

NEWS



CELEBRATING 40 YEARS:

Looking Back, Looking Ahead



Students and staff celebrate Westbridge Academy's 40th Anniversary.

When Westbridge Academy – then, the Child Development Center – first opened its doors in 1973, it served just six children.

Since then, the non-profit school has grown, not only in enrollment, but also in scope. With support from its all volunteer board of directors, the school

now serves roughly 60 students and boasts a full clinical team, including a school psychologist, social workers, many of them bilingual, a full-time school nurse, speech therapist and dozens of teachers and para-professionals.

While the mission has remained the same, in 2010, the school changed its name to Westbridge Academy, in part to reflect the school's commitment to academic excellence. According to Executive Director and licensed psychologist Dr. Viviana Litovsky, the students today not only have more challenging behavioral disorders, anxiety and depression, but also, greater academic promise. "These students have 'invisible disabilities' and would otherwise not get the services and supports they need to maximize their full potential," she said.

Looking ahead to the next 40 years, school leaders hope to further expand the performing arts program. "Since opening our arts and technology wing in 2006, it has become clear that our children have a deep need for artistic expression, and have many untapped talents," Litovsky said. "I want to expand our program so students who may need mental health and therapeutic supports can cultivate their talents in ways that transcend the issues they are confronting." ■



1973

THEN AND NOW



2013

In a parent's own words

“

“La Academia es la mejor escuela para mi hijo. El personal le trata con respeto y dignidad.

El trabajo terapéutico hecho con él ha tenido éxito. Todos ellos le tratan como un individuo que le hace sentirse cómodo.”

- Ofelia Sosa, parent

“Westbridge Academy is the best school for my son. The staff treats him with respect and dignity. The therapeutic work done with him has been successful. They all treat him as an individual which makes him feel comfortable.”

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HEARTSMART:

Ready for Anything

“Janet’s Law” requires that all public and private schools have an automated external defibrillator (AED) onsite by January 2014. The life saving device is used for those who have had a sudden cardiac arrest.

Westbridge Academy school nurse Mary Landy, B.S.N., R.N. knew it was a great idea, but it was also a costly one.

Landy turned to leaders at HeartSmart, a well-known and respected distributor of AEDs. With help from HeartSmart’s Brian Marshall, the entire package of AED equipment was donated to the school.

And although Janet’s Law requires only five school employees, coaches, or trainers be certified in CPR and in the use of the devices, Westbridge has doubled that by training ten staff members in CPR AED use.

STAFF HIGHLIGHT



Mary Landy, School Nurse

Mary Landy, B.S.N., R.N. is more than a school nurse - she is a vital link to a child’s home and medical caregivers. Many children at Westbridge receive Medicaid, and Landy said that means doctors change often. “In many circumstances, the school is the most stable link in terms of a student’s medical and behavioral history,” said Landy.

Since coming to Westbridge more than 17 years ago, Landy said more students are presenting with seizure issues, diabetes, mental health challenges and a need for medication monitoring. “We work closely with caregivers, families, clinics and hospitals to ensure that children get the care they need, wherever they may be. That way, when they come to school, they are ready to learn!”

Building Student Character to Ring in the New Year



As part of Westbridge Academy’s social skills training and character education, we embed the following values and qualities in our therapeutically-based curriculum. Parents can help children by teaching them:

- **HONESTY** – Do the right thing. Be honest and deal fairly with others even when you don’t want to or when no one is watching.
- **RESPONSIBILITY** – Take ownership of your actions and behavior. Make good choices BEFORE you act. What you say and do counts and allows others to trust you. If you say that you will do something, do it! Following through is very important. Make sure you complete the things you say you will do and go where you say you’ll be.
- **RESPECT** – Respect yourself and others. Show this by what you say and how you act. Be considerate of other people’s feelings and beliefs. Some beliefs are not right or wrong, just different than ours.
- **INTEGRITY** – Be fair; adopt a set of values that you can be proud of. While honesty is about being truthful, integrity is having the best values to guide you and do the right thing. Life isn’t always fair, but your actions should be.
- **COMPETENCE** – Work hard to become really good at something. Everyone has natural gifts. Identify which are yours and use them to the fullest. Get involved in activities that make your school or community better, uphold the rules and be a positive role model for others. Try to make every situation better than it was before.
- **EMPATHY** – Care about others and be willing to lend a helping hand. By doing so, this kindness will be returned to you and builds happiness within. Express thanks when a person helps you or has done something nice for you. It makes you feel good about yourself and others.
- **GRATITUDE** – Recognizing and appreciating the positive things in your life is an effective way to keep anxiety, depression and anger away. It gives us strength to draw from and a sense of wellness by looking at the bright parts of our lives. ■

Bridges to Home



Parents, children and staff enjoy 'craft night' as part of the Bridges to Home program.

"I came away feeling like I knew each parent a little better. It allowed all of us to connect in a different way."

One of the things that makes Westbridge Academy successful is the school's ability to engage and support parents and caregivers on many levels.

Part of that support is direct: Westbridge offers parent and family counseling services.

The school also provides traditional home-school supports, like communication notebooks and phone calls.

What was missing was a greater sense of school connection, so leaders at Westbridge launched **Bridges to Home**, a new family partnership program offering a wide range of programs, from evening talks by community leaders and parent educators, to a family arts and crafts night at the school. Some are just fun and hands on, others are educational, but all are designed to build a sense of community and connection.



Education reform advocate Dr. Howard Knoff presents to parents.

According to Donna Martin, L.C.S.W., School Social Worker, getting parents to attend events at the school can be a challenge. "We are not a neighborhood school, so we have families coming from a distance and from many different communities."

The program is off to a good start. "I came away feeling like I knew each parent a little better. It allowed all of us to connect in a different way," added Martin.

The next Bridges to Home event is a special Valentine's Day pasta dinner, with the school's own West Street Band providing entertainment. ■

VALUES IN ACTION:



School principal, Anthony Hadzimichalis leads the Morning Meeting, preparing teachers for the day ahead.

The Morning Meeting

Westbridge Academy's new principal, Anthony Hadzimichalis, looks forward to coming to work every day. With nearly 15 years of experience as an educator and school administrator in both public and private school settings, Hadzimichalis said he has never experienced anything like the Westbridge Academy's morning meeting.



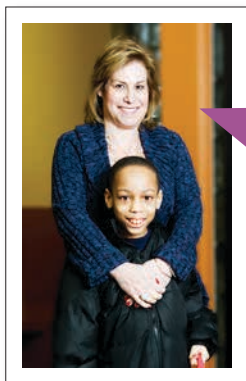
"Each morning teachers and administrators start the day with a 15-minute meeting, where we wrap up the day before, share positive messages and moments with each other, and plan for the day ahead. It's amazing!" he said.

Hadzimichalis has a deep commitment to values-based education for at-risk students. "I felt an immediate connection to Westbridge Academy's approach to therapeutic and educational intervention. I love working at a school that puts its values into action every day."

One of Hadzimichalis' first projects at the Academy is to help align the curriculum with the Common Core Standard, and lead teachers as they build lesson plans.

"Our teachers are already differentiating instruction and engaging students as participants in their own learning, helping them solve real world problems," said Hadzimichalis. ■

"I felt an immediate connection to Westbridge Academy's approach to therapeutic and educational intervention."



"We accept students throughout the academic year. We would love to hear from you."

**Dr. Viviana Litovsky,
Director
973-429-8110
info@westbridgeacademy.org**



About Westbridge Academy:

Created in a culture of caring, WESTBRIDGE ACADEMY is a unique special needs school in which students with behavioral and emotional disabilities are taught how to minimize obstacles and tap into strengths so that they can have productive, fulfilling lives.

WESTBRIDGE ACADEMY'S progressive approach maintains a structured environment that is warm and nurturing – one day and one student at a time – to support each student's well-being. WESTBRIDGE ACADEMY is accredited by the state of New Jersey. Students are placed by their local public schools and attend at no cost to parents.

FAST FACTS:

STUDENT PROFILE:

Students in grades K-12 with emotional, behavioral and learning challenges. Many are bilingual.

APPROACH:

Combining individualized academics with therapeutic support.

PROGRAMS:

Elementary, Middle and High School; Community-based Instruction and Transition Services; Extended School Year.

STUDENT TEACHER RATIO: 6:1

AREAS SERVED:

Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Union Counties.



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