



NEWS



HONORING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

A Schoolwide Culture of Kindness

A safe, trusted and predictable school environment is vital in order for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. At Westbridge Academy, we know that a school free from bullying, intimidation and harassment begins with a positive school culture.

School culture is affected by many factors: academic instruction, classroom, and schoolwide behavior management, and parental involvement. It is reflected in relationships between and among teachers, school administrators, support staff, students, and parents. Like all New Jersey schools, Westbridge Academy has adopted policies and procedures to address bullying, intimidation and harassment.

Westbridge Core Values

Our values were carefully developed over the school's 45-year history, not in response to public policy or mandates, but in response to the needs of our students.

1. **Self-Sufficiency** - Every child can learn and progress if given the right support. We help kids address their challenges, so they become "ready to learn."
2. **Self-Worth** - Every child deserves to find their niche in society. No child is written off as unworthy of learning or growing. We persist when others give up.
3. **Caring** - It's at the core of all we do. The staff cares about the well-being of the students and puts students' needs first.
4. **Supportive Environment** - When students have a supportive environment, they are more likely to succeed. We make sure each child feels supported by everyone associated with our school.
5. **Collaboration** - Communication and partnership with the family are integral to a child's success. The thoroughness of our students' plans, documentation, and communication is legendary.

But it is not simply a matter of addressing HIB when it happens. It is the goal to make sure it does not happen at all.

"Here, we actively teach kindness. It is part of our school culture. Our anti-bullying efforts are not in a silo, but rather, are deeply embedded in our school values and in everything we do," said School Psychologist and HIB Coordinator, Carrie-Ann Feakes.

"By actively teaching students these values across the curriculum, students learn to trust the school, the teachers, and each other to do the right thing. They learn to feel safe, valued and supported and are ready to learn." ■



Adriana Perrotta, Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services



Adriana Perrotta

Adriana joined Westbridge Academy in 2018, bringing decades of experience in the field of special education. In her role as Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services,

Adriana coordinates annual Individualized Education Plans (IEP) with students, teachers, parents/guardians and sending districts, and serves as a liaison to district child study teams for tours and intakes.

She began her career at Youth Consultation Services in 1991 as an aide and was quickly promoted to teacher. She has served as a teacher, school social worker, curriculum coordinator, and supervisor of special education.

Adriana earned a B.A. in Psychology at Rutgers University and holds two master's degrees, one in Social Work from New York University and the other in Educational Leadership, Administration & Supervision from New Jersey City University. She is a Licensed Social Worker (LSW) and holds New Jersey state certifications for Teacher of the Handicapped, School Social Worker, and School Supervisor.

"Adriana embodies the core values at Westbridge Academy and embraces our approach to learning and treatment," said Executive Director Viviana Litovsky, Ph.D. "She fosters home, school, and community partnerships, and is integral to student success." ■

When Paper Dances

When Art Teacher, Alice Juliano introduced her students - mostly teen boys - to the work of French Impressionist Edgar Degas, she was ready for some resistance. Many students had never seen Impressionist work and were not all that interested in the subject matter- ballet dancers.



Juliano got creative. Before asking her students to create works of their own, she explained the hallmarks of Degas's work, and how he was able

to create the illusion of movement in his paintings and drawings. She explained the concept of "impressionism" and how artists used light and an open composition. She invited her students to squint their eyes so they could experience the ways in which colors blur and shapes soften, simulating an impressionist painting.

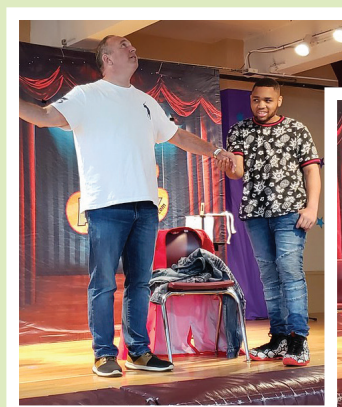
Some students were willing to use Degas's work as a starting point, while others would not even look at it, opting instead to work from Juliano's words and their own imagination. Using oil pastels, students created their own drawings in the style of Degas.

"Their work is stunning, and demonstrates a deep understanding of the artist and his style," said Juliano. "My students connect with art, and simply need the opportunity to see and experience it in whatever way works for them." ■



Anti-Bullying Lessons are Magic

"Magic Mike" Kirsch was back at Westbridge Academy in early October. With his whacky and fun combination of magic and message, Magic Mike kept our students mesmerized as they learned how to cope with, avoid, and stop bullying from both sides. ■



Discipline in an Era of Social and Emotional Learning

by Dr. Anthony Hadzimichalis, School Principal

There is a lot of buzz these days about Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Just what is SEL, and how does student discipline fit in?

CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, defines SEL as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

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.

An important but sometimes overlooked aspect of SEL is student discipline. Educators tend to think of discipline as focused on compliance, order and rules. Sometimes,

discipline suggests punishment designed to correct disobedience. But discipline is also about teaching skills rooted in SEL – skills like self-control and self-management. In fact, the Latin word disciplina means “teaching, learning.”

When looking at school discipline through the lens of SEL, educators have to ask: “*is our school’s approach to discipline aimed at teaching, or is it rooted in punitive models founded on negative consequences, suspension from services, or even harsher punishment?*”

Classroom and schoolwide approaches to student discipline can be intentionally shifted toward the development of SEL skills.

While our students are fully accountable for their actions, we take proactive steps to be sure that they have the prerequisite skills to understand cause and effect, and teach them the self-regulatory ‘tool kit’ they need to follow rules and school norms.

Our schoolwide approaches to discipline reflect our deep understanding that students often communicate their needs through behavior. Our policies and procedures reinforce SEL and support stronger relationships, student engagement, and equitable outcomes.

It is not enough to simply reduce or eliminate a student’s behavior issue. Our goal is always to teach social and emotional competencies that will last a lifetime.” ■

5 Core Components of SEL

- ✓ **self-awareness**
- ✓ **self-management**
- ✓ **responsible decision-making**
- ✓ **relationship skills**
- ✓ **social awareness**

Student Showcase Shines

Each spring, students at Westbridge take the stage for our Spring Showcase. The performance is the culmination of months of practice, and allows students’ skills and talents to take center stage.

“Practice and performance teach lifelong lessons and build connections between students and staff,” said Vice-Principal, Abraham Matthew. ■



Parents Are Teachers Too

Speech Therapist, Cheryl Jones, SLP, makes a point of inviting parents and guardians to engage with their child and help them improve their skills at home. In her monthly newsletter to parents, she offers easy ways to increase their child’s vocabulary and expand expressive speech.

1. *Do not accept one-word answers. (Ask them to speak in sentences as much as possible.)*
2. *Read to them every day for at least 15 minutes.*
3. *Include them in household activities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and yard work.*
4. *Provide outside experiences, as simple as a trip to the local library or a museum.*



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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

"My child is secure in an environment with experts who know how to deal with any situation." – Carolina Martinez, Parent

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
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 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.