

From a Resource Teacher promoting school bridge programs.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to share with you the wonderful benefits of having a school bridge program. I am a gifted resource teacher in two elementary schools in an urban school district and have had the pleasure of working with Ms. Earlye Lee Miller for the past two years to bring bridge lessons to students in my schools. The bridge program has been well received by students, teachers and administrators alike.

At the beginning of the year, I ask the classroom teachers who work with the gifted students to identify a group of students who might benefit from the opportunity of learning to play bridge. The children that teachers choose are either gifted or high achieving students and they are all strong in math. In October or November, Ms. Miller begins meeting with the students for one-hour sessions once a week and continues to work with them for the next four months. Ms. Miller begins with very basic information such as card values and basic card games such as war and gradually adds more complex information and practice. All of this is supplemented with reading and review of a bridge textbook. After months of instruction and practice, the students play in a bridge tournament and the winners receive a trophy.

In this age of high stakes testing and accountability, bright students are at risk of stagnating. Standards of Learning (SOLs) are minimum competencies on which the high stakes tests are based and they are taught, tested and re-taught. Many of our bridge students begin the school year already having mastered these standards or only requiring an introduction to or a single teaching of the material. There is very little challenge or excitement in many of the learning experiences these children have. Bridge, however, is complex and stimulating – it pushes these students just beyond their comfort zone while engaging them in an exciting activity. The beauty of bridge is that it does provide a higher level thinking challenge, but it can also be linked to several of the SOLs – everybody is happy!

In addition to providing a much needed challenge for many of our students, I have seen other positive benefits of bridge in the schools. It is when playing bridge that I have seen some of my underachieving gifted students come to life. I have one student in particular with a high IQ score for whom teachers question his ability – he doesn't perform in class and his grades are flat. I found it fascinating to watch him play bridge, however. I could see his mind working as he focused intently on the play and used planning and strategy that Ms. Miller had not yet taught him. When challenged by bridge, this child came to life.

A classroom teacher has told me that she saw an improvement in standardized test scores for students who participated in bridge. Students have told me that they have gone home and taught their family members to play bridge. I had a student who found a bridge game online and excitedly informed me that he was playing in an international bridge game online. I now even have younger students asking when they will get to begin bridge

lessons. Since the bridge program was introduced to my elementary school students, it has expanded in my school system and has been taught in additional elementary schools as well as after school programs in middle and high school.

Amazingly, Ms. Miller has single-handedly provided the lessons on a volunteer basis for these students – at least thirteen groups over the past two years! Her expertise along with her tireless and selfless commitment to the bridge program has allowed students from diverse backgrounds to be introduced to the pleasure and the social and intellectual benefits of playing bridge. Of course, The American Contract Bridge League's generosity in providing excellent resources and incentives for this practice is also invaluable.

If your purpose for getting this information is to determine how you might make the School Bridge program even better, I have three suggestions: (1) Clone Earlye Lee Miller, (2) Provide more hands-on /visual reference items for students (*i.e.*, business card sized references or posters with essential information), (3) Create a how-to video or CD Rom that students can use between bridge classes to clarify or reinforce their understanding of key concepts and procedures.

I strongly support bridge lessons in the schools and I highly endorse Ms. Miller as a teacher of bridge. Students eagerly participate in this opportunity, and teachers have only reported positive results from the program. I feel that we are very fortunate to offer such a high quality program to students that is free of cost. It is my intention to continue to take advantage of this opportunity in the coming school years.

Sincerely,

Kim Biemann,
Gifted Resource Teacher
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