

## Budget Forum Feedback

### Themes – Side Comments/Discussion during Presentation and Public Comment Period:

- Son in third grade combined into a second grade class. Classes are overcrowded. How can we fix this? Setting child up for failure with classes of “30 something” students.
- All Bridgeport citizens need to be involved in economic revitalization – if “we have high quality schools, increased likelihood industry will consider Bridgeport”. Taking away education from students delay’s our progress for the future.
- Guidance counselor – Are you aware that research shows guidance counselor interventions have improved student behavior as well as test scores. Service 21,000 students. Importance of guidance counselors in school districts is huge.
- State health plans for lower premiums. Unions should get together to agree on one.
- Need to make residents of Bridgeport active members in the economic evolution. They need people to guide them to get to a better place and be able to move forward rather than continuing to keep minorities down. Needs to be looked at as an investment. Need to put pressure on the mayor to put pressure on the federal government.
- We need to provide great things for our children because we expect great things from them. We need to work together to make something happen in Bridgeport. We’re not recognizing the problems we have with drugs in the schools and programs, which addressed this issue – good programs have been cut.
- John Lee mentor- tracking money posted in CT post. How money got so far behind. Is the state going to raise cost sharing? Need to vote “to connect with your board and voice opinion on budget” -
- This is about education, not cutting things. They need the social workers, and the teachers. We need 4 adults in classrooms with 30+ kids.
- Some compliments to the board for having an open meeting. Sharing information is important. Come up with a chart that shows how they other cities have more money to spend compared to Bridgeport. Voting is important to have your say in what happens in the city and in education in general.
- Keeping full day kindergarten. Each dollar found will be added back into services previously cut.
- “We have to do this together. I would give up a day for my counselor and other services. If I have to give up a day to save my social worker. We all have to sacrifice something. If we don’t figure something out there will be a layoff. Everyone has to give up something in order to get what we want. Every city is given more than Bridgeport. We all need to get together to get the money that we need to keep all these services.”
- If moved from 183 days to 180 days we could keep all the guidance counselors and all the social workers.

- Harford and New Haven are getting money. People have all sacrificed and are continuing to sacrifice. It's not fair. The state has underfunded us for decades. Our city has been left behind for decades. They say educators should sacrifice more because they're not willing to do it. Time for the city and state to carry their own share of the load.
- How important social work services are. Bridgeport social work system – finest and best in the state. Cutting most affective program – hard to get that back. Social and emotional needs of the children are important to address. These kids need support systems and we won't be able to do that if we cut these services. For many of the kids there is no one else to provide support besides the social workers. 7 cut already. 700 children no longer getting those services. Children walk in school with the home problems, impact of poverty, and the feeling of being bullied. All factors that create obstacles for learning. They can't learn when they have so much going on in their lives. School systems that have cut social workers have spent more money down the road to bring back the social workers that were lost. Need social workers, nurses, guidance counselors. "We need to pay attention to our children's education. Children will end up in street without all of these services." Senior Bassick HS student- social worker and coaches helped him with "serious" drug problems. Bassick High School Student: "I don't think we should cut social workers." Had no parental support. Started taking drugs. Owes it all [success] to social worker and coach. Intervention improves student behavior, which leads to academic or other forms of achievement.
- Everyone has a real passion. I think this board has made it very clear to us, exactly what the problem is. If Hartford and New Haven have all this money, how are they getting it? What are their partnerships? Do we have anyone looking for money for us? We need to be at the city table asking for the resources. You need to have some strong partnerships in order to get the resources we need.
- Retired teacher- Can you reveal what these private sources are? Have a vote on who would be willing to give up three days a year.
- Parents are a very powerful force. The parents need to be here, we need to hold teachers, parents and the board accountable for the students' success. Come speak for your children.
- Encourage the new board to look at the problem of substance abuse in the Bridgeport school system. Leadership group that was cancelled was one of the biggest support systems for children. The program worked, but was ended last year.

#### **Questions/Concerns – Reported to Note-takers by Public**

- Elementary classroom to art classroom – Different perspectives. Teaching by the test – seen the frustrations of academics in addition to issues from home. Use Art teacher, Librarian, Music teacher etc as rewards b/c students are frustrated within the classroom. If 8 art teachers are taken away, 280 prep periods, which teachers will not get. 30 minute lunch period is not enough. Teacher has to deal with a lot, taking away one prep period makes everything worse. Specials teachers are just as

- important as any classroom teacher. Kids need a break from all of that data collection and testing. If it's all about the kids then something needs to be addressed.
- Disappointed that not more parents were here. I disagree that the children can't do anything. Even in the form of a letter. Send a message that we need the resources. Why are we not getting the money when other cities are getting the money? If they are pressured enough maybe they will listen. Willing to help coordinate in the schools to help get this done. Let the kids be part of it and send letters advocating for their schools. State leaders should hear these stories that mean something (guidance counselor saving student's life etc.) It is important to get as much information out in every form.
  - Remember that some staff cuts – social workers, counselors, psychologists – are mandated services...not just special education but with other required initiatives like SRBI and PBIS.
  - Resident retired teachers: private sources of funding. Are strings attached to funds? Want teachers to give up 3 days to go to 180 day year – said she'd do it.
  - Parents are not represented and need to hold teachers and board accountable.
  - "Overcrowding - 2nd grade- needs for social worker, nurses, guidance counselor all needed. Shouldn't be that way. Children need something to do and have nowhere to go – when programs and support services are gone, we will feel the impact in rising dropout rates, truancy, substance abuse, etc."
  - "Only 5% will grad from Housatonic? We have to address this." Children are not being prepared for higher education and adult life.

### **Ideas/Strategies for Addressing Budget – Public via Note-takers and Jacqui Kelleher (after Forum)**

- Continue transparency and ongoing conversations – maybe keep the speakers on track – many tonight had their own personal agenda and got in the way of the issue at hand.
- Mayor negotiations for less health care cost – city needs to step up more
- Substitute teachers – concerns about cuts but can't we come up with a partnership with Education Departments from higher education?
- Social workers needed, should have 4 adults for 30 students. Cut top heavy administration
- Computer literacy may be a problem. Parent vouchers for going different places to learn. This is a good idea for business partnerships – empower the parents through literacy training and access to technology. Some businesses may have old computers to donate that they can give to parents who complete training.
- We must volunteer and give up a day in year to save jobs like social worker.
- Children live through talents, need creative outlets – concerned whenever arts get on the chopping block. Look for other areas to cut from. Concerned about class size.
- Get more from state - New Haven and Hartford are – have a designated task force to watch legislation or resource related issues at the capitol and advocate for

Bridgeport.

- Board said would sponsor leadership group with 500 students. Dismantled program recently. Central HS showed improvement during this program – not a good move since this was a program that helped kids connect. Learn from what worked in that program.
- Program worked with nonprofit partnership – need more partnerships like this across schools.
- Parent- How did Hartford and New Haven get what they have, do we have grant writers to search for money. Need to be at city table. Need more partnerships. Resources, etc. Get someone who can write grants and bring in more money.
- Consolidation, cutting prep periods, and specials like art not a good idea – will hurt the children.
- Grandparent disappointed not more parents. Need more information to parents in form letter format. Info on whom and how to email governor and other policy people.
- “Have a person from the city council in the mayor’s office present at future BOE meetings and vice versa at city council for better lines of communication. And meetings on different nights so they can have members able to attend both.”
- “Mentioned cutting back on high school suspension for extra money for someone in room with them. Assistant principal should put office in the same area as ISS and any time a teacher has a break take shifts so you can still avoid having to pay extra people to watch them. The purpose of meeting tonight is to find a way to educate our kids & raise money. Budget is overriding education of kids. We’re more concerned about the budgets than producing productive citizens of society. We’re so concerned about budget that we’re missing the point of why we’re here, getting the kids educated.”
- “Distribute the BOE meetings to (across??) The schools & where can a parent get a copy of the classroom curriculum?”
- “So concerned about money but if they ask parents and guardians to donate \$5, we could come up with a lot of what we need instead of losing the team that we need to provide the education. We won’t have to compromise for overcrowded classrooms or anything. There are jobs on the line and for parents and guardians, that’s their children. When they suffer, we suffer.” Stacy Bennett Kendrick
- “Speaking up for the social workers! My main concern is, why would you want to take the activities from the younger children? They need to try to fund for these programs. We should try to get donations for people who need these programs. Where are all the parents? I was only informed of this afternoon when I went to pick up my granddaughter. People should know of this ahead of time. We need volunteers to help get donations. The more people attend, the better we’ll do. We need to provide more for the Spanish speaking citizens (different languages on flyers, etc).”
- Use more technology to address cost of teachers or consolidations – have a master or one main class taught by a top rate teacher shot using the television system

available at each school – all kids get the instruction through the TV – there can be instructional assistants available to manage the classroom and help kids 1:1 during the instruction period. Everyone gets access to the best teacher and the BOE can spend less on more expensive staff.

- Audit the budget – let the BOE review the financials across all areas – don't think the right budget has been proposed by school leaders. Not a lot of transparency in how the budget gets developed and how decisions get made – bet there's more fat to trim in areas that have less direct impact on instruction.