



# THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2019-2021



Bridges' mission is to provide a safe and enriching academic and social environment where students with learning differences can explore their role in the world as learners and members of the community.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to those who participated in Bridges' strategic planning process:

**Board of Directors:**

Catherine Bekooy (secretary), Ann Brayfield,  
Sean Gabrio (treasurer), Carrie Hall,  
David Kirchfeld, Cathy Reynolds, Jennifer Rollins (chair)

**Bridges Faculty:**

Beven Byrnes, Carly Hauger, Heather Hofeld,  
Pat Lautenbach, Michal Mesa, Helen O'Donnell,  
Desi Pritchard, Don Shaw, Katrina Thompson

**Consultant:** Paula Manley Consulting



## THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

On behalf of the board of directors, I am pleased to present the Bridges Middle School 2019-2021 Strategic Plan. Our mission statement articulates the ideals that founded Bridges 20 years ago. This strategic plan provides direction to strengthen the school in order to offer the best possible educational opportunity for students and families in Portland and surrounding areas.

It is clear that our students are living and competing in an increasingly complex, dynamic global community, and so we must continuously advance our programs to prepare our students for high school and beyond. Bridges Middle School is at a unique place in its history. With a new centrally located campus, we can focus strategic attention on our students' educational experience and outcomes, and on Bridges' long-term sustainability.

Bridges Middle School's success has always relied on the support of the entire community: faculty, students, families, alumni and friends. Our strategic plan provides a clear direction and includes implementation steps for each strategic priority. It is anchored to a simple but bold vision – that Bridges will be a thriving school that prepares every student to graduate ready for success in high school and the community.

The exciting news for the Bridges community is that we have all of the ingredients to achieve our goals: a united board of directors; educators committed to doing whatever it takes to serve our children; engaged parents, community members and organizational leaders who are ready to help; a beautiful and centrally located campus; and of course, our greatest asset – the students we serve – all of whom dream of bright futures.

With passion, determination and tenacity, we know we can make a significant impact on bringing those dreams to life.

Beven Byrnes  
Principal/Executive Director

*“Many of us at Bridges are stranded people. Our past has been rough, we’ve been an outsider at our last school, we’re behind in our learning, we have very little self-esteem and we can’t get out of this rough state (of mind). Bridges forms a bridge for us so that we can get from one state to another and be extremely successful when we get there. Bridges changes lives, and not only does it build bridges, it gives us indescribable hope.”*

Zach, Bridges graduate

## INTRODUCTION

Bridges Middle School is the only middle school in Oregon specifically designed to help students with learning differences reach their maximum potential — in a loving, nurturing atmosphere. Our small class settings for fifth through eighth graders incorporate individualized academics with social skills, therapies and support that set the foundation for student success.

Bridges Middle School is a collaborative learning organization that analyzes data, uses research and reviews progress in a culture of trust and proactive problem-solving at all levels. Through this process of continuous improvement, we are able to recognize where we are excelling and where we need to improve, collaboratively identify the root causes for our successes and challenges, and identify clear next steps.


In recent years we have built significant momentum including undertaking a successful community-based funding drive, bringing new expertise and passion to our board of directors, and moving into a new facility centrally located in downtown Portland.

The future is bright for Bridges! We look forward to working with all of the school’s constituencies to meet the goals of this plan. Together, we will continue to provide a school distinguished by academic excellence, strength of character, and the social-emotional well-being of its students.

## OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Bridges embarked on a new round of strategic planning in the fall of 2018 to focus on the next three years. The process involved exploring trends in Bridges’ complex and dynamic operating environment, reviewing our strengths and challenges, refreshing our mission and vision, and committing to broad strategic directions through 2021. In crafting our plan, we considered the voices of parents, board members, faculty, students and donors.

To operationalize our strategic plan and ensure accountability, we also identified actionable 12-month milestones and a process for regularly reviewing progress and making plan updates.



*"I like that at Bridges students don't have to be afraid to raise their hand and get an answer wrong. Because here, even if that happens, they won't be embarrassed. It is like one big family."*

Rylie, Bridges graduate



*"I made friends at  
Bridges."*

Salil, sixth grade student

## OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Bridges operates in a continually changing environment, and we remain mindful of developments that could impact our future. There are several key trends. Population growth is creating overcrowded schools, which could increase Bridges' enrollment. Our communities are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and Bridges has already begun to diversify its student population. As the prevalence of ADD/ADHD, ASD and other specific learning differences continues to increase, teacher demand is growing, especially for special education teachers. Finally, while the competitive environment now includes more private schools, charter schools and online schools, changes in state regulation — like the ability to use college savings funds for middle school tuition — may broaden our applicant pool.

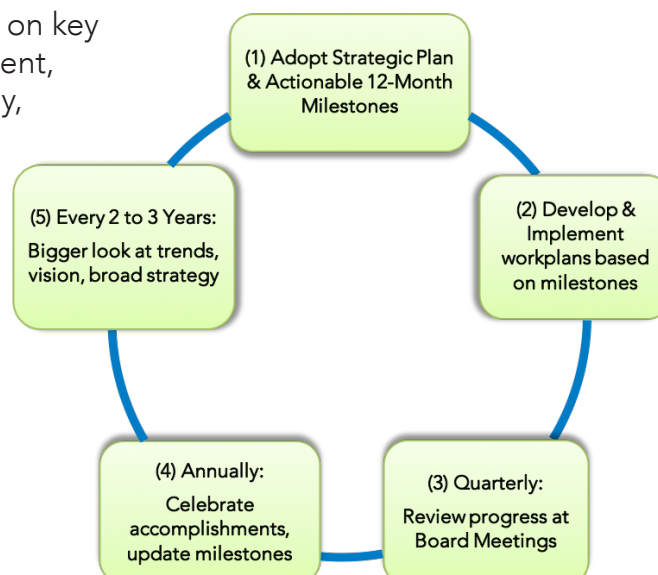
## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

As Bridges charts a course for the future, we are building on our strengths and working to address areas of challenge. Our strengths include energetic and capable school leadership, strong community support and a passionate and mission-driven board of directors and staff who bring significant expertise to our school and community. Furthermore, the addition of fifth grade at Bridges provides significant benefits to students, since it is developmentally and socially the best time for them to transition into our specialized academic program (rather than starting middle school in sixth grade).

Bridges' challenges include overreliance on key staff leaders, lagging fifth grade enrollment, underdeveloped systems and technology, and undefined measures of success. These areas are ripe for improvement in the next few years.

## PLANNING CYCLE

Bridges' planning cycle promotes ongoing action, reflection, learning and accountability as we implement the strategic plan.



*"This is a school where children are honored for who they are. It is not our intention to change them, 'fix' them or make them into something they are not. We want them to be confident, to understand their strengths and weaknesses. And with those weaknesses, learn how to advocate for themselves."*

Ms. Pritchard,  
Teacher

## OUR VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS (THREE-YEAR HORIZON)

We envision Bridges students graduating with the academic foundation, self-confidence and self-advocacy skills necessary to succeed in high school and in life.

To realize this vision, we will pursue the following five broad strategies:



### GROW AND DIVERSIFY OUR STUDENT POPULATION

We embrace the changing demographics of the Portland metro area and the nation; our increasingly diverse student population contributes to an even more vibrant school community.



### STRENGTHEN OUR ACADEMIC PROGRAM

We work to close gaps in opportunity and increase academic growth and achievement for all of our students.



### BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

We build capacity with transparency, informed communication, evidence-based decision-making, and clarity of responsibility between board, administration and faculty.



### IMPROVE FINANCIAL STABILITY

We accomplish our goals with prudent fiscal management, a growing student body, a strong marketing program and an inspired charitable culture.




### ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We are a thriving school community that is strong in character, service-oriented and welcoming to all.







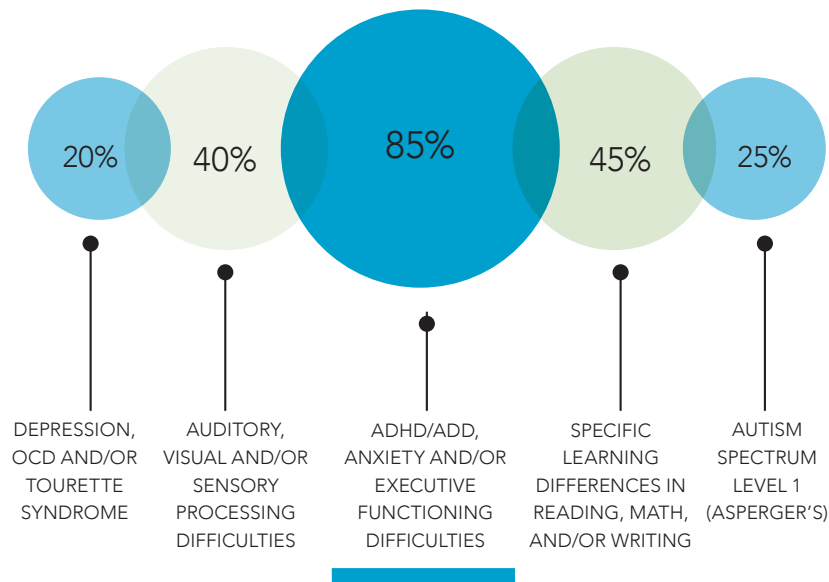
*“Bridges is here for our kids — and future kids we haven’t met yet.”*

Ann Brayfield, board member

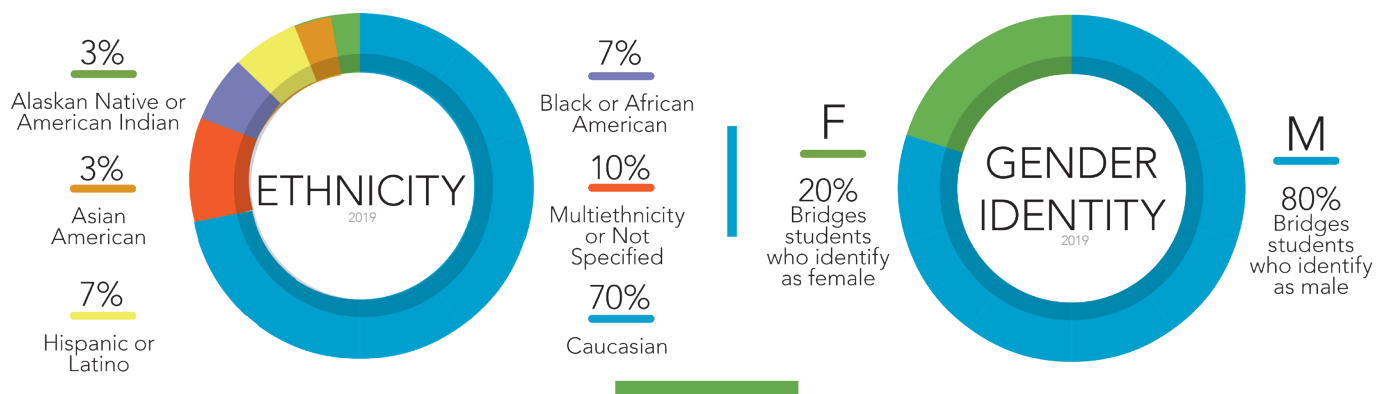
## BRIDGES MIDDLE SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS AT A GLANCE

Our students grapple with ADHD, ADD, autism, executive functioning difficulties and other learning differences that make traditional school settings difficult. Too often they have been the victims of bullying in previous schools, losing confidence and motivation. Bridges offers them another way forward. Through small class sizes, specialized curriculum and social-skills training, Bridges students learn how to learn and ultimately how to succeed in school — and life.

### STUDENT LEARNING DIFFERENCES

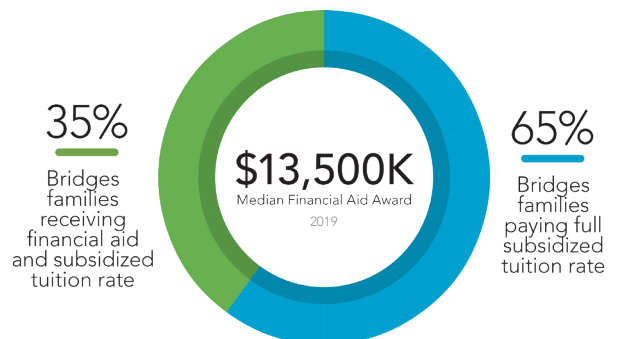


Bridges Middle School celebrates the diverse backgrounds of all of our students and their families. We welcome people of all ethnic origins, sexual orientation or gender identity to our inclusive school community.



### FINANCIAL AID

Bridges is a privately funded nonprofit school. Since our opening in 1998, Bridges has fundraised to fill the gap between the actual tuition cost and the subsidized tuition rate charged to families. Bridges is committed to offering financial aid to families with demonstrated need, helping to reduce the financial barrier to accessing a Bridges education, allowing us to maintain and increase student diversity while providing a quality service to families in need.



Funding for financial aid and subsidized tuition rates comes from individual and corporate donations, grants and fundraising events.



*"Here, you feel safe and like everyone cares about you – it is amazing how much Bridges has changed my life."*

Kimmy, Bridges graduate



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