

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At the December Delegates' meeting, Marilyn Ondrasik gave a presentation of recent BCAC research concerning the unequal treatment of Bridgeport Public Schools when compared to other urban districts and charter schools. Let's look at some of BCAC's research.

No news to us working in Bridgeport, a major study by the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding found that Bridgeport is the **MOST** under funded school district in Connecticut. Although the total number of students in Bridgeport is almost equal to that in Hartford, Hartford received about \$950 more per student in State funding for the 2004-2005 school year. During the same school year, New Haven public schools, which have almost 1500 less students than Bridgeport, also received about \$300 more in per pupil state funding. If these amounts were applied to the students in Bridgeport, it would total between 7 to 21 million dollars more in state aid.

Some community leaders have brought forth the concept of the establishment of more charter schools in Bridgeport as **the** answer. Although charter schools are an alternative, we cannot forget the impact they have on the budget and demographics of the students who remain in the Bridgeport Public School classrooms. There is a cost to the district for these charter schools. Fiscally, the school district is required by law to pay for the transportation and special education services for students who attend charter schools. This amounts to approximately \$650,000 during the 2006-07 school year.

In addition, many of the charter schools across the state have an inequity that is most disturbing- they do not serve all students. A look at the demographics shows that the percent of poor students attending these schools is much less than Bridgeport, where 95% of our students meet this criteria. Furthermore, many of these charter schools have very few Special Education Students ,or students from non-English speaking homes. The fact is that these schools, for the most part, do not service these high needs students .

This leads one to ask, where do these students go to school, and how are their educational needs met? The answer is back to the local districts where dwindling resources make it difficult to meet their needs.

In its **Evaluation Highlights** adopted in April 2003, the State Department of Education cited for special mention charter school test score gains of 10% -12% in a subject area from Grade 4 to Grade 6. On the 2006 CMT tests, when we apply this same standard to schools in Bridgeport, we find 13 Bridgeport Public Schools show MUCH HIGHER test score gains on 2006 CMT tests than cited in the State's evaluation report on charter schools. Five Bridgeport Public Schools had impressive CMT test score gains in **both** Reading and Math, and **more** challenging student demographics than charter schools. Those schools include: Classical Studies, Columbus, McKinley, Waltersville, and Winthrop.

We know what works to improve test scores. To site a few examples: high quality teachers, high expectations, teacher collaboration and planning, small class sizes, continuity of students, student supports and remedial interventions. The one thing these all have in common is they require funding by our state leaders.

Just think what we could do if we had the money that New Haven and Hartford receive! Speaking of which, the legislative session is gearing up, and we will all need to work together to make changes. The ECS (Education Cost Sharing) grant is open for reauthorization. One piece of the formula that legislators are reviewing is how poverty is measured. Currently, the poverty data comes from the community at large. Legislators are looking at using the poverty data from the school population. This change would net Bridgeport Public Schools a significant amount of new money. We will also need to do everything we can to fight legislation that would decrease state funds from our already high needs district. Please contact your legislators when asked to help make this change happen.

Last but not least, a heartfelt thank you to the Negotiating Team for the hard work and dedication on reaching an agreement beneficial to all. The team included: Gary Peluchette, Chair, Maria Nocerino, Chair, Delphina Pinto, Carmella Lorusso, Tiffany Ladson-Lang, Tito Planas, Victoria White, Ann Langley, Lorinda Larson, and George Bella. Thank you again.

Mary-Beth Lang,
BEA President