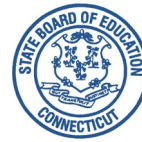




STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Bridgeport Public Schools Action to Address District Needs April 2026

Introduction

At its January 22, 2025, special meeting, the State Board of Education (SBE) duly authorized the Commissioner of Education to implement the powers set forth in Section 10-223e(e)(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes in order to address the stability of operations of the Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS), improve student performance – with a particular focus on students whom BPS has found eligible for special education and related service – and address other needs of the school district as deemed necessary by the Commissioner.

Fiscal Procedures and Decision-Making

Since February 2026, at the Commissioner's direction for weekly meetings, Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, Technical Assistance Team Lead David Erwin, and Dr. JoAnn Cox from Public Works have met with Interim Superintendent Royce Avery seven times to identify cost efficiencies within the district's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget. The greatest efficiency is a result of reducing special education costs associated with outplaced students. BPS identified and removed from its cost estimates students who are returning to BPS from outplacement or are graduating. The district estimates saving approximately \$5 million in FY27; however, this estimate does not account for future costs associated with new outplacements.

BPS was also directed to conduct the review of in-district transportation for students who receive special education services. Although the district does not yet have a dollar amount of savings, BPS anticipates being able to reduce FY27 cost estimates by removing graduating students from in-district transportation services, working with its vendor to optimize in-district bus routes, and removing in-district transportation from over 200 students whose Individualized Education Programs (IEP) do not require in-district transportation.

BPS also anticipates cost efficiencies of \$1 million after reviewing paraprofessional to student ratios and data from staffing agencies supplying paraprofessionals to the district. The district identified they were paying for 11 positions for contracted services for paraprofessionals assigned to a campus even after the students for whom the position was contracted are no longer at that campus. Additionally, BPS reviewed self-contained classrooms for a 1:3 ratio of paraprofessionals to students to identify 32 positions that could be reduced to align to the model.

The Team has also supported BPS to apply for excess cost reimbursement for in-district special education services resulting in a reimbursement of \$529,000, change Medicaid providers and conduct in-house training to claim \$666,852 in reimbursements thus far, and conduct staff training to audit health insurance claims which has resulted in \$2,200,000 in charges being billed

to individuals not eligible for coverage for which \$900,000 has been collected. As a result of this support, the identified cost efficiencies total \$6 million, and the estimated revenue from reimbursements and collections total over \$2 million.

On March 23, 2026, Bridgeport Mayor, Joseph P. Ganim transmitted his Proposed General Fund Budget to the City Council. The Mayor's proposal included a \$5 million (2 percent) increase in City funds for education over FY26 for a total appropriation of \$250,860,982. As outlined in the Mayor's budget timeline, the City Council has until no later than May 19, 2026, to submit its FY27 Adopted General Fund Budget to the Mayor, and he has the ability to veto it by June 2, 2026. The City Council has until June 9, 2026, to vote on the Mayor's veto, and by June 16, 2026, the City Council must set the mill rate.

On March 25, 2026, the City of Bridgeport submitted to the Municipal Finance Advisory Commission (MFAC) updated financial projections for FY27 through FY31. In November 2025, the City was asked by MFAC to provide more realistic projections for health insurance premiums before revisiting the request to access the \$5 million on behalf of BPS. MFAC is scheduled to meet on May 6, 2026, but has yet to release an agenda.

Human Resources Procedures and Decision-Making

BPS entered summer 2025 with over 120 certified staff vacancies. The CSDE and Team met with the Interim Superintendent and his team to intervene with support to fill those vacancies. By the start of school, BPS had reduced the number of vacancies to 41 with only 3 in special education. The CSDE, Team, and Public Works are monitoring closely the 44 vacancies as of March 27, 2026, to ensure BPS is as close to fully staffed as possible for the start of the 2026-27 school year. Additionally, Public Works is assisting BPS to strengthen the procedures for onboarding new employees, and the Team is assisting BPS with strategies to retain new certified staff.

Regular and Special Education Instruction

The CSDE, Team, Public Works, and other professional development organizations partnering in support of BPS will meet with the Interim Superintendent and his team to assist the district to plan and coordinate high-quality professional learning opportunities for certified and non-certified staff in advance of and through the 2026-27 school year. The CSDE already provided multiple days of professional development to administration and educators to strengthen special education systems and processes. Future professional development is aimed at supporting educators in providing differentiated and small group instruction, as well as support for English learners/multilingual learners.

School Climate

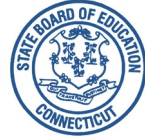
The CSDE has been working closely with BPS's District Attendance Review Team (DART) to reduce student chronic absenteeism rates. The focus has been on engaging families to support students to attend school, and progress is evidenced by a steep increase in the number of monthly home visits under the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP). From October 2025 to March 2026, the district has increased its monthly home visits from 39 to 504. The result of this effort has been a 2.6 percent February 2025 to February 2026 decrease in district chronic absenteeism. Five schools have experienced notable year-over-year reductions in chronic absence ranging from 7 to 11 percentage point drops. The CSDE will continue to support BPS to address persistent challenges to student attendance resulting from health-related absences, family understanding of excused and unexcused absences, and transportation.

Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bridgeport Board of Education

On March 23, 2026, the Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE) approved a second set of Series 9000 policies adding to their progress towards reviewing and updating all BBE bylaws to align with Connecticut model bylaws for boards of education. Upon the BBE's review and approval of the full set of bylaws and the Administration policies that address the role of the superintendent and the process for his or her evaluation, the Commissioner of Education may choose to permit the BBE to post for a permanent superintendent. On March 20, 2026, BBE Chair Jennifer Perez wrote to inform the CSDE that the BBE planned to postpone a search for a permanent superintendent until the 2026-27 school year, and that the BBE intended to extend Interim Superintendent Royce Avery's contract through June 2027. Attached is Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs Michael P. McKeon's March 31, 2026, response to the BBE Chair.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



March 31, 2026

Sent Via Email

ATTN: Jennifer Perez, Chair
Bridgeport Board of Education
Bridgeport City Hall
45 Lyon Terrace, Room 203
Bridgeport, CT 06604

Dear Chair Perez:

Thank you for your March 20, 2026, letter that provides an update on the Bridgeport Board of Education's (BBE) progress toward revising and updating its series 2000, 3000, and 9000 (bylaws) policies. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recognizes the BBE's efforts to strengthen its governance structures and the care it is taking to ensure those structures are fully implemented prior to posting for a permanent superintendent. The BBE's policy action to date aligns with the Commissioner of Education's expectations shared with you in the February 13, 2026, letter from Deputy Commissioner (DC) Charles Hewes.

You also shared in your letter that the BBE intends to delay a search for a permanent superintendent until later in the year to provide time to complete the review and approval of its policies. Resultingly, the BBE intends to extend Interim Superintendent Avery's contract through the end of the 2026-27 school year to provide continuity of leadership. As you are aware, the BBE is currently contracted with Dr. Avery to fill the position of Interim Superintendent until either the BBE appoints a new superintendent, both the BBE and Dr. Avery mutually consent to terminate the contract, or if the contract is terminated for cause. Given that, the BBE need not take any action to extend Dr. Avery's contract, because continuity is maintained by the very language of the current contract. Moreover, extending the term of Dr. Avery's contract with a definitive end date would lock the BBE into that contract, which could, in turn limit the opportunity of the BBE to act in a timely manner to secure a desired candidate, should that candidate be someone other than Dr. Avery, subject to the approval of the Commissioner of Education. Under such a scenario, and should Dr. Avery ultimately not be the candidate the BBE selects and the Commissioner approves, the BBE could find itself both paying the salary of a permanent superintendent while also being required to pay Dr. Avery for whatever remaining term was left on his contract.

The BBE's proposed delay of its search for a permanent superintendent is also at odds with the BBE's previously stated desire to move forward promptly with the search. For example, on January 15, 2026, DC Hewes and I met with you and two other members of the BBE in response to your inquiry about initiating a search for a permanent superintendent. The BBE had expressed a sense of urgency to initiate a search for a permanent superintendent to be able to attract a pool of highly qualified candidates. During the meeting, and reinforced in DC Hewes' letter to you on March 14, 2026, it was made clear that the BBE could take action to hire a search firm but could post for the superintendent position only when it had fully updated its bylaws and Administration policies that address the role of the superintendent and the process for his or her evaluation consistent with model bylaws and policies for Connecticut boards of education. At the same time, this process of updating bylaws and policies should not be permitted to drag on and thereby result in an undue delay in moving forward with the permanent-superintendent search. In short, there is a middle ground between immediately initiating the superintendent search despite not having updated the BBE's bylaws and policies and delaying this search until what would appear to be sometime late in the 2026-2027 school year.

As noted, the key consideration and action is the BBE's work on its bylaws and policies. To that end, on May 19, 2025, the CSDE provided feedback on the draft performance goals established by the BBE. The feedback was designed to ensure the BBE is taking the requisite action towards a more sustained and functional system of governance. The feedback included clear and measurable indicators of improvement relative to each performance goal set by the BBE as an outcome of its training provided by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE). More specifically, the BBE planned for the following to occur:

By July 1, 2025, the Board will adopt bylaws and expectations for Board member decorum during meetings. The Board will also develop and adopt a method by which the Board will respond to members who violate the decorum standards.

On July 29, 2025, DC Hewes wrote to you indicating the BBE had not met this goal, as well as two other goals, and requested that you provide an update on the BBE's planned next steps. In your August 15, 2025, response, you indicated the BBE discussed updating its bylaws on June 18, 2025, and planned to refer its bylaw updates to the Policy Committee for action on August 25, 2025. The BBE stated that it planned to review those updates during the first regular Board meeting of the 2025-26 school year. This did not occur. In fact, the BBE did not approve the bylaws pertaining to Board member decorum until recently, specifically on March 23, 2026.

The CSDE expects the BBE to prioritize the review and approval of the remaining bylaws and Administration policies prior to June 1, 2026. The BBE shall also act by June 1, 2026, to secure a superintendent search firm and work with CSDE Technical Assistance Team Lead, David Erwin, to develop its criteria for a permanent superintendent. Failure to meet a second deadline of June 1, 2026, may be perceived as the BBE's inability to operate efficiently and potentially result in the Commissioner of Education invoking her authorized right to unilaterally appoint either a superintendent or a district improvement officer pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223e(e)(2)(N).

Thank you for your attention to this letter and please keep the CSDE informed of the BBE's progress on completing its ongoing revision of its bylaws and relevant policies. In the interim, please let either DC Hewes or me know should you or the BBE have any questions regarding this correspondence.

Sincerely,



Michael P. McKeon
Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs, CSDE

cc: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson, Connecticut State Board of Education
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education
Dr. Charles E. Hewes, Deputy Commissioner of Academics and Innovation, CSDE
Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner of Educational, Supports & Wellness, CSDE
David Erwin, CSDE Technical Assistance Team Lead