



NEWS



HONORING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Read Across America

*"The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more things you learn, the more places you'll go."*

– Dr. Seuss

Read Across America is a nationwide celebration of reading and literacy that takes place in classrooms every winter. The week-long activities coincide with the birthday of Dr. Theodor Seuss, the beloved children's author and illustrator who brought us *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*.

This year, Westbridge Academy approached the event with a sense of fun and purpose. The school hosted a classroom door decoration contest that was scored by guest judges. Every student received a reading "goodie bag," and winning classes were treated to a pizza and ice cream party in the cafeteria. "Students learned to generate ideas and share them with others; they learned collaboration and teamwork," said John Cerniglia, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction.

Three authors, Kristine Lombardi, Henry Neff, and Jacqueline Resnick, came to the school to read to students and discuss their books. For more fun, Bloomfield firefighters read to our elementary students and spoke to older students. While the activities centered on reading, the instructional goals and learning objectives went deeper.

"The activities allowed students to connect the stories to their own lives—they learned empathy through the characters they met," he said. Students worked on executive function skills as they listened and engaged. And guest authors used differentiated instruction to reach all students: for example, author Kristine Lombardi used her skills as an illustrator as she interacted with the students.

"We tried to move beyond the fun of Dr. Seuss and use the event as a way to address social and emotional learning through reading," he concluded. ■



(Left to right) Students Antwanette, James, and Jourdan join author Henry Neff.



(Left to right) Bloomfield Firefighter Mr. Gray with Nikoloz, Mason, Nathaniel, and Tiona.

Westbridge Helps Educators Close the “Attitude Gap” with Principal Kafele



Principal Kafele

For nearly a decade, Westbridge Academy has welcomed educators to the school to hear from authors, clinicians, and thought leaders. The educational outreach program, offered at no cost, is designed to bring some of the best practices at Westbridge to the larger educational community, so that more children can benefit.

This spring, Baruti Kafele spoke to nearly 100 educators on the topic of “Closing the Attitude Gap.” Principal Kafele challenged attendees to look at the underachievement of at-risk students differently and provided strategies for closing the attitude gap.

He sees compassion and connection as a central theme, and asks educators to ask:

- ✓ Do I know them?
- ✓ What do I know about them?
- ✓ What do I know about myself as it relates to them?
- ✓ Do I care about them?
- ✓ Do they perceive that I care about them?
- ✓ How do they know that I care about them?

Social Learning through Video Gaming

Video sports games are not often associated with character education, but at Westbridge Academy, educators leverage students’ love for popular games to help teach patience, empathy, humility, and respect.

Classrooms at Westbridge are outfitted with a PlayStation 4 console, as well as both NBA 2K and Madden NFL. Through a schoolwide system of positive behavior supports, students earn opportunities to use the PlayStations. They earn game time by following through on individualized, student-centered social-emotional learning expectations and the physical education standards in their IEP.



Students learned how to win with humility, and how to lose with dignity.

But it is more than a reward, because character education lessons are embedded in the experience. “We teach students to process their thoughts with feelings that would lead to positive behaviors. They learn the value of expectations and how to follow through,” said Abraham Mathew, Assistant Principal.

Many students at Westbridge struggle with the competitive nature of gaming and may act out inappropriately when they lose, or respond with extreme jubilation when they win. “By helping them understand and anticipate emotions, we teach them how to win with humility and how to lose with dignity,” he added.

Efforts like this are important for students at Westbridge.

“Many of our students find limited opportunities to showcase their talents due to their behavior manifestations. WBA recognizes the need to provide individually designed programs to enhance the potential for student success. Students feel safe when they express themselves at our school because they know they are not being judged.” ■



Growth Mindset and Career Readiness

Failing is a natural part of the human experience. We all do it. The problem for students with disabilities is not failure in and of itself; rather, it is how they look at failure.

Westbridge Academy has a schoolwide “Growth Mindset” approach to teaching, reinforcing, and correcting students. This Growth Mindset reflects the idea that success comes from effort, learning from mistakes, and risk taking, and not from a student’s fixed set of talents or abilities. It is the difference between “*you are really smart*”—a *fixed mindset*—and “*you worked really hard on that and you are improving*,” a growth mindset.

“We know that character development, much like skills in content areas of math or history, can be taught and cultivated,” said Dr. Anthony Hadzimichalis, School Principal. “Character is not static.”

Other educators are getting on board and learning that a Growth Mindset is an important foundation for the transition to adult life. Working with SEL4NJ, the Social Emotional Learning Alliance of New Jersey, leaders at Westbridge took part in discussions about the importance of social and emotional learning as an in-demand skill set for the workforce. Data shows that for every dollar invested in SEL programming, there is a return of \$11. Employers need employees who can work with diverse teams, grapple with problems, and adjust to rapid change. New Jersey employers are directly calling for it, as evidenced in their job postings.



Students learn teamwork, patience and shared attention during a hands-on geology lesson.

“With its value in the workforce, a growth-oriented mindset could conceivably take one of our students from solving a complex conflict occurring at the school to solving a complex political or environmental conflict in their community or career,” he concluded. ■

Growth Mindset: Tips for Parents and Teachers

First: Confront your own beliefs and ideas about mindset—do you believe change is possible?

1. **Talk about your life’s “why”**—your reason for going to work, your motivation to get up in the morning, why you make the choices you do.
2. **Talk about your own process of problem solving**; it takes time and can be difficult, but it is important to teach children that problems have solutions.
3. **Talk about the amazing brain**, its ability to heal itself, and its ability to change, grow, learn, and adapt.
4. **Talk about events as “growth processes.”** For example: Encourage your kids to study living things that grow and change: caterpillars, fish, reptiles, animals. Tell your kids about things you learned to do, that you struggled with in the past.
5. **Be a growth mindset role model.** Use phrases like “not yet” instead of “I can’t.”



A growth mindset means that every opportunity is a chance to grow and learn.

**Hold the Date: Friday,
December 6, 2019**

Westbridge Academy presents our Fall 2019 Professional Development Outreach event with **Jessica Minahan, M.Ed, BCBA**, offering 3 free CEUs.



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Dr. Viviana Litovsky, Director
973-429-8110
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ESY BEGINS
JULY 8, 2019

WESTBRIDGE ACADEMY PROVIDES EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AT RISK OF REGRESSION. 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.



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Refer a Student
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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.