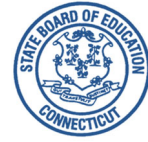




# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



## Bridgeport Public Schools Action to Address District Needs February 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 and Human Resources Procedures and Decision-Making

On January 29, 2026, the Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE) heard the *Superintendent's Proposed Budget Presentation 2026-27* presented by Interim Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Royce Avery. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Technical Assistance Team ("the Team"), and Public Works provided a significant amount of technical assistance to the Interim Superintendent in the development process of a comprehensive and transparent budget presentation. The Interim Superintendent's recommended budget ("Superintendent's Budget") is a 14.97 percent (\$44.1 million) increase over the 2025-26 operational budget and reflects cost increases in salaries and benefits, special education, transportation, utilities, and the operational expenses covered using reserve funds in the previous year. The Superintendent's Budget mitigated cost increases by terminating a vendor contract, reducing professional learning for staff, and reducing the estimated increase to health insurance from 20 percent to 14 percent; however, it did not result in reductions to staff or student programming.

On February 3, 2026, the Commissioner of Education met with the Interim Superintendent to share with him a list of items identified by the CSDE, the Team, and Public Works that may result in additional cost efficiencies within the Superintendent's Budget. As was shared with the SBE during the December 2025 update, the district began the budget development process late and did not have the time to consider all cost efficiencies prior to January 29, 2026. The CSDE is requiring the district to explore the cost efficiency opportunities included on the list before the final budget appropriation is determined and will closely monitor their actions.

On February 4, 2026, the BBE Operations Committee met to discuss the budget, and the full BBE met on February 9, 2026, to adopt a budget increase of approximately 36 percent (\$106 million) over FY26. The increase reflects both the Superintendent's Budget requests and the restoring of various positions reduced since FY13. Six BBE members voted for the 36 percent budget increase, two voted against it, and one member abstained from voting.

### Facilities and Maintenance

The Bridgeport Child Nutrition Program (CNP) staff completed procurement training made available by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The expectation of training was established after the district was identified for needing to return approximately \$140,000 in funds owed to the USDA. BPS has since returned the full amount of funds. Additionally, the

Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program administrative reviews conducted found no significant issues.

### **School Climate**

Bridgeport has a thriving and engaged District Attendance team that focuses on their partnership with school-based health centers and is planning an attendance meeting with the health leaders in the community. BPS has made strong efforts to communicate to families the threshold for when students are too sick for school. BPS is encouraging families to use the school nurse as a resource when deciding to send students to school so that more students are attending on a regular basis. Additionally, the Bridgeport Learning Center has a Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) home visitor that is strengthening relationships with students and families. Recently, BPS completed the “21 Day Challenge” for students to not miss school during the month of December. A total of 4,152 students met this goal. Despite these efforts, the percentage of BPS students identified as chronically absent as of December 2025, was 31.3 percent, which exceeds the 28.3 percent of BPS students who were chronically absent as of December 2024.

### **Regular and Special Education Instruction**

Earlier this year, BPS restored funding to engage the Hill for Literacy to support BPS to improve literacy outcomes at the elementary level. The Hill for Literacy has been actively supporting principals and coaching teachers in the implementation of Enhanced Core Reading Instruction (ECRI), a research-based approach to reading instruction that supports teachers to address the individual needs of students in the classroom. This high-quality professional learning opportunity is planned to continue throughout the academic year.

On January 29, 2026, the Team were directed by the CSDE to conduct an unannounced visit to the University School, a private provider of special education and alternative educational opportunities for students who have been expelled from BPS. The purpose of the visit was to assess the status of the education provided by the University School and to gather information related to issues raised by the State Auditors’ Report published in September 2025. The hour-long visit resulted in the Team gathering information about educator certification and background checks, current student enrollment and attendance, student schedules and programming, and the extent to which the school corresponds with families and the district. Based upon the visit and artifacts provided by the University School staff, the Team is recommending BPS a) review the contract between BPS and the University School to ensure the best interest of the district and its students are represented; b) conduct regular visits of the University School and other private special education providers using an established checklist to monitor programming; and c) ensure BPS staff are reviewing monthly attendance reports of students enrolled at the University School and responding accordingly.

### **Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bridgeport Board of Education**

On January 15, 2026, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles E. Hewes, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs Michael P. McKeon, Technical Assistance Team lead David Erwin, and representatives from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education met with members of

the BBE leadership to identify the responsibilities of the BBE necessary to initiate a superintendent search. The BBE's appointment of a permanent superintendent is subject to the approval of the Commissioner, pursuant to the powers set forth in Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223e(e)(2) and delegated to the Commissioner by the January 22, 2025, State Board of Education resolution. To attract high-quality candidates for the position of superintendent, the BBE must demonstrate its readiness to operate efficiently and effectively, which includes taking action to adopt updated bylaws that align with Connecticut model bylaws for boards of education and Administration policies that address the role of the superintendent and the process for his or her evaluation. Additionally, the Commissioner or her designee will be included in the design and implementation of the search process.