ACS WASC/CDE
INITIAL VISIT VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

Name of School: The Bridge Academy

Address: 789 East Poplar Street, San Mateo, CA 94401

Grades Reviewed: 10-12

Enrollment: 74

Initial Visit Chair: Elizabeth Oberreiter (626-290-2126) eoberreiter@acswasc.org

Name **Phone** **Email**

Date of Visit: May 14th, 2025

Introduction

[Excerpts from Initial Visit Report, including the school's purpose and schoolwide learner outcomes]

The Bridge Academy, officially recognized as a high school within the San Mateo Union High School District in May 2024, began in 2016 as a program within the district's Adult School. It was developed to address the needs of students entering the U.S. educational system at the upper high school level with limited or no prior formal education. The program launched in a single classroom to support students in building academic skills and progressing toward graduation. Its location was selected based on enrollment patterns and student accessibility, ensuring proximity to where most students live.

Over time, the program expanded into a standalone high school with a structure grounded in In Lak'ech pedagogy. This guiding philosophy emphasizes mutual respect, shared responsibility, and community-centered learning. The school environment is shaped to support healing and academic growth for students adapting to a new culture, language, and school system. Recognition such as the Kent Award in 2020 reflects the effectiveness of this model in responding to student needs through inclusive and culturally affirming practices.

The Bridge Academy currently serves students in grades 10 through 12, with most entering at the 11th or 12th grade level and identified as having interrupted or limited formal education. The school enrolled 84 students during the 2024–25 school year, with 74 actively attending. The student population is predominantly Spanish-speaking and Latino, with a small number transitioning from other district schools. Graduation pathways aligned with AB 2121 have enabled greater access to diplomas. Since the first graduation in 2022, the number of graduates has steadily increased, demonstrating consistent academic progress and student engagement.

Academic support, wellness resources, and enrichment opportunities are embedded into the school's structure. Students have access to tutoring, health services through a mobile clinic, and weekly grocery distribution. Participation in college visits, career exploration, and district-level student leadership fosters connection and real-world learning. Family involvement is supported through digital tools and school events. These integrated supports promote student development and contribute to a learning environment centered on community, resilience, and opportunity.

The Bridge Academy organizes student learning through a mission and vision grounded in the guiding principles of In Lak'ech pedagogy, which emphasizes shared responsibility, interconnectedness, and a commitment to justice, love, and hope. This framework is reflected in the school's development of a Graduate Profile that outlines the essential characteristics of students as they grow into confident communicators, thoughtful collaborators, and independent navigators. The process of creating the Graduate Profile was collaborative and inclusive, involving certificated and classified staff through structured professional development and ongoing planning. Staff worked together across extended monthly meetings and weekly collaboration sessions to develop a model that aligns with student needs and the school's values. Students and families were engaged throughout the process, offering feedback through focus groups, advisory meetings, and school showcases. The Graduate Profile is now integrated into student learning and

assessment, with students recognized for demonstrating progress and excellence during graduation ceremonies and other public events.

Governance and leadership are aligned with the San Mateo Union High School District's Equity Vision and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), ensuring that decision-making processes support equity, access, and inclusive learning environments. In 2024, the SMUHSD Board of Trustees unanimously approved the formal establishment of The Bridge Academy as an independent alternative high school. This decision was rooted in a five-year development plan and reflects the board's long-term commitment to multilingual learners and Newcomer student populations. Leadership teams at the school regularly analyze data related to academic progress, language development, behavioral trends, and attendance to guide responsive planning. Tools such as the ELPAC, Lexile assessments, internal rubrics, and learning gap screeners inform instructional planning and individualized student support. These assessments are combined with qualitative feedback gathered from student and family surveys, advisory councils, and staff reflections, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of school needs.

Collaborative structures are a central element of the school's organizational model. Weekly teacher collaboration sessions and monthly extended staff meetings bring together all members of the school community, including instructional aides, social workers, wellness counselors, and classified staff. This inclusive model reinforces a shared commitment to student learning and professional growth. The Student Equity Council meets weekly and co-leads schoolwide initiatives related to climate and inclusion. The Bridge Advisory Board, which functions as the school's English Learner Advisory Committee, includes parents and caregivers who review data, offer feedback, and support school planning. Student focus groups provide real-time insight into the student experience, allowing staff to reflect and adjust instructional strategies and support systems. Topics raised by students—such as the need for increased literacy support, more differentiated instruction, and expanded extracurricular offerings—have been integrated into professional learning, curriculum planning, and program development.

The school's professional development model is aligned with culturally relevant and academically rigorous instruction. Partnerships with organizations such as the Legacy Youth Project support the development of instructional strategies that reflect indigenous values and affirm student identity. New teachers participate in a two-year induction program through the district, which includes mentoring from experienced instructional coaches, collaborative inquiry cycles, and alignment with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession. These supports help ensure consistency in classroom instruction and promote reflective teaching practices that align with the school's vision. All staff, including support personnel, participate in professional development and are included in site-based planning sessions. This practice flattens hierarchical distinctions and supports a unified school culture. Professional learning sessions have focused on instructional mission refinement, the integration of trauma-informed practices, and strategies to increase student engagement across content areas.

Resource allocation is guided by a principle of keeping support as close to the student and the classroom as possible. The school maintains a low student-to-teacher ratio, currently averaging 10:1, supported by strategic use of Title I, Title III, and LCAP supplemental funding. Classrooms are equipped with up-to-date technology, including whiteboard tables, 1:1 student computers,

SMART Boards, and document cameras, which support collaborative and responsive instruction. Specialized lab-based courses such as art and photography include access to digital tools and MacBooks to enhance student learning. Facilities planning is currently underway for the development of a new standalone campus, with an anticipated opening in 2027. This expansion is aligned with the school's transition from a support program to a full high school serving multilingual and Newcomer students. Enrichment opportunities remain a priority, with students accessing school dances, yearbooks, food and clothing pantries, and extracurricular activities at minimal or no cost. Families and students provide input on desired services through advisory boards, home visits, and direct feedback, ensuring that school planning remains community-informed and student-centered.

The Bridge Academy is designed to meet the academic and developmental needs of recently arrived Newcomer students, the majority of whom enter in 11th or 12th grade and qualify for graduation under California Assembly Bill 2121. A smaller group of students entering in 10th grade follow the district's Alternative Newcomer Graduation Plan, which requires 180 credits. Over half of the students are identified as Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), and most begin their studies at early levels of English proficiency. Despite these challenges, all students engage in grade-level content across subject areas. Instruction is delivered using the California Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), English Language Development (ELD) Standards, and state content frameworks in math, science, social studies, and English. Teachers implement integrated and designated ELD strategies and draw from district-adopted curriculum resources such as *SpringBoard* (English), *Big Ideas Math*, *TCI* (social science), and *Amplify* (science), adapted for Newcomer accessibility. Teachers participate in regular professional development focused on high-impact practices for Newcomer learners, ensuring instruction remains both standards-aligned and responsive to language development needs.

The school's Graduate Profile serves as a foundation for instructional planning and schoolwide outcomes. This framework defines three essential competencies: Communicator, Collaborator, and Navigator. Staff have curated classroom assignments and projects that align with these competencies, ensuring coherence across disciplines. Teachers integrate the Graduate Profile within their planning and assessment cycles, using curriculum-aligned performance tasks and project-based learning that connect directly to grade-level standards. The Graduate Profile informs student assessment through structured presentations, evaluated by rubrics co-developed by staff. These presentations provide students with an opportunity to apply their learning in meaningful contexts and demonstrate growth across academic and interpersonal domains. The profile also functions as a common reference point for curriculum development, helping ensure that the concepts and skills taught in the classroom are consistent with broader schoolwide learning goals and the demands of postsecondary readiness.

Curriculum design integrates California content standards with college and career readiness indicators. All students have access to rigorous coursework, including Integrated Math and science classes aligned to NGSS, and U.S. History and World History courses using *TCI*'s History Alive! program, supplemented by culturally relevant texts and primary sources. In English Language Arts, students use *SpringBoard* as the core curriculum, supported by designated ELD courses using the *English 3D* program. Science courses incorporate lab-based instruction with *Amplify* and

custom units focused on environmental science and biology. Instructional practices prioritize real-world relevance, cultural connections, and skill-building aligned with future pathways. Students engage in projects that reflect themes such as migration, identity, and community, allowing them to draw from lived experiences while developing academic competencies. The Graduate Profile reinforces these efforts by guiding students toward practical skills they will use beyond the classroom. As students progress through their academic programs, they receive individualized guidance on course selection and credit accrual to ensure alignment with graduation requirements and postsecondary goals.

Postsecondary preparation is supported through strategic partnerships and expanded student services. A long-standing collaboration with the College of San Mateo and Skyline College offers dual enrollment opportunities, college counseling, and assistance with financial aid and registration. Students can enroll in English language coursework and participate in career technical programs. Alumni currently participate in a range of programs including ESL, cosmetology, and barbering, demonstrating successful transitions into community college pathways. A Newcomer Transition Coordinator, added in the current year, has increased the school's capacity to support seniors with planning, scholarship applications, and career exploration. Students benefit from guest speakers, personalized transition planning, and structured exposure to a variety of postsecondary and vocational options, reinforcing the school's focus on meaningful, achievable futures.

Family engagement and student belonging are integral to the school's educational model. In Lak'ech pedagogy guides efforts to build a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment. Personal learning plans are co-developed with students, families, and staff, reviewed regularly through counseling meetings, advisory periods, and showcase events. The school maintains open communication with families through home visits and multilingual outreach. Decision-making structures such as the Bridge Advisory Board and Student Equity Council promote inclusive governance and ensure that student and family perspectives remain central to school planning. By aligning curriculum, instructional strategies, academic content, and college and career preparation within a coherent and inclusive model, The academy provides a structured, supportive environment for Newcomer students to access educational opportunity and develop the skills necessary for success beyond high school.

All students engage in rigorous, standards-aligned instruction within a learning environment grounded in In Lak'ech pedagogy, which centers relationships, shared responsibility, and cultural affirmation. Regardless of English proficiency, prior schooling, or immigration background, students access grade-level content supported by intentional scaffolds. Courses align with California Common Core State Standards, the Next Generation Science Standards, and the English Language Development Standards. Curriculum materials include *SpringBoard* for English Language Arts, *Big Ideas Math*, *Amplify* for science, and *TCI* for social science, all adapted to meet the needs of Newcomer students. Instruction connects academic concepts to real-world themes such as identity, migration, and resilience. Classrooms reflect the diverse backgrounds of learners through visual aids, language supports, and co-created norms that promote inclusion and community.

The Graduate Profile defines the attributes of Communicator, Collaborator, and Navigator, and serves as a consistent framework across content areas. Teachers design interdisciplinary units and projects that embed these competencies into daily instruction. Performance assessments aligned to the Graduate Profile allow students to demonstrate mastery through research, problem-solving, and public presentation. Students participate in reflection and goal-setting, supported by shared rubrics and clear success criteria that promote transparency and ownership of learning. Advisory sessions and teacher-student conferences reinforce academic planning, while regular progress monitoring connects students' current performance to graduation requirements and postsecondary goals. Learning objectives and models of excellence are made visible to support clarity around academic expectations.

Student agency is embedded in instructional design, with opportunities for voice and choice integrated throughout the curriculum. Students contribute to decision-making about content and structure through focus groups, feedback surveys, and participation in the Student Equity Council. Projects are tailored to reflect students' interests and lived experiences, including writing assignments like autobiographies, identity poems, and cultural narratives. In physical education, art, and advisory, students create personalized learning plans and set growth goals aligned with individual aspirations. Flexibility in how students demonstrate learning—through writing, digital media, or oral presentations—supports differentiated expression and skill development. Curriculum is adapted to support emerging needs identified by students, such as expanded literacy supports, more challenge for advanced learners, and greater integration of culturally relevant themes.

Technology supports both academic and real-world skill development across disciplines. Digital tools such as Classkick, IXL, Quizlet, Duolingo, and Rosetta Stone support individualized practice in literacy, math, and language acquisition. Canvas is used to organize course materials, facilitate communication, and promote self-paced learning. Google Suite tools help students develop digital literacy skills necessary for college and career readiness. Recording tools such as Screencastify and Vocaroo support speaking practice and allow students to demonstrate understanding in flexible ways. Photography and design projects use Canon cameras and Canva, while SMART boards and document cameras enhance interactivity during instruction. Real-world readiness is supported through workshops in resume writing, job applications, and interview practice. Field trips, guest speakers, and partnerships with community colleges provide additional exposure to postsecondary opportunities. Learning extends beyond the classroom into authentic, applied contexts, reinforcing both academic content and future readiness.

Assessment and accountability systems are structured to support equity, transparency, and continuous improvement. Data collection, analysis, and reporting processes align with district goals and the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and are designed to address the unique needs of Newcomer students and those with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) are administered to all eligible students and inform both placement and instructional supports. In addition to state assessments, district-designed tools are used throughout the year to assess reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), developed and updated each trimester, serve as the foundation for tracking student progress in language development, academic achievement, and

postsecondary planning. These plans are reviewed during student-teacher conferences and family meetings, reinforcing transparency and student ownership of learning goals.

Performance data is communicated during Trimester Showcases, where families engage in structured conferences, review student work, and receive updates on academic and graduation progress. For seniors, these events include targeted discussions about postsecondary pathways. All students participate in goal-setting conversations and reflection cycles as part of the assessment process. Feedback is provided through one-on-one conferences, revision opportunities, and digital platforms such as Classkick and Google Docs, supporting a timely and responsive dialogue. Formative and summative assessments are used across subjects to inform instruction and evaluate student growth toward the Graduate Profile competencies of Communicator, Collaborator, and Navigator. Teachers integrate student self-assessment and project-based learning to build metacognition and align learning experiences with real-world application.

Assessment systems support consistency in performance expectations and grading practices. Staff have developed shared rubrics aligned with the Graduate Profile, creating coherence across content areas. A pilot Graduate Profile Demonstration Project was introduced in spring 2025, allowing students to present portfolio-based evidence of skill development. These performance-based assessments reflect both academic standards and character competencies. Returning students are building comprehensive portfolios that will serve as a foundation for an expanded assessment model in the coming year. Students are also recognized during trimester awards ceremonies for achievement, growth, and contributions to the school community, reinforcing the value of both academic progress and social development.

Data-driven decision-making informs instructional planning, course placement, resource allocation, and professional learning. Student achievement data is reviewed collaboratively by staff and site leadership to adjust schedules, identify intervention needs, and inform curriculum modifications. English Language Development course placement is reviewed in coordination with the district's Multilingual Learner Department. Professional development is structured around identified needs and assessment trends, with an external facilitator supporting the development of aligned practices and the Graduate Profile rubric. Ongoing collaboration with district leadership ensures that school-level practices align with policy updates and research related to Newcomer education. Future priorities include formalizing portfolio assessments, developing centralized data systems, and establishing structures for longitudinal outcome tracking to evaluate the long-term impact of these systems.

Family and community engagement practices are foundational to the educational model and daily operations of the academy. These efforts are structured around a belief that learning is relational and grounded in shared responsibility. Engagement is not treated as supplementary, but as a primary component of the school’s structure, aligned with the needs of a student population composed entirely of Newcomers, primarily from Central America and Mexico. Intentional strategies ensure that families are welcomed, informed, and included in the academic and social-emotional development of students. Trimester Showcases occur three times annually and serve multiple purposes: reviewing student progress, celebrating accomplishments, and building community through shared meals and child-friendly events. These showcases function not only as

academic check-ins but also as inclusive cultural gatherings designed to affirm and support the whole family.

Accessibility and cultural responsiveness are prioritized through bilingual communication and flexible outreach methods. All messages, including written updates, phone calls, and video content, are provided in English and Spanish. For families with varying levels of literacy, messages are delivered through voice recordings and in-person conversations. Over 99% of families identify Spanish as their home language, and all members of the leadership and student support team are bilingual. This linguistic consistency contributes to fluid, trust-based communication. An open-door policy further supports ongoing engagement, allowing families to visit, ask questions, and receive assistance without appointments. Each student's journey begins with an intake meeting that includes family members and captures cultural values, aspirations, and support needs. These initial conversations form the basis for the individualized support system and affirm the school's belief in the strength and capital each family contributes.

Family partnership is informed by theoretical frameworks such as Tara Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model, which recognizes and values the navigational, linguistic, familial, and aspirational capital of historically underserved communities. These ideas shape family interactions and inform decisions about curriculum, student support, and communication. The Bridge Advisory Committee serves as a formal structure for gathering caregiver feedback and contributing to continuous improvement efforts. This group plays an active role in evaluating school programs, completing state-mandated family surveys, and shaping decisions that affect campus life. The advisory group's recommendations are reviewed by leadership and often integrated into planning for academic programs, resource allocation, and student support strategies.

Family involvement is also embedded in the instructional and cultural life of the school. Curriculum and schoolwide events reflect the cultural backgrounds and values of students and their families. The school's guiding framework, In Lak'ech pedagogy, centers mutual respect, shared responsibility, and love—principles that influence classroom routines, advisory lessons, and community celebrations. Graduation ceremonies, for example, include family-style dinners and student storytelling to reflect both academic achievement and cultural identity. Students engage in personal reflection through assignments like "I Am" poems, autobiographies, and immigration narratives, which are often shared with families. Learning extends into the community through field trips, student exhibitions, and cultural events that affirm students' lived experiences. Families participate not only as observers but as contributors to these events, strengthening the connection between home and school. Through consistent communication, inclusive practices, and culturally responsive engagement strategies, family and community members are integral partners in advancing student success.

Continuous School Improvement

Strengths

The Bridge Academy provided a very thorough initial visit report, including supporting evidence. During the initial visit there was the opportunity for meaningful dialogue with the stakeholders, observations of students engaged in learning, and examination of additional evidence. The visiting committee found many positive aspects to the school which follow.

- **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Communication:** All school communication is consistently provided in English and Spanish using accessible formats such as written notices, voice messages, and videos, ensuring that families can engage regardless of literacy level or language proficiency.
- **Inclusive and Meaningful Family Events:** Trimester Showcases are designed to include families in academic and cultural experiences, allowing them to meet with all teachers, review student work, and participate in shared meals and activities that support a welcoming school environment.
- **Principal's Direct Engagement with Families:** The principal maintains strong connections with students and families through bilingual outreach, personal introductions, attendance at family events, and an open-door policy, which supports trust and accessibility.
- **Staff and Teacher Collaboration with Families:** Teachers and support staff regularly communicate with families in their home language, participate in conferences and showcases, and use classroom practices that reflect and affirm family cultures, building consistent connections between school and home.
- **Ongoing Opportunities for Family Input:** The Bridge Advisory Committee provides a structured space for parents and caregivers to share feedback, engage in school planning, and contribute to discussions around programs, surveys, and schoolwide goals.
- **Culturally Responsive Curriculum and School Traditions:** Instruction and events reflect the cultural backgrounds of students and their families through projects focused on identity and migration, bilingual presentations, and community celebrations that recognize student and family contributions.

Areas for Improvement

The Bridge Academy has carefully identified areas for further development as a result of preparing for the ACS WASC initial visit. The visiting committee concurs with these which will be important as the school leadership and teachers prioritize the tasks within the schoolwide action plan that will be implemented and monitored by the school's formalized follow-up process.

1. **Implement a Comprehensive Performance-Based Assessment System**
   Expand the current Graduate Profile Demonstration Project into a schoolwide portfolio and performance assessment model. Develop shared rubrics, establish calibration protocols across content areas, and align assessment tasks with state academic standards and college/career readiness indicators. Integrate these assessments into academic courses and advisory to ensure consistency in measuring student growth.
2. **Develop Centralized Data and Monitoring Systems**
   Create a unified digital platform to track academic progress, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), and social-emotional learning indicators. Ensure that instructional, counseling, and leadership teams can access and analyze real-time data for student support planning, placement decisions, and resource allocation. Provide training for staff on the use of data systems to promote consistency and efficiency.
3. **Expand College and Career Access and Pathways**
   Introduce structured college and career readiness programming, including dual enrollment options, work-based learning opportunities, career exploration courses, and partnerships with industry and community colleges. Prioritize outreach and support services for students facing barriers to traditional postsecondary transitions, with dedicated staff coordination and student advising.
4. **Strengthen and Systematize Tiered Student Support Structures**
   Formalize Tier II and Tier III intervention systems by implementing consistent referral, documentation, and monitoring tools. Provide professional development focused on targeted academic, behavioral, and wellness interventions. Coordinate cross-functional staff collaboration to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and ensure responsive adjustments based on student needs.