

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604

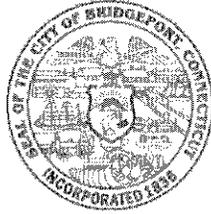
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February 20, 2013

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Minor and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Governor's budget proposals for education. I am particularly eager to focus on why I believe it is critical to continue to support and expand the Commissioner's Network.

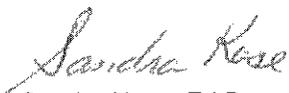
I came to Bridgeport to help change a system with the lowest performing schools in the state to one in which every child is assured a high quality education. Everyone believes we must provide additional help to students, teachers and schools that need it most. Lowest performing schools should be our highest priority. However, without strong, visionary leadership and the commitment to providing the resources and the maximum support to the most vulnerable children and families, this cannot happen. In my past experience, turning around the lowest performing schools in the largest school district in the country, I experienced, firsthand, the effects of diverting existing resources away from schools in the highest poverty communities and denying equity and access to a high quality education to our neediest students. For years, the populations in the poorest communities were not vocal about ensuring that their needs were met. These communities are traditionally populated by the newest immigrants and parents who struggle to feed their families who are not in positions to demand that they receive that to which they are entitled.

The wisdom of the Governor, the Commissioner of Education and the State Legislators to establish a Commissioner's Network was a huge and dramatic step toward identifying the lowest performing schools and altering how education is delivered in those schools. It provides those schools with opportunities to replicate research and evidence based practices that have demonstrated success in reforming other similar schools. In Bridgeport, the James J. Curiale school was accepted into the Commissioner's Network. It is a school of approximately 700 students from kindergarten through eighth grade and is located in a community made up of newly arrived immigrants and many economically struggling families. Curiale had been among the lowest performing schools in the state. The school was selected in Spring, 2012 and developed a plan that extended learning time throughout the year, provided more time for professional development for the staff, provided better services for parents and families and introduced a new philosophy for educating students.

Although we understand that school turnaround is a process which takes some time to materialize, there have already been some remarkable changes evident in Curiale. Teachers are actually excited about coming to school and educating their students. Staff attendance has improved from among the worst to the best in the district. Instruction is improving in all classrooms. Student suspensions for misbehavior have rapidly decreased and student attendance has improved. There is optimism that this school will become a model of success for other low performing schools in Bridgeport and in other districts.

While we in the education community are all working toward providing parents with options for their children's education, presently the only choice for most parents is their neighborhood school. We have a duty to help those schools improve so that their students receive the highest quality education. The Commissioner's Network is an important step in making sure that happens which is why I strongly support its continuation and expansion.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra Kase".

Sandra Kase, Ed.D.
Chief Administrative Officer
Bridgeport Public Schools