

Bridgeport Public Schools

District Profile

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| Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size): | 319 |
| Number of Schools: | 34 |
| Number of Students: | 21,722 |
| Number of Teachers: | 1,423 |
| Annual Budget: | \$196 million |

Superintendent: Dr. John J. Ramos, Sr. became superintendent of the Bridgeport Public Schools in June 2005. He previously served as deputy commissioner of education programs at the Connecticut State Department of Education and as superintendent of the Watertown Public Schools in Connecticut. During his career as an educator, Ramos has also held the positions of assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, principal and program director.

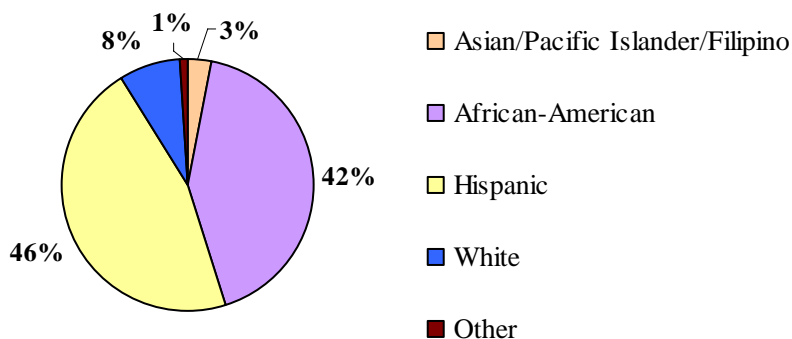
Governance: Nine-member school board, nominated by political party and elected for four-year staggered terms.

Teachers Unions: Bridgeport Education Association
Connecticut Education Association

Student Characteristics

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| Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Lunch: | 95 % |
| Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners: | 10 % |

Student Demographics



Student Achievement

Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) demonstrated student achievement gains as evidenced by publicly available data collected and analyzed by MPR Associates, Inc., a leading education research consulting firm. Among the reasons that BPS stood out among large urban school districts:

- **Greater overall performance.** In 2006, Bridgeport *outperformed other districts in Connecticut serving students with similar income levels* in reading and math at all grade levels: elementary, middle and high school, using The Broad Prize methodology.
- **Greater subgroup performance.** In 2006, Bridgeport's *low-income, African-American and Hispanic students outperformed their peers in similar Connecticut districts* in reading and math at all grade levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- **Greater overall improvement.** Bridgeport *showed greater improvement than other districts in Connecticut serving students with similar income levels* in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- **Greater subgroup improvement.**
 - Bridgeport's *low-income students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Connecticut districts* in reading and math at all grade levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
 - *Bridgeport's African-American students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Connecticut districts* in elementary and high school reading and math, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
 - *Bridgeport's Hispanic students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Connecticut districts* in math at all grade levels, and in elementary and middle school reading, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
 - Bridgeport has been *more successful than the state average in increasing the percentage of African-American, Hispanic and low-income students in the most advanced level of proficiency* in elementary and middle school math.
 - Bridgeport also has been *more successful than the state average in increasing the percentage of African-American students in the most advanced level of proficiency* in elementary and high school reading.
 - In addition, Bridgeport has been *more successful than the state average in increasing the percentage of low-income students in the most advanced level of proficiency* in elementary school reading and in high school math.
- **Closing achievement gaps.**
 - Bridgeport *narrowed the achievement gap between the district's Hispanic students and the state average for white students* in reading and math at all grade levels.
 - In addition, Bridgeport *narrowed achievement gaps between the district's low-income students and the state average for non-low-income students* in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading.

- Bridgeport also *narrowed achievement gaps between its African-American students and the state average for white students* in elementary, middle and high school math and in elementary reading. For example, between 2003 and 2006, Bridgeport narrowed the gap between its African-American students and the state’s average for white students in high school math by 9 percentage points.

Key District Policies and Practices

SchoolWorks, an education consulting firm based in Beverly, Mass., collected and analyzed evidence of Bridgeport Public Schools’ (BPS) policies and practices affecting teaching and learning. This qualitative analysis included a site visit, hundreds of interviews and analysis of extensive documentation. The criteria for evaluation, available at www.broadprize.org/TBPSchoolWorksQualityCriteria.pdf, are grounded in research-based school and district practices found to be effective in three key areas: teaching and learning, district leadership and operations and support systems. BPS demonstrated the following effective policies and practices:

Teaching and Learning

Research shows that effective teaching is the primary factor contributing to high levels of student achievement. In BPS, a comprehensive K-8 curriculum in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, a balanced literacy approach, a district-developed quarterly assessment system and instructional leadership at the school level are promoting strong teaching and learning in the district.

Curriculum

The Bridgeport Public Schools has a comprehensive written curriculum that contains the essential skills and knowledge expected for students in grades K-8, and the district provides supplemental materials to support the implementation of the curriculum. At the elementary level, there is evidence to indicate the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity. Curriculum documents are updated online and reviewed in five-year cycles.

- The K-8 curriculum in ELA and mathematics is aligned to the Connecticut curriculum framework. The curriculum outlines the essential questions, and pacing guides contain the proficient student “behaviors” and “assessment expectations” to guide content delivery. The curriculum is stored online in the district’s e-curriculum system.
- In grades K-6, principals and teachers uniformly reported consistent use of curriculum documents and core programs to plan and sequence instruction. The district’s comprehensive literacy plan provides teachers with an overview of the skills that need to be taught within a nine-week period in order to assist with pace of instruction. At the elementary level, Bridgeport uses Harcourt Trophies materials and textbooks to teach reading and ELA.
- Several programs and related textbooks are used to guide mathematics instruction. Saxon Math is used in grades K-2, Harcourt Math Advantage Metro Voyages in grades 3-5 and the Connected Mathematics Program (CMP) in grades 6-8. School leaders and district administrators reported that the use of a core program has increased fidelity of implementation and has also provided a structured resource for new teachers to follow.
- The district regularly reviews the K-8 curriculum. Each summer, a team of central office staff, coaches and teachers meet to review curriculum documents. Curriculum reviews are also used to identify

additional resources that might be used to supplement the curriculum. Bridgeport’s online e-curriculum allows for updates to occur in “real time” so that teachers district-wide have immediate access to modifications. Bridgeport reviews its alignment with state standards every five years on a staggered basis, which coincides with the state’s review of its framework.

Instruction

The adoption of a balanced literacy approach in Bridgeport several years ago resulted in the effective use of instructional strategies to support student learning. Intervention programs exist to support struggling students; the type of intervention, however, varies across the district, as schools decide what is most appropriate given their students’ needs.

- The balanced literacy approach incorporates a variety of instructional strategies to teach reading, including extensive use of center-based activities—students working in small groups on varied learning tasks, direct instruction, guided practice for students, independent reading, as well as thinking maps and various visual cues posted to assist students in the learning process. The district requires two 90-minute blocks of literacy instruction. District administrators reported that this approach to literacy instruction has been very well-received and effective, and as a result, similar instructional approaches are beginning to be used in mathematics.
- The selection of intervention programs for students struggling in both ELA and mathematics is a school-based decision; there are no district-mandated programs. However, district content directors and curriculum specialists preview and pre-approve the intervention program options.
- Most schools provide one-to-one and/or group tutoring programs during and after school as an additional support for struggling students. This year, the district adopted the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) to address some behavioral, morale and climate issues that have persisted in Bridgeport. Preliminary reports from teachers, social workers and district administrators indicate the results of PBIS have been positive.

Assessment

District-created quarterly assessments have increased the use of data to guide instructional decisions. The district’s online assessment management system offers teachers and school leaders immediate access to assessment results and analyses.

- The district has developed formative quarterly assessments that are aligned with the curriculum pacing guides in grades 3-8. These assessments are comprised of former test questions from the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), as well as questions developed internally by district staff and coaches. In the future, Bridgeport plans to make the online quarterly benchmarks available for all grades.
- Quarterly assessment data reports “drill down” to schools, classroom and individual levels. At the elementary school level in particular, leadership and data teams analyze data to determine individual student strengths, areas for improvement, student groupings and differentiation strategies for students who need further interventions to master content to state standards. Teachers meet both horizontally (i.e., by grade level) and vertically (i.e., by content area) to discuss assessment data and guide instructional decisions.
- A district-built assessment management system provides immediate, real-time data that can be analyzed by standard, strand and skill for individual students, as well as for student groups. The assessment management system provides 15 to 20 different types of reports and analyses.

Instructional Leadership

The district makes a number of personnel available to support the teaching and learning in schools.

- Instructional leaders at each school consist of the principal and school leadership teams. The formation of the school leadership teams is due, in large part, to the district's participation in recent years in the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning (IFL), an instructional reform philosophy designed to bridge research and practice, through training in learning processes, principles of instruction, effective school leadership and district reform designs.
- All elementary and middle schools have one numeracy (mathematics) coach and at least one literacy coach. Some schools have two or even three literacy coaches. Coaches serve as a primary source of support for assessment, instruction and identification of instructional resources. The number of coaches each school receives is based on student enrollment and the needs of the student population.
- District directors and departmentalized curriculum specialists (e.g., math, reading, special education, ELL, etc.) provide an additional layer of content-area support to schools. These specialists assist teachers with curriculum design, instruction, modeling and coaching. Curriculum specialists are deployed by central office district directors based on need, and they spend the majority of their time in the schools.

District Leadership

District governance and leadership must support the essential work of teaching and learning in schools. To communicate and realize a clear mission for student learning, research shows that district leadership must set clear strategic goals and hold the organization accountable for implementation. Bridgeport has a clear mission that focuses on student success, strong values statements that include a commitment to community involvement, a strategic plan that establishes high expectations, and a five-year vision for progress that holds the organization accountable for improving teaching and student learning.

Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Planning

A unique feature of the Bridgeport mission is a focus on the importance of the community's role in raising student achievement. Many Bridgeport stakeholders noted that increased collaboration has been central to improved district practices and decision-making and to ensuring a widespread commitment to the Bridgeport mission.

- Bridgeport stakeholders have a shared understanding of and commitment to the district's mission and value statements, which literally recognize the important role the community plays.
- In 2006, under the direction of the superintendent, a citywide summit engaging more than 500 Bridgeport residents, parents, district and school staff, students and state and city representatives was held to gather input to develop the mission statement and the strategic plan. As a result, district and school staff reported that community and district expectations are much clearer now than they had been under previous administrations.
- The strategic plan's mission and value statements are based on a five-year vision for progress, including five student performance objectives that set high expectations for district performance. Student performance objectives are further defined by 10 strategies and related outcomes that indicate how the

district and the supporting community will accomplish the objectives. In addition, the strategic plan provides a cost-benefit analysis for each outcome.

- Ongoing district-community partnerships, such as those described below, bring life to the mission.

Operations and Support Systems

Research shows that the design and implementation of district operations and systems directly impact how well teaching and learning are supported. In BPS, learning and growth opportunities for students and teachers have increased through programs to grow the capacity of leadership and teachers, partnerships within the community and professional development.

Human Resources

Bridgeport supports the internal development of school administrators, as well as the growth of new teachers in the district.

- The Bridgeport Intern Program provides 125 hours of training to aspiring principals, assistant principals and curriculum specialists through a year-long program. Training activities include seminars, conferences and opportunities to work with a mentor in the school setting. Human resources staff reported that 60 to 70 percent of the district's current administrative staff have participated in the program. After attending the intern program, administrators who are placed in schools continue to work with a mentor for at least a year.
- The district has a comprehensive, two-year induction program for new teachers. Bridgeport's Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program has been recognized by the Connecticut state department of education for its excellence. The BEST program includes: a week-long orientation; an assigned mentor who has gone through extensive training; a resource manual that guides the work of the new teacher and the mentor; and after-school roundtables and the completion of an exit portfolio. In addition to a mentor, second-year teachers are assigned a portfolio coach to work on lesson design, lesson diversification and instruction.

Organizational Structures and Management

Central to its mission, Bridgeport maintains a range of community and grant partnerships that provide a wealth of additional services to its students. Examples include:

- The *Bridgeport Public Education Fund*, which provides: 1) grants to teachers to support project-based learning work in the classrooms; 2) mentoring and college assistance programs to help students get ready for college and attain a college degree; and 3) initiatives to support community engagement through public forums and conversations.
- The *Bridgeport Regional Business Council* partners with the city and the state of Connecticut to create an economic development vision for the City of Bridgeport. The Council has supported the district by conducting operation and management reviews and by participating in the strategic plan development.
- The *Regional Youth/Adult Substance Abuse Project (RYASAP)* provides student assistance grants to improve school climate. RYASAP also sponsors the Youth as Resources program that partners students with local community organizations.

- The *Greater Bridgeport Area Foundation* has provided the district with more than \$250,000 in student scholarships and \$50,000 to support cultural enrichment activities. The foundation has collaborated with the district to bring Teach For America to Bridgeport.
- The *School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport* increases volunteerism in the schools through reading enrichment, tutoring and mentoring. More than 500 volunteers read to Bridgeport students on a regular basis, and 125 to 150 volunteers tutor students during the school day and after school.
- Ten centers in Bridgeport schools provide multidisciplinary services for students and families in a clinical setting, including health care, dental care, psychiatry and mental health services, as well as outreach counseling for students and families.
- A recent district move toward full inclusion of special education students has allowed students with disabilities access to the general curriculum.

Support for Teaching and Learning

Professional development in Bridgeport is data-driven and designed to improve the quality of teaching.

- At the district level, data from both formative and summative student assessments guides the development of professional development activities. For example, district demographic data (e.g., attendance, behavior, etc.) drove the decision to train teachers to incorporate PBIS to improve school culture. In addition, district administrators report that district-wide professional development is rolled out when new initiatives are implemented.
- The primary model used in the district to train teachers is a turnkey, or train-the-trainer, model. School-based coaches, district curriculum specialists and teacher representatives are provided a range of training throughout the school year to bring back to their schools, where they will train other teachers.
- A variety of professional development activities also exists at the school level. Principals reported they have autonomy to select school-based professional development activities to target specific staff and school needs.