

February 25, 2021

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Rebecca Cabrera, the Principal of Madison Elementary School, the largest K-6 Elementary School, in Bridgeport Connecticut. I am writing to you to provide testimony for the March 1st, 2021, Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget for Elementary & Secondary Ed Agencies.

As you know, Bridgeport is the largest urban school district in the state with arguably the most economically disadvantaged student population. Although highly disadvantaged in many ways, our students, families and staff are very resilient, despite enduring decades of underfunding by the State. The latest proposed state budget would again cut funding to Bridgeport Public Schools by \$7 million dollars over the next two years. Further cuts to our District and the children and families it serves, is unacceptable and inequitable, given that we live in one of the wealthiest states in the country.

I am calling upon you to pass a fully funded state education budget which is necessary to effectively provide the quality education our students deserve. On paper the proposed budget cuts may seem nominal. However, this cut on top of years of underfunding may be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. Since 2016, chronic budget cuts have cost Madison School numerous staff members including our kindergarten paraprofessionals, Homeschool Coordinator, Guidance Counselor, two Tier 3 Interventionists, our Math Coach, our Literacy coach, our college teaching interns, two-thirds of our custodial staff and our Assistant Principal. Losses, such as those suffered at Madison, have happened in kind across the district. Furthermore, budget cuts have impacted the District's ability to provide bussing to many students. Those who live up to a mile away from school no longer qualify for bussing. How can we in good conscience allow children, no older than eleven, to walk in all types of weather, during a pandemic, up to two miles a day to get to school?

Human capital is the most valuable resource in our district and in our schools. Our students' education relies on a vast number of individuals and the expertise they bring to the table. Teachers, paraprofessionals, guidance counselors, social workers, speech therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, special education teachers, ELL teachers, nurses, custodial staff, food service workers, security guards, administrators and support staff at the district level are all instrumental in developing programing that provides a high-quality, individualized education for each student. As staffing is continually cut, staff members are being asked to fulfill multiple roles. Individual responsibilities have been significantly increasing, while support and instructional materials have conversely been decreasing. The educators and staff of the Bridgeport Public School District are some of the most committed, resourceful and passionate individuals in their field. However, lack of proper staffing is affecting our ability to provide the highest quality, most equitable education for all students.

The positions lost due to the yearly reductions in state and city funding were invaluable in many ways. Bridgeport is known as a training ground for new teachers across the state. Cutting our interns may have contributed to further teacher shortages within the state. The loss of Math and Reading coaches has negatively impacted the effective implementation of ELA/Math curriculums, ended in house coaching opportunities for teachers, and reduced the ability to provide intensive remediation for our struggling students. The loss of our tri-lingual Home School Coordinator has resulted in a significant decrease in our ability to quickly communicate with our non-English speaking parents. In Bridgeport, we have a very high percentage of English Language Learners and special education students. In fact, here at Madison these student populations make up 46% of our total student body and require additional services to succeed. As the number of families moving into Bridgeport from neighboring states, or other countries increases, our SPED and ELL numbers increase as well, and yet the financial support needed for these students does not. The District's allocates a large portion of its operating budget to provide services to our special education population. The remaining funding is not enough to provide for other services needed to support our students' social-emotional development, educational needs or well-being, nor our capability to provide proper building coverage.

In conclusion, I am asking the State of Connecticut to invest fully in the future of public education for our students by fully funding the Bridgeport Public School District. Our students deserve the same educational opportunities as every other student throughout our great State. Continuing to cut funding to a district already struggling to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, one that is comparable to our numerous wealthy neighbors throughout the State, is abhorrent and unconscionable.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Rebecca Cabrera

Principal, Madison Elementary School