



NEWS



HONORING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Social and Emotional Learning Prepares Students to be Global Citizens

At Westbridge Academy, educators know they have a responsibility to prepare students for the future, and that means they must teach students to understand a diverse, complex and changing world.

“We want our students to grow up to be global citizens and learn to be part of a democracy,” said Dr. Viviana Litovsky, the school’s executive director. “We have found that through character education, our students grow beyond ‘tolerance’ to a true appreciation of diversity,” she added.

There is a strong relationship between character education and social and emotional learning. Students at Westbridge Academy learn and practice the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

To help students develop the essential social skills they need, educators use Project Achieve, a nationally-recognized curriculum that uses evidence-based techniques and strategies to teach students how to solve problems, strengthen their own resilience, and develop effective self-management skills. Used at all grades, lessons are incorporated into the curriculum throughout the school year, to help students improve their ability to listen to others, ask for help, deal with teasing, manage anger and differences, and learn to apologize.

“We teach skills to build a ‘civics disposition’ – character traits essential to participating in group discussions and group decision-making in ways that are respectful and honor differences.” ■



DID YOU SEE US? Westbridge Academy’s character education program was featured in the Fall 2016 issue of People & Families Magazine. To see the full article, go to our website www.westbridgeacademy.org

Breaking the Code: Students Learn Computer Programming



Matt Dango, teacher at Westbridge Academy

Matt Dango, a social studies teacher at Westbridge Academy, has brought his own curiosity and love of coding to his students, opening their minds to a new world of ideas – and careers.

During Westbridge Academy's club periods, students use an online "code playground" that brings a new twist to traditional group-learning methods.

"Like other kinds of play, it encourages natural trial and error learning, and invites students to be 100% exploratory without the need to plan the outcome," said Matt.

He gave students a project – build a basic website that is all about them, with pictures, lists, drop down menus and other features. They learned basic layout, how to space, fonts (type face) and color palettes.

"Students have fun so it is an effortless learning experience. The interactive gameplay lets them work at their own pace, and engage with peers through both competition and collaboration," said Matt.

Matt's students are taking their curiosity home with them. Using resources he learned in school, one student taught himself Ruby, a beautiful and artful programming language used for web and other applications.

"This club activity introduces our students to computer careers that are portable and creative. And there are a million ways to use coding skills across the curriculum– it draws on math, science, language arts, reading, and art." ■

STAFF PROFILE:

Westbridge Welcomes New Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction



John Cerniglia

Westbridge Academy proudly welcomes John Cerniglia, a lifelong educator and school leader, as the new Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction. John returns to Westbridge with three decades of experience. He began his career at Westbridge Academy in the late 1980s when the school was known

as the Child Development Center. He began as an aide and was quickly promoted to teacher, a position he held for two years. Then, for the next 28 years, he worked for Youth Consultation Services where he served as a teacher, Supervisor of Education, assistant principal, and principal.

John earned a B.A. in Psychology, and two master's degrees, one in Educational Psychology and the other in Administration and Supervision. He also holds New Jersey state certifications for Teacher of the Handicapped (TOH), Elementary Education K – 8, Supervisor, Principal, and a Certificate of Eligibility for Chief School Administrator.

"We are thrilled to welcome John back to Westbridge Academy," said Dr. Viviana Litovsky, Executive Director. "He has a unique skill set and decades of experience working with children with special needs in schools and after school programs."

In his new role, John is responsible for the implementation of Westbridge Academy's mission, goals and philosophy. He provides leadership in collaboration with other supervisors in the development and articulation of the curriculum; plans, organizes, implements, and monitors programs and services; aligns and communicates curriculum objectives and proficiencies with student testing; and monitors instructional areas, lesson plan reviews, Standardized Assessments, and school safety and security. ■

From Learning to Read, to Reading to Learn

Students who come to Westbridge Academy are typically referred for social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. Many times, these same students also have a history of academic difficulties that are rooted in reading disabilities or delays.

When a new student arrives, educators begin by assessing reading levels, and designing an instructional plan to move them from where they are, to where they need to be. Most students can be supported through intensive reading instruction in the classroom, but some need more help, and that is where Academic Support Coordinator, Milena Sillett comes in.

Working one-on-one with her students, Milena uses Orton-Gillingham-based instructional strategies, building skills... and confidence. She begins with a detailed assessment to identify skill levels, and then personalizes a plan that includes a combination of games, drills and repetition, and other activities to build awareness of sounds, blends and “rules for reading.” Because multisensory learning is very important for students at Westbridge, Milena also uses hands-on activities with sand, play dough and locking ‘Unitex’ letter blocks.

“Our students need a lot of modeling and visual cues. As they are learning to read, they are also learning to follow directions, use a ‘system’ for learning, and stay on task. We are with them every step of the way, and build a firm foundation before we move on –limiting the opportunities for frustration and failure,” she said.

The change can be transformative. One student, C.P., could read only a handful of sight words when the school year began.



Milena Sillett, Academic Support Coordinator uses multi-sensory strategies to teach young readers.

It was a huge source of frustration and anxiety for him. Now, he is reading 10 sentences and is incredibly proud of his accomplishments.

Many of Milena’s younger students who are close to grade level can get back on track quickly with early intensive intervention. “We can actually prevent academic failure in the future,” she said. “Once that foundation is in place, they can bring it into the classroom.”

Milena works with the classroom teacher to “pre-teach” content so students are ready for new words and concepts that will be introduced in other subjects, allowing them to experience success. ■

Westbridge Expands With Two New Classrooms

In response to growing demand, Westbridge Academy is pleased to announce that we are expanding our lower school. Our two new elementary/middle school classrooms are designed around the needs of students ages 8-14 with academic skills at, near or above grade level. To learn more, contact Leigh Ann Fossella, 973-429-8110 Ext. 137. ■





WESTBRIDGE ACADEMY

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"We invite parents and school districts to our school for a tour. Call us any time."

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

Learning with P.R.I.D.E.

"Professionalism, Respect, Innovation, Discipline, Excellence"

LOOKING
AHEAD:

OUR EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR PROGRAM TAKES PLACE IN JULY. CALL TO LEARN MORE 973-429-8110

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 to face their issues 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.



Visit Us Online
www.westbridgeacademy.org



Refer a Student
973-429-8110



Ask a Question
info@westbridgeacademy.org



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FAST FACTS:

STUDENT PROFILE:

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

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.