

# BRIDGEPORT

## Education Update

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

| June 2025

### Commissioner's Message

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) wants all students, families, educators, and the entire Bridgeport community to know that we stand with you as a partner in change as we work together to improve student outcomes and build a stronger, more supportive school system that meets the needs of every student in Bridgeport. The focus is not only about stabilizing a budget—it is about strengthening district leadership, enhancing accountability, and establishing a strong, enduring foundation for long-term success. Bridgeport receives over \$300 million in state and federal funding; however, without sound financial planning, student-centered decision-making, and strong governance, even the largest budgets will fail to effectively serve students.

The insights you provided during listening sessions and ongoing dialogue, which included students, families, educators, and community members, have guided our approach. Every decision made by the CSDE is focused on ensuring that all of Bridgeport's 20,022 students receive the education they deserve and that the district is positioned for success.

Yours in partnership,

Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker

### How we got here

In January 2025, the SDE authorized Education Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker to address the stability of operations in Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS), improve student performance—with a focus on students receiving special education services—and address other needs in the district as deemed necessary.

These interventions included, but are not limited to, assigning a technical assistance team to work in, and with, the BPS to guide district initiatives and report to the Commissioner. Additionally, members of the Bridgeport Board of Education were required to undergo training designed to improve their operational efficiency and effectiveness as a board.

### Technical Assistance Team

A four-member Technical Assistance Team (Team) with 150 years of combined experience in school operations, finance, instruction, governance, and systems design has been embedded in the district since April 2025. The Team has facilitated 58 Listening Sessions with students, staff, and community members; hosted numerous meetings with district and school leadership; and conducted over 20 walkthrough observations of classrooms. The Team meets weekly with Commissioner Russell-Tucker and her staff, who have also convened with BPS leadership on multiple occasions to review progress and align next steps.

## What has the CSDE and Team done so far?

### Budgeting and Staffing Processes

- Identified opportunities for BPS to consolidate transportation payments and reduce 2024-25 costs.
- Improved timeliness and efficiency of Delta-T paraeducator placement information; directed the development of vacancy plans.
- Connected with partners to expand student wireless access.
- Initiated the development of a financial and budget procedural manual for school leaders.
- Supported BPS in identifying a new Medicaid claims vendor to assist BPS in maximizing Medicaid reimbursements.

### Facilities and Maintenance

- Conducted meal-plan and food-quality listening sessions with BPS students and nutrition staff to identify menu improvements.
- Currently assisting BPS with plans to identify solutions to the over-enrollment concern at the new Bassick High School.
- Facilitated housing of the district's central registration at CT State Housatonic, streamlining the student enrollment process.

### Regular and Special Education Instruction

- Directed BPS to prioritize filling certified special-educator vacancies in self-contained classrooms.
- Assisted in expanding and marketing the Advanced Alternative Route to Certification in Special Education for BPS teachers.
- Provided technical assistance to BPS to re-store Hill for Literacy professional development targeted at improving kindergarten through grade 5 literacy achievement.

- Supported the Special Education Parent Advisory Council's expansion and comprehensive communication strategy.
- Initiated planning for a curriculum audit and adoption process for Connecticut Model Curricula that is available free of charge to the district.
- Planned a two-day leadership institute for general and SPED administrators (Boosting Student Achievement: Quality IEPs and Classroom Behavior Management Strategies — MTSS).
- Planned a two-day training launch for SPED and general education administrators (Supporting SPED teachers and related service providers through classroom-based progress monitoring (Tool Review), Quality IEPs, behavioral strategies, and instructional support).
- Planned a two-day individualized education program (IEP) institute for SPED teachers and related service providers (Boosting Student Performance Through High Quality IEPs).

### Bridgeport Board of Education

- Approved BBE's request to have the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) conduct required training sessions, which have covered budgeting, policy development, and roles and responsibilities.
- Directed the BBE to postpone the superintendent search until evidence of improved governance meets the Commissioner-approved improvement goals.
- Provided feedback to ensure those goals were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

## Next Steps

In the coming months, the Team will provide support for BPS in addressing the high number of staff vacancies, identifying cost-savings opportunities to mitigate budget deficits, developing community and family-focused engagement opportunities, and planning for summer and beginning of the year professional development. The CSDE will continue its support and determine the extent to which the BBE requires additional training. The CSDE also awaits the result of the forensic audit it commissioned in May 2025 that will determine whether BPS's fiscal year 2024 and 2025 expenditures align with adopted budgets.