

**Bridgeport Board of Education Chair Jessica Martinez**  
**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing**  
**Thursday, February 13, 2020**

My name is Jessica Martinez, I'm a Bridgeport parent leader, the Chair of the Bridgeport Board of Education and the Chair of the BBOE Finance Committee.

I have been serving my community since 2011, tonight, I am here in support of equity and fair funding, in education for ALL students and ALL schools across Connecticut but especially in Bridgeport. I urge this committee today to put the interests of all our children at the top of their priority list, just as you did last year.

As a parent first and foremost I support choice in education, as an Elected Leader I stand for all children and parents in my city of Bridgeport, including parents who exercise choice in their sons and daughters education. **All voices matter, and in my capacity as a Board of Education Member I make it a priority to fight for everyone!**

Although I wear many hats, my first hat is being a parent and the subject of the education budget hits home for my son and I. My son, Jose Martinez is now a sophomore at Bassick High School in Bridgeport. He had the privilege of attending Notre Dame where we were setting him up for not only college readiness but also access. As a single mom, that school of choice was no longer affordable. At Bassick we have a hard working and caring staff, however, the challenges we face as a district and city creates many obstacles for the future of my son.

We ask that members of the Appropriations Committee be supportive of the traditional public and public charter school students in the budget they are putting out this session. The Governor's budget state charter school cuts will unfairly impact many of Connecticut's highest need students.

**I love my city and want to share some general information about Bridgeport's schools:**

- Bridgeport is in the lowest level on the economic scale among all school districts in Connecticut.
- Bridgeport has the second highest enrollment among Connecticut school districts.
- Bridgeport has high enrollment of the neediest students – in special education and English language learners (ELL).
- Bridgeport is grossly underfunded, in comparison to its peer districts.
- Regarding NCEP: October 2019 Bridgeport \$14,697 Hartford \$19,838 Stamford \$19,271 New Haven \$18,064 Waterbury \$16,048

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**Bridgeport is underfunded by \$20.1M 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 \$103.5M!" We thank you for producing 73.6% of our budget, however, in the last 4 years we have had an astronomical reduction of 44.11 Million in our operating budget. For the school year 2020-2021, we are in need of at least 7 million from the State in order for us not to make any more cuts.**

We are all facing challenges. Our Public Charter Schools are facing even more deficits to operate. I have had the pleasure and immense satisfaction of witnessing the tremendous academic achievement of scholars who attended and currently attend public charter schools. As the BBOE liaison for Capital Preparatory Harbor School there is an interesting and celebratory fact all should be aware of, prior to Thanksgiving of 2019 all 40 Seniors that attend Cap Prep, had college acceptance letters and 8 of the seniors had scholarships for full rides. **This is my vision for ALL students in Bridgeport.**

**I am fully aware that every child learns differently, but the overall goal does not change. We must prepare our kids for their future.** We can not sit idle as children in our community lack resources that will enable them to become marketable professionals to meet the opportunities our State offers.

**I also appreciate and value the amazing work of our public charter schools:**

**Connecticut's public charter schools are public, tuition-free and accessible to all students through an open lottery process.**

Across Connecticut there are 10,000 generally low-income, special education and English learners in public charter schools who are underfunded every year. I hope we can work together to make sure these students begin to receive what I like to call the "minimum wage" of education funding.

- **Nearly 65% of public charter school students come from low-income families - almost twice the state average.**
- **More than 85% of public charter school students are Black or Latino - more than twice the state average.**

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Last year, this legislature passed a \$15 minimum wage. I hope this year we can take a step together toward equitable funding for all students.

Traditional public schools do as best that they can, making incremental gains with limited resources. Charter schools provide a quality education to students who often don't have access to great schools, and their performance shows it.

Demand for Connecticut's public charter schools has rapidly increased over the past two years. The latest waitlist includes over 7 thousand names, representing the families demanding access to these schools.

What is paramount for me is Unity in our City and State as well as equity and fair funding for all students. We can achieve so much if we put aside differences of opinion, and become laser focused on one thing, our children's education and their future!

Sincerely,

Jessica Martinez  
Bridgeport Board of Education Chair  
Bridgeport Board of Education Chair of Finance Committee