

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING**  
**Wednesday, February 22, 2012**  
**1:15 PM, Room 1E**

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From: Paul S. Timpanelli, President & CEO, Bridgeport Regional Business Council

It was six years ago this month that I last had the opportunity to testify before the Education Committee of the legislature. I must say the experience for me was an enlightening one. The leadership of the *Bridgeport Regional Business Council*, had just then made a decision, after 20 years of devoting most of our time and resources to working with the city and the state to develop an economic development vision and plan and to bring job growth to the state's largest city, we then decided to devote some time and resources to defining a role for us to improve public education in Bridgeport. Why – because if Bridgeport is to succeed from an economic development perspective, it needs to be a city where people want to live. And, if we want more people to live there, it must have a quality school system.

So, in 2006 we came to the legislature to inform the Education Committee that we were about to undertake a two year project in partnership with the city school system to improve financial accountability, transparency and operational efficiency within the school system. We felt at the time that this was a critical step because we had learned that in "Hartford", at the legislature, the Bridgeport school system was considered to be dysfunctional and its spending was thought to be inefficient, unproductive, with a top-heavy beauracritic governance. We, therefore, concluded that before the local business community could become real partners with the school system and be advocates for the investment of resources in the city's school system, we needed to be assured that that dollars were being invested wisely, efficiently and that public investment in the schools had a direct and positive impact on student outcomes.

Although we have made real and measurable progress, that 2 year project begun in 2006 is not yet complete. In should be done in 2012, but what was intended to take 2 years took 6. The reason was that the previous school Board was, in fact, dysfunctional and unable to not only manage this project, that was being paid for with private and public funds, but unable to fully comprehend the value of such an undertaking.

Today, we have new, energetic, progressive and competent leadership and a new system of governance. The business community is now confident that as a result of our \$700,000 investment in Bridgeport's schools made to uncover operational efficiencies and create a more accountable and transparent financial system, that we can tell you with assurance that the system, although room for improvement remains, is efficient, monies are invested well, and the system is not top heavy. We firmly believe that the current board and administrative leadership has the necessary fortitude, attitude, skill sets and focus, to enable positive change and to implement the \$13 million in operational savings that have been identified through our work. What the Board and the administration continue to lack is adequate resources to enable these things to happen in a way that can expedite and assure their impact on student outcomes.

We urge you to act swiftly and with attention to the plight of our urban school systems. The future of so many kids depends upon you.

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