

In our continuing series highlighting the academic program at The Bridge Academy our focus for this issue is . . .

SELF ADVOCACY IS ESSENTIAL . . .

Susan Morris, Director of Education

What are self-advocacy skills and why are they important for any student, especially essential for students with learning disabilities? Self-advocacy in its simplest definition requires two necessary understandings. The *first* is know who are you as a learner and the *second* is know what you need to succeed. All students can and should develop a deep understanding of their strengths, challenges, learning style and roadblocks.

Developing self-advocacy, is a critical skill for students to possess prior to their transitioning. To help each student develop the ability to advocate, we use a multi-faceted approach. From youngest student to oldest they are taught to “think about their thinking” called meta-cognition.



Self-advocacy in action

Meta-cognition is an essential skill to develop self-awareness of individual learning strengths. It consists of two basic processes occurring simultaneously, self-monitoring of learning and adapting strategies. Across the curriculum, as students practice meta-cognition, teachers encourage them to use the strategy that works best for them as an individual. Strategies may include:

- interactive notebook system
- developing checklists
- noting important points for IEP meetings based on individual legal rights
- thinking aloud
- self coaching through difficult advocacy issues

In school wide homeroom twice a week, we publicly celebrate successes and highlight students who demonstrate self-advocacy. Student examples include those within The Bridge Academy and those outside. When a student asks the teacher if he could put the window shade down to reduce the distractions for himself we celebrate that awareness. Another instance shared was a student who talked with her boss about giving her a written list of expectations. She then used her highlighting system to organize and prioritize the jobs. Another student attended an orientation for a performing arts camp; she raised her hand and asked if accommodations would be made for a student who could not read the script. One of our varsity athletes achieved greater success by asking a football coach to diagram plays instead of just talking them.

The opportunities for self-advocacy proliferate as students with learning disabilities enter college. Students should be encouraged to take part in as many of these opportunities as possible to demonstrate their independence. Bridge Academy alumni have shared just how key their ability to speak for themselves in college is. Parents, staff and most of all, the students themselves benefit from effective negotiating and advocacy. The self understanding and determination students with learning disabilities demonstrate in learned self-advocacy skills better prepare them to be successful in post secondary settings and the world beyond. Parents, teachers and other educational professionals can offer continual skill development and feedback to the student throughout this learning process. At The Bridge Academy we are proud of our curricular design which helps students become strong self-advocates.

ALUMNI NEWS . . .

The Bridge Academy is pleased to announce at the completion of our fifth year we have 49 alumni. In an alumni tracking survey, we are able to proudly announce that 87% of our alumni are in higher education. Following is a list of the colleges, universities and technical schools that have accepted Bridge Academy Alumni.

- ◆ American University
- ◆ Art Institute of Philadelphia
- ◆ Burlington County Community College
- ◆ Colorado Mountain College
- ◆ Green Mountain College
- ◆ Fairleigh Dickinson University
- ◆ Kean College
- ◆ Middlesex County Community College
- ◆ Moravian
- ◆ Northeastern University
- ◆ Ramapo
- ◆ Rochester University
- ◆ SUNY Delphi
- ◆ University of New Haven
- ◆ Arizona State University
- ◆ Bloomsburg University
- ◆ Cabrini College
- ◆ Dean College
- ◆ Emerson College
- ◆ Johnson & Wales
- ◆ Mercer County Community College
- ◆ Mitchell
- ◆ Mount Ida
- ◆ Pennsylvania State University
- ◆ Rider University
- ◆ Southern Vermont College
- ◆ The College of New Jersey (TCNJ)
- ◆ University of Hartford
- ◆ Widener

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2009 GALA & AUCTION . . .**REACHING FOR THE STARS IN OUR 6TH YEAR!**

This year's Gala will be held Saturday, March 21, 2009 at the Trenton Country Club, West Trenton, NJ. Invitations have been mailed for an evening of great food, wine, exciting auctions and great fun. Festivities start at 6:00 pm and will include a sit down dinner, music, and the chance to bid in a variety of silent and live auctions. Our Special Honoree is Assemblyman Wayne P. De Angelo.



A few attendees from our 2008 Gala

We are happy to be working with BJ Jennings, an auction organization whom has worked with us in prior auctions and helped us make each a huge success. New this year is our Fire & Ice Raffle. A gorgeous 3.75 Carat Pink Topaz Diamond Necklace will be raffled off with a limited number of tickets being sold. People who are unable to attend the event and would like to support The Bridge Academy may send their contribution to The Bridge Academy, 1958B Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

**THE BRIDGE ACADEMY**

1958-B LAWRENCEVILLE ROAD
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Return service requested

WINTER NEWSLETTER!

SOCIAL HOUSE CONTINUES COMMUNITY SERVICE . . .

Adrienne Lambdin, Teacher

For a third year, students at The Bridge Academy have been able to take part in The Bridge Academy Social House Program. Students are engaged collaboratively in social projects which benefit their immediate as well as extended environments.

“The Social House System is specifically designed to enhance student camaraderie, build school spirit, and impact the broader community,” states Brad Gingrich, Social Studies teacher and Social House Committee Co-Chair.

This year’s Social House theme is “Humans, Species, and Environment.” Students have again divided into six groups and have been tasked with voting upon and successfully carrying out a variety of projects that benefit these three areas. For example, the children spent an afternoon improving The Bridge Academy outdoor environment by cleaning up the common grounds and making necessary repairs.

FOCUS
ON
SOCIAL
HOUSE

Students, parents, and Bridge Academy staff spent another fall morning by walking over the Trenton-Morrisville bridge as part of a “Bridge Walk” to raise awareness about their causes. Additional projects have included collecting and putting together large Thanksgiving Food Baskets for the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, and helping the agency once more in January by donating new hats, gloves, scarves, and socks for those in need. Social House participants also continue to correspond by mail with students at St. Michael’s school in New Orleans, whose school was affected by hurricane Katrina.



Social Houses making baskets for Trenton Area Soup Kitchen



Bridge To Everywhere Walk

“Social House goals are achieved through the implementation of sponsorship (protecting endangered species), community service projects, and environmental programs,” explains Mr. Gingrich.

A key factor in the success of The Bridge Academy Social House Program is that

houses are student led. Although staff members are assigned to Social Houses, leadership within each house comes from student-elected Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Secretaries. During meetings, which take place approximately twice per month, teachers are available to house leaders for consultation, but student office holders are responsible for sharing information, taking minutes, and providing guidance for fellow group members.



Checking the finances during Social house meeting

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT. . .**James C. Houghton**

The newspapers and television continue to spout such dismal tidings that it's easy to get down on everything, and yet I still believe that this early in 2009 it can and will be a Happy New Year. While the economy and foreign affairs may have many hurdles to overcome to meet this goal, on a smaller scale The Bridge Academy continues to deliver on its mission of empowering children to reach beyond their expectations and set them on the path to reach for their dreams. This is done one student at a time, by a staff which knows what it takes to connect and succeed with kids where traditional education methods have failed. Every time I set foot in our School and meet the students and staff I am reminded why this is such a special place and why it will definitely be a Happy New Year, at least within these walls.



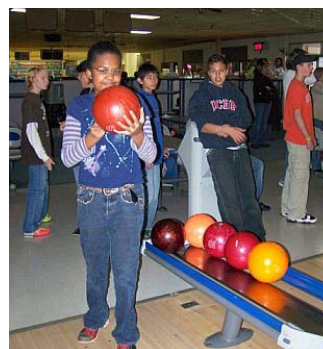
The Bridge Academy has a variety of plans to move forward and extend our mission in a number of ways. Many of these plans rely on moving us beyond our existing small school footprint. While the School building is home-like and cozy, it also means we are capped today in the number of students we can assist. We are in the final stages of securing the approvals and completing the work necessary to add a trailer next to the current structure, and this will allow us to expand upon and enrich the education we are providing today. We hope to be able to continue to enlarge our footprint so that even more exciting things can happen inside, benefiting even more students.

This is where readers of this newsletter can lend a hand. Our plans will require additional resources which will allow us to continue to move forward. I encourage you to join me in donating to our Annual Fund or attending our always successful and enjoyable Reach for the Stars Gala in March, or assisting by donating your time and experience. I understand that it's easy to feel that our current problems are too big for any one of us to solve, but at The Bridge Academy each of us can make a real difference and see the results in changed lives.

NEWS FROM THE PTO . . .**Nancy Boyle and Cathy Bongiovanni, Co-Chairs**

The Bridge Academy PTO is off to a good start this year. At Back to School Night, many parents signed up to run or assist with the activities planned for this school year, which will help to continue this worthwhile organization.

A major part of PTO's function is raising funds for school activities. Our first fundraiser, the candy sale was a success with 72 out of the 80 boxes sold. Our second fundraiser was All the Best for Less and David's Cookie Dough. The third fundraiser will be candy and gifts for Easter and Passover. The final fundraiser will be the flower sale. The flower sale was our most successful fundraiser last year. We are hoping for continued participation in these programs so that we can provide free, fun, family-oriented activities.

*Ayla ready for a strike!*

Our first family activity of the year was The Fall Family Festival held on October 19th. Over 150 people were in attendance including current students, their family and friends, faculty and even alumni! Good food and fun activities made for a memorable event.

*Mrs. Boyle & Ms. Bongiovanni calling the winners on the "Lucky Draw" auction at The Fall Fest.*

In November, we held an All School Dance which was fun for both students and teachers. The events planned for the rest of this year are Ice Cream Bingo in March and another All School Dance in May. These activities are a great opportunity for the students to bring their family and friends to school for something other than academics.

In addition to the activities planned by the PTO, we also support school wide activities financially. These activities include the Summer Reading Reward Lunch, the Bowling trip, the Junior/Senior trip, refreshments after the performances, school-wide breakfasts and many more activities. To continue these worthwhile programs, we need families and friends of the Bridge Academy to participate in the fundraisers. Every little bit helps.

Last but not least, the PTO participates in Box Tops for Education through General Mills and Labels for Education through Campbell's. By clipping the box tops and labels the Bridge Academy community continues to support the school because these labels are sent in and redeemed for items used in the classroom.

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