Autobiography of Renee McErlean

My name is Renee McErlean. I graduated from LaSalle University in the year 2000 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree and certifications in both Elementary and Special Education. Immediately after graduation, I began teaching in an autistic support classroom at Bankbridge Regional School, which is part of Gloucester County Special Services School District. I educated students with autism ranging in age from nine to twelve years old from 2000-2005. I taught both academic and vocational skills, as well as social and daily living skills. In addition, I wrote, choreographed and directed four class plays in which all of my students participated. Each student narrated, sang, danced and assisted in the set creation. Proudly, I was also awarded a monetary grant to begin a community-based instruction program for Gloucester County Special Services. After the initial year, I expanded the program to include all elementary classrooms dedicated to students with autism and multiple disabilities. Finally, I was nominated for Teacher of the Year in 2005 for my dedication to my students and exceptional teaching methodology.

In 2005, I was married to my wonderful husband, Sean, and embarked on a new educational journey. I broadened my teaching experience by continuing my career in the Central Bucks School District. I taught students with autism in seventh to ninth grade at Tamanend Middle School from 2005 until 2010. I continued to teach academic, vocational, social and daily living skills. During my career at Tamanend, I expanded upon both the vocational and job skills program and the Reverse Inclusion Program. In addition to teaching students with autism, I coached Tamanend’s Varsity Cheerleading squad from 2005-2008. I led my team to three undefeated seasons, as well as, securing two National Championship titles.

In 2009, I completed my graduate coursework. I received a Masters of Science Degree in Education from Gratz College. I graduated with the highest of honors and a 4.0 grade point average. My thesis is published, and it is titled, The Effects of Reverse Inclusion Involving Students with Autism.

In 2010, I joined the Bridge Valley Elementary School family. I taught students with autism in grades three through six from 2010-2018. I helped to create a program that assists in the transition of students with autism from elementary school to middle school.

During the 2018-2019 school year, I enhanced my teaching experiences by teaching students with autism in first grade. I continued to provide instruction in all of the key areas.

While at Bridge Valley, I was the head of the Autism Awareness Committee. Each year since 2005 during the month of April, I organize an autism fact sheet. A fact about autism is shared each day during morning announcements. I also give students in grades K-6 the opportunity to ask me questions about autism. I answer each question individually in order to help spread awareness and acceptance. Moreover, I create autism awareness bulletin boards and a murals symbolizing each student and staff member’s dedication to learning about autism and spreading autism awareness and acceptance. I also help to organize “Light it up Blue for Autism” on World Autism Day from 2012-2018. Additionally, my students have helped to make over 1,000 autism awareness ribbons for each student and staff member to wear throughout the month of April. In 2016, I organized the first annual Bridge Valley Cook-Off and Dessert Silent Auction! All donations collected throughout the month of April is donated to Autism Cares Foundation. Both our 3rd cook-off and silent auction were a success! This activity not only help to fundraise money for a scholarship fund, but it also continues to build upon the solid foundation of love, acceptance and awareness at Bridge Valley.

Most importantly, in 2013, Lindsay Smith and I wrote, directed and produced a peer training and Autism Awareness video titled, “Awareness is Growing: A Guide to Accepting and Understanding my Friend with Autism.” This video has helped to educate not only the students of BVE but also students throughout the district, teachers, administrators, and community members. The private youtube link for the video is [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs\_gfqf\_ZAQ](https://webmail.cbsd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=7e3b273a14ae489d8f415fe4cbfe0b30&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fwatch%3fv%3dRs_gfqf_ZAQ). The video continues to have a positive impact on communities across the country including nearby communities in Bucks County, as well as, California and North Carolina.

Lindsay and I also presented a workshop titled, “Integrating Technology into Social Skills Instruction and General Education Peer Training Activities for Students with Limited Language” at the Bucks County Autism Support Coalition’s Autism Conference in 2013.

I joined the Jamison Elementary School Family during the 2019-2020 school year by teaching students with autism in grades fourth, fifth and sixth who are included in their general education classes. I continue to enjoy collaborating with the general education teachers at Jamison and working as a team. I also strive to create a comfortable classroom where each student thrives and achieves success and feels good about themselves. In addition, I feel that confidence is essential to the learning process. I help each student grow independently and confidently with pride and respect.

Personally, I enjoy spending time with my husband and three amazing children. I have a beautiful daughter named Madison. She is a friendly fifteen-year-old and loves crew. I also have two sons. My son, Sean, is a creative thirteen-year-old who loves singing, building Legos and playing basketball. My son, Ryan, is an energetic, sweet six-year-old! He loves playing baseball, riding his quad, and swimming! We also have a gigantic puppy named, Lincoln😊 He is a lovable, cuddly Bernadoodle. I love and enjoy every moment I spend with my family. I enjoy going to the beach, going for walks, playing games, reading books and participating in organized community activities with them. I love every minute I spend with them😊

I am dedicated to both my family and my school family. I strive to be the best that I can be in all aspects of my life☺