

BRIDGEPORT

Education Update

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

| October 2025

Commissioner's Message

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) continues to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Bridgeport community in our shared commitment to improve student outcomes and strengthen the systems that support them. Over the past eight months, we have worked with Bridgeport Public Schools to ensure that progress is not only possible, but visible.

Governor Ned Lamont, State Board of Education members, and I had the honor of joining Mayor Joseph P. Ganim, members of the Bridgeport Board of Education, members of the Bridgeport legislative delegation, and Interim Superintendent Dr. Royce Avery—together with Bridgeport educators and school staff—at this year's Convocation to welcome the start of the new school year. That moment was a powerful reminder of the many people who make up the foundation of this district, and it also underscored that state and local leaders and community partners stand behind you and are deeply invested in the work ahead. As Governor Lamont reminded us during his remarks, buildings and programs are important, but it is the collective work of the people who bring them to life.

One of the clearest signs of progress is the reduction in teacher vacancies. Last fall, there were 120 openings, including 31 in special education. Upon the opening of school, that number is down to 41, with only two in special education—progress that comes at a time when many comparable districts continue to struggle. We have also restored safe and reliable bus service for thousands of students, reducing walking distances and stabilizing routes. At the same time, our focus remains on building stronger governance, enhancing accountability, and strengthening the foundation of support across the district.

These efforts are about more than solving today's challenges—they are about creating lasting change that lifts every student and every school. Together, we are connecting leadership, instruction, and community to build a stronger Bridgeport Public School system that supports each and every one of the 20,022 students.

Yours in partnership,
Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker

Technical Assistance Team and CLA Audit

In February 2025, the State Board of Education authorized the Commissioner to assign a four-member Technical Assistance Team (Team) to Bridgeport Public Schools. With more than 150 years of combined experience, the Team has worked directly with district leadership to strengthen operations, provide governance training, improve hiring processes, and stabilize key services.

To further address longstanding fiscal concerns, CSDE commissioned an independent forensic audit by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA). Released in July 2025, the audit found no evidence of fraud but identified deficiencies in oversight, budget classifications, and management practices. CLA issued 34 recommendations to improve transparency and accountability, which are now guiding ongoing work to build a stronger and more sustainable financial system.

What have the CSDE, the Team, and Bridgeport accomplished together?

Teacher Recruitment and Staffing

- Required weekly staffing updates and set clear expectations for principals and central office leaders to take an active role in hiring.
- Introduced new recruitment tools such as CT REAP and encouraged the expansion of outreach through social media and other recruitment platforms.
- Provided guidance in their decision to reassign central office staff to temporarily support human resources and speed up application processing.
- Educated district leaders on retiree hiring flexibilities to quickly address shortages.
- Reduced teacher vacancies from 120 in November to 41 in September, with special education vacancies falling from 31 to two.

Transportation and Facilities

- Negotiated an agreement that restored safe and reliable bus service for thousands of students, reduced walking distances, and stabilized transportation routes.
- Facilitated housing of the district's central registration center at CT State Housatonic, streamlining the enrollment process for families.
- Engaged students and nutrition staff in meal plan listening sessions to improve food quality.
- Continued support for addressing over-enrollment at the new Bassick High School.

Instruction and Student Support

- Restored Hill for Literacy professional learning and aligned supports with the Connecticut Literacy Model for early literacy.
- Expanded the Special Education Parent Advisory Council and launched a stronger communication strategy to engage families.
- Convened quarterly coordination with community health partners to align behavioral and physical health services for students.
- Delivered a three-day institute for special education administrators and teachers, plus added two-day institutes on quality IEPs, behavioral strategies, and classroom-based progress monitoring.

Governance and Accountability

- Directed the Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE) to undergo governance training with CAGE on budgeting, policy development, and roles and responsibilities.
- Guided development of a revised organizational chart, adding an Assistant Superintendent for Academics/Curriculum & Instruction and an Assistant Superintendent for Human Capital.
- Commissioned a forensic audit that identified 34 recommendations to strengthen fiscal oversight and transparency.
- Supported the development of a financial and budget procedural manual for school leaders to guide consistent practices.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, our efforts will center on supporting the district in designing a balanced and efficient FY26–27 budget, while also deepening literacy initiatives and continuing to address core operational needs. As this work progresses, we will provide regular updates to the community and ensure the State Board of Education remains fully informed at each stage.