



Overview of the District

Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size):	291
Number of Schools:	36
Number of Students:	21,722
Number of Teachers:	1,421
Annual Budget:	\$162.0 million

Superintendent: John J. Ramos, Sr., Ed.D., was named superintendent in April 2005. Previously, he served as deputy commissioner for educational programs and services for the Connecticut State Department of Education, and he also served as superintendent of the Watertown Public Schools from 2002-2004.

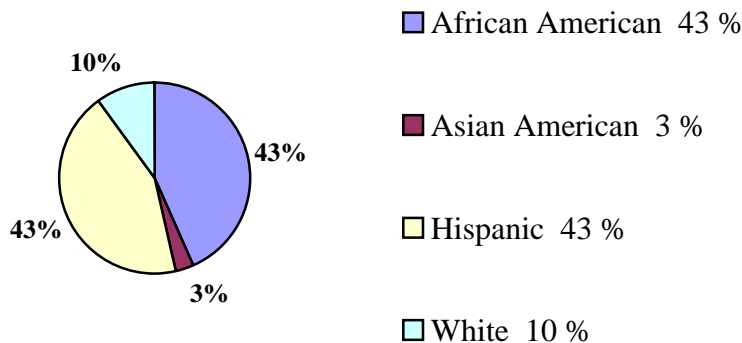
Governance: Nine-member board elected for four-year terms during staggered elections.

Teachers Unions: Bridgeport Education Association
Connecticut Education Association

Student Characteristics

Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Lunch:	96 %
Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners:	12 %

Student Demographics



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Consistent High Performance while Reducing Achievement Gaps across Ethnic Groups

- ✓ In 2005, Bridgeport performed at high levels in mathematics and reading among demographically similar districts in Connecticut. Although Bridgeport serves the highest percentage of low-income students in Connecticut, Bridgeport students outperformed in six out of six areas (elementary, middle and high school reading and math) using The Broad Prize methodology.
- ✓ In 2005, Bridgeport's low-income, African-American and Hispanic students also outperformed their peers in other Connecticut districts in six out of six areas.
- ✓ Between 2002 and 2005, African-American students showed greater improvement than their peers in other Connecticut districts in six out of six areas.
- ✓ Bridgeport has reduced the achievement gap for Hispanic students when compared to their white counterparts in elementary, middle and high school reading. For example, between 2002 and 2005, the Hispanic achievement gap closed seven percentage points in elementary reading and 10 percentage points in high school reading. In addition, Bridgeport has closed the Hispanic achievement gap faster than the state average in elementary and high school reading and high school math.
- ✓ Bridgeport has also reduced the achievement gap for African-American students when compared to their white counterparts in elementary and high school reading and math. For example, between 2002 and 2005, the African-American achievement gap closed 11 percentage points in elementary reading and five percentage points in high school math. In addition, Bridgeport has closed the African-American achievement gap faster than the state average in elementary and high school reading and math.

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ Starting with the state standards of the Connecticut Framework, groups of teachers and district content supervisors meet annually and on an "as needed" basis to discuss what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. Once the group has reached a consensus, they articulate grade-level expectations in quarterly pacing guides. These guides are updated regularly, and teachers can access them on the district's intranet.

- ✓ Building from the curriculum pacing guides, Bridgeport has worked with an outside vendor to create a web portal for internal assessments. The district started with grades 3, 5, 6 and 8 and will add grades 4 and 7 in the coming year. Data from these assessments feeds directly into an online system, allowing teachers, principals and district administrators to see in real time how students performed on any given standard.
- ✓ To ensure that the curriculum is correctly implemented in all schools, Bridgeport trains all coaches, principals and teachers before introducing new curriculum materials and provides follow-up training throughout the year. District teams monitor implementation through data analysis and school walk-throughs. They look for whether classroom lessons and materials are consistent with the objective being taught, monitor student learning and assess the classroom environment. Each team discusses these visits with other teams to identify the district's common strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ In response to an analysis of student performance data, Bridgeport developed a Comprehensive Literacy Plan for grades 3 through 6. The plan, which is designed to provide a common language and philosophy of teaching literacy and to increase literacy skills, is in its third year of implementation. The literacy objectives are firmly anchored in the Connecticut Framework state standards and have been recently aligned with the newly adopted Harcourt Trophies program.
- ✓ Bridgeport is in the process of developing an all-encompassing accountability plan to address its achievement gaps, based on information received from various recent audits, as well as feedback from the community.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ To address its high administrative turnover, the district has developed a “grow your own” program for teachers who are aspiring school leaders. The year-long program provides targeted training and job-shadowing opportunities. Program acceptance is based on two recommendations from current supervisors, a completed administrative certificate, five years of successful teaching experience and a writing sample. Those accepted into the program participate in a number of reflection activities and seminars and then develop and present a plan for improving student and teacher learning. More than 50 percent of the participants have been hired as administrators.
- ✓ Newly hired principals in Bridgeport are paired with a trained mentor for their first two years. The district also hosts roundtables where new principals can discuss administrative topics like district policies and practices, evaluation and supervision of staff, budget planning and how to manage support services. The roundtables also allow new principals to share their experiences and learn how others are dealing with similar issues.

- ✓ Bridgeport recently revamped its personnel evaluations to include induction and growth cycle components for both principals and teachers so that the skills of new and experienced personnel are evaluated differently. The new evaluation design is an outgrowth of training from the state, visits to districts across the country and the collective efforts of district administrators working with a consultant.
- ✓ Following their initial induction, new teachers are supported through the state-supported BEST (Beginning Educator Support and Training) program, which assigns every new teacher a trained mentor. The mentor and new teacher work together and often attend training together for the first two years. New teachers also go through an induction training program as part of their evaluation and professional growth plan.
- ✓ Bridgeport offers its teachers a number of additional professional development opportunities. Recent training topics have included Lauren Resnick's work on social interaction and learning in adolescents as well as training in support of the district's inclusion model.
- ✓ The district supports teachers by providing literacy and numeracy coaches who work directly in classrooms modeling lessons, providing feedback, and co-teaching.
- ✓ Bridgeport has added planning time for teachers as the result of a recent contractual agreement with the union. Many schools alternate their schedules to create common planning time, giving teachers opportunities to meet vertically and horizontally. Teachers report that they use this time to share and develop lessons, analyze data, and evaluate students' work.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ Bridgeport has recently adopted Harcourt Trophies as the district's reading program, a decision that was prompted, in part, by Reading First funding and the need to provide literacy consistency across the schools. The district has also adopted the Empowering Writers program, a comprehensive, practical, teacher-friendly K-8 program designed to teach narrative, expository (informative) and persuasive writing in new and creative ways. The initial pilot has spread to other schools due to teacher interest.
- ✓ As part of its literacy plan, Bridgeport has incorporated a number of instructional strategies that target literacy development and fluency. For easy reference, the district gives teachers a guide with descriptions of research-based strategies and examples of how they can be incorporated into lessons.

- ✓ Bridgeport has recently partnered with the Discovery Museum and Sacred Heart University to create an inter-district magnet for pre-kindergarten through grade 8 on the grounds of the museum. The school shares university and museum staff and has access to educational resources like the museum's planetarium. A portion of the monies for this magnet will be granted through state funds set aside for addressing the achievement gap. The district also has a plan for opening a school in partnership with the state-funded Beardsley Zoo.
- ✓ Bridgeport has partnered with Housatonic Community College to pilot a middle college plan. The partnership allows high school students to take college courses at both their high school and Housatonic. The district is looking for additional funding to expand this program in 2007.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ Bridgeport has recently participated in three audits in an effort to assess the district's finances, operations and instructional practices. The instructional assessment was conducted by the National Urban Alliance, which sent a group of consultants into every school to develop a set of recommendations for the schools and the district as a whole. Information from all three audits is guiding development of Bridgeport's accountability plan.
- ✓ With the move to more data-driven decision-making, Bridgeport developed online quarterly assessments that are tightly aligned to the state standards and Bridgeport's own pacing guides. Data from these assessments is available in real time, allowing for immediate diagnostics and subsequent adjustments. The district has rolled out these assessments slowly to ensure the system is working properly and to have time to create resources that will help teachers implement the assessments. Bridgeport also uses the SASI (School Administration Student Information) system to store student-level data, including grades, demographics, attendance and discipline.
- ✓ In addition to the data available on SASI and the district's internal web portal, Bridgeport has access to the state's web portal, CTreports.com, which provides districts with aggregated state-level data to identify statewide trends. The web portal also allows central office staff and principals to create customized summary reports from the Connecticut Mastery Test and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test.
- ✓ Given the greater availability of data and tools, principals and teachers are becoming more comfortable using data to guide their work. District administrators indicate that principals are using data to discuss their needs and plans. Teacher teams also report that they analyze data to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Student performance data is used during planning meetings, as well as during "Looking At Student Work" sessions, twice every month, during which school teams review student work and discuss strengths, concerns and interventions.

- ✓ In addition to assessment data, Bridgeport relies on qualitative data collected during district-level instructional walk-throughs and school learning walks. During learning walks, teams of principals from different schools observe similar lessons at multiple campuses and classrooms, scoring them on a rubric to determine strengths, weaknesses and commonalities. Feedback from the learning walks is given to teachers through scored rubrics and debriefing conferences. Central office staff and principals have been trained to use scoring rubrics through a collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning.
- ✓ The district has created K-6 report cards that are fully aligned with the pacing guides to reflect the mastery of students as they progress through the standards. Teachers provide both a letter grade and a checklist of skills mastered for the reporting period. The report card also provides space for scores from the quarterly assessments and state assessments, as well as the Developmental Reading Assessment for the primary grades.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ Bridgeport recently completed an internal study to find out why several schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress. The study prompted the district to begin pulling special education students from a few specified school locations back into their neighborhood schools to receive more school-based accommodations and support.
- ✓ Nineteen Bridgeport schools have been identified as needing improvement. Principals and teachers at these schools are required to participate in accountability training, to create data teams and to build data-driven campuses. According to district administrators, the power of this work has caught on, and district schools not receiving the training have also requested to participate. To meet this need, the district is sending six administrators for additional training so they can train principals and teachers.
- ✓ To address the needs of low-performing schools, district and school leaders regularly examine school data and develop action plans. The district supports these plans by providing school-based instructional specialists, targeted professional development, direct support to students and, in some cases, assistance in grant writing for additional supports. In Bridgeport's two lowest-performing schools, the plans are being monitored by outside consultants to evaluate improvements.
- ✓ The district recently brought in a group of consultants to help address school overcrowding. Based on the consultants' recommendations, school zones for densely populated campuses were reconfigured and a new academy school was introduced. Working with the consultants, the district has developed a master plan to build ten new schools over the next five to ten years.

- ✓ Struggling teachers are supported by their principals, but principals can ask for district support in developing an evaluation plan with specific objectives the teachers must meet. As part of the plan, struggling teachers can work with curriculum specialists and district supervisors who coach and model appropriate learning strategies. Additionally, these teachers are sent to targeted training for any skill deficits. Principals monitor a struggling teacher's progress through walk-throughs, direct observation and assessment data.
- ✓ The district has numerous interventions to support the needs of struggling students, including extra instruction before and after school, summer school and even tutoring during school hours. Additionally, the district has Opportunity Schools, which offer instruction in the evening for students struggling in the traditional school environment. The district has also created a new program for students who have been held back for academic failure and are significantly older than their grade level, offering a structured environment in a new building and accelerated learning.

Influential Factors

- ✓ The Bridgeport community includes numerous organizations committed to serving the needs of the district. The district enjoys a strong executive parent committee with sub-committees established at every school to help with volunteer activities and to conduct neighborhood outreach. The district also has the support of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund, which provides grants to teachers. The recently established Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance, which includes representatives from the district, local colleges and universities and the state department of education, was created to tackle the issue of students not graduating from high school ready for college.
- ✓ The district's recently adopted strategic plan was developed collaboratively among the School District, its Board of Education, the City of Bridgeport and community agencies and Foundations who felt they had a vested interest in the sustained improvement of student achievement.
- ✓ District and union leaders describe their relationship as collegial and have worked together on a number of initiatives to improve the schools and the working conditions of teachers. The union and the district have also developed superintendent roundtables where teachers have the opportunity to meet with the superintendent to discuss their concerns and needs face to face. In addition, union leadership indicates that the district significantly improved professional development in recent years to meet teacher needs.