

**Proposed School Name:** Bridge Preparatory Charter School for Creative Thinkers (“Bridge Prep”)

**Proposed School Mission Statement:** Bridge Prep is rooted in providing a high quality education for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities by enabling each student to gain the skills and confidence necessary to meet their full potential via the use of alternative, but research-based teaching methods.

**Proposed School Location:** Community School District 31 (“CSD”). Bridge Prep intends to request public space in NYCDOE facility, but will also continue to explore alternative private space options.

**Proposed management and/or partner organization(s):** Bridge Prep will not have a formal partner organization, charter management organization or charter network affiliation.

**Replication of high quality school model:** N/A

**Target Population:** At Bridge Prep, we believe that, like other students with differing needs and abilities at-risk of academically falling behind, students with dyslexia and other language-based disabilities have the right to be educated within their own community in an option designed to meet their needs. In the 2016-2017 school year, Staten Island (CSD 31) has a total of 43,152<sup>1</sup> students enrolled in public schools across grades PK-8, making it one of New York City’s largest CSDs, and 16,749<sup>2</sup> students enrolled in non-public schools across PK-8. Research shows that about 1 in 5 children have dyslexia<sup>3</sup> equating to ten million nationwide and thousands of students on Staten Island – diagnosed and undiagnosed. Given the lack of educational options available to meet their needs, dyslexic students on Staten Island are forced to either continue struggling in their current schools or to travel off the Island to be educated in New Jersey, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens which comes at great cost to the public, to their families and most importantly, to their development as children.

**Proposed Grade Levels & Number of Students (for proposed charter term):**

Grades	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
1	12	12	12	12	12
2	24	24	24	24	24
3	24	36	36	36	36
4		48	48	48	48
5			56	56	56
6				64	64
7					64
8					
Totals	70	120	176	240	304

Given the consequences that dyslexia and reading difficulties have throughout a child’s development and well into their adult life, we must commit to addressing this need as early as possible and develop automaticity when it comes to reading and writing, liberating a child’s full development potential. The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity notes that early intervention

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<sup>1</sup> Per the New York City Department of Education’s 2016-2017 Unaudited Register, as of October 31, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.privateschoolreview.com/new-york/staten-island>

<sup>3</sup> Shaywitz, S. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for reading problems at any level*. New York: Knopf.

and action is necessary as “the achievement gap between dyslexic and typical readers is already present in first grade.”<sup>4</sup>

**Enrollment & Retention:** Bridge Prep will target and recruit students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities; students who are often the least well-served within the traditional school structure. Our community outreach approach focuses on emphasizing that our multisensory curriculum and balanced approach to literacy, are designed to not only serve students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities, but also students with other exceptionalities, ELLs and low-income students particularly well.

Based on the overwhelmingly positive response already received from members of the Staten Island community, the lack of options currently available for students with dyslexia and the aforementioned need for a school of this type in our community, we are confident that families will apply in large numbers to Bridge Prep. Our recruitment of students and outreach to the community will be robust, inclusive and extensive and will include open houses, information sessions, community presentations, outreach and marketing to the following groups:

CSD 31 – Borough Field Support Center, Director of Special Ed, Early Childhood Education & ELLs	District and private pre-school and elementary school communities including teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, therapists and SBST
Special Education & ELL Advocates, Private Counselors, social workers, SETSS providers, tutoring services	Local civic associations and community boards, CBOs, housing and apartment complexes, real-estate agencies, local businesses
Social media and local and educational news outlets	Pediatricians, hospitals, health centers, neuropsychologists who diagnose dyslexia or language-based learning disabilities
Parents – through advocates, PTAs , parent coordinators, charter advocacy organizations and social media	Churches, religious organizations, community centers, health centers, immigrant advocacy organizations and centers

All public materials used by Bridge Prep to recruit students or for community outreach will be made available in English, Spanish, Russian and Chinese- the 4 primary languages in our diverse community- to ensure maximum participation.

Bridge Prep is designed to serve and retain students at the greatest risk of falling behind and we anticipate a significant proportion of our students will be reading below grade level upon entering. Bridge Prep will ensure that all students experience success, regardless of academic level, socioeconomic status, special educational needs, or English language proficiency through our balanced multisensory curriculum, extended day, summer re-orientation, professional development for staff, partnerships with families, and commitment to the development of the whole child through a variety of programmatic offerings. At any point, should growth and development indicate that a more traditional educational setting is in the best interest of the student, Bridge Prep will assist the student and family with this transition.

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<sup>4</sup> Ferrer, Emilio, Bennett A. Shaywitz, John M. Holahan, Karen E. Marchione, Reissa Michaels, and Sally E. Shaywitz. "Achievement Gap in Reading Is Present as Early as First Grade and Persists through Adolescence." *The Journal of Pediatrics* 167, no. 5 (2015). doi:10.1016/j.jpeds.2015.07.045.

**Public Outreach and Community Support:** Bridge Prep has conducted extensive community outreach to date with more forthcoming. Beginning as early as 2014, representatives from the Borough President’s office began meeting with advocates and parents who pleaded for a school for students with dyslexia on Staten Island. To date, Bridge Prep has received the support of many parents, educators and students in the community as well as:

Borough President James S. Oddo	Community Education Council 31 (“CEC 31”)
Assemblymember Matthew J. Titone	Staten Island Federation of PTAs
Assemblymember Ronald Castorina Jr.	Society of Dyslexia
Assemblymember Nicole Malliotakis	Staten Island Reading Association
Senator Andrew J. Lanza	Staten Island Foundation
Senator Diane J. Savino	Literacy Partners
NYC Council Minority Leader Steve Matteo	YMCA
NYC Council Minority Whip Joe Borelli	March of Dimes
Congressman Daniel M. Donovan Jr.	Catholic Charities of New York

Bridge Prep’s online survey (attached), created to gather community feedback, was shared to date with over 5,000 parents, community members and educators via email and social media. Survey responses indicate that approximately 99% of respondents believe that parents or guardians should have the ability to choose an educational environment that best suits the needs of their child, 98% think Bridge Prep would be a valuable option for children with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities on Staten Island, and 98% believe this school will a benefit to the community as a whole. Open ended responses indicated feedback overwhelmingly asking for an option designed with small classes; a curriculum that is multisensory, creative, and includes the arts; properly trained teachers; a variety of programmatic offerings to further develop students; and an accessible location within the community. In addition to several media articles discussing our plans and outreach done via social media, we co-hosted a Dyslexia Awareness Forum open to the entire community, held public information sessions across the borough, presented to CEC 31 and the Staten Island Federation of PTAs and reached out to the CSD 31 Superintendent. Attached is a detailed table of all community outreach including public information sessions, presentations, and collaborative conversations with stakeholders. Please see our timeline in additional attachments for the full scope of community engagement regarding planning for Bridge Prep.

**Key Design Elements:**

**A Multisensory Instructional Design Spanning Across the Curriculum**

Children with dyslexia require a special methodology in order to achieve academic success. Bridge Prep will use the highly structured and sequenced Orton-Gillingham method of teaching, which is specially designed for students challenged in learning to read and write utilizing conventional teaching methods. Multisensory instruction allows students to use their individual learning strengths and deliberately uses all sensory modalities – sight, sound, movement and touch - to help students connect language to words and remember the basic phonetic principles needed for fluent reading.

While Bridge Prep will target students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities, we will provide a high quality, innovative, multisensory education to all of our students and do what it takes to meet their individual needs. We know that while **all** students can benefit from a multisensory approach, as it gives students more ways to connect to what it is they are learning, it is essential for dyslexic students.

### **Bridging the Gap- A Balanced Approach to Literacy**

Bridge Prep's approach to literacy, via the use of enhanced, individualized and remedial instruction through Orton-Gillingham, will be aligned to New York State and Common Core Academic standards. Students with dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities often need explicit teaching of the rules of the language and reading, necessary for comprehending, remembering and communicating information. Bridge Prep's curriculum a language-based curriculum that directly teaches these language rules and strategies, will mirror curricula used in other highly successful schools such as GRASP Academy, the Windward School and the Community School.

As writing competency is closely aligned with reading, Bridge Prep will utilize the writing program, *Teaching Basic Writing Skills*, developed by Dr. Judith Hochman, which enables students to develop the skills needed to write clear, linguistically complex sentences, paragraphs and compositions. The consistent reinforcement of these skills by teachers of other subject areas, will assure that students learn to think and write with greater precision and confidence.

### **Keeping the Promise**

Many children and adults have had their lives altered by reading difficulties, as dyslexia knows no class, race or intelligence level. The ability to read is not one that comes naturally and a dyslexic child's experience with reading is very different than most other students. While many children look forward to developing the ability to read and write, the same cannot be said for students with dyslexia or other language-based disabilities. Without the proper supports, students with dyslexia are forced to rely on hastily constructed compensations such as memorization, cue cards and tricks, which are ultimately self-defeating.

Similar to other highly successful charter school models, Bridge Prep students will benefit from an extended school day dedicated to emersion in experiential, tactile and technology-based skills, organizational sequencing and structure, study skills and additional academic support. Recognizing that student engagement is a non-negotiable part of a wholesome and happy student experience, we will seek to partner with community-based organizations to provide a variety of after-school programs including activities such as sports, drama, dance, drums, creative design and martial arts.

### **Student Centered School Structure**

A key component of Bridge Prep's mission is to inspire students to find joy in their educational experience. Through a combination of our multisensory instructional approach, which allows students to use their individual strengths to make connection to instruction, and a school culture that encourages and embraces the creative intellectual minds of our students, Bridge Prep will build confidence and grow self-esteem in all of our students.

We believe there is no substitute for the hours a student will spend with an effective teacher. In small class settings, with specially trained teachers, our students will gain an understanding of their unique learning style. We also believe that a child's academic, personal and social development all share equal weight. Students will have the ability to participate in a variety of extra-curricular clubs, sports and be exposed to a variety of other educational and extra-curricular programming from partners in our community. As part of our basic model, we will

invest in additional days of learning to develop and nurture the minds and skills of our students via our summer “re-orientation” sessions designed to combat the instructional loss during extended school breaks, which is amplified for dyslexic students.

#### ***Building a Support Network for our Parents and Staff***

At Bridge Prep we celebrate investment in our school family and acknowledge that with great staff, leadership, and family partnerships, our possibilities become virtually limitless. The research is replete with studies that indicate when families are involved in their children’s education, student achievement and progress are markedly increased. We do not take this lightly and know that multiple opportunities, such as set aside family-staff time, integration of families into professional development and student-centered recreational events will ensure our families are part of the bedrock of our structure.

A foundational piece of our model, Bridge Prep’s “*Center for Teacher Development*” will provide our staff with extensive opportunities for professional development and practicum to assist in improving instructional outcomes for our students, while helping them grow as young adults. By design, our extended day structure and summer re-orientation program (which will also include families) will offer collaborative planning time, as well as the opportunity to obtain hands-on practical experiences. Additionally, we will offer our professional development opportunities to teachers and advocates from across the Staten Island educational community to in order to all support any educator working with dyslexic students in our community.

#### ***Serving as a Connection to the Larger Community***

Staten Island’s sense of community and collaboration is what makes it such a wonderfully unique place to live. While Bridge Prep is being founded to meet a major community need, we will be unable to serve all Staten Island students with dyslexia and other language-based disabilities. We look forward to partnering with the NYCDOE, the Archdiocese of New York and existing community organizations already serving students with these needs, through our designed after-school and weekend programming.

As a member of the Staten Island education community, we commit to partnering with diverse organizations to provide an array of services, which will be available to the larger community. These services could include free screenings for dyslexia, afterschool or weekend academic programming for dyslexic students, and workshops for parents, advocates and educators. We want Bridge Prep to be as a place where families of dyslexic students have equitable access to the multitude of resources, services and supports we will make available to them.

#### ***Bridging the Divide between District and Charter Schools***

Albert Shanker envisioned “a new kind of public school” that allows educators to explore innovative approaches to educating students who are not experiencing success within the traditional school structure. We believe this mindset is needed now, and will be embodied in our school as we apply innovative, but research-based, strategies for our students who need it most. We hope to develop partnerships with the NYCDOE for the sharing of best practices and professional development to create the synergy of creativity and skill needed to support so many children in our community.