



Bridges of Silence

5770 Niagara Street #B, Commerce City, CO 80022

Grades: 6-12

Director: Lisa Benjamin

Bridges of Silence, founded in 2005 in Commerce City, serves a predominantly Hispanic community heavily populated with low income, single-parent homes and at-risk youth. Prior to opening a Hope Online Learning Center, Bridges of Silence offered after school tutoring and sign language classes to aid hearing impaired and deaf students. Still, Lisa Benjamin, Director of Bridges of Silence, believed the organization could further impact students' lives through online education.

While continuing to serve the hearing impaired, Bridges of Silence specializes in educating students with troubled school histories. Hope Online offers individualized lesson plans, developed by a Hope Online highly qualified teacher, to students at Bridges of Silence who, on average, are three to four grades behind when they enroll. The main goal at Brides of Silence is to help students to reach their grade level and progress towards graduation. Ms. Benjamin and the Bridges of Silence mentors give students one-on-one attention as students progress through their lessons.

“Complementing their academic studies, students learn life skills that they must utilize to be successful in the future,” says Ms. Benjamin. “As a result, learning doesn’t stop when students go home. Hope Online students participate in projects that cultivate real life skills, such as budgeting and parenting.

“At Bridges of Silence, nearly 80% of students stay at the Learning Center until 6:30 p.m. With such long days, we must creatively present material to cultivate interest and stimulate curiosity,” explains Ms. Benjamin. “It seems to be working—our students are making wonderful academic progress.” One student joined the program after failing 10th grade, but after two years at Hope Online, he graduated in June 2008, and is attending college in Alabama.

Ms. Benjamin credits the success of Hope Online and Bridges of Silence to a small setting with individual attention. In fact, Bridges of Silence boasts the smallest mentor to student ratio (1:4) of all Hope Online Learning Centers. “We focus on the quality of our students rather than the quantity. Using the online curriculum, the experienced Hope Online teacher Don Westman and Bridges of Silence mentors ensure that students are ready to be successful in the world after high school,” explains Ms. Benjamin. “We always award excellent progress on our recognition nights. We constantly encourage the students to pursue their educational dreams. We let them know that with hard work and dedication failure is not an option.”

Learning Center Administration

Lisa Benjamin - Director and Lead Mentor

Lisa Benjamin opened Bridges of Silence after working as a Youth Director for 18 years at Hands of Praise. Prior to her work at Bridges of Silence, Ms. Benjamin taught college courses for computer skills and computer engineering. With a passion for education, Ms. Benjamin is committed to helping local youth in the Commerce City community. A Colorado native, Ms. Benjamin received an Associates Degree in Computer Science from Red Rocks Community College.

Hope Online Teacher

Don Westman – Hope Online Teacher

Don Westman is an experienced Colorado licensed teacher who brings his passion for choice in education and his desire for students to achieve academic success to Hope Online. His extensive experience includes teaching middle school math, character education, and k-8th grade physical education. Previously, he coordinated the mathematics program for a charter school in Westminster, CO. Mr. Westman received a Bachelor of Arts in Physical Education from Black Hills State University in Spearfish, SD.