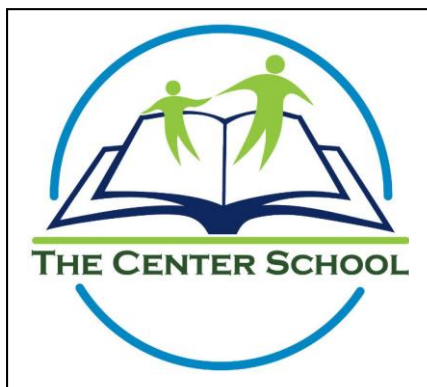


History of The Center School:

The First 50 Years



1971



2021

by
Ronald P. Rinaldi, Ed.D.
Executive Director
The Center School
2021

Forward

The impetus for this short history of The Center School is two-fold. First and foremost, it marks the school's 50th Anniversary. As of September 2021, The Center School will have been serving the needs of the special education community for five decades, touching the lives of thousands. Not only has our school had profound and life changing effects on the thousands of students who have passed through its halls, but, just as important, it has been a powerful force and ally in the lives of their families who looked to the school for help during the difficult journey of raising a special needs child.

In this 50th year we are seeing our students and their families needing this support and guidance just as much, if not more, as those who founded the school back in 1971. So, this short history is timeless in its account.

The second purpose of this history is to give the students, parents, and staff a sense of what they are a part of as they join The Center School community. As a historian, I believe we need to know how we arrived where we are today, on whose shoulders we are standing, and understand who we are as we look at our institution's "family tree". This knowledge is so important as we both celebrate our school's triumphs over the past five decades and begin to create our school's history for the next 50 years.

The information you will read in the following pages has been documented from articles, periodicals, interviews, and other primary sources. By no means is it all-encompassing, as many primary documents and voices are missing from over the years. To this point, I would ask any stakeholders and alumni who read this account and may have pertinent information to offer regarding the school's history, to contact me so it may be added. The goal is to create as complete a picture as possible for all our stakeholders and community.

Dedication

I want to dedicate this first written account of the history of our school to our wonderful staff, past and present.

As we begin to celebrate 50 years of working with special needs students, we are also marking the end of a long and challenging school year filled with unprecedented changing teaching practices due to Covid-19. Our staff has shown outstanding and unparalleled professionalism and dedication to their students while they transitioned from the classroom to on-line distance learning with special needs students starting in March of 2020.

Their success and unwavering conduct returning to the school and teaching synchronously during the 2020-2021 school year is both reminiscent and representative of the spirit and dedication of all those staff members who served our students over the years since 1971. It is almost uncanny that as we enter our 50th year, due to these unprecedented times, our staff have unwittingly carried on and proven their significant contributions and invaluable service which our school's special education teachers have always had and will always have as we look to the future.

Center School Staff--

On behalf of all our students, families, and stakeholders—I both salute you and thank you.

Founding, 1971-1976

The Center School opened its doors in September 1971 to provide a school for students with special needs. It was founded to replace the Willis School for Educational Therapy which had operated on Mt. Bethel Road in Warren, as a school for students who were neurologically impaired or emotionally disturbed. The Willis School, founded by Mrs. Elizabeth Ann J. Willis, operated in Plainfield from 1960 -1970, then moved to the building on Mt. Bethel Road rented from Our Lady of the Mount Church (Mount, 1971). However, in the summer of 1971 the Willis School closed suddenly and teachers and parents from the school believed that there was a need to continue to have an educational facility for these students (Jeanne Prial, personal communication, March 18, 2021). They worked all summer to get The Center School state certified and opened by September of that year (Short, 1972). Jeanne Prial was one of the original founders of The Center School and later became its Director.

Both the Willis School and The Center School operated under the then special education laws, The Beadleston Act for Handicapped Children (1954), P.L.1954, cs.178, 179 and 180, enacted by New Jersey Assemblyman John Beadleston. The laws “established three categories for classifying persons who were considered mentally retarded -- educable mentally retarded, trainable mentally retarded and not educable or trainable; and multiple categories for physically handicapped” (Settle, 2004, 59). Two of these classifications were emotionally disturbed and neurologically impaired. They required local board districts to: conduct thorough examinations, and provide suitable facilities and programs of education and training including special classes if needed, whether in the school district or by sending to another school district or by the provision of individual instruction or training at home. These laws were the impetus for providing legal protection for students with educational disabilities in the State of New Jersey by guaranteeing their right to special education. They are also considered the cornerstone predecessor to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), and subsequently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

At first, The Center School rented space from the St. John’s Lutheran Church at 317 Winsor St., Bound Brook, for their approximately 45 children, ages 5-13, from four counties and 19 school districts. Students admitted to the school had to be identified as being neurologically

impaired or emotionally disturbed through their district's child study team. Staff consisted of 6 teachers all certified in special education, most of whom had their master's degree in the special education field. Four of those original six teachers had been teachers at the Willis School. Each teacher had a classroom aide to assist with the 6-11 students in their class (Short, 1972). The Center School offered a day program (8:45 am – 1:00 pm) as well as a supplemental program, 2:00 pm-4:30 pm each day, for public school students needing assistance in "learning situations" ("Psychology professor", 1971, 19).



Courier News photo from Feb. 26, 1972 article "More Concern Focused on Learning Disabilities"

Anyone remembering LIFE magazine, a general interest magazine published as a weekly between 1883-1972, as an intermittent "special" until 1978, and as a monthly from 1978 until 2000, knows it became the first all-photographic American news magazine and is an iconic periodical which chronicled America's society with photojournalism. In the October 6, 1972 issue LIFE did an 8-page article on The Center School and the education of learning-disabled children, presenting just as many photos of the school's students and staff (Bradbury, October, 1972).

The article discusses the issues students “handicapped by learning disabilities” face and the challenges their teachers battle. Memory issues, trouble following directions, auditory and processing troubles, hyperactivity, perseveration, gross and fine motor skill deficits, and speech related issues are just a few of the disabilities the article explains challenge these students in the school environment. The article introduces the term “learning disabled” as referring to these children and briefly gives an overview of causes, diagnosis, signs, and options for help. Using The Center School as an example of how these students are assisted by the specific programs found in a special education school, it highlighted the inability of district schools to handle these unique learners and the sad situations these students had in public schools.

For millions of children, subtle flaws in perception can brutally handicap bright minds

An agony of learning



At the Center School in New Jersey, Joseph, second from the right, and his classmates wait for lunch after a morning's special schooling. All are bright, but they are handicapped by learning disabilities that make it difficult for them to read and write.

by WILL BRADBURY

This morning, like most at the Center School in Bound Brook, N.J., has been long and hard—a snarl of tension and tears, occasional obscenities and frequent scuffles. But now, in front of the camera, these youngsters might be any group of 7- and 8-year-olds hamming it up for a photographer. But they are not. What separates them, and perhaps two million more like them, from other children is a very special kind of problem, one that affects each uniquely: these youngsters cannot learn properly. No doctor could tell Courtney or Joseph or Kurt or Mitchell, clowning on the far left, why they have this problem. But it involves the nervous system—that billion-cell triumph of sensors, nerve cable and brain cells that runs all human beings. Deep within its seemingly infinite circuitry something has gone wrong, perhaps for genetic reasons, perhaps because of an infection early in a mother's pregnancy, perhaps because of an accident at birth. The result is that these children can't correctly process the flood of sensory information that spills into their brains. Most often such deep-brain imperfections are slight, for these youngsters are not retarded or autistic and usually they are of average or better-than-average intelligence. But for a child entering the disciplined and carefully programmed world of a classroom, where the pace and needs of the group rule so completely, learning flaws can be brutally handicapping. Take Joseph, second from the right, sneakers

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HOW JOSEPH IS LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

Joseph's teachers at the Center School cannot cure his special auditory difficulties, but they can effectively bypass them. Using a carefully tailored learning program that takes full advantage of his senses of vision and touch, they are helping him to read and write as normally as possible. When Joseph works on his spelling, for example, he uses large wooden letters he can see and handle, and objects like an apple or a bottle whose names begin with letters that give him difficulty. His teachers speak to him in short, simple sentences that they repeat several times. When they help Joseph with some of his other problems, such as orienting objects in space or remembering the sequence of things, they work in a one-on-one situation with him and use specially devised equipment. Above all, they try to maintain an atmosphere of tenderness and well-ordered activity that helps Joseph cope with his emotional problems and hyperactivity.

In all there are nearly 50 children like Joseph at the Center School this year. Most have left public school because of their problems, and each is being taught according to the unique pattern of his disabilities. Housed in rented quarters in a church, the school was created by a group of parents and teachers more than a year ago to replace a similar school that closed. This year for the first time it will have a class for kindergarten youngsters, who can be helped much more easily than older children. Yet the Center School is really a temporary institution: it exists only because most public schools are not yet staffed or equipped to educate learning-disabled children.



In an effort to work around his auditory handicap, Joseph and his teacher Grace Rheinhardt (right) use cut-out letters and objects he can touch—a bit of fence, a lemon, a plastic Indian and the table itself—to spell the word "hill." On the blackboard above, Joseph tries to do a perceptual problem—he must match identical designs. But his auditory difficulties have already betrayed him. Instead of starting at the top, as he was told, he has started at the bottom.

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At the Center School in New Jersey, Joseph, second from the right, and his classmates wait for lunch after a morning's special schooling. All are bright, but they are handicapped by learning disabilities that make it difficult for them to read and write.

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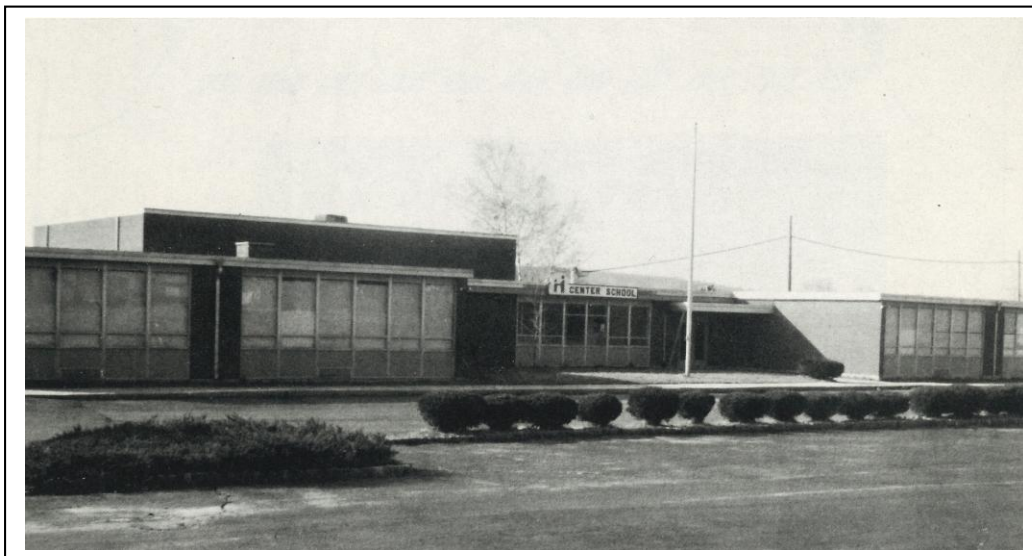
Take Joseph, second from the right, sneakers

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Growth, 1976-1989

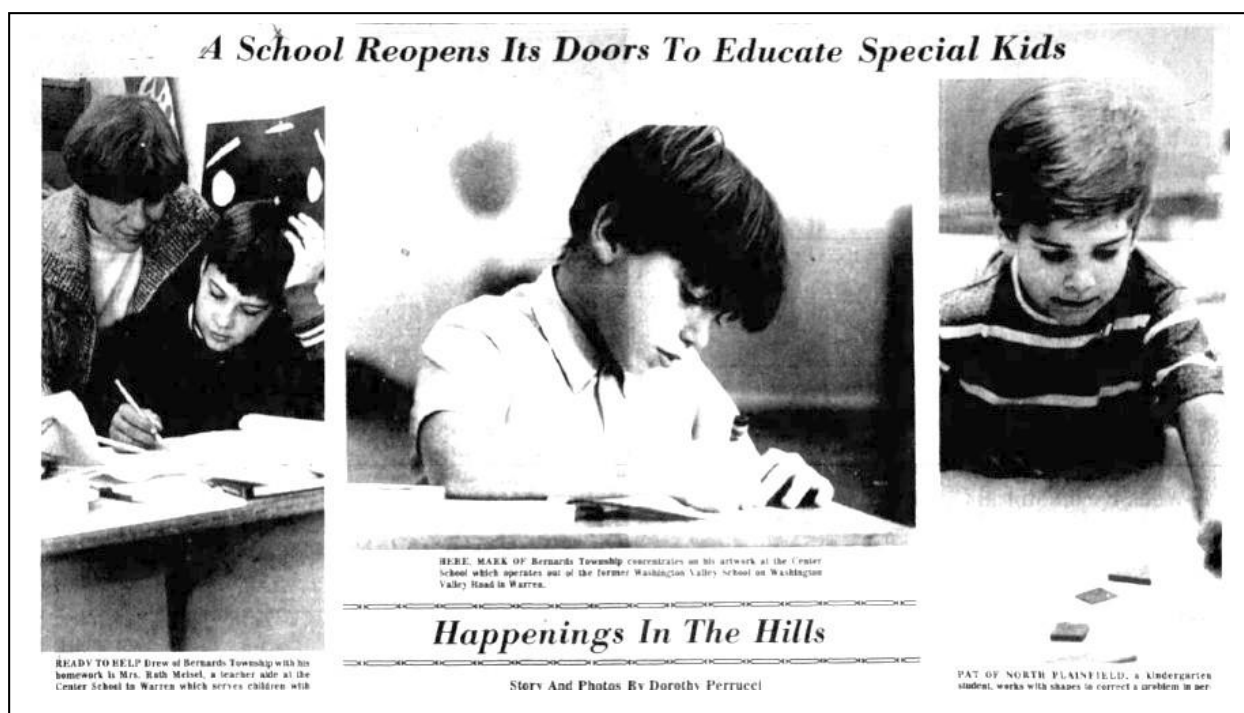
Five years later, in June 1976, The Center School signed a lease to rent the Washington Valley School for \$21,500 per year for three years, with another year optional (“Warren School Rented”, 1976, 5). This was a fortunate opportunity for The Center School as the Washington Valley School was closed due to falling enrollment, which was projected to last 3-5 years, and The Center School needed room to expand from their present location in Bound Brook.



Washington Valley School- Used by The Center School 1976-1989

In September 1976 The Center School moved to Warren with its now 96 students, who were from 35 sending districts from seven counties (Perrucci, 1976). The larger space allowed growth to 12 classrooms. Staff grew as well, to 12 classroom teachers each with a classroom aide, a gym teacher, art teacher, typing teachers, and two speech and language pathologists. The staff was supplemented with four learning consultants. Students not only had academic classes, but they also had group activities “in music, art, typing, physical education and woodworking, plus films and class trips” (Perrucci, 1976, 1). Cutting edge technology at the time, the “talking typewriter”, provided the opportunity for students to improve their reading skills. This machine used auditory and visual cues to help students. Students typed a word and if they spelled it wrong the typewriter would “talk” and tell them to try again until they got it right.

To mark the occasion of this move to their Warren location, a local newspaper, *The Echoes Sentinel*, printed a full page spread about the school's re-opening in September - "A School Reopens its Doors to Educate Kids" (Perrucci, 1976). This article discussed the school's programming, staff, disabilities served, purpose for special education schools like this one, how students are recommended for attendance, and other aspects of learning-disabled education. Mrs. Helen Goldberg, the school's Director, was not only proud of what the school had accomplished for students needing these services, but also still "concerned that there are those children whose learning disability problems remain undetected" (Perrucci, 1976, 1).



Photos from full page article in Echoes Sentinel, September 30, 1976.

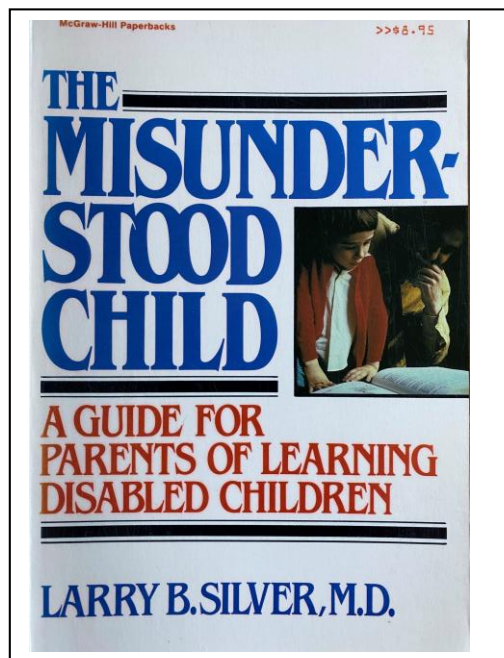
Echoes Sentinel photo from September 30, 1976 article "A School Reopens its Doors to Educate Kids" showing the talking typewriter.



The Center School thrived at its new location in Warren at the rented Washington Valley School over the next eleven years. In December 1982 a new computer room was dedicated at the school with four new color computers and one black and white computer for the students to learn on after funds were raised by a committee from the Board of Trustees. ("Computer room dedicated", 1982, E-17).

In September 1983 a new departmentalized program was instituted for middle and high school students "to enable youngsters who often have difficulty relating to numerous authority figures to develop this skill in a small setting", according to Director Helen Goldberg ("New program offered", 1983, E-5).

In April 1984 Dr. Larry B. Silver, the school's consulting psychiatrist for eight years, dedicated his book "The Misunderstood Child, A Guide for Parents of Learning-Disabled Children" to The Center School. The book was a comprehensive guide to understanding the challenges of a learning-disabled child in the school, home, and social settings. ("Book dedicated to school", 1984). It is still one of the primary, go-to manuals for parents of special needs students and is in its fourth edition. Dr. Silver went on to be Professor of Psychiatry, Professor of Pediatrics, and Chief of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Robert Wood Johnson School of Medicine; Deputy Director at the National Institute of Mental Health; and subsequently Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center. He has over 150 publications.



This book is dedicated to
 THE CENTER SCHOOL, Warren, New Jersey
 To its director, Helen Goldberg, and the dedicated professional
 staff for teaching me about these children;
 To the children, who shared with me their feelings, thoughts,
 fears, and hopes;
 And, to the former social worker, R. Joan Guilmartin, who
 taught me the importance of the family.

Thank you.

For the school's 50th Anniversary celebration in April 2022, Dr. Silver commented "my wife and I have very fond memories of our days at The Center School". (Larry Silver, Personal communication, March 7, 2022). He could not attend the celebration but wrote the following message about the school.

In the early 1960's, a group of educators began to describe a specific group of students who struggled with learning. They did not fit into the known categories of students with academic problems. These students were of at least average intelligence and did not show evidence of social or emotional problems. They came from families who were not socially or culturally disadvantaged; and, they were in good classroom programs with competent teachers.

As these students were observed in their classrooms, it was noted that they appeared to have difficulties with specific aspects of learning. They might have problems with visual or auditory input of information. Others had difficulties understanding or processing this information. Some students sowed

difficulty with the storage of this information into short-term or long-term memory. And, for some of these children, they had problems getting this knowledge from the brain out by the use of motor (writing) or oral (language) outputs.

One of the pioneers in studying these children was Dr. Sam Kirk. He used the term "Learning Disabilities" to describe these difficulties and this term became the formal one used to refer to these children.

Public schools began to develop programs to teach students with Learning Disabilities. Some of these programs were excellent; some were less so. And some school systems had no services for these students.

Parents began to request these needed services for their children. The efforts of educators and parents to require such services resulted in Public Law 94-142, "The Education for All Handicapped Students". If a school system did not have adequate services, parents could request placement in a private school. Their public school was required to cover the cost.

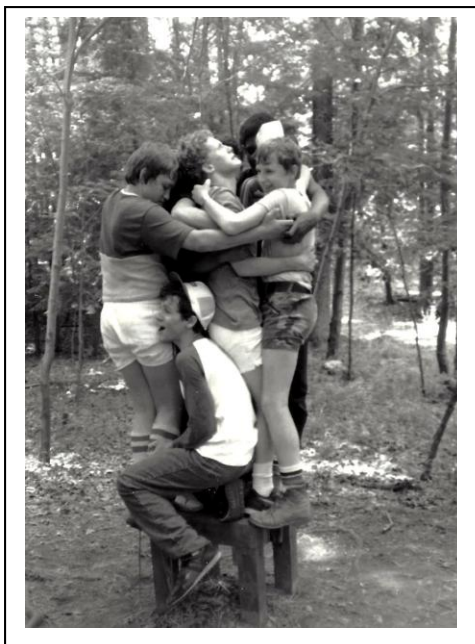
One of the first such private schools to open was The Center School. From the start, the basic philosophy of the school was to build on the student's strengths to compensate for their areas of weaknesses. A multi-sensory model for learning was developed that maximized teaching to the student's strengths while building strategies for addressing the student's weaknesses.

Graduate schools of Education developed programs to prepare special education teachers to work with students who had learning disabilities. One of the first to do this was Teacher's College of Columbia University in New York City. The Director of this program was Dr. Margaret Jo Sheppard. She knew of The Center School and placed students there for field training.

*Dr. Sheppard asked me if I would teach a one semester class on the social, emotional, and family problems students with learning disabilities often developed as a result of the stresses of the classroom and as a reflection of their learning disabilities. I developed the course as the semester went along. I knew I wanted to use the basic format of Input-Integration-Memory-Output. When the semester ended, the student feedback was positive. I used my notes and the feedback to write my book, *The Misunderstood Child: A Guide for Parents of Learning-Disabled Children*". I am proud to have been part of the early years of this program and marvel at the creative ideas still being taught today.*

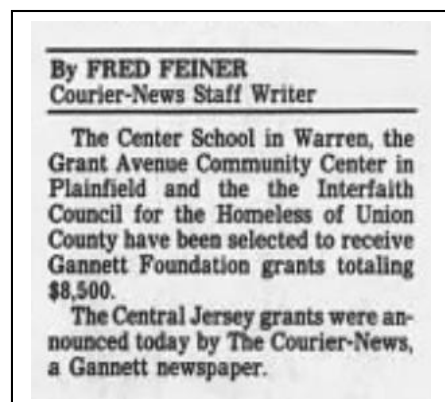
*Larry B. Silver, M.D.
March 2022*

A June 1984 article in the Courier News explained how Center School students participated in a 2-day adventure-based educational outing at Princeton Education Center's Camp in Blirstown. Students learned teamwork, problem solving, and cooperation skills through activities such as canoeing, traversing a cable suspended 60 feet above ground, rappelling down the side of a dam, and problem-solving fitting 10 people on a wooden 1-foot cube. The camp activities also provided personal growth and a sense of accomplishment for students. (Strausfeld, 1984).



In 1986 Jeanne Prial, who had previously served as the Principal and was one of the original founding members of the school in 1971, became Director of The Center School and served until retiring in 2007. Mrs. Prial stated her years at the school were wonderful and the children she worked with were so interesting and made working at the school fun throughout her career (J. Prial, personal communication, March 18, 2021).

In December 1986, The Center School was one of three organizations to receive the Gannett Foundation Awards. The grant in the amount of \$4,000 went to purchase two Apple IIC computers as part of the school's "write away" program. The computers in this program helped students learn how to write sentences, paragraphs, and form letters by hand. In addition to these skills, and building hand-eye coordination, Center School's Director Helen Goldberg added, "students will use the computers to publish their own newspaper" (Feiner, 1986, B-1).



By 1987 the school was now at 112 students and 53 staff. In addition to their academic courses, students took "computer education, woodshop (which every student took), art, physical education, Health and Family Life, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, pre-vocational skills development, and career awareness" (Altmiller, 1987, E-11). Also available to students was a computerized reading program, Apple II E enhanced computers, a student-run store, student-run bistro, and a student-published newspaper "*The Center School Scoop*" with news and creative writing elements. At the time it cost a district \$10,900. per student to send them to The Center School. The need for special education was so important that the school had a waiting list of 50 students.



Picture of Apple II E enhanced computers at The Center School, 1987.

But that same year (1987) population growth in Warren required the Warren Board of Education to begin to look at using its school building for their own residents. In November 1986, The Center School had created a Building Fund Committee to start raising money to either build a new school building or buy an existing building in case they needed to relocate. According to Director Goldberg, it consisted of 30 people interested in “helping the school” some of whom like 13th District State Senator Richard Van Wagner and other influential business types: “bankers, builders, and restaurateurs” (Altmiller, 1987, E-11) cared much about the school’s future. The goal was to raise \$7.5 million within 3-4 years. A business connection was made with Allied Signal, Inc., located near the Warren location of the school, and a long-time contributor to the school. Eventually a proposal for funds and a building project was presented to the president of corporate affairs at Allied Signal Foundation which was acted upon.

Allied contributed \$20,000 to the fund. Some of its employees’ children had attended The Center School and Allied recognized the need for these important special education services, as well as trying to keep the school in this area (Altmiller, 1987, E-11). Other fundraiser events were subsequently held to raise money like a Celebrity Brunch at the Somerset Marriott (June 1987) where Carl Banks of the Giants appeared.

Highland Park, 1989-2012

The Center School moved to a renovated building in Highland Park in September 1989. This move was made as a result of student population growth in Warren and the need for that township to re-open its school building, the Washington Valley School, for its students. The new location, 319 North 3rd Avenue in Highland Park, New Jersey, would be the school’s home for the next 22 years. During that time the school’s student population grew to its largest ever at around 160 students.



Highland Park Location

Highland Park to Riverview Drive, 2012-2021

The Highland Park location served the school from 1989 until February 2012 when it was damaged by fire on Valentine's Day. The fire, which started in a classroom, led to the building being unusable. One week later, on February 22, the school moved to the Old York School in Branchburg, vacated after the Branchburg School District consolidated their schools in September of 2011 due to lower student enrollment numbers.



The administration of the school, with 112 students and 51 staff, decided to finish the 2011-2012 school year in Branchburg. The decision to remain there through 2012-13 was made to avoid a mid-year move that would be disruptive to the students.



The Branchburg building had several features the school administration believed enhanced their programming. These included a commercial kitchen, a lunchroom, outdoor playgrounds, a basketball court, and two baseball fields. The school had 20 classrooms, with more space for programs such as art, music, and robotics. The school finished out its 2011-2012 school year at the new location and returned a second year (2012-2013).



This 2012- 2013 school year witnessed many “firsts” in the school. During the summer of 2012 The Center School held its first ESY program. Students in the Elementary, Middle, and High School worked on enriching their skills in language arts, math and social skills. Then on Sunday September 30, 2012, the school opened its Highland Park consignment shop called “Front and Center” where Center School students in the work readiness program learned retail skills. The 2012-2013 school year also brought the first Center School LEGO club for Elementary and Middle school students which allowed them to build and program an autonomous robot designed to perform missions. It was also this year The Center School’s robotic team #4281 participated in their first competition, “Duel on the Delaware”, held in South Jersey competing against 38 teams from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware. The team finished 7th overall!

The Center School remained at the Old York School in Branchburg a third year (2013-2014) while discussions were held regarding whether to continue to remain in this location and purchasing the Old York School, or re-locating again. The administration considered other properties available in Hillsborough, Bridgewater, and along the Route 22 corridor from Green Brook, Bound Brook, and South Bound Brook through Bridgewater.

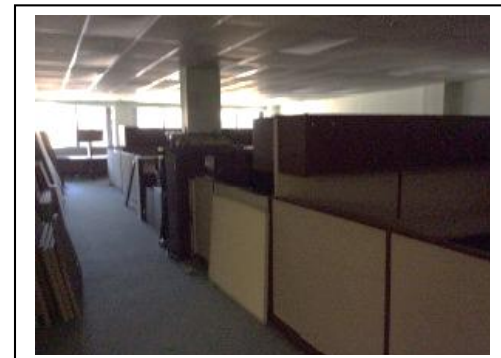
After an extensive search for a new location, on Friday, May 2, 2014, The Center School took possession of their new property at 2 Riverview Drive in Franklin Township, after receiving zoning approval to allow for a school in the M-1 Zone District. The new location was conveniently located off Route 287 and was ready for a soft opening in July 2014. The grand opening occurred on September 3rd for the 2014-2015 academic year.

The new 3-story 80,000 square foot building provided ample space for the Elementary, Middle, and High School classrooms. Each school has a learning studio off of which are located the classrooms. The learning studio allow students to gather in larger groups. When in these larger groups (holding a morning meeting or group project), students can work in a setting similar to a district

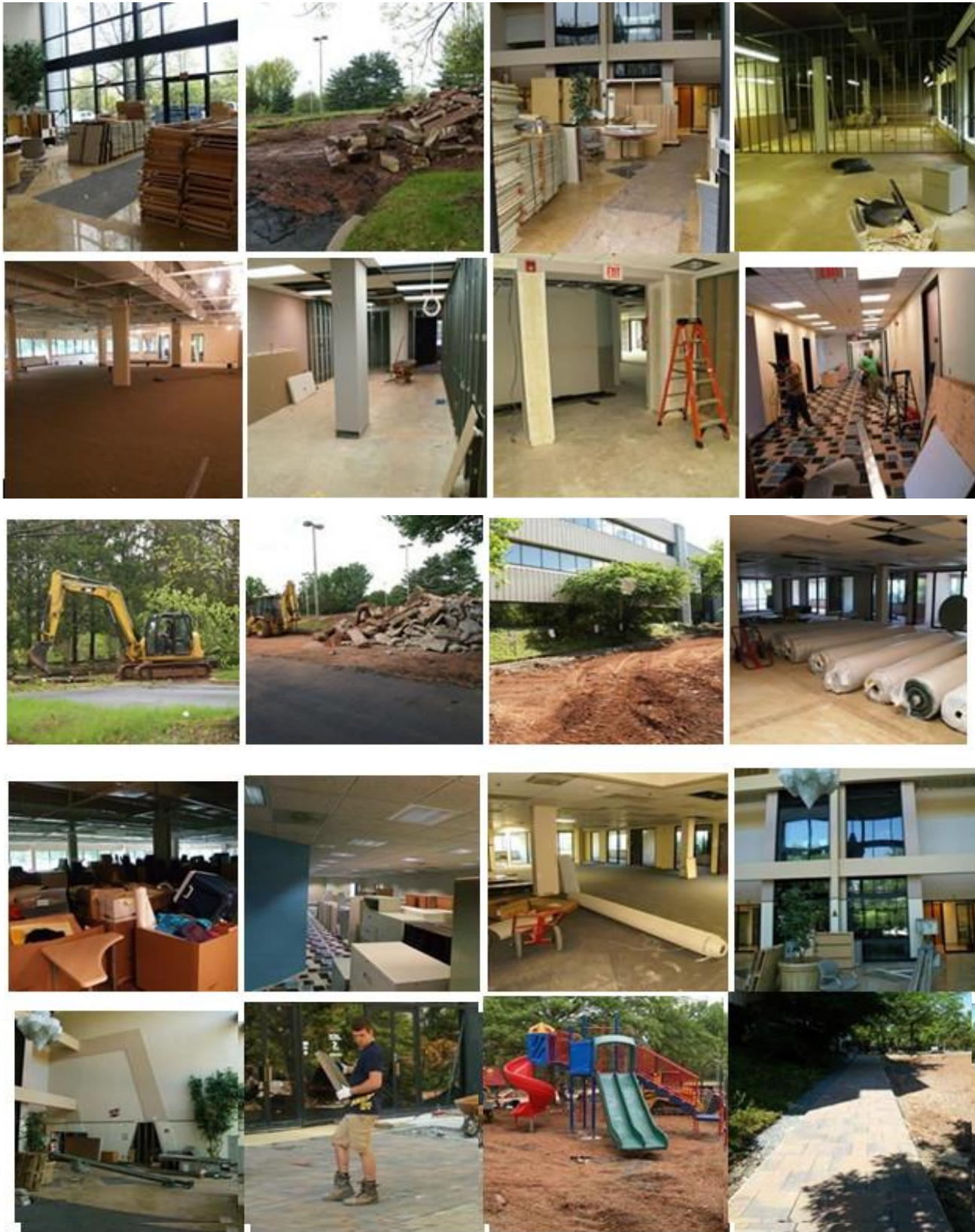
classroom of 20-25 students for that socialization and environmental setting and then disperse to their classrooms of 5-7 students for smaller, more individualized learning. Some rooms (art, music, science lab, OT, woodshop) are extremely large spaces allowing these programs to expand both in resources and opportunities.

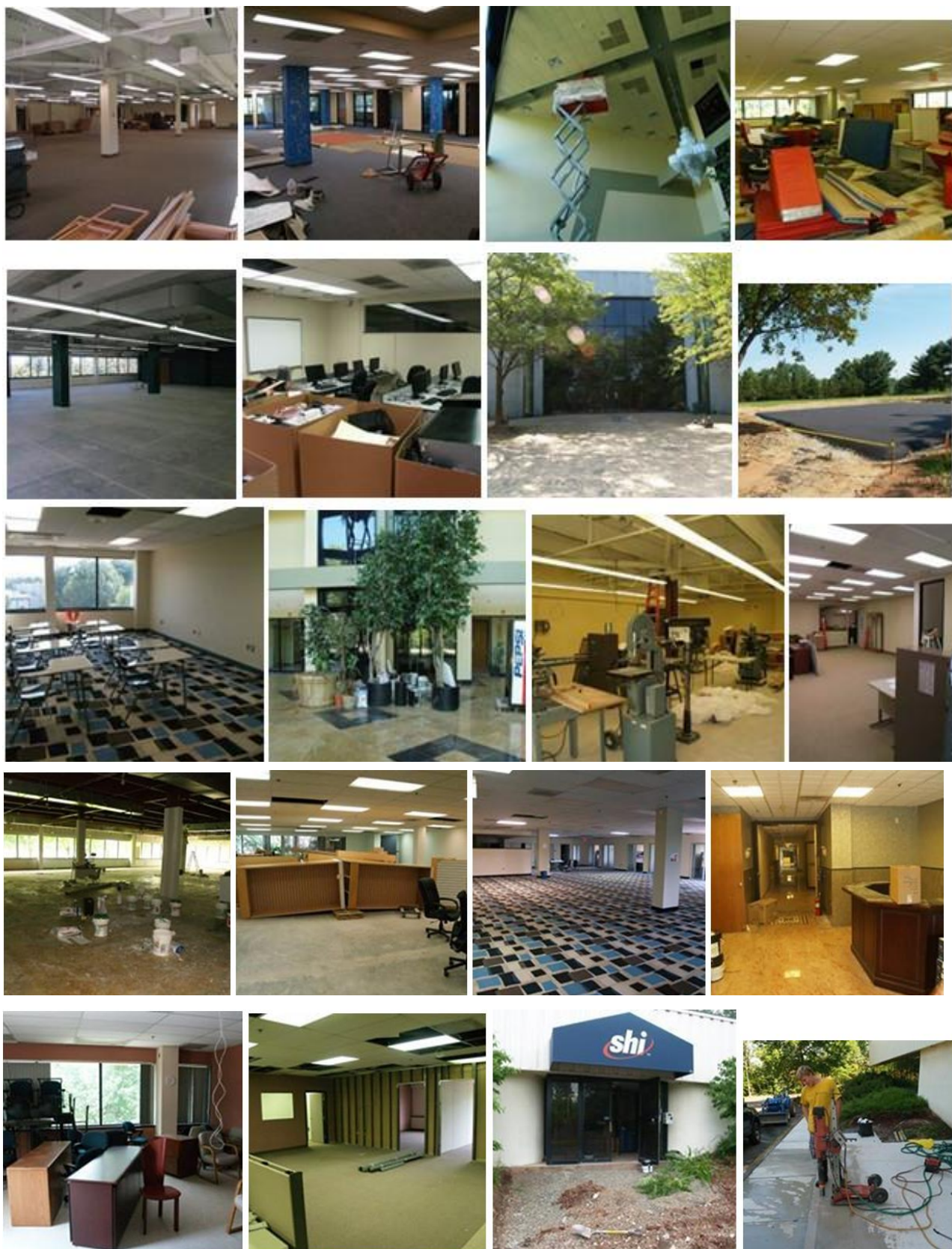


Photos of the new location at 2 Riverview Drive
prior to renovations. (Klein, 2019)



Photos of Renovations (Klein, 2019)





The original grand entrance (now the Bistro) was regraded and turned into a patio area. The side entrance became the main entrance. A large paved parking lot on the east side of the building was torn up, filled in with dirt, and made into a large grass field. Open balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floor overlooking the Bistro on either side of the elevators, were walled up (for safety purposes) and other construction like the wall between the nurse's office and school store were added to create the present-day room layouts. All classrooms and learning studios were outfitted with smartboards, Mimios, or some element of technology.

The woodshop/industrial arts room, a hallmark of The Center School and staple of the curriculum since the 1970's, has all the modern tools, apparatus, and air systems required to allow significant project manufacturing by our students. A spacious OT room has all of the latest tools and resources necessary to continue our "second-to-none" program.

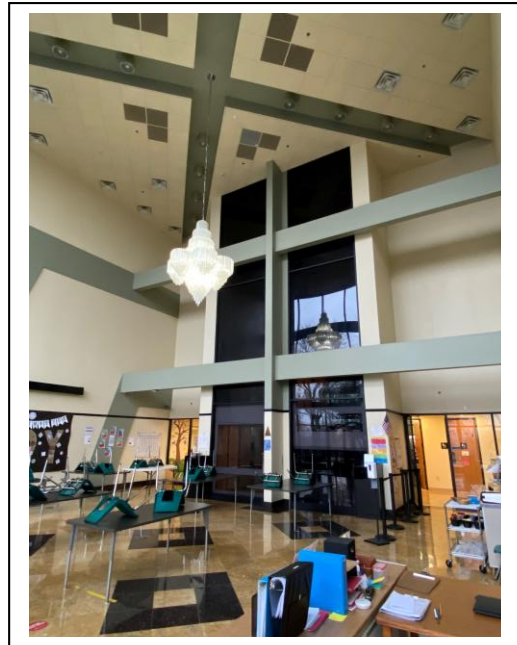
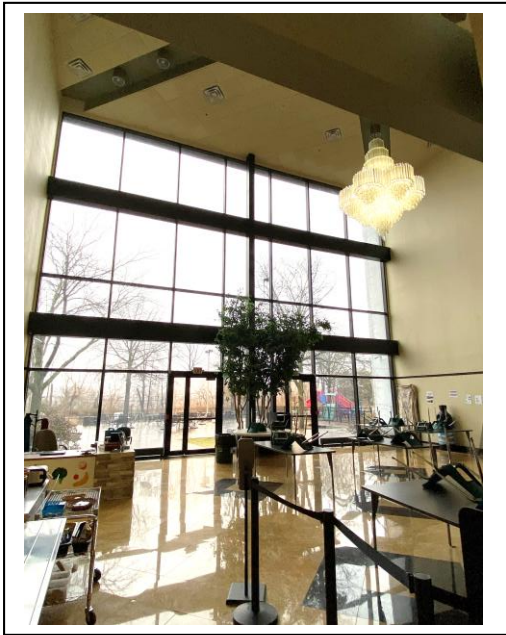


Woodshop / Industrial Arts Room



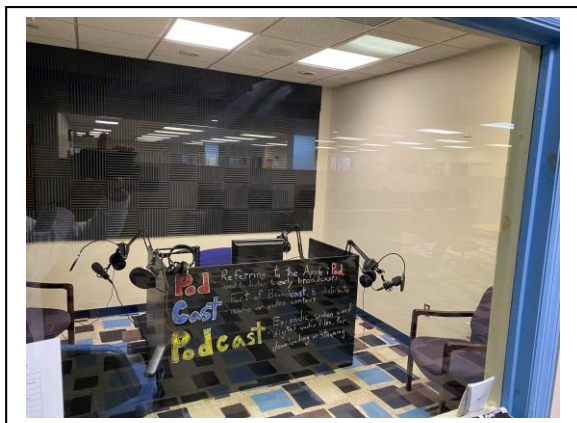
OT Room

The Bistro is a large 3-story room crowned by a chandelier and lit by a wall of windows which looks out on a full-size patio allowing both indoor and outdoor dining, as well as other events for students, staff, and families. Students eat lunch daily in the Bistro and can observe the operation of the two elevators through the glass walls of the Bistro side of the elevators.

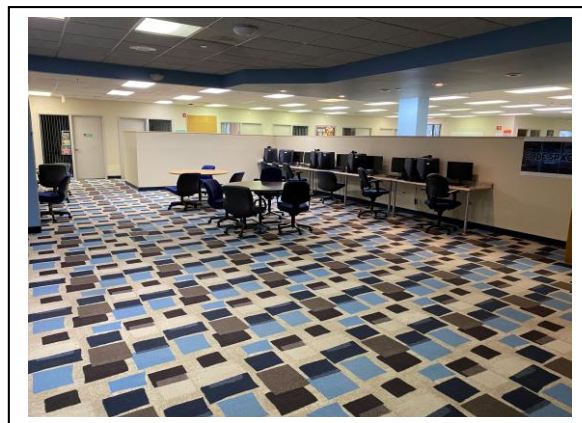


Each year, since 2014, renovations have taken place by adding classrooms, dividing some larger less-used spaces into smaller more purposeful rooms. These renovations were in response to the specific needs of the students and their programming. In 2014 the school's consignment shop relocated from Highland Park to downtown Somerville and was renamed "Thrifs and Gifts". Students in the transition program could continue to work in the store and learn all about marketing and retail.

The school's HVAC system was updated (2015), a virtual reality room was added (2017), a new STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) area created (2019), a pod-cast studio built (2020), and a modernized elevator system installed (2021).



Podcast Room



STEAM Area

In the last seven years, since opening at the present location, The Center School staff continued to provide the familiar academic services and behavioral supports on which their reputation had been built over the past five decades. In 2019, The Center School was awarded the Spirit of Somerset Award for Education for its embodiment, dedication, and significant contributions made for the betterment of the entire community.

Entering the 50th year of operation, the school and its staff successfully met the challenges of Covid-19 and the unprecedented instructional activities now part of the educational process. Long distance synchronous instruction became a part of the lexicon of the school curriculum. Technology, always having been one segment of today's education, now became the primary tool and a necessary foundational skill required by students and staff. This latest addition to the skills The Center School students learn, exemplifies the continued efforts at ensuring our special needs students receive the latest best practices in the field of special education.

Going forward, as our school's history is written, I believe the next several decades will prove to be as successful as these past 50 years have proven to be for all our stakeholders.

Post-2021

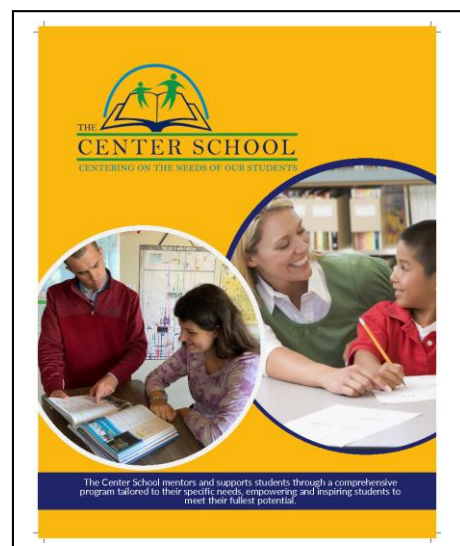
In the years following our 50th year of operations, The Center School continues to evolve and improve upon the services for our students.

In 2021 we redesigned our school website to include videos of our various programming offerings, as well as improve our presence among the special needs community. Despite having such a long history, it was still remarkable to hear so often that many people in search of a school like ours did not know we existed. Capitalizing on social media as the primary source of information for today's society this update allowed us to increase awareness and improve communication.

We also created a new brochure (our last one was printed circa 2008).

STEAM & ESports

Keeping in step with the advances in technology and the interests of students in the 21st century, The Center School adopted a new STEAM activity which aligned perfectly with the younger generation's gaming interests. Esports and video gaming.



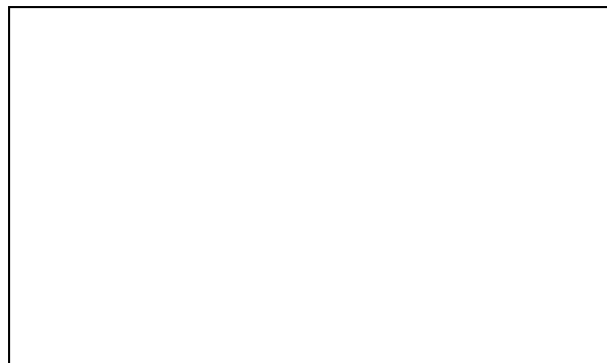
Fall 2019- A video game club was created for students to have the ability to hang out and play their favorite games after school. This club started with 3 members.

Spring 2020- During Quarantine due to COVID-19, a shift was made from having an after-school club to a full-fledged ESports team, where students would compete with peers in other school programs like ours. During this time, many students entered a number of tournaments, for games such as Super Smash Bros Ultimate and Rocket League, at a national scale. Two students placed in national tournaments through the NASEF organization with one student becoming a national champion for that competition.

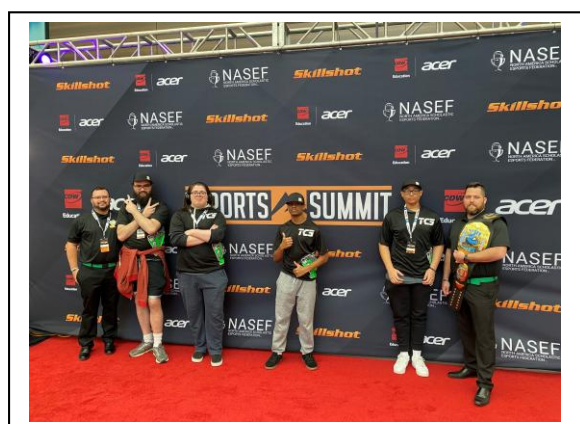
Fall 2021- Team Cerberus was born. ESports was now established as a statewide varsity sport with the team's inclusion into the Garden State ESports league, which is recognized as the official division for scholastic Esports for the state of New Jersey. During this time, the team was invited to participate in International Esports Day where Team Cerberus competed against another Esports team located in Wales, United Kingdom.

Winter 2022- The ESports team found success as many of our e-athletes were able to make the playoff berth across multiple games. In particular, Team Cerberus was able to claim a State Championship in Knockout City, becoming the first-ever team in Center School history to do so. The championship event took place at Ryder University.

Spring 2022- While clinching another playoff berth in Smash Bros., the team took time to become active in the wider school community. The Center School Cerberus assisted Branchburg Central Middle School in holding its very own Retro Arcade to benefit the Megan Rose Bradley Foundation, whose goal is to find a cure for pediatric brain cancer.



Fall 2022- The Center School received an invitation to compete at the Dreamhack convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Driving 15 hours each way, Team Cerberus ventured to play Knockout City against an all-star Georgia state team. The entirety of this exciting matchup was streamed live on Twitch.tv with one of Center School's very own co-hosting with the local color commentary team.



Winter 2023-The team once again visited the state championship competition at Kean University for the Knockout City video game. Though not victorious, the team put on a great performance against talented players.

Spring 2023- Super Smash Bros Ultimate season was a success as the team was able to yet again make playoffs this season by progressing to the quarterfinals.

Solar

During the 2021-2022 school year, a long planned solar project was able to break ground and start after delayed due to Covid issues. Starting in October, and lasting through the winter and into the spring, the parking lot was torn apart and the project took place, finishing by June 2022. With the new solar panels on the roof and in the parking lot, the school's

electrical needs were subsidized. The school also obtained a newly paved parking lot out of the deal.



Transportation

In the spring of 2023, after 15 years of owning only one small school bus for school trips, The Center School purchased two full size school busses for safety reasons. These busses enabled the school to transport the entire student population to any off site location should an emergency occur at the school. Additionally, the busses allowed more freedom in scheduling both academic and rewards trips throughout the school year for the students and staff.



Alumni

In April of 2023, The Center School hosted Mr. Sam Farmer, a former student of the school from the first days of the school's existence in the 1970's. Mr. Farmer, an information technology consultant, neurodiversity community self-advocate, writer/author, public speaker and adviser for Floreo, a company that leverages virtual reality technology in teaching life skills for neurodiverse individuals, authored the book *A Long Walk Down a Winding Road: Small Steps, Challenges, & Triumphs Through an Autistic Lens* (2019). He spoke to our stakeholders about his life and experiences. At that engagement in April we gave him a copy of the 1972 Life Magazine article written about special education and The Center

Author Talk with Sam Farmer *A Long Walk Down a Winding Road*



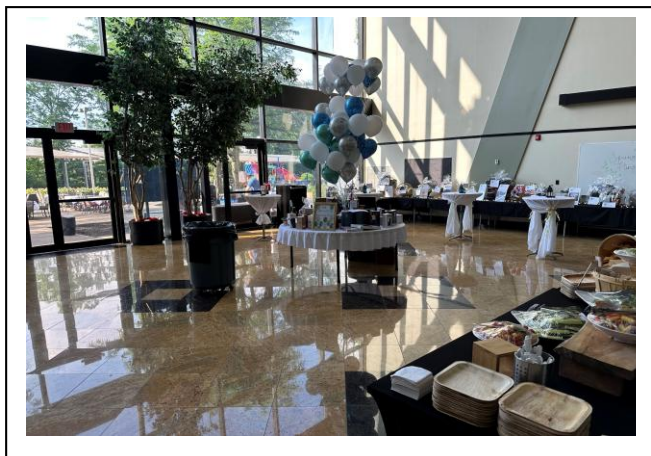
School. He never knew the article was written and responded to this surprise with an article in Autism Spectrum News October 2023.

A link to an article in Autism Spectrum News October 2, 2023 references his reunification at the school and his thoughts about that Life Magazine article.

<https://autismspectrumnews.org/autistic-lived-experience-life-magazine-labeled-me-a-bright-child-who-cant-learn/>

Fundraising

In June 2023 we held our first **Spring Fling** fundraiser at the school on the grounds. The new venue was a hit as stakeholders liked being at the school for a fundraiser.



2023-2024 School Year

Technology Upgrade

Grant for new technology

The Craft Space

In December 2023, the long planned and awaited opening of **The Craft Space** occurred. Our school had been operating a thrift store downtown Somerville for a dozen years where transition students could get retail job experience and learn social skills needed for their futures. Formerly known as Thrifts & Gifts, the store was a consignment shop offering all types of secondhand items and clothing. In 2022 ideas and plans were created by our staff, woodshop

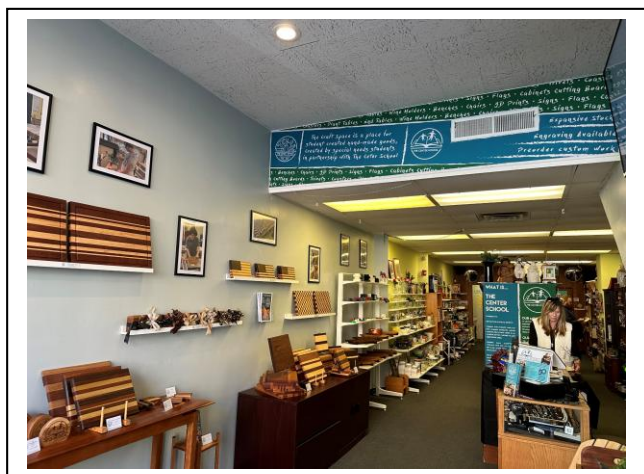
teacher Mr. Martin Dulak and computer/IT teacher Mr. Richard Ostrander, to incorporate student hand-made craft items into the sales at the store and transition the store to a fully functional student operated store.

The products, made by Center School students and to be exhibited and sold, were wooden cutting boards, furniture, ornamental items, trivets, coasters, and other special household items.

Options included several types of wood and personalization of the items using a laser etcher. Additionally, 3-D printed knick-knacks were also made and sold. The grand opening was held on December 15 and saw students, staff, and ASAH Executive Director John Mulholland, as well as other dignitaries in attendance.



The store was a hit with shoppers, and sales were fantastic. Within the next year, 2024-2025, plans were to fill out the store with other handmade crafts such as pottery and candles made by the students.



Kiln

School store

Alumni Staff Joined the School

During the 2023-2024 school year, we hired two former staff who worked at The Center School many years prior. The first was Mr. Pablo Vasquez, who had

The second was Mr. Fred Fell, who had been a counselor at the school

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Personal Communications

Jeanne Prial, March 18, 2021

Larry B. Silver, March 7, 2022