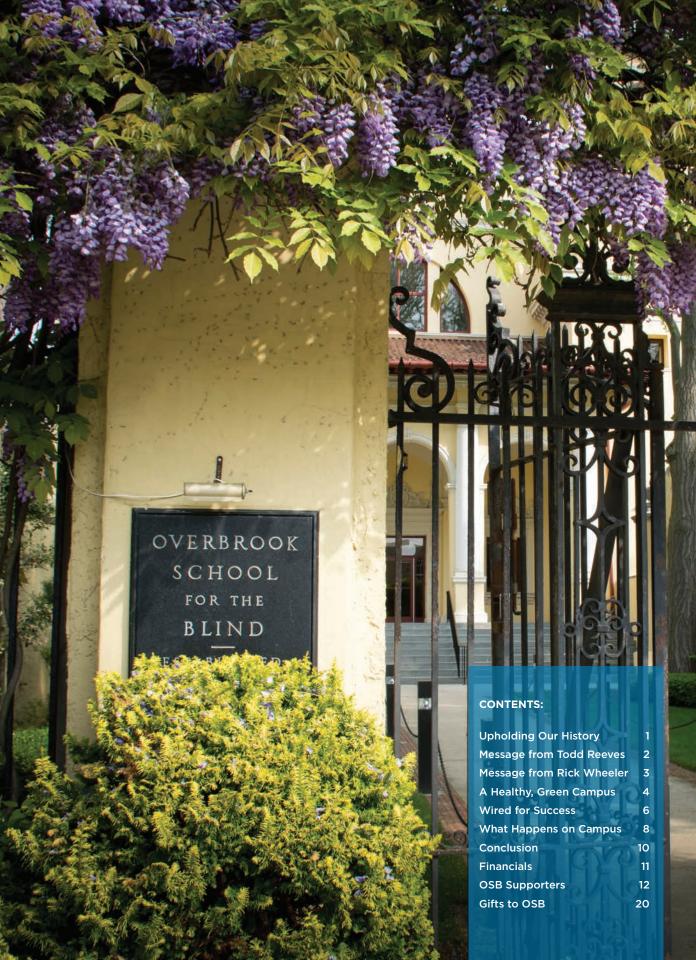
# OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND



2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT





Julius Friedlander 1841

### **Upholding Our History**

In 1832, Overbrook School for the Blind was built on resolve, courage and innovation—three traits that continue to define this organization today. Our founder, Julius Friedlander, strongly believed that people who were blind or visually impaired had the same potential as people who were sighted. And whatever obstacles he encountered in educating young students with visual impairments in the early years, he overcame with wisdom, conviction, and assistance from dedicated cohorts who shared his ambition.

185 years later, our vision hasn't changed. We are a community dedicated to educating and inspiring students with visual impairments and other challenges to achieve their highest potential. We continually promote an environment where we push beyond boundaries to create innovative services and programs, paving the way to ensure that students with visual impairments and special needs continue to have access to the services they need. Last year, we enhanced the OSB campus and Farm to Table program, expanded the School Age Itinerant program, and elevated the options available in technology for each and every one of our students.

By being mindful and committed to these ideals, we uphold our founder's dedication to students who are blind or visually impaired and their well-being.

It is this belief that brings us together and sets us apart.



Executive Director & CEO Todd Reeves, fourth in from the left

# Dear Friends:

As we complete the celebration of the 185th anniversary of Overbrook School for the Blind, I feel honored to have been newly entrusted with the leadership of an organization that is a magnet for excellence in vision. The passion to help children living with blindness, visual impairment, and other challenges, as demonstrated by the hundreds of people associated with OSB, inspires me every day.

Overbrook School for the Blind has proven time and time again that we will meet every emerging challenge with a renewed determination to promote our mission: to nurture and advance the education and well-being of children with visual impairments. Just like the young students we serve, we draw our strength and resilience from our unfailingly supportive family: OSB's Board of Trustees, staff, alumni, donors, and volunteers. Every success of our past, and every hope for our future, we owe to this exceptional community of dedicated people.

Upon this strong foundation, we build toward our vision: to become the leading educational destination for children with blindness, visual impairment, deafblindness, and other challenges. I have every confidence that we will succeed through the same visionary spirit and commitment to excellence that has sustained us for the past 185 years.

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees, thank you for a successful school year. We are proud to share this Annual Report with our Overbrook School for the Blind family and friends.

Sincerely,

Todd Reeves
Executive Director and CEO



Warwick S. Wheeler

Where did we come from? Where are we going?

Since time began, these are two questions individuals and organizations have grappled with, on both a philosophical and practical level.

At Overbrook School for the Blind, we have no doubt as to where the school and its students have been. The school's celebrated history is well documented from its founder Julius Friedlander's early vision to its most recent accomplishments as recorded in our *Towers* publication or on our OBS.org website. Each student's goals and achievements are also thoughtfully identified and meticulously updated in OSB's Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that are considered the gold standard in tracking and stimulating student progress.

Where are we going? That is a question that the Board continually addresses as we refine our strategic plan. Our search for a new Executive Director further sharpened our focus. We needed to articulate to candidates our thoughts on the school's challenges and direction while absorbing their ideas as to where they might take the school. The end result was gratifying. We have a new Executive Director, Todd Reeves, who brings enormous experience, energy and compassion to implementing a shared vision for the school. Program excellence, adaptability to a rapidly changing environment, an enhanced local, national and international profile, and creative partnerships are hallmarks of the strategic plan.

Where the school will be in five or ten years we can't exactly say. However, we can unequivocally reaffirm the school's commitment to its historic goal — namely, providing excellence in the education and care of each student associated with the Overbrook School for the Blind.

These are challenging yet exciting times. We look forward to sharing our progress.

Sincerely,

Warwick S. Wheeler
President of the Board of Trustees



# A Healthy, Green Campus



n 1832, when Julius Friedlander came to the United States to start a school for the blind, many Americans were skeptical. For years, people thought that the blind were unable to function in society. But with the help of several influential leaders from Philadelphia, Mr. Friedlander started the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, now known as Overbrook School for the Blind (OSB).

Over the years, board members took steps to secure buildings to house the school, but it wasn't until 1899 that the Rotunda building on Malvern Avenue — our present day home — was completed. The site was chosen for its proximity to the Overbrook train station, and formerly a farm, the location was surrounded by green open space, perfect for promoting good health.

In recent years, OSB has taken great strides to enhance the quality of the campus by creating a healthy learning environment with horticulture and sustainable agriculture programs, all



Students tending gardens 1910

adapted to each student's needs. The popular OSB Farm to Table program allows students to plant and cultivate their own plants, vegetables, and fruits around campus. The produce is used in the salad bar in the cafeteria and also sold at a weekly farm stand on campus.

The OSB Edible Orchard project, largely planted by OSB and Philadelphia Orchard Project volunteers, blossomed last year with the assistance of business volunteers from KPMG who planted 30 additional fruit trees on campus.

To accommodate the increasing needs of the Farm to Table program, ground was broken last year on the M. Christine Murphy Horticulture Education Center (named in memory of a former Trustee), a 1,780 square-foot, fully adaptive, accessible greenhouse that will provide a climate-controlled environment to grow crops, plants, and flowers year-round. Thanks to a generous grant from the Green Mountain Energy Sun Club, the M. Christine Murphy Horticulture Education Center will also be a LEED and NetZero Certified Building.

The M. Christine Murphy Horticulture and Education Center will help students in OSB's School to Work program gain real-life workforce skills that can result in future employment opportunities. We are equally excited for additional outcomes that will benefit the entire OSB community. With the year-round ability and space to grow crops, the goal is to produce enough yield to sustain the Student Salad Bar. We will also closely monitor the crop yield versus the fruits and vegetables that are purchased from outside vendors over a span of two years to determine if we can reduce our dependence, thanks to our home-grown produce.

echnology has impacted almost every aspect of life today, and education is no exception.



**OSB Classroom 1910** 

In some ways, education seems much the same as it has been for many years. A photo of OSB students seen here from 1910 depicts a typical lecture classroom scene. The scene is easily recognizable because of its parallels to the modern day. The teacher lectures while the students sit in rows and listen. Some of the students have books open in front of them and appear to be following along. A few look bored. Classrooms today do not look much different, though you might find modern students looking at their laptops, tablets, or smart phones instead of books. Technology

has profoundly changed education for students who are visually impaired, and OSB has always served as a catalyst for change and progress with technology. In the early 1990s, for instance, as technology was becoming a part of everyday life, OSB developed a strategic plan to put appropriate technology into the hands of every student. This plan, called Overbrook 2001, integrated technology into the classroom and provided students with the literacy of the 21st century.

Within the last year alone, OSB upgraded refreshable braille displays and introduced touch screen tablets with embedded braille displays in our classrooms. We partnered with OSMO, an award-winning game system for iPads and iPhones that is designed with reflective artificial intelligence, a technology that allows the iPad to make sense of what it sees. We presented instruction on how to use eye-gaze technology to maximize functional vision at the Assistive Technology Industry Association's annual conference. And we piloted a program with OrCam MyEye, a wearable artificial vision device that features a miniature camera that sees and recognizes what the user is viewing, whether text or a face, and then reads what it is seeing to the user via an earpiece. Two units of OrCam glasses are currently being utilized by School to Work students.

Technology is a powerful tool that can support and transform education in many ways, from making it easier for teachers to create instructional materials to enabling new ways for our students to learn and work together.



# Wired for Success





# What Happens on Campus Doesn't Just Stay on Campus



hen Julius Friedlander came to Philadelphia to establish a school for the blind, he initially taught students in his own home, and by 1839, when the number of students had grown, he rented a building on what is currently known as 20th and Race

Streets. It wasn't until 1899 that the school moved again, this time to its present day location at 6333 Malvern Avenue. The name was changed to Overbrook School for the Blind in 1946, an homage to its new neighborhood, and the school continued to grow, offering quality education to the children of the area who were blind or visually impaired.

Today, one of our fundamental goals at OSB is to provide vision services to students and families who need it regardless of where their primary placement may be. For the past three years, Overbrook School for the Blind



Classroom 1923

has collaborated with our region's school districts, charter and private schools to provide students with visual impairments the vital educational and supplemental services they need to become successful.

In order to serve as a resource for families and educators however possible, the OSB School Age Itinerant program expanded to serve a total of 34 students in the region for vision services with eight of those same students being seen for orientation and mobility services as well. Two full time vision teachers, and a part time teacher, were added to keep up with the growing list of referrals to do independent evaluations in distant communities like Lehigh County to southern New Jersey.

In addition to the School Age Itinerant program, the OSB Early Intervention Outreach program (EIO), which provides specialized services to children ages birth to five and their families, delivered services to 170 families in Philadelphia and surrounding counties. Birth to three services are typically provided in the home, and three to five community based services are provided in preschool or daycare settings.

Wherever students in our region who are visually impaired are based, either on the OSB campus or in the community, they are seen by an OSB teacher, all of whom are Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments, experts on how visual impairment affects a child's learning and development.



t Overbrook School for the Blind, we understand that students' minds are enormously varied, and we believe that effective teaching requires understanding and working with this natural diversity. Our experience confirms that all children benefit from an approach to education that takes into account their unique natures and strengths.

This perspective has evolved naturally since OSB's founding in 1832 when the goal was to create an academic environment that honored and educated the mind, body, and spirit of students who were blind and visually impaired. Today at Overbrook School for the Blind, we continue that tradition and aim to promote a continuum of educational provision that is inclusive and responsive, and provides an appropriate education for children with blindness and special educational needs.

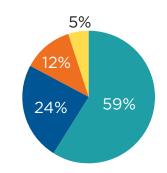




# 2016 - 2017 Financial Review

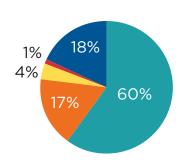
#### **OPERATING REVENUES**

State & Local Tuition	\$17,116,200
Government & Grants	7,000,300
Gifts and Private Support	3,625,900
Other Income	1,387,200
TOTAL	\$29,129,600



#### **OPERATING EXPENSES**

School Age	\$17,353,900
Preschool	5,008,600
Early Intervention	1,248,300
International Outreach	220,100
Overbrook Friedlander	5,298,700
TOTAL	\$29,129,600



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