

BUDGET 2017-18

TALKING POINTS

- Good afternoon. On behalf of the Bridgeport Community, thank you for the opportunity to present the financial needs of the Bridgeport School District, as you consider the 2017-18 budget.
- Bridgeport is the lowest on the economic scale among all school districts in Connecticut. A district of over 21,000 students currently, the second largest in Connecticut, Bridgeport has added almost 700 in student enrollment over the last five years; and within the total, there has been corresponding growth in special education students and English language learners, our neediest students. Special education students constitute almost 16% of the enrollment; and English language learners, 15% of enrollment.
- As to our education budget, it is an established fact that Bridgeport is grossly underfunded, in comparison to its peer districts. Compare Bridgeport's NCEP of \$14,328 (as of October 2016) to Hartford, at \$19,305; to New Haven, at \$18,247; to Waterbury, at \$15,214; and to Stamford, at \$18,045. Bridgeport is underfunded by \$21M for each \$1,000 in NCEP it does not receive. If Bridgeport were equitably funded with Hartford, as an example, Bridgeport's budget would rise by \$105M!
- In Bridgeport, the City's percentage contribution to the total education budget is only 26%, while the State contributes the balance, 74%. Evidently, with the State contribution at this high percentage, **Bridgeport relies substantially on State funding.**
- In this current school year, 2016-17, Bridgeport has confronted a **negative funding status** due to a reduced operating budget **and** reductions in grant revenue. Specifically, City funding remained virtually flat, while the State ECS/Alliance appropriation was lowered by -\$1,161,334 in total, \$911,334 at the start and \$250,000 midyear; and the cuts in various State grants, such as the Priority grant, Magnet and Aquaculture, amounted to an additional loss of -\$1.3M. On top of negative funding, the district had to manage escalated costs, such as collective bargaining, health insurance and special education. **These two factors led to a plan to close a Budget Gap of \$16M.**

- **What actions did the district take to close the Budget Gap in 2016-17?**
Among the services eliminated were: Kindergarten paraprofessionals, Home-School Coordinators, guidance counselors at the elementary level, mathematics coaches and university interns. Clearly, the loss of these services has an adverse impact on the capacity of schools to meet the needs of our students, particularly for intervention geared toward academic and socio-emotional growth.
- **In planning for 2017-18**, Bridgeport will require an additional appropriation of **\$11.4M to fulfill non-discretionary purposes**. Within this amount, our Board of Education seeks funding to restore paraprofessionals in kindergarten classes, one per two classes. It is generally accepted among educators that assistance in the kindergarten classroom has a powerful effect in strengthening the foundation of a child's development.
- **For 2017-18**, in addition to \$11.4M, the district is requesting a supplement of at least **\$3.6M** to provide services we regard as essential. With discretionary funds, we would expand intervention services in the early grades and in grades 9/10 in the high schools, as well as pursue curriculum and technology renewal at a more rapid pace in alignment with advances.
- **For 2017-18**, in summary, Bridgeport is seeking a total increase in the operating budget of \$15M, comprised of \$11.4M labeled as non-discretionary and 3.6M as discretionary.
- **We urge the State legislature to vote in favor of an equitable allocation of resources toward the operating budget of the Bridgeport School District, equal to \$15M as described. We further urge you to vote against recurring reductions in critical State grants.**
- Thank you for your consideration of the needs of students in Bridgeport's public schools.