

Addressing the Achievement Gap

SMALL CLASSES ARE BETTER

The results are in! National studies show that reducing class size can significantly narrow the achievement gap between under-performing students and those performing at or above grade level. Smaller class size is an important bridge over the divide between the two Connecticut's – one producing the students who make the state first in the nation in achievement, and the other leaving children behind without the knowledge and skills to compete in our changing economy.

BENEFITS OF SMALLER CLASSES

- ⇒ Higher standardized scores in mathematics, language arts, and curriculum-based tests in early grades
- ⇒ Improved SAT scores
- ⇒ Higher rate of high school graduation – including graduation with honors and attending college
- ⇒ Long-term learning benefits that translate into consistent academic achievement
- ⇒ Lower rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration

National associations of educational professionals including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommend a class size of 15 students in Grades K-3, and even smaller in special education programs. The State of Connecticut recommends a class size of 18 in Kindergarten – 3rd grade.

Bridgeport must lower class size to improve academic performance. But decreasing class size alone isn't enough to narrow the achievement gap. Hiring qualified teachers – and offering them professional development opportunities – as well as providing high quality curriculum and creating appropriately designed and maintained schools are key to students' future academic success. Studies caution that hiring unqualified teachers can negatively impact a district's efforts to improve academic performance and address the achievement gap.

A TENNESSEE TALE: STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SMALL CLASSES SHOW LONG-TERM GAINS

The STAR Project, a longitudinal class-size study in Tennessee, found that students in smaller classes (13-17 students) substantially outperformed students in larger classes on both standardized and curriculum-based tests. Students enrolled in small classes enjoyed long-term gains; 72% of students graduated on time, compared to 66% from larger classes, and 19% dropped out, compared to 23% from larger classes. Additionally, the percentage of class time devoted to instruction in smaller classes increased 6% while the time devoted to non-instructional activities such as discipline decreased 6%. *The bottom line: students in small classes were between 6 and 13 months ahead of other students in math, reading and science.*

TO NARROW THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP, BRIDGEPORT SCHOOLS NEED SMALLER CLASS SIZES WITH QUALIFIED TEACHERS

- ▶ Two out of three Bridgeport elementary classrooms are overcrowded, with 74% of K-3 classes overcrowded and 64% of Grade 4-8 classes.
- ▶ Class size in Bridgeport is significantly larger than class size statewide.
- ▶ To achieve smaller classes, Bridgeport needs to build new schools and renovate existing facilities.
- ▶ Bridgeport lags far behind Hartford and New Haven in building new schools and in securing state funding.

Bridgeport is facing a crisis resulting from the delays in new school construction. At least 300 **MORE** classrooms are needed to achieve the documented academic improvements that can be gained by smaller class sizes.

The Bridgeport Public Schools Facility Master Plan recommended up to 13 new school buildings. More than \$443,000,000 has already been approved by the state for up to eight new schools.

THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR THE CITY TO MOVE FORWARD RAPIDLY WITH THESE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

BRIDGEPORT'S CLASSROOMS ARE BADLY OVERCROWDED DURING THE MOST IMPORTANT LEARNING YEARS

3 out of 4 Grade K-3 Classrooms Are Overcrowded			
Grade	Total Classrooms*	Overcrowded Classrooms	Percent Overcrowded Classrooms
K-3	294	217	74%

Grade K-3 Classrooms With More Than 18 Students on October 1, 2003
*Does not include part-day kindergarten, bilingual or self-contained special education classrooms.

Research demonstrates the importance of K-3 learning and the long-term positive impact resulting from small class size. When class size is reduced to between 15-20 students, there is a significant impact on student achievement. The State Department of Education recommends class size of no more than 18 students in Kindergarten – 3rd grade. According to a U.S. Department of Education report, “a growing body of research demonstrates that students in small classes in early grades make more rapid educational progress than students in larger classes,” and these gains persist throughout their elementary education.

A ten-student reduction in class size raises the percentage of third-grade students who exceed national median test scores by roughly three percentage points in mathematics and four percentage points in reading. Reducing class size means reducing the achievement gap in our state.

A comparison between current Bridgeport class size and the statewide average for Kindergarten and Grade 2 reveals that Bridgeport classes are larger by 2 students. Both Hartford and New Haven have done a better job of reducing class size than Bridgeport. In Hartford, the average Kindergarten class size is 2 students smaller than Bridgeport, and both Hartford and New Haven have smaller Grade 2 classes by 1-2 students respectively.

OVERCROWDED ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS RESULT IN POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND TEACHER TURNOVER

A DEFINITION OF OVERCROWDING: More than 18 students per K-3 classroom and 25 or more students per classroom in Grades 4-8.

Overcrowding exacts its toll on student achievement. Twenty-seven out of 33 elementary schools in Bridgeport have at least half of their classrooms overcrowded. More than 70% of fourth, sixth and eighth-grade students in Bridgeport who took the Connecticut Mastery Test in fall 2002, did not meet the state goal in reading, writing or math. This early learning deficit has a lasting impact because research shows that students who do well on standardized tests in early grades, do well later on. Overcrowding also leads to teacher turnover. Nearly 10%, or 139, Bridgeport teachers did not return to their jobs for the 2002-03 school year. Nearly three out of four Bridgeport teachers who leave take positions in other school districts.

BENEFITS OF SMALL CLASS SIZE IN GRADES 4-8 According to a national study by the Educational Testing Service, lower student/teacher ratios are positively related to higher mathematics achievement in the fourth grade. Fourth graders progress 33% more quickly in smaller classes of fewer than 20 students. The U.S. Department of Education recommends a class size of no more than 24 students for Grades 4-8. At the eighth-grade level, lower student/teacher ratios improve the school social environment, which in turn leads to higher achievement.

BRIDGEPORT CLASS SIZE STILL LAGS FAR BEHIND THE STATE

Compared with the state average of 22 students per class in Grades 5 and 7, Bridgeport has 25 and 27 students respectively. In Grade 5, Hartford and New Haven have 4 fewer students per class than Bridgeport and 3-5 fewer students per class in Grade 7.

Bridgeport Class Sizes Are Too Large				
	Bridgeport	New Haven	Hartford	CT
Kindergarten	20.2	22.4	18.0	18.3
2nd Grade	21.7	21.0	19.3	19.6
5th Grade	24.9	20.9	21.1	21.5
7th Grade	26.7	23.6	22.1	21.9

Average Class Size 2001-02

Over the last seven years, Bridgeport reduced class size significantly in Kindergarten and Grade 2. However, class size in Grade 7 increased dramatically.

In the Last Seven Years, Bridgeport Has Made Progress in Reducing Class Size in the Early Grades, But Class Size Has Gotten Significantly Worse in Grade 7

Kindergarten	- 2 students
2nd Grade	- 2 students
5th Grade	- 1 students
7th Grade	+ 4 students

Change in Average Class Size From 1996-2002



THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR THE CITY TO MOVE FORWARD RAPIDLY WITH THE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS.

WHEN IT COMES TO HIGH SCHOOL SMALLER IS BETTER

Both the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommend smaller high schools and smaller class size to improve student achievement. Test scores of students in small high schools are consistently higher than test scores in larger schools. Likewise, small schools facilitate greater contact between student and teacher and lead to higher rates of attendance as well as improved student self-perceptions and performance. Smaller learning environments create happier, safer, higher achieving students.

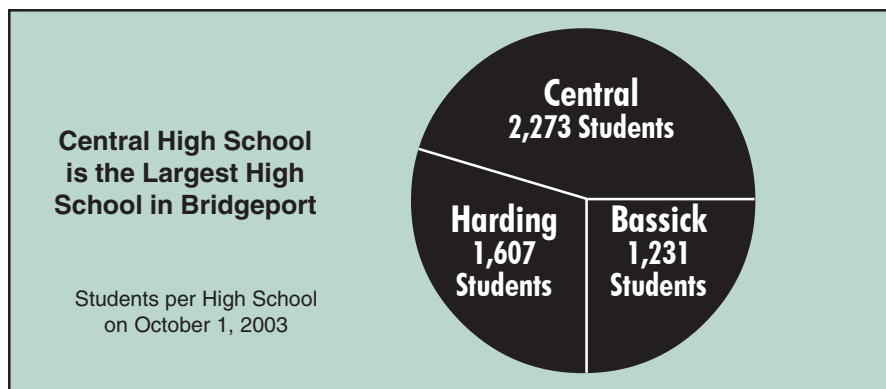
OVERCROWDED HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES Bridgeport high school classes tend to be less crowded than K-8 classrooms because as many as 30% of 8th graders who attend Bridgeport elementary schools go on to a private or technical high school. More than one out of four students drop out of school before graduating.

1 in 3 High School Classes is Overcrowded			
High School	Total Classes*	Overcrowded Classes	Percent Overcrowded Classes
Bassick	304	178	58%
Central	671	170	25%
Harding	390	124	38%

Bridgeport High School Classes With More Than 25 Students
November 2003

*Does not include physical education, study halls or self-contained special education classes.

BRIDGEPORT HIGH SCHOOLS ARE TOO LARGE The overall size of Bridgeport high schools puts students at a disadvantage. Research by the National Association of Secondary School Principals has found that the ideal high school size should be no more than 600 students. The average national dropout rate for high schools with more than 1,000 students is 6.4%, compared to 3.5% in schools with fewer than 200 students – statistics that clearly put Bridgeport teens at risk in our three high schools, each with enrollments of well over 1,000 students.



A SUCCESS STORY BRIDGEPORT SPECIAL EDUCATION

OVER THE LAST 3 YEARS, BRIDGEPORT HAS LOWERED SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS SIZES *By law, all children with special education needs should be placed in their least restrictive educational environment.* In 2001-02, in compliance with the law, the Bridgeport Board of Education expanded the special education continuum of services to ensure that students with disabilities are educated with non-disabled students in the same classrooms and in their neighborhood settings. The district also worked to reduce class size for special education students with severe behavioral needs. In order to achieve its class-size reduction goals and bring students back to their neighborhood schools, the Special Education Department increased its budget by nearly \$3 million with a significant portion of those funds used to hire additional classroom teachers and paraprofessionals.

MORE STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL BEHAVIORAL NEEDS ARE IN SMALLER CLASSES Bridgeport schools recorded a 140% increase in the percentage of students in smaller special education classes, with a ratio of no more than eight students to one teacher and one paraprofessional – 13% of students in smaller classes in the 2000-01 school year, compared to 31% of students in the 2003-04 school year.

Special Education Success in Reducing Class Sizes				
% Special Education Students in Smaller Size Classes	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
	13% of students	28.5% of students	32% of students	31% of students

In the last three years, the percentage of K-6th grade special education students going to their home school zone nearly doubled in Bridgeport, and the number of 7-8th graders in neighborhood schools increased by 50%. That's good news because neighborhood schools increase parent involvement in the school, enable students in special education to develop friends in their neighborhood, and reduce time students spend in transit.

DROPPING OUT: A CASE STUDY Julia Richmond High School in New York City, a school of 3,000 students, had a 66% dropout rate and the highest rate of violence in the NYC school system. After the high school was broken into six separate small learning communities, the rate of violence dropped to one of the lowest in the city's high schools.

More Special Education Students are Attending Their Neighborhood School Than Ever Before			
Grade Level Special Education	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grade K-6	27% students in their neighborhood school	46% students	47% students
Grade 7-8	46% students	71% students	69% students

Percent of Bridgeport Special Education Students Attending Their Neighborhood School

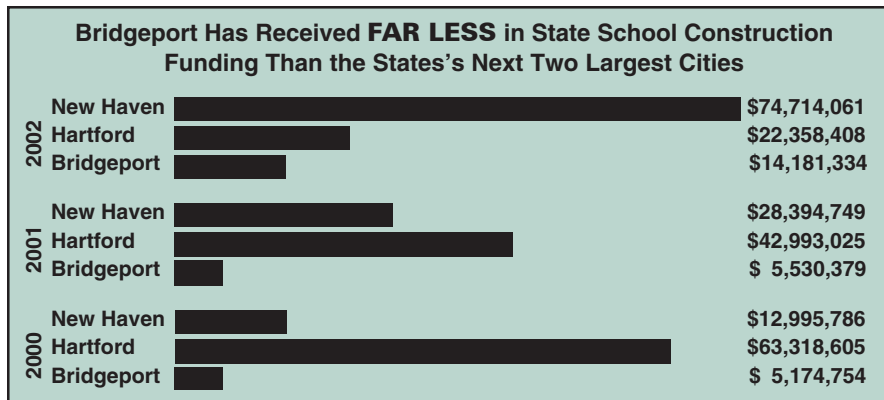
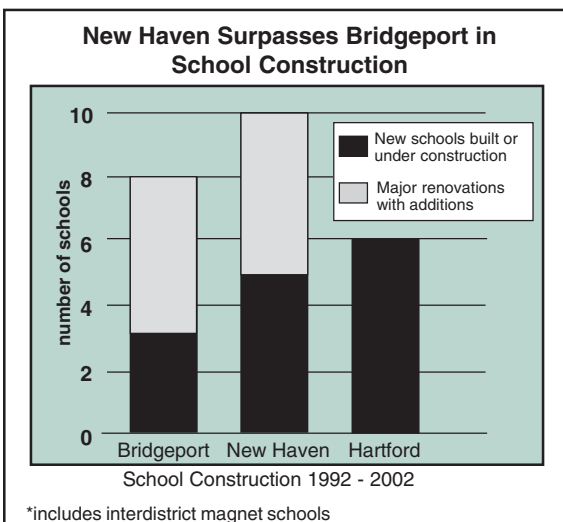
The commitment to increase staffing continued into the 2002-03 school year, enabling the Special Education Department to increase the number of special education teachers by 15% and paraprofessionals by 52%. Subsequently, the number of special education teachers leaving the district was greatly reduced. Five special education teachers did not return to teach for the 2002-03 school year, compared to 18 in 1999-00 – a decrease of nearly 75% in teacher turnover.

The Board of Education and the City Made the Commitment to Reduce Class Size by Hiring More Teachers and Paraprofessionals			
STAFF	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Teachers	192	204	221
Para-professionals	92 full-time 30 part-time	140 full-time	140 full-time

Bridgeport Special Education Classroom Staff 2001-2003

The gains in reducing Special Education class size, teacher retention and use of paraprofessionals should be implemented throughout the rest of the school system.

BRIDGEPORT SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION LAGS FAR BEHIND HARTFORD AND NEW HAVEN



State School Construction Funding 2000-2002

AGING SCHOOL FACILITIES Of Bridgeport's 36 public school buildings, four are more than 50 years old and have never been renovated; another four are more than 100 years old with renovations that are more than 15 years old.

Over the next ten years, the district will need at least 884 classrooms at the elementary school level, 300 more than the district currently has.

BRIDGEPORT LAGS BEHIND IN BUILDING STARTS AND FUNDING

Hartford and New Haven have nearly doubled Bridgeport in school construction over the last three years. In Hartford, it takes an average of five years from the time the educational specifications are approved until the school is ready for students. In nearby Fairfield, city and state approval, demolition and construction on the McKinley Elementary School project took two years from start to finish. In Bridgeport, the average length of time for new school construction from start to finish is seven to eight years. New Haven has 60% more construction activity underway than Bridgeport. Over the last three years Hartford received \$128.7 million in state funding and New Haven received \$116.1 million – nearly five times as much as Bridgeport.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS Over the past decade the city identified the need for up to eight new schools, and funding for all of the projects has already been **APPROVED AND COMMITTED BY THE STATE**, a total of **\$443,372,854**. However, the City of Bridgeport has only accessed funds for two of the proposed new schools, the West Side and North End Schools.

IN APRIL 2000, THE CITY TOOK CONTROL OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AWAY FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Despite "fast tracking" status for two schools, construction is still not underway for either the West Side or North End schools. The remaining school construction projects were put on hold until the Bridgeport Public Schools Facility Master Plan was completed.

The plan was adopted by the Board of Education in May 2003, but the City Council has yet to act on it. In the meantime, a total of \$355,122,854 in state funds has been approved but not yet accessed by the city because of the city's slow progress.

SCHOOL PROJECTS UNDERWAY

- West Side School to replace Elias Howe School
- North End School to replace Webster and Maplewood Annex Schools
- Barnum Replacement/
- East Side School to replace Waltersville and Barnum Schools

STALLED PROJECTS

- East End School. to replace McKinley and Newfield Schools
- Hall School Replacement
- Fourth High School
- Harding High School Replacement

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A SCHOOL? ... MUCH LONGER IN BRIDGEPORT

In other school districts including New Haven, the average time from approval by the local Boards of Education to completion is five years or less — Bridgeport lags far behind.

More than \$49 million in state funding was approved for the new West Side School in June 1999. Groundbreaking took place four years later, in June 2003. Demolition of existing structures is scheduled to take place during 2003-04, with construction to begin in 2004. The new school is scheduled for a fall 2006 opening – a span of over *seven years*, assuming no further delays.

The North End School was also approved by the state in June 1999 and \$39 million committed. Site selection was not approved until four years later, in April 2003. Construction is scheduled to begin in fall 2005. The school is projected to be open for students in fall 2007, *eight years* from start to finish.

A Tale of Delays and Inaction by the City			
WEST SIDE SCHOOL		NORTH END SCHOOL	
Board of Education Approval	June 1998	Board of Education Approval	June 1999
City Approval	June 1998	City Approval	June 1999
State Approval for \$49.2 M	June 1999	State Approval for \$39 M	June 1999
Board of Education Revisions	December 2000	Board of Education Revisions	December 2000
Architect Hired	November 2001	Architect Hired	November 2001
Groundbreaking	June 2003	Site Identified	July 2003
Demolition/Land Clean-up Begin	Sept. 2003	Demolition/Land Clean-up Begin	Fall 2004*
Construction Begins	Fall 2004*	Construction Begins	Fall 2005*
School Construction Complete	Fall 2006*	School Construction Complete	Fall 2007*
* projected		* projected	

WAITING FOR THE CITY TO TAKE ACTION

In fall 2002, the Board of Education hired a consulting firm, DeJong & Associates, to develop a master plan for school construction. A Steering Committee composed of parents, educators, school and city officials, and community leaders was convened to work with the consultants in creating a Bridgeport Public Schools Facility Master Plan. The Steering Committee met 10 times between September 2002 and March 2003. Two major community conversations involved the input of hundreds of parents. This comprehensive Master Plan report demonstrates the critical need for smaller classes, credentialed teachers in every classroom, and buildings that are safe and conducive to academic success.

The final School Facility Master Plan was presented to the Board of Education in May 2003 and the Board adopted the plan. City Council action is now needed. The City Council needs to approve the plan and vote to bond its share of the funding to get the construction going without further delay.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

The Bridgeport Public Schools Facility Master Plan calls for building up to 13 new schools in Bridgeport at a cost of over \$470 million and major renovations and additions to up to nine schools at an estimated cost of \$180 million. This is an opportunity to build not only new schools providing more classrooms and more modern facilities, but also an opportunity to provide jobs to Bridgeport residents.

Unemployment in Bridgeport was 8.4% in October 2003. There are many ready and willing workers in Bridgeport. Construction jobs are higher paying jobs and could provide a needed boost to Bridgeport's economy. BCAC urges the city and Board of Education to negotiate with school construction contractors that 50-75% of all construction jobs be reserved for Bridgeport residents.

Many of Bridgeport's schools have become hubs of community activity with after-school programs, school-based health centers, summer programs, and a range of community activities that take place in the evenings and weekends. Schools will increasingly serve as centers for community life. In this role, they can help to build strong communities. Bridgeport's new school construction plan offers yet another opportunity to promote community development. BCAC urges that neighborhood revitalization be a key consideration in the decisions on where the new schools will be built.

SCHOOL DESIGN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A well-designed and maintained school not only reduces operating costs and contributes to teacher retention but can enhance students' academic performance. As Bridgeport undertakes a major school construction effort, it can benefit from research findings that link design features with academic performance.

- ▶ Providing space in schools for preschool classrooms ensures that young children have the opportunity to participate in a quality early education experience, which has been shown to significantly improve academic outcomes.
- ▶ In a national survey, teachers cited climate control and acoustics as the most important environmental factors affecting classroom success. Poor classroom acoustics can be addressed with low-cost, low-tech solutions, including the use of quiet heating, ventilation, and regularly maintained air conditioning (HVAC) systems, which also minimize respiratory ailments. Placing classrooms away from internal noise – band room, cafeteria, and traffic – can enhance acoustic values.
- ▶ Daylight and indirect lighting can reduce eyestrain and headaches related to direct lighting.
- ▶ Designing aesthetically pleasing classrooms – cool colors to calm, stronger hues for areas that demand notice – can help focus and lengthen student attention spans.

CREATING SCHOOLS WITHIN SCHOOLS

Use of design to create schools within schools supports and enhances the bonds of learning communities. Schools within schools are large public schools that have been divided into smaller units or schools that function independently, with their own budgets and planning, while security and building operations are handled jointly. The ideal size for a school within a school is up to 500 students. In 1996, a report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommended smaller schools and smaller classes as essential for student improvement.

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BCAC RECOMMENDATIONS

CITY

- ▶ Expedite the bonding process and move ahead quickly to address the unfulfilled promise of new schools.
- ▶ Reform the school building process, and move rapidly to site acquisition and contractor selection through a bidding process open to public scrutiny.
- ▶ Move rapidly to request funding already approved by the state as soon as City Council approves the Facility Master Plan.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

- ▶ Make quarterly public reports on school construction progress.

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- ▶ Waive some state requirements to account for unique density of Bridgeport and site limitations to keep state reimbursement at 80% of project costs.

PUBLIC

- ▶ Advocate for your children by getting involved and speaking out about the need for small class sizes and the urgent need for school construction.
- ▶ Hold the Mayor accountable for moving quickly on school construction. Call the Mayor and City Council members and tell them you want action NOW.



Bridgeport
Child
Advocacy
Coalition

"Mobilizing on Behalf of Children"

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

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