



## MEET NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO TODD REEVES

*Towers* sat down with Todd Reeves to get to know him and his future goals for OSB.

**Q:** *You've been at OSB for exactly one month. What are your first impressions?*

**A:** My first impressions are of Overbrook's proud history and the legacy Overbrook has established for itself. In the way I phrase it, Overbrook's legacy has been one of shocking the world in big and small ways because of its history of innovation that pushes the typical boundaries of a typical school. Beyond the fact Overbrook is the third oldest school for the blind in our nation, how many schools — specialized schools like ours or otherwise — have an international program in numerous countries, assisting with the development of services to children who are blind and visually impaired within those developing countries? How many schools reach beyond their own enrolled students and provide services to others enrolled in the public schools?

As CEO, it's incumbent upon me to reclaim the legacy while looking forward to the future, finding innovative ways of creating inroads to even higher mountaintops for children within our Commonwealth who are blind and visually impaired, and in some respects, and in a humble way, continue to shock the world. I think that of the people I've met here over the course of the past month, my feeling is that they, too, are interested in those broader objectives.

**Q:** *What are you most excited about for your new role as CEO?*

**A:** I think I'm most excited about meeting the people who we serve, just to interact with students and families, because that's what always fuels the passion for everything else that we do. Unfortunately, time spent sitting behind computers and in conference rooms to do the things that are necessary to ensure our students have even better services tomorrow than they had today is unavoidable, but I like to engage with our students as much as I can. Having had the



opportunity to be here during the ESY Program, to be at the bus pickup and drop off, to see our students start the day with a smile, to drop in on classes, and to see students smile through challenging work, that's always the best part for me. Secondary to that, but just as redeeming nonetheless, is meeting the people that share the passion and are here teaching students during the summer. I think it's especially gratifying when you realize, as the CEO of Overbrook, that the people who are here teaching students in the summer made the choice to do so. They opt in. They commit. They choose to be here instead of sitting on the beach somewhere along the Jersey shore. They're here when they could be somewhere else.

**Q:** *What inspired you to get into education?*

**A:** When I was 13, I was identified as being hard of hearing, so I received special education services at that time, and that was my 'boots on the ground' experience. Before that, I had received speech therapy as a very young child in which they hadn't yet identified my hearing impairment. When it was identified in my teen years, I continued to receive services and that spurred my interest in pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Communication Disorders which is, essentially, speech language pathology, which is how it would be phrased now. My Master's Degree was in Clinical Audiology and Deaf Education. From there, I

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Dear Friends:

It is with great pride and excitement that I write this letter of introduction to you as the newly appointed Executive Director and CEO of Overbrook School for the Blind. I look forward to getting to know all of our students and working with parents, the Board of Trustees, and our educational partners in the Overbrook community.

My passion for special education and supporting the success of all students has been shaped over the past 30 years as a speech therapist, Teacher of the Deaf, attorney, principal, and superintendent. In each of my roles, I was driven to provide the most challenging educational opportunities for each child and to initiate practices that increase academic performance, self-advocacy, student involvement, self-esteem, and success for every child. Not only am I excited to begin working with your children, but I look forward to the work we will do together.

Finally, I want you to know that one of my most important goals this year is to keep the lines of communication open with you. I invite and encourage you, our students and parents, to work in partnership with me. Please do not hesitate to reach out at any time with questions, comments, and suggestions to [todd.reeves@obs.org](mailto:todd.reeves@obs.org).

My best wishes for a successful 2017-2018 school year!

Sincerely,

Todd Reeves

*Executive Director and CEO*



**HELP US GO GREEN!** If you would like to receive an electronic version of the Towers newsletter, please send in your contact information and email address to [Gloria@obs.org](mailto:Gloria@obs.org). Also, a large print version of each issue of *Towers* is posted on the Overbrook School for the Blind website at [www.obs.org](http://www.obs.org). If you wish to receive a braille copy, please contact Maryann Flack at [Maryann@obs.org](mailto:Maryann@obs.org) or call her at (215) 877-0313, ext. 256.



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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA  
Established 1832

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## MEET OSB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO TODD REEVES

became a speech therapist and Teacher of the Deaf at the Washington School for the Deaf.

**Q:** *What are your short-term and long-term goals for OSB?*

**A:** My short term goals are to become more aware of the systems in place at Overbrook and to become much more literate in the programs that are being offered to students and families. I'm taking a little bit of time just to become grounded and part of the Overbrook culture.

My longer term goals are to make sure that I am allegiant to the strategic plan, to make sure those expectations that the entire community is invested in, are front and center in the work that I will do. Beyond that, I'll be thinking of other types of programs and services that align with the strategic plan, but may not have been envisioned or advanced in its original construction. We should always consider how we can be innovative, to think of the things that have not yet been thought of. To not look around and ask why, but to dream things that never were and ask why not, which are essentially the words of Robert F. Kennedy.

**Q:** *What would you like folks to know about you?*

**A:** One thing I focus on more than most other superintendents or CEOs or directors of schools for the blind is how the student population, how the school itself, can serve the community. Many other directors orient their thinking to how others can serve the school. What I have found is that if you can change the perception of a school and its



Todd Reeves joined students and staff to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Converse Sneakers. Converse makes accessible sneakers.

student population, and can focus on how students can serve others, there is a different perception of how that individual can contribute to the business, the workplace, the organization, and ultimately, to society upon graduation.

**Q:** *What is one surprising thing you learned about OSB?*

**A:** One surprising thing I learned about Overbrook was on a tour of the campus, which took about three hours and I had only seen about a quarter of the campus. I learned that the cupola on top of the main rotunda building was originally envisioned as an illuminated beacon of some sort, because the original construction documents left behind by the workers used the term 'lantern' to describe the cupola. It sets in my mind how Overbrook was envisioned as a place that beckons people to it and serves to light the way.

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## CAMPUS CONSTRUCTION

Beneath protective scaffolding, crews are completing the roofing and stucco exterior of White Hall and Friedlander Hall this fall. It's all part of the multi-year project going on campus-wide to include new tile roofing, new gutters, and new flashing on OSB's historic buildings. After White and Friedlander Halls are finished, the stucco exterior work will move on to the west cloister and is projected to be finished by next summer.



Photo: Frank Irzyk

# NEW BEGINNINGS



## Welcome New Members of the OSB Board of Trustees and Board Committee Members

(Back row from L to R): Daniel Mahoney, Budget and Audit Committee; Brad Bartkowski, Facilities Committee; Susan Neumann, Board of Trustees and Budget and Audit Committee; Crystal Casmirri, Board of Trustees and Instruction Committee; OSB Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves; John Milne, Development Committee

(Front row from L to R): Edward J. McGinn, Jr., Board of Trustees and Facilities Committee; Robert Marcantuono, Board of Trustees and Budget and Audit Committee

### NEW BOARD MEMBERS

**EDWARD J. MCGINN, JR.**

Mr. McGinn is Chair of the Construction Litigation Practice Group with the law firm of Marshall, Dennehey, Warner, Coleman & Goggin which focuses on the defense of personal injury claims in matters involving Construction Accidents, Product Liability, General Casualty matters.

**SUSAN NEUMANN**

Ms. Neumann is Vice President of Accounting at Smart Sand, Inc. in Yardley where she is responsible for the accounting, tax and financial reporting functions of the \$60 million revenue publicly-traded company.

**CRYSTAL CASMIRRI**

Ms. Casmirri is President of Sequoia Seeds Inc. Early Intervention Services in Havertown which provides families with evidenced based therapeutic and educational intervention services.

**ROBERT MARCANTUONO**

Mr. Marcantuono is Chief Financial Officer of the Germantown Friends School (GFS) where he is responsible for the leadership, oversight, and stewardship for all aspects of GFS's financial resources.



Photo: Michael Mansor

## Welcome New OSB Staff Members

Top Row (left to right): Jhahleel Rowtham — ParaEducator Substitute, Maribeth Scherneck — Speech Therapist

Middle Row (left to right): Brittany Larkin — Teacher in Early Childhood, Katie Davis — Teacher in Early Childhood, Amanda Bear — Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Staci Szymanski - Teacher in Middle School

Bottom Row (left to right): Laren Simpson — Teacher in Elementary Program, Rose Yanders — School Aged Itinerant Teacher



## Welcome New OSB Student Council Officers

(left to right): President — Janna T., Secretary — Shadirah W., Treasurer — Tierra H., Vice President — Tamir T.

# THE 2017 OVERBROOK EXPERIENCE

Over 180 friends and supporters of OSB experienced “A Day In The Life” of students who are visually impaired or blind during the Fourth Annual Overbrook Experience Dinner on October 5.

“I’d like to ask everyone to close their eyes for a moment,” OSB High School teacher Eva Worsley began her after-dinner remarks. “If I asked you what you see right now, some of you might say darkness and some of you might say nothing. But if I ask my colleagues what they see, they’d answer opportunity.” Worsley was one of three OSB teachers — joined by Middle School teacher Vicky Stough and School to Work teacher Andrea Dasch — who helped to better connect Overbrook Experience Dinner guests with OSB’s 185 year-old Mission.

Arriving guests were greeted in the Rotunda by a classical guitar quartet made up of two OSB students. The cocktail hour in the west cloister featured a beer garden complete with locally-sourced offerings from some of the best breweries in the region, including Moss Mill Brewing Company, River Horse Brewing Company, and Conshohocken

Brewing Company. Guests could also purchase a distinctive bottle from the Wine Wall and bid on silent auction items like Philadelphia sports packages, gift baskets, hand crafted home decorations, and student artwork.

Guests were welcomed by OSB Board of Trustees President Warwick S. Wheeler, and Development Committee Chair and Board Trustee Emmeline VanderZwaag, who introduced the evening’s speaker, Todd Reeves, Overbrook’s new Executive Director and CEO.

After a tented dinner on the west lawn, “A Day In the Life,” a compelling video presentation set to a very familiar tune highlighted OSB’s mission, teachers, campus, and above all, student body.

More than \$98,000 was raised at the Overbrook Experience Dinner for OSB’s mission and student programs.

Special thanks to the Overbrook Experience Committee for making this year’s dinner so memorable, and to the more than 30 OSB staffers who volunteered their time to ensure that the event ran smoothly.



1: Guests enjoyed a cocktail reception in the West Cloister 2: OSB Board of Trustee Member Robert Pratter (on right) had some fun with guests Andy and Lorraine Audet at the Selfie Station 3: OSB teachers Andrea Dasch, Vicky Stough, and Eva Worsley presented during the Dinner 4: OSB Board of Trustee Member Bryant Greene bids on an item during the live auction

# OSB'S AGENTS OF THE SHIELD

Photo: Samantha McGovern



Students in the Early Childhood program proudly display their new shields.

By Christine Wozniak & Samantha McGovern, OSB  
Orientation and Mobility Specialists

For young children who are blind or visually impaired, traveling safely indoors and outdoors can be challenging. Teaching a child to protect his face when walking through open space or when following walls or furniture with his hands can be difficult, as often they do not see and/or anticipate danger. Therefore, self protection is not an automatic reaction and children must be taught to position their arms protectively.

Upper body/forearm protective technique is one of many basic skills taught for traveling safely indoors and outdoors. This technique involves raising one arm to shoulder height and bending it in a slightly greater than 90-degree angle with the palm facing away from the child's face. Some students have difficulties performing or maintaining this position and are taught adapted methods.

When asking students to use the upper body/forearm protective technique, functional language such as, "Arms out in front," may be used. More commonly, students at Overbrook School for the Blind hear the phrase, "Use your bumpers." Though a student may eventually learn what is expected when they hear "arms out in front" and "use your bumpers", these phrases do not provide a concrete understanding of what the child is to do. For example, a student may place his arms out in front of him below shoulder height and wider than shoulder width. This action would leave the student vulnerable to corners and open doors.

Due to the abstract nature of the current phrases and the need for consistency in language, the Orientation and Mobility Department began to brainstorm new verbal prompts

that would increase student understanding of expectations. After much thought about which word or phrase would be most succinct and concrete, shield was accepted by the group. While it does seem like a mature word for a very young child, it actually isn't too much of a stretch given that children gain exposure to this word in many popular movies, books, and TV shows such as *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Thus, we began to trial the word shield with some of the Early Childhood students. With help from classroom staff, the students were introduced to the purpose of a shield and various shield designs. The students involved in the experiment created their own personal shields during art class which allowed them to manipulate a tangible object that can be used like one's forearm in the upper protective technique.

This fall, many students have tested out their shields with their Orientation and Mobility Specialists. Additional opportunities for the students to practice the upper protective technique during playtime and functional travel time are in the works. There are plans to expand the shield project to students in other programs on campus.



Brendan R. tries his new shield with Orientation and Mobility Specialist Christine Wozniak.

# HAPPENINGS AT OSB

Photo: Helene VanBernum



**A large, green, furry creature**, otherwise known as the Phillie Phanatic, visited students from the Early Childhood Program this summer. The visit was part of the "Philly Fun Week" theme in the Extended School Year Program.

**An ensemble of musicians** from the renowned Philadelphia Orchestra performed a particularly meaningful and creative program for the entire school community in September. The concert was part of the Orchestra's We're H-E-A-R Week, a series of inclusive music programs to reduce barriers for all students with various challenges.

**Blindness Awareness Month** was recognized throughout the month of October on the OSB campus. Organized to help people understand the realities of living without sight, Blindness Awareness Month includes White Cane Day and World Sight Day, a global effort to raise awareness about braille, low vision, eye care, and more. White awareness ribbons were worn throughout the month by OSB staff to Keep the Blind in Mind.

**Back by popular demand**, OSB Teacher of students with Visual Impairments Jim Palmer and OSB Choir Director Christopher Sapienza will be singing in the choir for the world-famous tenor, Andrea Bocelli, on December 8. Mr. Jim will also be singing in The Philly Pops Choir during their holiday concerts.

**Congratulations** to OSB Elementary Teacher Lee Stough and his students and helpers who created a spectacular garden on the OSB campus this year. His garden was selected by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society as a Garden of Distinction in this year's Gardening and Greening Contest. This is a great honor as a few hundred gardens entered the contest this year.



(left to right) OSB student Savannah M., ParaEducator Roxanne Scott, OSB student Jason A., and OSB Teacher Lee Stough

**Come wrap yourselves** in the warm sounds of winter as the OSB Music Department — the Encore Singers, Mixed Choir, Mixed Ensemble, and Bell Choir — presents Winter Lullaby on December 7 at 7 p.m. in the OSB Auditorium.



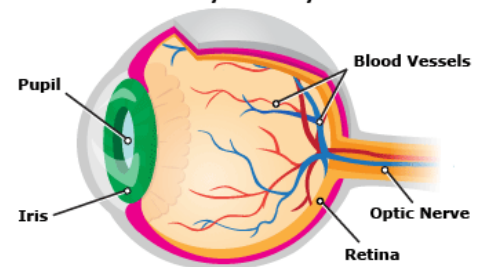
## Insight ...information about eye conditions and diseases that can affect a child's vision

Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) is an eye disease associated with premature babies. It causes abnormal blood vessels to grow in the retina, the layer of nerve tissue in the eye that enables us to see. This growth can cause the retina to detach from the back of the eye, leading to reduced vision or blindness. Some cases of ROP are mild and correct themselves, but others require surgery to prevent vision loss or blindness. Surgery involves using a laser or other means to stop the growth of the abnormal blood vessels, making sure they don't pull on the retina.

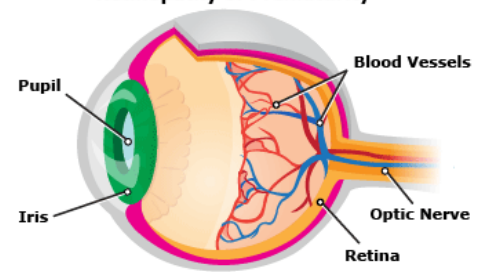
Because there are varying degrees of ROP, the surgical approach used can differ for each case. ROP can stop or reverse itself at any point, so it often resolves as the baby grows. Sometimes, the disease may progress to cause scarring, which pulls the retina away from the rest of the eye. ROP has no signs or symptoms. The only way to detect it is through an eye examination by an ophthalmologist.

For more information, visit [www.ropard.org](http://www.ropard.org).

### Anatomy of the Eye



### Retinopathy of Prematurity



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# 185TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR



**You could say we celebrated OSB's 185th Anniversary year with pomp and flair, OSB style!**

Throughout this milestone year, OSB students and staff wore red and white with pride. We paid tribute to our founder, Julius Friedlander, on OSB History Day. We ceremonially broke ground for our greenhouse, the M. Christine Murphy Horticulture Education Center. We buried a time capsule. And, everywhere you looked on campus, there was the number 185.

From artwork in the hallways, floats in the Kappen Aquatic Center, flowerpots in the gardens, and even muffins in the lunchroom, the number 185 appeared to remind us all that Overbrook School for the Blind has made a difference for students who are visually impaired for 185 years.

A great big thank you to everyone on staff who helped make 185 a fun number for each and every one of our students this year.

**We're already looking forward to our 200th anniversary!**