

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bridgeport District Review
Presented to the Bridgeport Board of Education
March 24, 2008 (Revised)

Review Process:

Bill No. 8003, Sec. 32. Section 10-223e & Sec. 33 passed in July 2007 gives the State Board of Education (SBE) authority to require schools and districts in need of improvement, as defined by No Child Left Behind, to participate in an assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses in schools and districts. During the week of November 26, 2007, a team of two Connecticut State Department Education (CSDE) consultants, led by two Cambridge Education associates, conducted a review of the district over the course of one week. Beginning the week of November 19, 2007, and carrying over to the week of November 26, 2007, other CSDE and Cambridge Education teams were conducting assessments in the following 18 Bridgeport schools.

Elementary Schools

Barnum	Blackham	Bryant
Cesar Batalla	Cross	Curiale
Dunbar	Hallen	Longfellow
Luis Munoz Marin	Madison	McKinley
Read	Roosevelt	Waltersville

High Schools

Bassick	Central	Harding
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District team members communicated daily to review the findings; all evidence collected was triangulated to ensure that claims were only made when there were several sources of information that could substantiate judgments. The draft report was shared with the review team members, superintendent and participating principals for a fact check to ensure that information and figures were accurate prior to the report being published.

The purpose of the district assessment is to answer the following questions:

1. How well is the District doing now?
2. What is the evidence that all components of the District's improvement plan and, where relevant, the District's restructuring plan, have been implemented?
3. What is the impact of the restructuring and improvement plans, and what evidence is there that the actions have resulted in improved student learning?
4. What does the District need to do in order to continue to improve?

The key focus areas for the district review are as follows:

- Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment
- Leadership, Culture and Accountability
- Management of Human and Fiscal Resources
- Operational Systems
- Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction

Each focus area is scored using the following categories:

- In need of substantial improvement
- In need of improvement
- Meets minimum requirements
- Exceeds minimum requirements
- Excellent

Bridgeport Domain Ratings:

Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment: In need of substantial improvement

Leadership, Culture and Accountability: In need of improvement

Management of Human and Fiscal Resources: Meets minimal requirements

Operational Systems: Meets minimum requirements

Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction: Meets minimum requirements

What the district does well:

- Within the Senior District Leadership Team there is a galvanized and effective team spirit which focuses on raising student achievement. This clear sense of direction and vision is articulated in the District Strategic Plan which involved the whole Bridgeport community in shaping the district's educational priorities and which has been unanimously adopted by the board of education.
- The superintendent has opened effective communication channels and forums for consultation with schools, teacher, administration and paraprofessional unions, the City, business and faith communities.
- There is a strong commitment to the social and emotional development of students alongside strategies to raise achievement.
- The introduction of a comprehensive information technology (IT) infrastructure is beginning to support learning effectively. It supports building administration with administrative purposes and provides teachers with a good tool to plan curriculum and begin to track student progress.

What the district needs to improve:

- Raise achievement and test results for all students in reading and math by:
 - supporting schools in the development of common formative assessments and training them in using assessment data in order to enable planning to raise student achievement;
 - supporting schools in improvements that result in consistently high quality instruction across all grades and effective usage of assessment to enable the differentiation of student work which is matched to needs and raises achievement;
 - ensuring that an articulated English language arts curriculum guide, meeting the needs of students grades 9 to 12 is implemented and that the reading for information skill is effectively taught to all grade 9 and 10 students throughout the district.

- Reduce suspensions and increase student attendance throughout the district's schools by:
 - gathering the views from students and school psychologists, counselors and social workers in order to better understand why many students cut classes, find themselves in trouble and do not enjoy coming to school. Use this data source as information which enables the development of a strategy and action plan which aim to reduce suspensions and improve attendance;
 - work with and train building administrators to be more consistent in behavior management within their buildings and more consistent in the agreement of the reasons for giving out suspensions, particularly to the most vulnerable students with special needs;
 - share the examples of good practice which have resulted in reduced suspensions and improved attendance across the district. Review and simplify the district's complex code of discipline policy so that it provides clear and improved guidance to the administration in schools about the offences which require a suspension from school.

- Improve the governance role of the Board of Education by ensuring that they, as advocates for all children through Bridgeport's public school system, focus on holding the superintendent and senior leadership team accountable through monitoring and evaluating the impact of the priorities on the District's Strategic Plan. While doing this, give the superintendent the autonomy to drive forward strategies to improve student achievement by:
 - Discussing the progress made on actions in the plan at board meetings in a more regular and timely manner;
 - through its agenda, regularly inviting members of the senior team to provide progress reports on the priorities;
 - ensuring robust and constructive procedures are in place to hold the superintendent accountable by developing and implementing the evaluation tool designed to evaluate his performance while increasing his autonomy to drive the strategy forward.

- Improve the instructional leadership role of school administration by providing professional development for principals and assistant principals which focuses on:
 - improving their knowledge and understanding of the literacy and numeracy curriculum;
 - honing their skills of analysis of data and its use to enable planning in their schools to raise student achievement;
 - improving their skills in conducting lesson observations and providing feedback to teachers on instructional practices, so that teachers become more effective instructional leaders in their classrooms.

- Limit the number of initiatives and prioritize the main ones to raise student achievement so that:
 - based on the analysis of data the district successfully moves forward with the most important initiatives and has the opportunity to showcase across the district those which work the best to raise student achievement;
 - the most effective use can be made of the resources available in sharing good practice to raise student achievement;
 - prioritized initiatives make a cutting edge difference to the quality of education for students.

SDE Report on Cambridge Review of Bridgeport Public Schools

Areas in Need of Improvement	Current Strategies	<i>Questions to Consider for further improvement</i>
<p>Raise achievement and test results for all students in reading and mathematics.</p>	<p>The District Education Plan, guided by the Strategic Plan, interprets the District’s Strategic Plan which addresses goals for improving student achievement. This document has been collaboratively developed by principals and District Office staff and is used to guide practice in the district and schools.</p> <p>The District Education Plan guided by the Strategic Plan is poised to guide the development of individual School Education Plans focused on maintaining areas of strength and targeted interventions for areas identified as in need of improvement.</p> <p>Principals develop School Plans as per Strategic Plan, Action Plan #3, in collaboration with their staff and support from district/CSDE/Leading and Learning Center.</p> <p>There is a well-developed on-line assessment tool for grades 3 – 8; current plans are underway to move this tool up to HS with ECS dollars.</p> <p>The district has developed data-driven decision making/data teams as a focus and practice for the next 18 months.</p>	<p><i>How will the district ensure that the learning strands of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) are incorporated into school and district improvement plans?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district support schools in the development of common formative assessment and further develop their ability to use assessment data?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district support schools in improvements that results in consistently high quality instruction across all grades?</i></p> <p><i>How will the Central Office ensure that a Response to Intervention Framework is implemented with fidelity across all district schools?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district ensure that the English curriculum addresses the needs of all students in grades 9 - 12 and that the reading for information skill is effectively taught to all grade 9 & 10 students?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district expand the online assessment tool to increase student achievement in the high schools?</i></p>

	<p>All district principals have received accountability training and its application to school education plans.</p> <p>Principals and other administrators use data-driven decision making/data team training to establish school/department goals and targeted strategies for improvement.</p> <p>Schools and district personnel monitor the impact of strategies for school improvement on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Principals set, review, and adjust professional goals with their assistant superintendent tri-annually.</p> <p>Ongoing meetings are scheduled for review and adjustment if needed.</p> <p>Budgets and professional development focus areas are submitted annually by principals.</p> <p>Principals have received Common Formative Assessment Training (Dec.07 and 2/08).</p> <p>District provides release time for certified staff to attend Common Formative Assessment training (CSDE-CALI program).</p> <p>There are plans for an update and revision of current HS curriculum; a collaborative activity with school and district staff.</p>	
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	<p>Content directors are planning and delivering professional development for principals to improve their understanding of curriculum.</p>	
<p>Reduce suspensions and increase student attendance throughout the district's schools.</p>	<p>Enhance strategic, pro-active interventions addressing social emotional literacy and supports by increasing the number of schools implementing school wide Positive Behavioral Supports, (PBS) and Peer Mediation. Expand use of outcome data to test efficacy of these school wide supports as well as individual social emotional services currently being provided by support staff. For example, school social workers will continue to develop goal statements, including measurable outcomes, aligned with their counseling programs.</p> <p>Revise District “Code of Discipline” so as to be more closely aligned with social emotional literacy beliefs embedded in Superintendent’s Theory of Action and District’s Strategic Plan. This revision will be “culturally competent” and reflective of the needs of children, youth and families, as well as a broader need for safety and order. It will include clearer application and directions to school leaders and will be aligned with an in-school suspension program currently being developed. This in-school suspension program, a “Continuum of Consequences will provide an alternative</p>	<p><i>How will the district disaggregate the suspension/expulsion data and attendance data (school and district) by grade/gender/race? How will the district use these data to inform staff about the academic and social/emotional learning needs for students?</i></p> <p><i>Are there subgroups that are disproportionately suspended and/or absent from school?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district gather anecdotal data from all stakeholders in the school community to understand the nature of student disengagement?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district support administrators in the consistent use of behavior management strategies across the district?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district review and simplify its code of discipline to support understanding and application of appropriate behavior.</i></p> <p><i>How will the Central Office ensure that a Response to Intervention Framework is implemented with fidelity across all district schools?</i></p>

	<p>to out of school suspension.</p> <p>Student attendance will be supported by the broad array of academic and affective social emotional enhancements embedded in the District’s <i>Strategic Plan</i>. Further, the continued implementation of “Special Attendance Register” will allow for increased focused attendance support for students and strategic data management, including clearer accountability measures for school and district based staff.</p> <p>Support to schools will allow for the further use of <i>School Education Plans</i> as the “blueprint” for reducing suspensions and increasing student attendance.</p>	
<p>Improve the governance role of the board of education by ensuring that they:</p> <p>Focus on holding the Superintendent and senior leadership team accountable through monitoring and evaluating the impact of the priorities on the district’s strategic plan.</p> <p>While doing this, give the Superintendent the autonomy to drive forward strategies to improve student achievement.</p>	<p>The Bridgeport Board of Education has revised and reviewed the district’s long-standing policies, including the 9000 series (its governance).</p> <p>The Bridgeport Board of Education is moving meetings into the school community.</p> <p>Individual board members are attending workshops & seminars.</p> <p>The Board of Education has held two dinner-meeting retreats in recent months and is considering more engagements of this type.</p> <p>The Board of Education is making an effort to integrate the Superintendent’s</p>	<p><i>How does the Board of Education ensure that progress made on actions in the district Strategic Plan is discussed in a timely manner?</i></p> <p><i>How does the board use its evaluation tool designed to evaluate the Superintendent’s performance while increasing his autonomy to drive the strategy forward?</i></p>

<p>Improve the instructional leadership role of school administration by providing professional development for principals and assistant principals.</p>	<p>evaluation with the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>The superintendent has clearly articulated a vision which focuses on closing the achievement gap between and among students from varied socio-economic backgrounds, racial, and ethnic groups, and varying abilities.</p> <p>Currently there are 2 sessions developed and led by superintendent (1st Thursday, 4th Tuesday) that address leadership.</p> <p>An opening of school retreat for administrators provides leadership professional development as a focus for the school year; strategies based on the superintendent's theory of action are discussed.</p> <p>Ongoing professional development for administrators is aligned with the District Education Plan.</p> <p>Principals and administrators are encouraged to seek ongoing professional development opportunities.</p> <p>There are regularly scheduled principals' meetings and professional development opportunities for leadership.</p>	<p><i>How will the district provide school leaders with a systemic approach to time management that results in more time for the supervision and evaluation of instruction?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district support principals in a deeper understanding of the literacy and numeracy curriculums?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district further support principals and assistant principals in the skills of support, supervision and evaluation of staff?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district ensure that the instructional leadership has a thorough knowledge of data analysis and its use in raising student achievement?</i></p>
<p>Limit the number of initiatives and prioritize the main ones which raise student achievement.</p>	<p>The district's Learning and Teaching department meets regularly to discuss fidelity of implementation to initiatives in place.</p> <p>Individual departments and schools gather and review data as to the</p>	<p><i>How will the district make use of available resources and prioritize initiatives, based on an analysis of data, which have the greatest impact on student achievement?</i></p> <p><i>How will the district collaborate with the CSDE leadership team to ensure district</i></p>

	effectiveness of programs and initiatives. Programs deemed ineffective or stagnant are eliminated at the end of contract periods.	<i>accountability for student success?</i> <i>How will the district communicate with schools and the community about district successes that raise student achievement?</i>
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QUALITY REVIEW DISTRICT FINAL REPORT

Bridgeport Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Bridgeport District

**45 Lyon Terrace
Bridgeport
Connecticut
06604**

**Superintendent: John J. Ramos
Dates of review: November 26 – 30, 2007**

Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb

Cambridge Education (LLC)



Content of the report

Part 1: The District Context

Background information about the district

Part 2: Overview

What the district does well

What the district needs to improve

Part 3: Main findings

Part 1: The District Context

Information about the district

The Bridgeport Public School District provides for the education of 21,722 students representing 88.1 percent of the total student population in the city of Bridgeport. In this highly diverse city of 139,529, located in the county of Fairfield, Bridgeport's 34 public schools serve students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. It faces significant challenges, particularly student transience, within its schools. Bridgeport has 95 percent of its students who are known to be eligible for a free or reduced price lunch, a figure well above both the average of its statistical neighbors (75 percent) and also the state average (27 percent). The students represent many ethnic groups, nationalities, religions and cultures including 46 percent Hispanic, 42 percent Black/African-American, 8 percent White, 3 percent Asian American and 1 percent American Indian. Ten percent of the student population is English language learners (ELLs). Spanish is the primary language spoken, but there are over 70 different languages spoken by the student population as a whole. Just over 10 percent of students are identified as needing special educational services, a figure below similar communities and the state average. This reflects its inclusion policy and commitment to reducing the number of students in the district with individualized education programs. Overall, the average attendance rate of 91 percent across all schools compares favorably with the state average, but in the high schools, it falls to 85.1 percent. The dropout rate for students after the freshman year is significantly higher than the state average.

There is a City Facility Plan, and one new state-of-the-art building completed in January 2007. Another five buildings are currently a work in progress. However, linked to lack of funds available, a number of existing school buildings are lacking what is required for an education service in the 21st Century. There is a plan to address this deficiency, but it is dependent on funds being available. There are three magnet elementary schools and admission from this year is by *'blind lottery'*; historically a race and gender component had been built into the admission criteria. Also, there had been selection into kindergarten, but this too has been eliminated. Most magnet students transfer at grade 9 to Central High School, but there are now specific magnet programs in business and health in other high schools. Links between the district and the community stakeholders are effective and used well to support students' social and educational development.

Part 2: Overview

What the district does well

- Within the senior district leadership team there is a galvanized and effective team spirit which focuses on raising student achievement. This clear sense of direction and vision is articulated in the district's strategic plan which involved the whole Bridgeport community in shaping the district's educational priorities and which has been unanimously adopted by the board of education.
- The superintendent has opened effective communication channels and forums for consultation with schools, teachers, administration and paraprofessional unions, the city, business and faith communities.
- There is a strong commitment to the social and emotional development of students alongside strategies to raise achievement.
- The introduction of a comprehensive information technology (IT) infrastructure is beginning to support learning effectively. It supports schools' administration with administrative purposes and provides teachers with a good tool with which to plan curriculum and begin to track student progress.

What the district needs to improve

- Raise achievement and test results for all students in reading and mathematics by:
 - Supporting schools in the development of common formative assessments and training them in the use of assessment data in order to enable planning to raise student achievement;
 - Supporting schools in improvements that result in consistently high quality instruction across all grades, and effective usage of assessment to enable the differentiation of student work which is matched to needs and raises achievement; and
 - Ensuring that an articulated English language arts curriculum guide, meeting the needs of students through grades 9 to 12, is implemented and that the reading for information skill is effectively taught to all grade 9 and 10 students throughout the district.
- Reduce suspensions and increase student attendance throughout the district's schools by:
 - Gathering the views of students, school psychologists, counselors and social workers in order to better understand why many students cut classes, find themselves in trouble and do not enjoy coming to school. Use this data source as information which enables the development of a strategy and action plan which aim to reduce suspensions and improve attendance;
 - Working with and training school administrators to be more consistent in behavior management within their buildings and more consistent in the agreements of the reasons for giving out suspensions, particularly to the most vulnerable students with special needs; and
 - Sharing the examples of good practice which have resulted in reduced suspensions and improved attendance across the district. Review and simplify the district's complex code of discipline policy so that it provides clear and improved guidance to the administration in schools about the offences which require a suspension from school.
- Improve the governance role of the board of education by ensuring that they, as advocates for all children through Bridgeport's public school system, focus on holding the superintendent and senior leadership team accountable through monitoring and evaluating the impact of the priorities on the district's strategic plan. While doing this, give the superintendent the autonomy to drive forward strategies to improve student achievement by:

- o Discussing the progress made on actions in the plan at board meetings in a more timely manner;
 - o Through its agenda, regularly inviting members of the senior team to provide progress reports on the priorities; and
 - o Ensuring robust and constructive procedures are in place to hold the superintendent accountable by developing and implementing the evaluation tool designed to evaluate his performance while increasing his autonomy to drive the strategy forward.
- Improve the instructional leadership role of school administration by providing professional development for principals and assistant principals which focuses on:
 - o Improving their knowledge and understanding of the literacy and numeracy curriculum;
 - o Honing their skills of analysis of data and its use to enable planning in their schools to raise student achievement; and
 - o Improving their skills in conducting lesson observations and providing feedback to teachers on instructional practice, so that teachers become more effective instructional leaders in their classrooms.
- Limit the number of initiatives and prioritize the main ones which raise student achievement so that:
 - o Based on the analysis of data, the district successfully moves forward with most important initiatives and has the opportunity to showcase across the district those which work the best to raise student achievement;
 - o The most effective use can be made of the resources available in sharing good practice to raise student achievement; and
 - o Prioritized initiatives make a cutting edge difference to the quality of education for students.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The district's overall performance

The district is in year four of needing improvement. The District Strategic Plan sets out a clear vision and direction for raising student achievement. The superintendent has skillfully engaged all important stakeholders across the Bridgeport community in shaping the plan. It has been unanimously adopted by the board of education. The plan ran ahead of the budget cycle, but given the introduction of a clear budget calendar, funds can be allocated to the goals in the District Improvement Plan. It is important to reduce the number of initiatives and focus on fewer key priorities to raise student achievement. It is also crucial that the board of education holds the superintendent accountable for managing change to raise student achievement, while providing him with the autonomy to make decisions and bring about change.

Overall, the achievement gap is narrowing in mathematics, but more needs to be done, particularly for grade 10 students. Student performance in reading overall is not good enough and there is a need for a clearly articulated English language arts program. The teaching of the reading skills students need in order to succeed in tests must be carefully monitored. Implementation of strategies to improve instruction across the district schools and the sharing of good practice between schools is an urgent and essential requirement for school improvement. Administration teams require more focused professional development in order to become better instructional leaders. Their skills in analyzing data, conducting lesson observations and giving feedback in their buildings need to be enhanced and improved. Student suspensions must be reduced if achievement is to improve. The district needs to listen more carefully to students and find out why so many cut classes at the high schools and why the dropout rate is so high and to act on the information gathered.

The online assessments are beginning to benefit teachers' tracking of student progress, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the system.

Throughout the district leadership team, there is good team spirit and everyone recognizes that they have an important part to play in improving educational opportunities for students. The district supervisors are valued by schools for the good work they do to support teachers. Key operational managers, such as the bus manager and food manager, recognize just how important it is to get students to school in time for a good breakfast so that they have the energy to learn. The building manager has developed a good plan to improve school buildings, but the plan is dependent on funds being made available.

Human resources work hard to recruit and retain good teachers. The budget process is good and the time is right to more carefully align funds to goals on the District Improvement Plan. It is important that these goals are carefully monitored. There is a thoughtful and detailed strategy to secure a funding model for the district's schools, which gives the board of education greater autonomy over funds than at present.

Partnership with parents is improving, but some schools still need to do much more to welcome parents and involve them in their children's education. The superintendent has networked well with the community and this benefits students' personal development. An example of this is the after school clubs, where students learn the importance of working as part of an effective team.

There are some good features in the arrangements for students with special education needs; in particular the number who attend their neighborhood school. There are individual schools within the district which do exceptionally well in narrowing the achievement gap. However, there are no systematic ways in which the good practice in these schools can be shared across the district and therefore it is not used effectively to raise achievement and aid school improvement.

Domain 1: Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment

This area of the district's work is below basic level and needs substantial improvement.

The district as a whole failed to make adequate yearly progress in the 2007 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) in both reading and mathematics. In mathematics there was growth in the percentage of students, who took the CMT, reaching the proficient level and above. This applied to students in all grades, except grades 3 and 5, between 2006 and 2007. However, in reading there was a dip in the percentage of students achieving at the proficient level and above between 2006 and 2007 in the CMT in all grades, except for grade 4. Over the same period of time, a very significant dip in reading was seen in the grade 10 CAPT test. Mathematics results for grade 10 students in the CAPT also dipped between 2006 and 2007. In mathematics, the proportion of students at or below basic level in the CMT also fell between 2006 and 2007, but at the same time reading increased. Within this tapestry, there is evidence of pockets of growth in certain grades, and significant growth in a few schools. For example, in mathematics in 2007, the proportion of grade 6 to 8 students who attained level 3 and above grew significantly from the previous year, and the percentage of grade 6 students at the proficient level and above increased from 58.9 percent in 2006 to 64 percent in 2007.

Although in recent years, the trend over time provides a picture of inconsistent growth, kindergarten through grade 3 students have shown an improvement in reading from January to May as evidenced by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) with the most growth shown in grade 3. In the CMT results, a few schools do exceptionally well. Individual schools within the district, such as the Multicultural Magnet Middle School, where 86 percent of low income students were within goal range in 2007 and the High Horizons Middle School where 63.3 percent of African American students were within goal range in 2007, are significant success stories. In addition, the performance of the magnet students in Central High School in the reading and mathematics CAPT masks the overall poor performance of the majority of the students. The district has set robust targets to raise student achievement, but these targets have not been based on a focused and detailed analysis of particular schools or groups of students. Consequently, too many schools have not identified which particular students they need to focus upon to raise their test scores. In recent years throughout grades 11 and 12 there has been very small growth in performance in the SAT Reasoning Test and the number of students leaving school for a two or four year college course. However, the upward trend is not consistent and growth is not fast enough to significantly reverse the negative trend.

The curriculum is a work in progress. There are a number of significant strengths, but also some weaknesses. There are early signs of promise with the implementation of a 'Response to Intervention' model for literacy in the early grades. Careful analysis of the progress of this work, and the fidelity with which it is being delivered in the district, will determine the extent to which the district will expand this model to provide targeted assistance to students in both the academic and social/emotional arena. Very good work has been done to shape a mathematics program linked to helpful quarterly assessments. There are good pacing guides and mathematics teachers, under the very effective leadership of the district supervisor for mathematics, are currently working on linking standards, content, skills and assessments aimed at enabling teachers across the district to be more consistent in their teaching of the subject. In completing this work, it is important that sufficient challenge is built in at the points of transition from one program to the next to secure rapid progression for students as they move through the grades. Good work has been done towards producing a scope and sequence in science for kindergarten through grade 8. Indeed, the grade 9 component has just been completed. There are good online science assessments for grade 4 and grade 8 students and kindergarten through grade 5 units cover the state standards. However, although the English language arts program has good features, it lacks coherence as a whole. There is a kindergarten through grade 8 program, broken into nine weekly units, which covers what teachers need to teach to enable their students to reach mastery. The guided reading and individual work program provide a model for differentiation. However, the development of ongoing assessment is a work in progress and the reading scheme used up to grade 6 is not implemented in grades 7 and 8. These were the grades which took a significant downturn in the 2007 CMT reading scores. Work in progress focuses on producing a skills based program in grades 9 and 10, as there is serious deficiency which occurs in these grades. It is imperative that this development does not lose sight of the importance of building in high expectations for all students, including those who are gifted and

talented. Assessments in English language arts lack cohesion and there is a need to bring together the good work in progress, such as the development of methods to involve students in self-assessment, into a cohesive assessment model. Good work has been done on the development of regular writing prompts which are scored according to the CMT rubrics and on the development of a portfolio model. However, English language arts lags behind both mathematics and science in providing the curriculum and assessments online for teachers. Mandatory tests for ELLs are carried out and the district holds good data on their performance, but achievement for these students remains too low. Sharper and smarter use needs to be made of this data to improve programs for these students in order to raise their achievement.

Imaginative use has been made of priority grant funding to develop alternative curriculum programs targeted at motivating some of the most vulnerable students across the district. Programs aimed at enabling students who are lacking credits for graduation and yet are older than their grade level peers have been particularly successful. The Opportunity Program at Central High School is effective in motivating a group of disaffected students; suspensions amongst the group are falling and their attendance improving. There is a very good aquacultural program for secondary students, which combines high order mathematics and science skills development. However, overall, in the high schools, the range of electives that are offered has fallen due to budget cuts. The district is committed to rolling out an emotional literacy program targeted at all students but particularly those with challenging needs related behavior. This has been met with varying degrees of enthusiasm within its schools, and is very much still in development.

The quality of instruction is far too variable and inconsistent across the district's schools. Even within a particular building it can range from very good to poor. The district has provided schools with good online quarterly assessments in mathematics, and some good science assessments. However, work needs to be done in working with teachers to design regular, common, formative assessments which can be used on a lesson by lesson basis in English and mathematics in order to assess what students can and cannot do. These assessments have the potential to inform and plan specific learning outcomes for students to raise their achievement. Currently, too few teachers across the district's schools as a whole differentiate their instruction in order to match work to student needs. In too many lessons, students complete the same work, which is too hard for some and too easy for others. The software package recently put in place by the district has the capacity to support teachers in assessing students in a more refined manner than at present, but many teachers need to be trained and to become more confident in the use of data to improve their instruction. The system for identifying students with special education needs is particularly effective. Language difficulties associated with a disability are not confused with the needs of ELLs. The district has reduced the over representation of Black students with emotional disturbance and the number of Hispanic students with learning difficulties because of its effective calibrated identification rubric.

A number of systems and structures have been put in place to develop data teams and to enable teachers to meet regularly and to plan collaboratively. However, although cross-district subject and content teams meet, principals are not at these meetings and so are not kept sufficiently sharply abreast of curriculum and assessment developments. Their skills as instructional leaders could be improved by attending these meetings. The district supervisors are valued by schools as are the literacy and numeracy coaches in the elementary schools. They all contribute well to raising student achievement, but the coaches do not have the required certification to hold teachers to account for their instruction. There are well thought out strategies to improve instruction and raise achievement. However, many are only just beginning to inform the revised District Improvement Plan and so their impact cannot yet be evaluated.

Within the context of very old buildings, the district has worked hard, and with a reasonable degree of effectiveness, to ensure students are taught in clean and safe buildings. There is excitement about a recent new building and those where there is work in progress. However, there is frustration about the lack of available funds to move the building managers' facility plan to improve all buildings forward at the speed with which the district would like.

There are some effective professional development opportunities, but again there are some weaknesses. Principals receive high quality professional development, but it does not focus sharply enough on developing and improving their skills as instructional leaders. There has been good professional

development to enhance teachers' skills in analyzing and using data, but it has not been sufficiently targeted at teachers most in need of this development. The mentoring programs for new principals and teachers are effective.

Domain 2: Leadership, Culture and Accountability

This area of the district's work needs improvement.

The district leadership team has a clearly articulated vision which focuses on closing the achievement gap between students from the lowest socio-economic background and those from more affluent parts within the district. The board of education and all staff at central office are clearly committed to this vision. There is also a focus on promoting the social and emotional development of every student throughout the district. A significant strength within the district is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities successfully educated in their home schools alongside their age appropriate peers. However, some decisions and actions taken to improve the quality of education for students have been impeded by a lack of funding. For example, the inclusion of students with challenging behaviors to enable them to work alongside their able-bodied peers occurred at the same time that budget cuts meant the loss of social worker and paraprofessional positions. Imaginative initiatives, funded out of grant monies, have been designed to support school leaders in managing change to raise student achievement. Grant money has also been used well to support the structure of small learning communities in the high schools so that every student is known. However, although school administration is committed to reducing the number of out of school suspensions in the high schools, no funding has been made available to create a suitable space in some of the buildings for in-school suspensions. Similarly, schools' administration requires professional development on how to become better instructional leaders, but there is no money set aside in the operational budget for this activity. The district may like to consider, as it uses its strategic plan to fine tune the developing District Improvement Plan, how funding can be aligned to this important development. In addition, it may also wish to consider how some of the collaborative data teams already in existence could embrace the involvement of principals.

The superintendent has a sense of urgency about what needs to be done. He has inspired and motivated the district leadership team to embrace his sense of urgency. However, as the newly evolving District Improvement Plan is shaped, it would be expedient for the district to limit the number of initiatives and to prioritize more smartly. Building administration teams are concerned about too many initiatives and should concentrate on those that are the most important. Improved data analysis can help this process, so that change is made only where necessary and professional development can be targeted where it is most needed. Also, there are schools which are doing very well for low income students and ethnic minority students. Unfortunately, this good practice has not yet been shared across other district schools so they can also raise the achievement of these groups of students.

The long-term strategic plan unanimously adopted by the board of education in April 2007 sets out the direction and map for raising student achievement and building their confidence and self-esteem. It successfully embraces the views of all stakeholders across the district and is based on a reasonable analysis of student performance. However, as it is used to inform the new District Improvement Plan, the important student performance objectives need to be broken down into more manageable and realistic goals used as stepping stones towards achievement of the long-term goals. Examples of these are the achievement of a zero student dropout rate and 100 percent of students graduating "college ready." The honing of these inspirational and challenging goals into achievable small stepped goals is more likely to assist teachers and building administration to sustain enthusiasm and energy. In addition, it is important for the district to discuss and review its success criteria, so that they become more focused on measuring realistic student outcomes. Now that there is a budget, calendar funds can be more accurately applied to the priorities within the plan and task groups can more meaningfully monitor progress in relation to the priorities.

The board of education is poised to develop its governance role as the advocate for the child. The time is right to improve the model for holding the superintendent accountable for student achievement across the

district, while at the same time giving him the autonomy, with his team, to drive the strategy forward to improve student achievement. Members from the board of education were involved in shaping the strategic plan and all board members have unanimously signed up to making it work. In addition they have designed an evaluation instrument, albeit in its early stage of development and in need of refinement, to evaluate the superintendent's performance. It may now wish to consider improving its role in monitoring and evaluating the strategic plan in a more timely and regular manner by placing important achievement priorities for discussion on the agenda at its board meetings. Consideration may be given to inviting members of the district leadership team to talk more regularly about the progress towards these priorities at its meetings. The board of education is involved in the budget-setting process and appropriately scrutinizes the budget. However, with improved accountability, there is an opportunity to consider allowing the superintendent to have autonomy to spend the budget on important staff resource decisions designed to raise achievement, thus enabling the board to hold back from micro management of the budget. Such a strategic approach is likely to enable the superintendent to focus more sharply on the big strategic picture in an effective partnership with a supportive board of education. This allows for the development of an advocacy model whereby the board of education works in an effective partnership with the district leadership team to improve student achievement.

Feedback from building administration, and from reviewers out in schools, confirms that principals and assistant principals need to improve the way in which lesson observations are conducted. They do not focus consistently on the connection between instruction and the impact on learning when observing teachers at work in their classrooms. Consequently, the quality of feedback to teachers on how to improve their instruction is too often lacking in useful advice and concrete examples. In addition, the evaluation of principals by the district team is also too variable and inconsistent in quality. It is imperative that the professional development of principals focuses on the improvement of instructional leadership and that this is reflected as a priority within the new District Improvement Plan. The allocation of adequate funding is also essential in ensuring this development is of sufficiently high quality. However, the mentor support for new principals is good. The use of literacy and numeracy coaches to model good instruction in elementary schools is effective in improving instruction, but staffing difficulties have been problematic and this has led to inconsistency across schools. The district supervisors for mathematics and science are very valuable in supporting building administration and faculty, but principals need to have greater involvement in their collaborative cross-district data team meetings in order to raise achievement. There have been staffing difficulties in this role for English language arts and so progress lags behind in mathematics and science, but the capacity is now in place to drive this forward.

Domain 3: Management of Human and Fiscal resources

This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.

The hiring policy for the appointment of teachers is transparent, fair and designed to appoint the best teachers in the interest of the students. It dovetails the teacher contractual requirements and involves building administration in the process of appointing teachers. There is a very good relationship, based on effective communication, between human resources and the teachers' union. Consequently, issues are usually quickly resolved and it is rare for an issue to go to arbitration. Although the district loses teachers to a neighboring district that pays higher salaries, it nonetheless has a retention rate above the state average. There are a number of innovative strategies to retain teachers, and the central human resources team has successfully bargained with the teachers' union to put a little more weighting (funding) into the Step I grade (grade for new teachers). It has used funds wisely to pay mentors to help induct new teachers. Its 'Grow Your Own Initiative,' with funding from the State Personnel Development Grant and in partnership with Southern Connecticut State University, which puts 30 paraprofessionals through school to become special education teachers, is both imaginative and successful.

The system and processes for managing fiscal resources meet minimum requirements. The present system of a program budget is a significant improvement on the former models of a line budget and then a site budget. It is open, transparent and clearly set out, so that it is accessible to the reader. Since the appointment of a new director of finance, important changes have been made in the budget process and budget policies. There is a robust plan for the budget and its management to be separated from the city

of Bridgeport's budget and management. The current District Strategic Plan ran ahead of the budget. Consequently, although loose fund allocations are placed alongside the action plans, the costs are broad stroke estimates. Now that a zero budget process and precise budget calendar have been implemented, the district is well poised to cost out its priorities more precisely as it uses its strategic plan to inform the key priorities for the next year within its revised District Improvement Plan. Consideration may be given to reducing the number of initiatives in its new plan and to costing them accurately with the funds available. So for example, if it considers the recommendation in this report of the importance of developing building administration as instructional leaders, it may like to allocate funding from its operation budget to their professional development and put a less urgent initiative on the back burner for the present.

Within the total funds available the district emphasizes two key objectives:

- to maximize the resources available to submit a reasonable budget; and
- to provide every student in Bridgeport with the best educational opportunities available on the basis of the funds available to the district, all of which focus on raising achievement and align with the strategies on the District Strategic Plan.

Some of the budgetary decisions made in recent years have had an adverse impact on the quality of some of its plans. For example, the district is committed to inclusion and to enable students with disabilities to be included in their home neighborhood schools. Yet in 2006–07, the decision was made to eliminate three counselor positions and increase class sizes in 7th and 8th grades in five schools. In addition, over three quarters of students in Bridgeport attend schools which have buildings in need of significant improvement. Currently there are often significant time delays between requests being made to city for improvement and action being taken because of lack of funds.

With the introduction of the 2008–09 Budget Development Calendar, the time is now right to sharpen the allocation of funds to key priorities for the year ahead. It is important for the board of education to monitor the funds allocated to these priorities. The zero budget process now starts in November with the budget manual and request forms being sent to schools and departments. They are invited to make budget requests according to the needs of their schools and departments. This is a thorough, detailed and open process. The central facilities and business office team has a good relationship with the board of education finance committee. This committee fulfills its role in scrutinizing and monitoring the budget regularly. It did this well before the new budget model was introduced. However, on occasions the board of education micro-manages spending decisions in relation to staff appointments, rather than handing over this strategic autonomy to the superintendent, together with the understanding that he will be held robustly to account to the board for decisions made. The new budget model will enable the board of education to see what is spent under the various budget headings from month to month with clarity and to ask pertinent questions. The superintendent has also developed a positive relationship with the common council in relation to fiscal matters. Roles and responsibilities are set out clearly in the 2008–09 budget development manual.

The district has a formula funded approach to allocating resources to schools. The formula used has been in place for several years and allocates a higher per student amount to high schools than to elementary and middle schools. The pupil allocation is vulnerable and can increase or decrease yearly dependent on revenue shortage in a particular year and/or a fall in the district enrollment figure. This is a common approach, but the district may wish to consider re-visiting the basis on which the differentiated payments are made between the elementary and middle schools and the high schools, if only to check that they are still appropriate. Principals are, in addition, given a discretionary amount of \$5 per student across all schools. They have freedom over how this funding is used, so long as it dovetails with the priorities on their School Improvement Plans. Purchasing is not yet done through a streamlined online system, but the model in place provides good value for purchasing. All proposed purchases for \$7,500 or more go out to bid/tender and are managed through the city purchasing agent. All funding is linked to School Improvement Plans, but the allocations could be more precise. Overall, although budget systems and processes are in need of improvement and this is a work in progress, they nonetheless serve most of the students and schools well.

Of its total 2007–08 Adopted Budget of \$206,575,241, the district spends 63.47 percent on salaries, 16.8 percent on employee benefits, 8.78 percent on purchased services, 8.21 percent on tuition, 2.19 percent

on supplies and 0.54 percent on property. These proportions are in line with what would be expected in a district of this size, with the possible exception of the low proportion spent on property. The newly appointed building manager has put together a \$58 million prioritized plan for building improvements for submission to the city. This is in addition to the City Facility Plan for the major capital projects of new buildings, which is a work in progress. There is a significant backlog of issues which need urgent attention to ensure that buildings of quality which all students deserve can be provided throughout the district.

The district has been successful in bidding for, and receiving, increased grant allocations year on year over a five year period. Grants awarded include entitlement and competitive grants. The total federal and state grant allocation for 2007–08 is \$51,169,725; the SDE Accountability Grant is \$2,033,560. There are a total of 70 grants. There are precise and clear district guidelines for accessing these grants, which ensure that public law guidelines are adhered to when making applications for federally funded projects and federal grants. Similarly, agency guidelines are followed when making applications for private endowment grants. All grant proposals are presented to the district superintendent for review and approval. Proposals are then presented by the superintendent to the board, with a recommendation for approval. This process is totally open and transparent, and subject to rigorous scrutiny and review. All projects funded by grant income are detailed in the budget documentation. A project director is responsible for ensuring that each project's solvency and for overseeing that the projects are carried out in accordance with the conditions of the grant. However, she is new in her position and recognizes the importance of tightly allocating specific amounts of funds to the prioritized actions on the District Improvement Plan.

In 2007–08, the district received Title I; Title IIa and Title IIc; Title III; Title IV; and Title V funding. Title I (\$13.4 million) funding is used to resource literacy and numeracy coaches in the elementary schools. It is also used to fund parental involvement programs which impact on the classroom. There is a tutoring component funded for parents who elect for their children to attend when schools are deemed to be failing them. Title III funds amount to \$418,000. This amount funds bilingual assistants to support the ELLs across the district.

The special education budget is identified by the district as being 20 percent of the total education budget. This is below the average of its statistical neighbors and below the state average of 22 percent. The district has a strong inclusion strategy and has a policy of bringing students back from out of district schools wherever possible. It identifies fewer students as having special education needs than both its statistical neighbors and state average. However, at a time of increasing inclusion opportunities, the district has made some cuts to related services and this must be reviewed to sustain the good inclusion strategy effectively. It would be helpful to have an in-house stand alone special education budget to use as a management tool in order to see at a glance exactly where the spending on special education services are made. The amount and use of the IDEA grant is clear, as is the amount of the operational budget spent on gifted and talented students.

Domain 4: Operational Systems

This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.

The District Educational Technology Plan is detailed and robust. An effective infrastructure is in place to support student E-learning and also to provide building administration with an effective tool to manage student data, such as attendance, suspensions and students' addresses and telephone numbers. The software package with curriculum and assessments is beginning to prove extremely valuable in enabling teachers to plan lessons and to track student progress. The district provides school administrators with good electronic student performance data. However, further training is required to support teachers in making effective use of the data they are provided with by the district to plan for raising achievement. Outages are rare and, when they occur, problems are speedily resolved. Currently, with a vision to gain further budget autonomy and to move away from reliance on the city, the district is exploring a suitable software package to manage its finances.

External and internal communication systems are on the whole effective. Consultation and transparency of communication are strengths in this district. The superintendent keeps the unions and the board of education, in its advocacy role for the child, well informed. All stakeholders across the district are consulted over, and involved in, shaping educational policy.

The health and safety needs of students are high priority. There are clinics strategically located on school sites in order to address students' mental health needs and provide counseling on sexual health. Risk assessments are thorough. Recommendations made by fire officers and state kitchen inspectors are followed up by the district speedily and meticulously. Arrangements are in place to improve the security of school buildings. Video cameras and buzzer entry systems are in place in a number of schools and are being rolled out to others as part of a capital program. Recently, the building manager has written a new Capital Facility Plan, which prioritizes needs across the district's schools in terms of repair, upgrade and maintenance. However, often there is a time lag between a request for work to be carried out and action taken because of lack of funds being released from the city. As part of the long-term City Facility Plan, there is a work in progress in respect of new buildings, but it is slow. However, a recently completed new building is to the state-of-the-art specification. At least one school in every cluster complies with accessibility requirements and there is a plan to improve all of the others.

A large number of students are transported daily (10,895 per day). The district has a good safety record, and student behavior on the large buses has improved significantly since video cameras were installed. However, challenging behavior remains an issue on the buses used to transport students with disabilities. Subject to funding, it is planned to equip these buses with video cameras. Monitors are provided for students with disabilities, but retention and continuity of staffing is problematical. Overall, buses are in good condition, but some drivers are concerned about the quality of repairs. There are plans to computerize routing as the district moves towards redistricting of the student population so that students attend neighborhood schools.

Operational managers show a real care towards the students and imaginatively connect what they do to student learning. The bus manager monitors scheduling carefully, always with an eye on getting students to school on time and as quickly as possible. Bus drivers work hard to promote as much independent mobility as possible for non-ambulant students when getting on and off buses. The food and nutrition manager is committed to providing healthy breakfasts and lunches so that students have the energy they need to learn well. Considerable sensitivity is given to religious dietary requirements. Speech pathologists and occupational therapists work effectively to provide feeding programs for students with disabilities, to promote their independence in feeding. A pilot to improve students' readiness to learn by providing breakfast in the classroom in six elementary schools has resulted in improved socialization, better attendance and fewer nurse visits.

Criterion 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction

This area of the district's work meets minimum requirements.

The superintendent has been proactive in putting in place structures to listen to the views of students. Student representatives helped shape the District Strategic Plan. They are invited on occasions to attend and address board of education meetings. The superintendent has introduced a regular round table meeting to listen to selected student views. However, there are insufficient structures in place to listen to the views of the whole student body across the district. For example, insufficient use is made of surveys to gather student views about suspensions, and why a number of them cut class, or stay away from school. Systems in place at present do not sufficiently tap into the hearts and minds of the disaffected students. An opportunity is also missed to bring all of the social workers, counselors and psychologists from across the district to the round table on a regular basis to discuss the reasons for student disaffection, and to use the data from such meetings to plan to reduce suspensions and raise attendance.

Robust systems are in place for the superintendent and the district's human resource team to consult with unions. This attends to potential conflicts early and helps to resolve them. In turn, this results in very few issues growing out of proportion or going to arbitration. In addition, the relationship between the district

and the unions is good, and so they can work effectively with regard to problems with staff in schools as true advocates of the child. The unions support the district in helping building administration deal with staffing difficulties.

There is work in progress to better engage with parents in the education of their children. The executive parent coordinator group speaks highly of the parent workshops provided by the district to support parents in becoming more confident in helping their children with new methods of learning to read and solve algebraic problems. However, this group recognizes that there is considerable inconsistency in the quality of parent groups across the district's schools, and the negative response of some schools to such groups. It goes so far as to say that there are still schools where the parental voice is not welcomed or valued. As evidenced by the district's strategic plan, much work is still required to develop effective partnerships between schools and parent groups across the district. At the preschool stage, good attempts have been made by the district to engage parents and guardians in the education of their children. Uptake though, even here, is low and the district recognizes that it has considerable work to do to reach out to parents of children and young people of all ages.

There is a wide array of school, community, business and voluntary organization partnerships. These play a very important part in shaping educational strategy and supporting actions which benefit the development of students both socially and academically. At school level, the community supports valuable out of hour's clubs and an extensive range of enrichment activities. At a strategic level there is a willingness on the part of the community to support the implementation of policy and in the monitoring of its effectiveness for students. Effective use is made of local universities to support the district's key priorities.

The superintendent is aware of federal and state legislation and builds mandatory expectations into strategic planning. Good links have been established with the city and work is in progress to gain greater autonomy over the education budget. There is effective networking with politicians, but always in the advocacy role for the child. The superintendent is robust and has a steely determination to continue to liaise with the state about what he sees as a significant inequity in funding, which is a barrier in driving forward his improved achievement agenda.