environment where it was ok to be different, because everyone was."

David is now a sophomore at The Solebury School in New Hope, PA. At the end of his first year there, the school recognized him "for how much progress he made and how hard he worked," Sue noted.

At Bridge, the small classroom size, the one-on-one attention, the flexibility they have to customize the program "all add up to an approach as unique as each child. What they have here is magical. I don't know if you could replicate it."

"I think a lot of it has to do with Ms. Morris. She has an eye for hiring talent; developing them, nurturing them and giving them the freedom to be successful. That, in turn gives the students the freedom to be successful. When you find the right place, the right people, anything is possible."

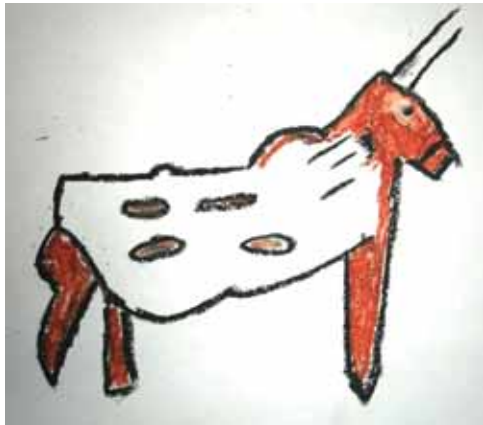
“David felt respected, that his opinion counted and that he could learn.”

The Teaching Staff

The experience and dedication of our closely knit staff is perhaps the greatest strength of The Bridge Academy program. Our teachers are experts in each facet of their duties, from the initial assessment of student needs through the development and implementation of an individualized learning program. Many of The Bridge Academy teaching staff are certified as **Teachers of the Handicapped**—most at the Master's Degree level.

The Board of Trustees' and the school's commitment to professional development allows our staff to keep abreast of the latest innovations in educational research. We maintain the highest commitment to professional development, this year hosting our first professional open house. Over 100 attendees benefited from sessions in state-of-the-art strategies and methods for teaching the learning disabled.

Also this year, our Math Department Coordinator Carrie Strasburger, was chosen to conduct two workshops on The Bridge Academy's unique approach to teaching mathematics—at gatherings of the International Dyslexia Association



Tatianna R.,
Cave Painting

and the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped. And our science teacher, Kathleen Sommers, was awarded a fellowship to Earthwatch as a research scientist and traveled to Brazil, under a

grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

The Academy joined several professional development organizations: The Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped, The National Association of Special Education Centers, The Council for Exceptional Children, and the Association for Supervision of Curriculum and Development.



Bridge students perfect the art of recreating volcanos.

Our Parents

The Bridge Academy has a highly dedicated parent network whose volunteers work hard to help maintain a nurturing and enriching environment for Bridge students and their families. The **Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)** meets consistently throughout the year, hosting events every six weeks. In 2004-2005, students enjoyed social activities like ice cream bingo, parent work weekend, ice skating and game night. The PTO also created a student directory and parent phone chain for emergency closures.

All parents are involved in their child's education at The Bridge Academy. We view our parents as partners in their child's education, and enjoy a 100 percent attendance rate at parent-teacher conferences.

New this year, **The Building Bridges Program** strongly encourages parents to commit a minimum of eight volunteer hours per year to the school. Research studies have consistently shown that when parents are involved, students progress at faster rates and achieve higher levels. Staff, Board members and other friends of the school all participate. Building Bridges makes it easy for volunteers to donate time and energy to a variety of educational and social activities.

Bridge Kids – Danny

“We first diagnosed Danny at age four. He didn’t seem to listen and he didn’t talk,” said his Mom, Diane. “When I took him to Project Child, they said he had never understood a word we’d said. He couldn’t understand English.”

“For four years, Danny went to the local school and didn’t learn to read or write one word because they didn’t have a system,” she said. “Different teachers did different things each year. There was no consistency.”

“He was at a preschool level going into the fourth grade,” she added. “He couldn’t read a menu; couldn’t read a street sign; couldn’t write down a phone number.”

“The teachers at The Bridge Academy were magnificent,” Diane said. “They knew where the weaknesses were and worked to correct them before they moved on. I never had to question anyone’s teaching style. They’ve always been like part of our family.”

Danny graduated from the Bridge Academy in 2005. He took entrance exams and got into the college of his choice—Green Mountain College in Poultney, VT. “Danny got a 95 on his first algebra test” in college, Diane said proudly. He also got an A in one of his writing classes, is on the soccer team and the ski team.

When he left the public school system to work with Sue Morris and her staff, Danny said “what about my friends who also can’t read? Aren’t we taking them with us?”

“I wish we’d gotten Danny out sooner,” Diane added, “but I think he is lucky to be where he is today. I think he was prepared for college because of The Bridge Academy.”

Financial Priorities

The Bridge Academy relies upon three major sources of funding: sending-district tuition, private-pay tuition and public support. Tuition dollars cover approximately 65 percent of our costs per academic year. The other 35 percent must be raised through other sources. We hope

you will help us meet the challenges we face as a fledgling nonprofit school.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, the majority of non-directed funds raised were invested in facilities expansion and technology enhancements. Laptop computers were purchased for teachers and staff. We integrated Orton-Gillingham teaching strategies into our technological focus, using its principles to teach keyboarding skills to students. We have invested in state-of-the-art software and hardware designed to both compensate and bypass learning disabilities. Some of these include:

- ◆ The Wynn program that serves as a text reader, aids in research and enables students to read large quantities of text;
- ◆ Dragon Naturally Speaking, an innovative voice-to-text software program;
- ◆ Power Point presentation software.

In addition, Bridge invested in professional development as well as curriculum development, student enrichment, scholarships, operations, research and program study, and an endowment system this year.

Because The Bridge Academy has maximized its use of current space and facilities, we are exploring options to ensure we continue to offer an environment that supports the needs of the staff and students.



Lianne R., Digital Self Portrait

Development Report

Our fundraising success during the 2004-2005 academic year was made possible through the dedicated work of Board of Trustees and Advisors, the school administration, staff, parents, students, friends and the surrounding community.

Their commitment, enthusiasm and dedication to the mission of The Bridge Academy and the results seen in students' academic and social growth were major factors that compelled so many people to support the school and its mission.

Our campaign included an annual fund drive, Gala, auction, individual solicitations, corporate contributions, matching gift programs and events.



Gala Co-chairs Bruce Turner, Lucia Smith and Alan Brody (right) with Honorary Chair Judith McCartin Scheide (second from right).

The 2005 Gala – Reach for the Stars

This year, The Bridge Academy's Annual Gala and Auction raised more than \$45,000 for the school. Over 200 of our parents, friends and supporters joined together for an evening of gourmet food, spirits and live entertainment. A variety of exciting auctions contributed to the evening's success. Funds raised at the event have been dedicated to:

- ◆ Expanding the science department,
- ◆ Enhancing technology used for the Language Arts programs,
- ◆ Providing enrichment activities that go beyond regular curriculum and budget,

- ◆ Supporting additional training and professional development sessions for teachers and staff, and
- ◆ Assisting in providing scholarships for deserving students.

Recognition and Thanks

The Bridge Academy would like to acknowledge the following organizations and individual for the extraordinary contributions they made during the 2004-2005 school year:

Adath Israel Congregation for their unqualified support and for treating the entire Bridge Academy Community as a neighbor and friend rather than only a tenant,

William H. & Judith McCartin Scheide whose interest in the school and dedication to our mission enabled us to succeed in our second fundraising year,

Ms. Diane Corson for her continued support of our mission to serve children with learning disabilities,

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Sartori not only for their financial support, but for their personal involvement both during our startup and the past two years,

Ms. Eleanor Horne, Corporate Secretary, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ for allowing The Academy to use their facility as the site for our *Reach for the Stars* Gala and Auction,

Mr. Alan Brody and Bryce's Catering Service whose generous donations of time, goods and services have been invaluable in terms of making our fundraising efforts a success,

Mr. & Mrs. Epply Schmidt for their financial and personal commitment to the school, and their donations of both time and services,

The Bridge Academy Parent-Teacher Organization and all of the active parents who consistently support fundraisers, social activities and various parent/teacher functions throughout the year. Their efforts and these activities directly contribute to the overall academic and social development of our students,

The Westminster Conservatory Youth Chambers Singers, The American Boychoir School Resident Training Choir and the Bob Leibowitz Jazz Band for donating the entertainment provided at our 2005 *Reach for the Stars* Gala, and

Archer & Greiner, PC, Attorneys at Law for their legal advice during our inception and continued commitment to the school.

Our Supporters

The Bridge Academy would like to thank the following donors for their support in 2004-2005.

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*Diane Corson
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*Bristol Myers Squibb Company
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Pillar

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Funding Levels

Summit: \$10,000 and above

Arch: \$5,000 - \$10,000

Span: \$2,500 - \$4,999

Pillar: \$1,500 - \$2,499

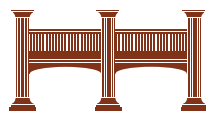
Pier: \$501 - \$1,499

Foundation: up to \$500

*Rebecca Maynard
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The Bridge Academy apologizes for any errors or omissions.



THE BRIDGE ACADEMY

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