

HELP WANTED: CLASSROOM TEACHERS

*A report on teacher recruitment and retention in
the Bridgeport public school system*

THE BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM NEEDS ATTENTION.

At the conclusion of the 1999-2000 school year, *one of every eight full-time teachers* in the Bridgeport public schools did not return to their classrooms the following September.

Consider the affect of this statistic on students. When one in every eight teachers leaves by the end of one school year and does not return the following year, *as many as 3,500 students in more than 150 classrooms* across the city are affected.

In every school system — and particularly in an urban school system — retaining teachers is critical. Without a corps of teachers returning to their classrooms year after year, systems break down and students suffer. Teachers are “dropping out” of the Bridgeport school district at unacceptable rates.

Many Bridgeport teachers are dropping out to move on to school districts with newer facilities, better salary schedules and higher per pupil investment in education. Former Bridgeport teachers, now teaching in other school districts, are less likely to face overcrowded classrooms, leaking ceilings and broken toilets, scarce classroom materials or diminishing education dollars.

QUALIFIED TEACHERS ARE NOT LEAVING THE PROFESSION . . .

During the 2000-2001 school year:

- ▶ Nearly 160 teachers did not return to teach from the previous year.
- ▶ As of October, there were 37 teacher vacancies.
- ▶ As of March, 34 teaching positions were still vacant.

. . . THEY ARE LEAVING BRIDGEPORT.

The result is that the system is losing teachers faster than it can recruit them or retain them and this gap continues to widen with each year.

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, BCAC, has looked at teacher recruitment and retention as part of its continuing study of the Bridgeport school system. This is a serious and growing problem, which will require policy changes as well as financial investment. Changes must be undertaken not only at the local district level, but also at the state level.

ENROLLMENT INCREASES RISING FASTER THAN TEACHING POSITIONS

School Year	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	% increase over 4 years
All Classroom Teachers	1,361	1,342	1,369	1,385	1,377	1.2%
Student Enrollment	21,534	21,928	22,168	22,225	22,321	3.7%

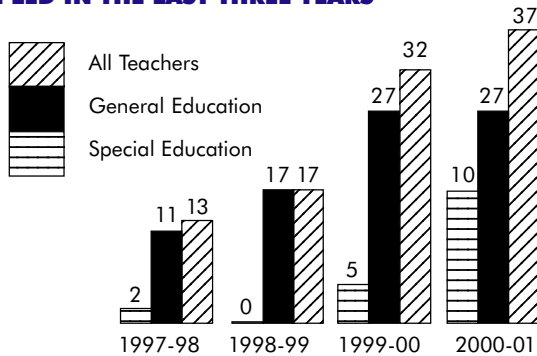
Even if every full-time classroom teaching position was filled by a state-certified teacher, increases in student enrollment (and therefore teacher demand) are climbing faster than the number of approved and funded teaching positions.

A GROWING PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS DO NOT RETURN IN SEPTEMBER

School Year	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	% increase not returning
All Full-Time Teachers	133	152	158	19%
General Education Teachers	119	127	133	12%
Special Education Teachers	14	25	25	79%

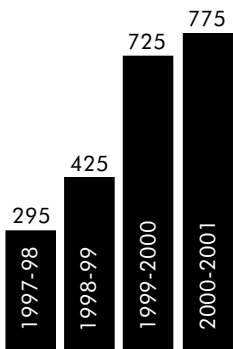
Despite low growth in the number of teaching positions in Bridgeport's schools, the percentage of teachers choosing not to return to their schools and classrooms continues to grow. The trend is much worse for special education teachers, with a nearly 80% increase over the last two years in the number of special education teachers not returning to teach in Bridgeport. For years Bridgeport's education budget has been chronically underfunded. Every dollar is needed for basic education expenses, with little left for teacher recruitment.

UNFILLED TEACHING POSITIONS HAVE NEARLY TRIPLED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS



Open teacher vacancies as of October 1 of each school year

As teacher losses cause more and more teaching vacancies each year, it becomes harder and harder to fill them in time for the opening of school in September. One result is an increasing number of unfilled positions extending further into the school year and an increasing number of students without full-time teachers.



THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS TAUGHT BY FULL-TIME SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS HAS GROWN BY MORE THAN 250% IN THE LAST THREE YEARS

NINE SCHOOLS SHOW VERY HIGH TEACHER LOSSES

Nine of the city's 37 schools show an average teacher loss over the last four years of more than 10 percent, in one case more than 16 percent. Another 20 schools have loss percentages between five and ten percent on average.

Schools with teacher losses of 10% or more		Schools with teacher losses of less than 5%	
Newfield	16.5%	Black Rock	2%
Harding	14.5%	Webster	3%
Read	13.25%	Multicultural Magnet	3.5%
Beardsley	12.75%	Garfield	3.75%
Ben Franklin	12.5%	Hallen	3.75%
Dunbar	12.25%	Skane	4%
Longfellow	12.25%	Park City Magnet	4.5%
Hooker	12%	Waltersville	4.75%
Edison	10.75%		

NEARLY THREE OUT OF EVERY FOUR TEACHERS LEAVING BRIDGEPORT SCHOOLS, LEAVE TO TEACH IN ANOTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Teachers leave for many reasons, however, in Bridgeport nearly three fourths of them leave to take teaching positions in other school districts. These numbers have remained high for several years now. In other words, qualified teachers are not leaving the profession, they are leaving Bridgeport schools.

Reasons for leaving given by departing teachers			
School Year	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00
RETIREMENT			
All Classroom Teachers	18%	28%	18%
General Education	20%	32%	20%
Special Education	0%	8%	8%
TAKING ANOTHER POSITION / PERSONAL			
All Classroom Teachers	74%	62%	74%
General Education	71%	57%	72%
Special Education	93%	88%	84%
LOST CERTIFICATION/DEATH/DISABILITY/OTHER			
All Classroom Teachers	8%	10%	8%
General Education	8%	10%	8%
Special Education	7%	8%	8%

Representatives of both the teachers union and Board of Education personnel office believe that the vast majority of teachers marking the "TAKING ANOTHER POSITION/PERSONAL" category on their exit paperwork are taking positions in other school districts.

NO SUPPORT, NO SUPPLIES, AND NOWHERE TO TURN

"We in special education have nicknamed ourselves the step-children of the education system . . . morale is low . . . we get the left-over supplies and textbooks . . . sometimes we can't even get enough books or teaching manuals . . . we lack support systems . . . no help from busy administrators or over-taxed social workers . . . we feel blamed . . ."

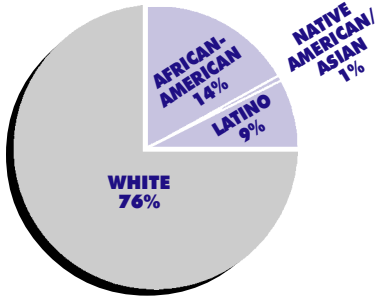
a conversation with a special education teacher

THE FACE OF BRIDGEPORT'S TEACHERS IS NOT THE SAME AS ITS STUDENTS

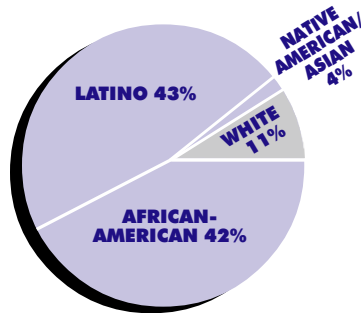
Approximately 89 percent of Bridgeport's students, but only 23 percent of its teachers, are African-American, Latino or Native American/Asian. No school can boast that its percentage of teachers reflects the diversity of its student population. This imbalance presents another obstacle in the city's efforts at teacher recruitment. In a school district with such high teacher turnover, a better ethnic balance could be achieved in a relatively short time if the district could find ways to increase its recruitment of minority teachers. This concern is not unique to Bridgeport nor other urban school systems, yet some remedy must be found.

Ethnic Breakdown of Bridgeport's Teachers and Students

**Percent Full-Time Classroom Teachers
1998-99 School Year**



**Percent Student Enrollment
1998-99 School Year**



In 1975, a lawsuit (*Crumpton v. Chop*) was brought against the City of Bridgeport, the Bridgeport Board of Education and the State Board of Education on behalf of students and parents to address racial inequities and racial imbalance in the Bridgeport schools. A settlement was reached four years later and included a plan to hire one minority teacher for every white teacher hired until minority teachers approximate the percentage of minority workers in the Bridgeport labor force. Over the last eight years, the percentage of minority teachers in Bridgeport's schools has declined from 28 percent in 1990-91 to 24 percent in 1998-99.

NEARLY HALF OF BRIDGEPORT'S SCHOOLS HAVE 20% OR LESS MINORITY TEACHERS

Number of schools and their percentage of minority teachers		
OVER 50%	2	■
41-50%	4	■
31-40%	6	■
21-30%	8	■
11-20%	15	■
0-10%	2	■

- ▶ More than 50 percent of the city's classrooms are overcrowded.
- ▶ Nearly 30 percent of the Class of 1999 dropped out before graduation.
- ▶ The 1999 Connecticut Mastery Test Scores show that two out of three Bridgeport students do not meet the state's goals in any of the three tests, reading, writing and math.

Can these numbers — and others — be improved if teacher recruitment and retention are improved?

HOW DOES TEACHER TURNOVER AFFECT EDUCATION?

BCAC ranked all schools for several indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, student attendance, academic performance (using four-year average of Connecticut Mastery Test school index scores), and improvement in academic performance (using the change in school index scores over 4 years). By this method, we can begin to see some patterns emerge.

Neither kindergarten nor high school students take the Connecticut Mastery Test, so Skane School and the three high schools were not ranked on academic performance and improvements in academic performance.

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE TEN WORST SCHOOLS ON THE FIVE INDICATORS, WE FOUND THE FOLLOWING:

- Beardsley School ranked among the ten worst schools on four of the five indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, academic performance, and improvement in academic performance.
- Central and Harding High Schools ranked among the ten worst schools on three indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, and student attendance.
- Dunbar School ranked among the ten worst schools on three indicators: teacher turnover, student attendance, and academic performance.
- Maplewood Annex School ranked among the ten worst schools on three indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, and academic performance.
- Ben Franklin School ranked among the ten worst schools on teacher turnover and student attendance.
- Read School ranked among the ten worst schools on teacher turnover and improvement in academic performance.

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE TEN BEST SCHOOLS ON THE FIVE INDICATORS, WE FOUND THE FOLLOWING:

- Multicultural Magnet School ranked among the ten best schools on four indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, student attendance, and academic performance.
- Hall and Hallen Schools ranked among the ten best schools on three indicators: teacher turnover, student attendance, and improvement in academic performance.
- Garfield and Webster Schools ranked among the ten best schools on three indicators: teacher turnover, teacher attendance, and improvement in academic performance.
- Barnum and Black Rock Schools ranked among the ten best schools on teacher turnover and teacher attendance.
- Park City Magnet School ranked among the ten best schools on teacher turnover and academic performance.

We urge a closer look at this data by the school district as it develops its plans to address the numerous issues affecting teacher turnover.

BCAC Recommendations

Teacher recruitment and retention is a problem not only in Bridgeport and Connecticut's cities, but increasingly in Connecticut's suburbs. The wide disparity in teacher salaries between poorer school districts and wealthier school districts continues to be a major problem. Poorer school districts have limited funds for teacher recruitment and professional development programs. The State of Connecticut must equalize funding among districts to ensure all children an equal education.

Recommendations to the Bridgeport Board of Education

For Bridgeport to address its serious problem of teacher recruitment and retention, its focus must be on teacher support and a combination of enhanced outreach along with an intensive program to develop, nurture and support home-grown interest in teaching as a career. In the short term, more attention must be paid to strategies to increase the quality of substitute teachers, to set clear expectations for them, and to give them the training and support to do their job well. Our specific recommendations are:

- Offer prospective teachers signing bonuses.
- Incorporate more flexibility when establishing salary steps and experience levels for those who switch to a career in teaching.
- Establish a salary scale more competitive with other area school districts.
- At college job fairs, offer assistance to prospective teachers with state certification.
- Expand the hours and the benefits for paraprofessionals and provide assistance to those who are interested in pursuing a teaching career.
- Study corporate recruiting models to identify additional effective recruitment strategies.
- Increase daily pay for substitute teachers to attract more experienced substitute teachers and to provide more stability and continuity for students.
- Develop an orientation for substitute teachers on school procedures and district expectations as well as a training program that includes class management.
- Hold job fairs specifically for candidates for substitute teachers.

Recommendations to the State of Connecticut

The State of Connecticut must become involved at three different levels to address this growing problem. The first is by developing incentives to increase the number of teachers teaching in Connecticut public schools. The State needs to focus on attracting both college-bound students into teaching and those already working in other fields to make career changes into teaching. The second is by assisting prospective teachers with the teacher certification process. And the third is by providing financial assistance to the hardest hit school districts to increase their investment in teacher recruitment and professional development. Our specific recommendations are:

- Provide state financial and other incentives for teachers to teach in priority school districts.
- Establish a program to provide tuition assistance and loan reimbursement for college-bound students pursuing careers in teaching who commit to teaching in Connecticut's priority school districts.
- Provide incentives and assistance for those making career changes into teaching.
- Change the Teacher Mortgage Assistance Program eligibility requirements so that they more accurately reflect the cost of housing and family income.
- Provide financial support for preparation courses for the teacher certification examination and for test fees.
- Allow education college graduates who are teaching as substitute or provisional teachers up to three years to obtain their teaching certification.
- Study certification reciprocity with other states that have comparable teacher certification requirements to Connecticut.
- Study differences in salary, compensation, and flexibility in negotiations among Connecticut school districts.
- Assist priority school districts with their professional development programs for new teachers and for teachers not meeting teaching standards.
- Provide a stipend of \$1,000 to teacher mentors participating in the Beginning Educators Support and Training (BEST) Program.
- Re-establish the Teaching Opportunities for Paraprofessionals (TOP) Program to provide financial assistance with tuition and books to all paraprofessionals who pursue a teaching degree.

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