

HISTORY

The Bridge: A School/Community Partnership is one of the programs developed as part of the Melrose School Committee endorsed Strategic Planning Process that took place in the early 1990s. In May 1991, a thirty-member community planning team was formed. This team consisted of volunteer representatives from city government, the school system, senior citizen groups, students, business leaders, and community leaders. From October 1991, through February 1992, the planning team developed system-wide goals, strategies, and preliminary lists of success indicators. In March 1992, community meetings were held to establish action teams. Six teams were formed. The members of the action teams were members of the original planning team and people who volunteered during the planning process.

One action team was the Parent/Community Partnership. This team had a vision of the Melrose community re-investing in and valuing its public schools. Recognizing that parents have always been generous in their support of the schools, they believed that involving a broad cross-section of the community in education, as volunteers, provides a "reason for caring" for many who might otherwise not have an opportunity to get involved. The team looked to other cities and towns to learn how they included people from all segments of their population including professionals, business people, retirees, college students, and government employees. With the help of the Office of Community Planning at City Hall they applied for and received a grant to fund a pilot volunteer management program: The Bridge: A School/Community Partnership.

Both the philosophy of the volunteer program and initial plans for organization were formulated at a two day workshop held in January, 1993. At the workshop there were parents, teachers, school administrators, members of the school committee, the newly hired Coordinator of Volunteers, and interested members of the community. From this group the Bridge Advisory Committee was formed. By mid February 1993, the first volunteers were recruited for a pilot program at the Lincoln and Horace Mann Schools and with the high school math department. Throughout the pilot period the Advisory Committee worked together to formulate guidelines and evaluate the program. Based on the success of the pilot program, The Bridge's volunteer management program expanded during the 1993-94 school year to include the Beebe, Ripley, and Winthrop Schools as well as all other departments at Melrose High School. During the 1994-95 school year The Bridge's volunteer management program further expanded to include the rest of the Melrose Public Schools: Hoover, Roosevelt and Melrose Middle Schools.

As the configuration of the Melrose Public Schools has changed with the closing of schools and the addition of the Early Childhood Center, The Bridge has continued to provide a centralized volunteer program in which the number of recorded volunteer hours grows each year. The Bridge is truly a school-community partnership as it is funded in part by the Melrose School Department, in part by grants and in part by the Trivia Bee, The Bridge's annual fundraising event that will take place this year on March 31, 2012.