

Coburn School
West Springfield Public Schools
115 Southworth Street
West Springfield, MA 01089

July 25, 2016

Dear Bridges Together,

We are excited to submit our Letter of Commitment to participate in a Bridges Together grant-funded program. Our goal is to build upon the partnership that was formed last year between the West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center and Coburn School and to share the Bridges Together program with Coburn School students in grades 4 and 5.

Coburn School serves approximately 520 students in grades K-5. Our school community is a very special one, in that a large percentage of our students are brand new immigrants from all over the world. We have new students arriving often from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Central America and the Middle East. Many Coburn students are learning to speak and read English and over 70% are living in poverty. Our work with this population is both challenging and enormously rewarding!

Last year we began a Bridges Together Program in our grade 3 classrooms. We know from trying the first curriculum suite that Bridges Together had a huge impact on students' confidence and participation in school. The Council on Aging's volunteers were enthusiastic and patient while working with our diverse students; our students responded with joy and appreciation for the attention and kindness the volunteers showed them. Many of our students have had to leave their extended family behind in their native countries. As they worked on shared hands-on projects the senior volunteers told stories and listened to students' stories and provided the gift of loving friendship and acceptance that grandparents and special elders offer in a child's life. Classroom teachers were in awe as they observed students' interactions, their openness and willingness to talk and to participate.



Bridges Together positively impacts school climate and teachers. Teachers feel the support of an extended group of grown-ups. Senior volunteers helped support the program through their ideas and actions before, during and after lessons, through donations of materials and cash for supplies. The lead volunteer, Barb Morin planned an awesome end-of-the-year celebration by arranging for a animal

petting zoo to visit the senior center and the Coburn Students took a walking field trip to meet the animals along with their senior volunteers. It was a fantastic way to end our year together and teachers and students were immensely appreciative of the senior center planning this event.



The West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center is located just across the playground from the Coburn School. While in the past we talked about how our physical proximity should enable some interaction, we found the Bridges Together Program to be just the right catalyst to bring our two communities together. Now both communities want to find a way to do more collaborating! The Senior Center's volunteers want to continue to work with students in other grades as well. There is excitement for the opportunity to continue to volunteer with students they met over the prior year. We have the perfect timing with our Wednesday afternoon arts block, a two hour session of enrichment classes for students in grades 4 and 5. Our goal is for a new group to be trained in Bridges Together for grades 3-5 and to implement a program on Wednesday afternoons.

Coburn School and the West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center are excited for the opportunity to learn more from the expertise that the Bridges Together staff has cultivated over the years. We thank you for considering our deep commitment to this work and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

BethAnn Albro-Fisher

Reading Teacher, Coburn School

On behalf of Coburn School and West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center:

Shelly St. George, Principal, Coburn School

Laurie Cassidy, Executive Director, West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center

Teachers: Liza Lavelle, Bernadette Lozinski, Emily O'Brien