



NEWS



Westbridge Students Dare to Dream ... And Take Action!



Each year, students from Westbridge Academy take part in "Dare to Dream," a student leadership and self-advocacy conference run by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Making the move from participants to presenters, Westbridge students planned and delivered a conference session called, "Guess the Success." They read little known information about celebrities and politicians who had overcome their disabilities, and invited audience members to determine who the famous person was.

"The purpose was to help inspire other students to work hard, and not allow disabilities to get in the way of their dreams," said Maryanne Mansingh, Transition Planner at Westbridge Academy.

After weeks of planning, role-play and practice, the students were well prepared for their presentation, and were able to work as a team.

"It takes a lot of courage to get up in front of people you have never met and present a workshop," added Michelle Zinn, High School Teacher.

"The more experiences they get like that, the more they learn: 'Yes, I CAN do this myself,'" said Maryanne Mansingh. ■

ON A PERSONAL NOTE:

Javon

"I could not be more proud of him for having taken this next step toward performance."



Sometimes, courage and self-advocacy can surprise us. That was the case for Westbridge Academy students when the opportunity to perform at "Dare to Dream" presented itself in the form of an "open mic." A group of Westbridge students jumped from their seats to sing, clap and dance with students they had never met before. The biggest surprise came when 14-year-old Javon launched into an a cappella version of Pharrell Williams's pop hit, "Happy."

"It was absolutely mind-blowing," said Maryanne Mansingh. "No one knew he was going to do that; he did it all on his own."

With his new stage confidence, Javon performed at the Westbridge Showcase this spring. According to Rich Eisenstein, the music teacher and band director, Javon learned to sing with a band and backup singers. "He is very musical and has absorbed a lot of music theory," said Eisenstein. "I could not be more proud of him for having taken this next step toward performance."

In a parent's own words

"Westbridge is so much more than a school to us – it's an extension of our family. As a parent, Westbridge gives me peace of mind that I will always have someone to collaborate ideas with, celebrate victories with, and overcome any challenges as my son continues to grow."

"Westbridge es mucho más que una escuela para nosotros-- es una extensión de nuestra familia. Como madre, Westbridge me da la tranquilidad de que siempre tendré a alguien a colaborar con las ideas, celebrar las victorias con, y superar cualquier desafío mientras que mi hijo sigue creciendo."

- Jessica Jackson, parent

Westbridge Winners



AN ARTIST'S TOUCH

Anthony W. was recognized by ASAH and the New Jersey School Boards Association for his inspirational art work depicting the theme "Climbing the Ladder of Learning." He produced the drawing as part of statewide poster contest to mark Special Education Week. "Art is an important part of our curriculum. It allows students to express themselves in ways that words cannot," said Alice Juliano, the Art teacher at Westbridge.

Winner of ASAH Scholarship

Christopher B. has been described as a thoughtful, honest and trustworthy person, who consistently uses good judgment. A senior at Westbridge Academy, Chris is the recipient of a \$2000 ASAH Scholarship Award. "Chris has matured into a dependable young man, who has made a conscious decision to be successful,"



ASAH Scholarship Winner

said his counselor, Leigh Ann Fossella, M.S.W., L.S.W. "In spite of many obstacles, he has not surrendered to peer pressure or the pull of the streets. He has had to overcome his learning disadvantages, and has not limited his dreams," she added.

Chris will graduate this June, receiving his diploma through Irvington High School. He plans to attend Essex Community College as a full-time student in the fall, majoring in Criminal Justice.

"He has tremendous potential and I strongly believe that he will take full advantage of this remarkable opportunity," added his teacher, Linda Ordecki-Relevo.

Westbridge Staff of the Year



Donald Hill, Kerline Charles and Luis Rosario

Donald Hill (left) has been a paraprofessional at Westbridge Academy since 2012. He goes beyond what is expected, even when working with very challenging students, and is always willing to help where he is needed. Teachers say they could not do their jobs without his help.

"He has shown a willingness to grow, and always has a positive attitude of understanding and caring."

-Westbridge Staff

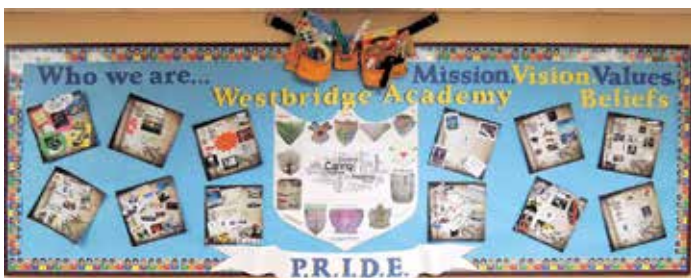
Kerline Charles (center) has been a teacher at Westbridge for the past 3 years. She is reliable, creative, dedicated to her students, and shows genuine care and concern.

"She is a remarkable teacher who gives 110% every day. She is patient, nurturing and a real team player who works well with staff, students and families."

Luis Rosario (right) has been with Westbridge Academy for 24 years and has demonstrated an outstanding level of excellence and commitment to the school.

"He is always there with a helping hand or a funny line for all the staff and students. It is so rare to see someone who does their job so well and ENJOYS doing it!" -Westbridge Staff

WINNING WEBINAR



Westbridge Academy was a national semi-finalist in Partlow Insurance's Best Practices Webinar Contest for its program "Promoting Tolerance and Acceptance of Diversity".

Dream Prints

CREATING A DREAM PRINT

A dream print can be as simple as a pencil drawing, or as complex as a multi-media project. It can be implemented across a school, in a single classroom, or at home with parents.

What you need: Provide your child with paper, glue, old magazines, photographs, books, colored pencils, markers, colored paper, paints, etc. You will also need construction paper or a poster board to mount the images. If you are a teacher, you can ensure continuity by giving all of your students the same size of paper to work on.

Creating School-Wide Connections One Child at a Time



How can school leaders create a greater sense of community and, at the same time, have students thinking about a very personal path toward their own future? The answer is Dream Prints.

This spring, the entire student body at Westbridge Academy engaged in a weeklong, cross-curricular project grounded in values, character education, self-advocacy, and transition to adult life. Students created a "Dream Print" – a visual depiction of their own future.



Anthony Hadzimichalis, principal, likes the way in which Dream Prints serve to unify the school. "It gave every student the chance to work individually on a very personal project – an exploration of a vision for their own future – and at the same time, connected the student body, because all of our students were working on it at the same time," he said. "It sends the message that while our individual journeys may lead to different places, we all have a vision for the future," he added.

"Dream Print" – A Visual Depiction Of Their Own Future.

The Dream Prints project also provided an ideal platform for self-advocacy and improved social competencies. "This is a fully student-driven project, where teachers become facilitators, inviting the students to engage and take ownership," said Hadzimichalis. When the Dream Prints were done, each student shared his or her Dream Print with the class, and eventually, all were posted together on bulletin boards through the school building.

Hadzimichalis believes that the Dream Prints project can be implemented in any school, corporation or business. "It establishes a sense of greater community, and lets people connect on a much more personal level," added Hadzimichalis. ■

What to do:

- 1) Talk to the child about his or her past, present and future as a timeline.
- 2) Invite self-inquiry through open-ended questions about the present such as: Why do you think you go to school? Why do you think it is important that you do homework? Why do you think your school teaches subjects like math and science? Do not offer corrections or "better answers" – this is a child-directed project. Adults should think of themselves as "guides."
- 3) Ask the child to think about the future. What do you dream of doing? What will your life look like when you grow up? Invite the child to look for images that capture that dream.
- 4) The child then uses whatever medium he or she prefers to create a Dream Print – collecting and arranging those images on paper.
- 5) The finished Dream Print can be a springboard for discussion about the future and can even become part of the IEP planning process as a student gets older.





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Save the Date: December 5, 2014 • Author and Educator Steven Heisler • 3 CEU Credits



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.



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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.