

New Fairfield Public Schools Bridge Program

Goal: To establish a comprehensive in-district pathway for students in grades 9–12 who experience significant social-emotional needs, school avoidance, and other barriers to school participation, including students who may be vulnerable to high-risk behaviors such as substance use. Across grades 9–12, the pathway will deliver integrated therapeutic interventions alongside academic instruction to promote consistent attendance, academic progress, emotional well-being, and sustained engagement with the school community. The program will also provide targeted school avoidance services for students in grades 6–8, with an emphasis on transition planning to support successful entry into high school. Through individualized supports and coordinated services, the program will foster resilience, strengthen coping and self-regulation skills, and, when appropriate, reduce the need for more restrictive educational placements.

Introduction: Bridge will operate within the district's Middle School BEST Program and High School Alternative Learning Center (ALC) as a supportive, therapeutic extension of existing services, incorporating social work supports and interventions. This structure ensures that students receive individualized care while remaining in their home district, allowing them to maintain relationships with teachers, peers, and the broader school community. By focusing on both academic continuity and emotional well-being, Bridge provides a pathway toward long-term success and greater inclusion within the school environment.

Rationale: Students with intensive social-emotional needs often experience interruptions in their education and a diminished connection to their peers and community. Out-of-district placements can exacerbate this isolation, separating students from the people and environments most familiar to them. Bridge addresses this challenge by providing in-district therapeutic services that promote stability, foster resilience, and maintain students' connections to their school community. By building on existing programs, the district can deliver individualized support to students awaiting placement or requiring more intensive services, while also offering families of outplaced students the option to consider returning to their home district. At its core, Bridge is designed to strengthen student belonging, build confidence, and help every learner find a pathway forward.

Student Population: The Bridge Program will support students in grades 9–12 with significant social-emotional needs, school avoidance, and other challenges that impact consistent school attendance, engagement, and academic success, including concerns related to substance use. In addition, students in grades 6–8 will receive school avoidance supports and transition services to facilitate a successful move to high school, with continued support as they enter ninth grade.

Location and Services: Students in grades 9–12 will access their academic instruction through the Alternative Learning Center (ALC). Bridge's therapeutic supports will be embedded within the school day and integrated alongside academic programming to promote engagement, consistency, and successful participation in school.

Staffing Request: This proposal recommends the addition of a full-time social worker to enhance the district's continuum of mental health and behavioral supports. The position will primarily focus on strengthening therapeutic services within the High School Alternative

Learning Center (ALC), supporting students experiencing school avoidance, addressing concerns related to substance use and other high-risk behaviors, providing embedded, targeted instruction in coping, self-regulation, and social-emotional skill development, and facilitating successful transitions from middle school to high school.

This position is essential to ensuring that students with significant social-emotional and behavioral needs receive timely, consistent, and high-quality support while remaining educated within their home district. The addition of a dedicated social worker will further strengthen the district's capacity to provide early intervention, promote student engagement and attendance, reduce barriers to learning, and support positive academic, behavioral, and postsecondary outcomes.

ALC & Bridge Financial Plan and Staffing Structure:

Staffing / Description	Current FTE	Proposed FTE	Change	Notes
ALC Teachers (English, Math, Social Studies, Science)	.8	.8	\$0	Small class sizes ensure individualized academic support.
Elective courses	Existing	No change	\$0	Provide access to courses often unavailable to outplaced students.
Special Education Teacher	1.0	1.0	\$0	Maintain continuity of academic support.
ALC Paraeducator	1.0	0	-\$25,197	
Social Worker	0	1.0	+\$60,900	New position dedicated to Bridge; individualized and group therapy, crisis intervention, school avoidance, substance use, and support for the MS BEST Program
Total	2.8	2.8	+\$35,703	Additional Funds Required
Out-of-district anticipated tuition transfer to Payroll			-\$35,703	26-27 Minimum anticipated cost savings (106,703) associated with serving outplaced students in-district
Total Change		0 FTE	\$0	No FTE change

Financial Benefits:

While the primary goal of Bridge is to meet the social-emotional and academic needs of students, the program is intentionally designed as a cost-avoidance and capacity-building strategy for the district.

By offering a high-quality therapeutic option in district, Bridge reduces the likelihood that students will require future out-of-district placements and allows the district to intervene earlier and more effectively. This includes addressing school avoidance through embedded, in-district supports, significantly reducing the need for external school avoidance services and consultants, which are both costly and short-term.

In addition, Bridge creates a clear pathway for students currently placed outside the district to return when appropriate, further decreasing tuition, transportation, and contracted service expenditures. Over time, this proactive approach allows the district to reinvest avoided costs into sustainable, student-centered supports that strengthen in-district capacity.

Summary:

Hiring a full-time social worker within the existing ALC structure is a financially sound and educationally impactful solution that delivers the following benefits:

- Improved student outcomes: Increased attendance, engagement, and social-emotional functioning.
- Cost savings: One position costs less than a single out-of-district placement.
- Immediate compliance: Ensures timely fulfillment of IEP requirements for students in crisis.
- Reduced out-of-district placements: Keeps students in district, resulting in significant tuition savings.
- Reduced reliance on contracted services: Decreases dependence on external school avoidance supports.
- Sustainable growth: Builds long-term district capacity for high-quality, in-district programming.