

Welcome to Bridge!



Parent/Guardian Information Packet
Methuen High School
Counseling Department
Room 1041-R

Location: Counseling Department, Room 1041-R

Who are we?

Bridge Staff

Junie Joseph- Bridge Clinical Coordinator

Kevin Geary- Bridge Academic Coordinator

John Crocker- Director of School Mental Health & Behavioral Services

Martha Tatro- Counseling Department Chair

How to Reach Us

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Counseling Staff

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About the Program

Bridge is a short-term, intensive, Tier-III general education program that supports students who have missed an extensive amount of learning as they transition back to school. The overall goal is for students to **return to their full academic schedule** upon graduation from the program, and finish the year on track with their peers. The time spent in the program varies depending on the student's level of need and access to outside support, and will be updated at progress meetings (frequency of these meetings vary and will be determined at each student's re-entry meeting).

The decision as to when a student moves from "active" to "alumni" status in Bridge will be made collaboratively by the Bridge program staff, student, parent(s)/guardian(s), and the student's school counselor. This group shares the understanding that Bridge is a **short-term, transitional program** aimed at supporting students in successfully **returning to their full schedule**. The team will look at the indicators below to help determine when a student is ready to exit Bridge:

- **Observable and sustained** improvements and stability, using data generated through the use of multiple **screening** and **progress monitoring** tools, in moods and emotions, school functioning, and, where applicable, self-harming behaviors/ideation and substance abuse
- Mainstream classroom **attendance** about 80% of the time
- No recent re-hospitalization
- Completion of **academic assignments**

Students who have completed the Bridge program will be considered **program alumni** and will have individualized plans for how they will stay connected/supported by the program.

Students who have been in Bridge for 4-6 weeks and have not shown any substantial improvement in school functioning will be reviewed by the Bridge Program Clinical Coordinator, Ms. Joseph, the student's counselor, the Director of School Mental Health & Behavioral Services, and any other involved support staff. Based on this conversation, careful planning will be undertaken to consider appropriate long term supports, including but not limited to special education services. Students may be discharged from the program if they are not accessing it appropriately.

*While they may not always be in the Bridge room, your student's **school counselor** will also play an integral role in their transition back to school. Ms. Joseph. Mr. Geary and Counseling staff will be in regular contact regarding the care for each student. Please feel free to contact your student's counselor with any questions or concerns.

What You Can Expect From Us

- An email or phone call regarding your student's progress in the program, as well as any exciting news or breakthroughs that they have made
- All information that students share with Bridge staff will be kept confidential unless:
 - **They are currently or plan to hurt themselves or someone else**
 - **Someone is hurting or neglecting them**
 - **They report someone else being hurt or neglected**
- Parents and outside support staff will be included whenever possible as important parts of our team. All major decisions will be made collaboratively
- Prompt communication regarding your student. When a student first re-enters school, communication may be daily
- All efforts will be made to **individualize supports** for your student based on their unique strengths, needs, and history
- Students will be pushed to do the best that they are capable of, with optimistic but realistic expectations
- Students will have help managing their workload of assignments and due dates
 - Ms. Joseph and Mr. Geary will be in regular communication with your student's **teachers** to determine which assignments need to be made up, which will be waived, and which will have flexible due dates
- We will use a **strengths-based approach**, emphasizing areas that your student excels in. We will work with your student to figure out how they best learns in order to meet his or her needs
- Other students actively enrolled in the program may pop in and out of Bridge while your student is in the room. If they are having a confidential conversation with Ms. Joseph, we will relocate to a private space

What We Expect From You

- Please keep **communication open**. If you have any questions, concerns, or happy news to share, we would love to hear it!
- Continuing with consistent outside therapy or doctor appointments will be critical in giving your student the best long-term outcome
- **Flexibility** will be important. Students may need to drop down a class level, drop a class completely, take online courses, etc.
- While we will do everything we can to ensure success for your student, there are no guarantees in this field of work. The process will look different for every student, and the rate of improvement will vary
- Setting up a **consistent environment** after school is key. A regular time and space for homework, as well as allowing for activities outside of school where your student can feel a sense of normalcy and have the opportunity to engage with their peers is also important

Things to Remember

- **Take care of yourself!** When students are going through a crisis, parents are likely going through heightened stress levels as well. We are here to support you **and** your students through this difficult transition. Be sure to take time for yourself and do things that you enjoy! This will both ease your mind, and show your student that it's important to **prioritize self-care**
- Bridge is an intensive program that serves a limited number of students. When your student is actively enrolled in Bridge, they have several faculty members looking after them, particularly in regards to staying on top of academic progress. When your student is home, **please prioritize rest and leisure activities** instead of strict academic monitoring
- The goal of Bridge is to help students transition back to school and to their full academic schedules. While we'll always welcome alumni back for a visit, **graduation** from Bridge is an amazing accomplishment, and will be **celebrated** as such!



Attendance Procedures

Attendance in school is crucial for your student's success. While we aren't looking for perfect attendance, having at least 80% attendance during the student's time in Bridge is very important. A few key points:

- Students should attend school everyday. If your student will be late to school, please sign them in via the main office. You are also welcome to email Junie Joseph and/or the student's individual counselor if your student will be late for the day.
- If your student is physically ill, please keep them at home. You are welcome to call or email the main office, nurse's office, Ms. Joseph, and/or the student's individual counselor to report the absence.
- If your student is struggling emotionally, please send them in! We want to help support the student through any issues, and give them the best care they need. We can make a plan for the rest of the day when they arrive, even if that means staying in the Bridge room all day.
- If you need to dismiss your student: For all dismissals, a note or an email will help keep the attendance officer informed. Some dismissals are excused, such as doctor's appointments. If you have more questions about attendance policies, please see the Methuen High School website and student handbook.
- All attendance policies outlined in the Methuen High School handbook are still to be followed. Students who cut class are not excused from disciplinary action.

Grading Policies

Teachers are great about supporting our students while in Bridge. Although some school work has been possibly excused by the teacher, grades are the sole responsibility of students and awarded by the teachers. Ms. Joseph and the counselors will advocate for the student's needs, but neither are able to change grades once awarded. Some key points:

- If a student has not been completing work, attending classes, and using the bridge room, they will receive whatever grade they have earned, such as an F. Students understand that they must be working on school work outside of school for at least 1 hour, and communicate with teachers on what they need help with, as well as stay after school if possible. They also can stay after in the homework help center, or ask Junie Joseph to stay after as well.
- An "INC" grade in Infinite Campus means the student has an incomplete for the quarter. This means the teacher has given the student an extended deadline in order to complete missed work. The work will need to be completed before the end of the year, usually by a deadline that the teacher has set. Once the work is completed, the teacher can then change the grade from an INC to whatever the student had earned.
- A "MED" grade in Infinite Campus means the student has been medically excused from the work for that quarter. However, this may mean that students may not receive full credit for the course if the student has not completed enough work. This would be up to the teacher and their department head to award full credit, half credit, quarter credit, or no credit.
- Students who are in 9th grade will still be required to take the Biology MCAS. Students in 10th grade will still be required to take the Math and English MCAS. Unless students have had accommodations as part of the IEP or 504 plan made in advance, students will have to take the

MCAS exam without accommodations. Please reach out to your student's school counselor or special education liaison if you are wishing to request accommodations prior to MCAS testing.

End of Year Policies

Students who have been in Bridge during the current year and have graduated from the Bridge program receive all alumni privileges outlined in the program phases. Students who have been discharged from the program do not receive alumni privileges. If a student is still enrolled in Bridge at the end of the school year, the student will either graduate from the program (receiving alumni privileges next year) or be discharged from the program (not receiving alumni privileges the following year) the day before all classes meet for finals. Students who have been part of the Bridge program will not be excused from final exams, and will have to take them with their classmates, unless special circumstances have been arranged with their respective Assistant Principal and/or the teacher prior to the final exam.

All students will be unenrolled from Bridge the day prior to final exams, regardless of graduation or discharge status. Students who have been in the Bridge Program are **NOT** automatically enrolled the following year. If you feel your student will need support over the summer and/or the beginning of the year, please reach out to your student's school counselor.

Bridge Program Phases

PHASE 0: RE-ENTRY MEETING

Description: Meeting with student, parent(s)/guardian(s), school counselor, and other staff (if needed) to support student's transition back to school, and orientation to program

Duration: Meeting should be no longer than 1 hour

Goals:

- Introduce parent(s)/guardian(s) and student to program
- Go over parent(s)/guardian(s) handbook, student handbook, explain each section, make sure questions are answered
- Receive consent to talk to outside supports
- Receive contact information for outside supports
- Set up 2 week check-in meeting

PHASE 1: ADMISSION

Description: Following re-entry meeting, student remains in Bridge classroom for full school day

Duration: 1 - 2 days

Goals:

- Get oriented to the Bridge Program classroom and build rapport with staff
- Work with Bridge Program Support Specialist to organize makeup work, begin to complete tasks, and create Coping Plan for managing emotions in school
- Work on filling out the student success plan and calendar
- 5 minute check in with each teacher in person or via email (accompanied by Bridge Staff if needed)
- Create timeline for re-entry into classes
- Determine initial grading options with teachers

Services:

- Daily academic check-in and one on one support as needed
- Daily counseling check-ins

PHASE 2: GRADUAL RE-ENTRY

Description: Student begins attending classes and receives 2 weeks of intensive services

Duration: 2 weeks (10 school days)

Goals:

- Student will be back in all classes by the end of 10 school days
- 15 minute meeting with each teacher (accompanied by Bridge staff if needed) to review makeup work in detail and plan time for extra help as needed
- Communicate with outside providers
- Assess family's need for additional community based supports and provide resources

Services:

- Student scheduled in Bridge daily, # of blocks in Bridge per day will decrease as student re-enters classes
- Daily check-in regarding academic progress
- Daily check-in regarding emotional progress
- Participation in weekly Bridge counseling group
- Friday emails to parent(s)/guardian(s) and school team with academic and clinical updates

PHASE 2 includes a 2 Week Check-in Meeting with Family and school support team:

- Share observations of student's participation in school (attendance, utilization of Bridge Program services, re-entry to classes, homework completion, affect)
- Recommendations for future student program, including course-load and levels, dropping classes, grading options, outside support services
- Decide which phase the student should go into (3A, 3B, or even graduation)
- *If there are classes that the student has not been able to enter by this point, a level change or drop may be recommended on a case by case basis*

PHASE 3 has two possible tracks - 3A and 3B

PHASE 3A: MAINTENANCE

Description: Student maintains attendance in academic classes

Duration: Average length of time for this phase is 6 - 10 weeks but will vary based on the student's individual needs and progress toward academic and emotional goals.

Goals:

- Maintain consistent attendance in major academic classes
- Access Bridge classroom as needed during electives, on an alternating basis to allow progress in those classes as well
- Work with teachers after school for extra help with course content
- Begin transitioning to working with other school-based counselor, for students who will need ongoing counseling support after exiting Bridge
- Assess whether the student needs longer term school support(s) (504, Special Ed eval, etc.)

Services:

- Individual counseling/check ins once per week with Ms Joseph and academic support with Mr. Geary once per week
- Communicate with outside supports, as needed
- Participation in weekly Bridge group therapy sessions
- Emails to parent(s)/guardian(s) and school team with academic and clinical updates

PHASE 3B: MAINTENANCE + GRADPOINT/ ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Description: Student drops a class and replaces it with a Gradpoint or Academic support block in order to maintain attendance and performance in academic classes.

Duration: Varies based on student's progress toward academic and emotional goals.

Goals:

- Maintain consistent attendance in major academic classes
- Attend/participate in Edgenuity/Academic Support in either assigned room, or Bridge room if needed
- Work with teachers after school for extra help with course content
- Begin transitioning to working with other school-based counselor, for students who will need ongoing counseling support after exiting Bridge
- Assess whether the student needs longer term school support(s) (504, Special Ed eval, etc.)

Services:

- Individual counseling/check ins once per week with Ms Joseph and academic support with Mr. Geary once per week
- Communicate with outside supports, as needed
- Participation in weekly Bridge counseling group
- Emails to parent(s)/guardian(s) and school team with academic and clinical updates
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PHASE 4: GRADUATION

Description: Student has demonstrated adequate improvement in three core areas: emotional well being, academic work produced, and attendance. Student is now ready to exit the Bridge Program.

Goals:

- Hold Exit Meeting with family and school support team:
- Observations and progress
- Recommendations for future student program (course-load, drop classes, online classes, summer school, repeat a course in future year, outside support frequency/type)
- School counselor or other school-based counselor resumes case management and/or counseling services
- Introduce “Alumni Status” as a way to remain connected to the Bridge community

Services:

- Student will have **ALUMNI STATUS**:
 - Ability to drop in before school, after school, or during lunch
 - Be invited to join weekly group therapy when appropriate
 - Communicate with parent(s)/guardian(s), as needed
 - Communicate with outside supports, as needed
 - School counselor or other school-based counselor resumes case management
 - If the student requires more intensive support in the future the team can reconvene to discuss next steps or referral to special education can be made on a case by case basis.

Passive Consent for Progress Monitoring

In order to ensure program efficiency, Bridge staff will periodically monitor both **symptom presentation and psychosocial progress** that students in the program exhibit during their time in the program. The tools that will be utilized for symptom presentation are the same **evidence-based** questionnaires, surveys, and screeners that address issues related to mental health that are given to all Methuen High School students periodically by the MHS Counseling Department. These tools help us gather information regarding how to best support your son/daughter with any challenges that they experience in or out of school. These screeners are available for your review on the MHS Counseling website at:

<http://www.methuen.k12.ma.us/departments/special-education/guidance>. You and/or your student may opt out of these screeners at any time.

Progress monitoring tools track both the changes in **symptom presentation** (i.e. anxiety or depressive symptoms), as well as the changes in **prosocial measures** (i.e. school/class attendance, discipline referrals, etc.). Ideally, we would like to see symptoms decrease as prosocial measures increase (i.e. depressive symptoms decreasing as prosocial measures such as class attendance increasing). Similar to the mental health screeners mentioned above, these prosocial measures will be simple questionnaires that are available for your review on the Counseling website (namely the SEI & SDQ). **We utilize a passive consent policy regarding these screeners from MHS parents/guardians, as outlined on our website. Know that you have the right to revoke consent for psychosocial progress monitoring via a written request at any time.**