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Columnists

New year and 'great' goals for schools

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For schoolchildren in Bridgeport, the new decade begins with pride for what they and their teachers have accomplished.

Achievement gains, which range from stunning for some schools to sustained upward trending by others, are recognized despite the challenge of an unequal playing field, where they, as compared to suburban students, do not benefit from families who have the additional resources to enable their children to succeed.

Reports suggests some families will go so far as to spend \$12,000 on helping their child construct a "perfect" college application to those who will spend \$30,000 per year on tutors.

In a Christmas Eve op-ed, "A letter to the new governor about equality," [Eric Cooper](#) of the [National Urban Alliance](#) passionately cautions our state about the disparities of inequality that can have a negative effect on "social mobility, health, education, employment, security and happiness" -- not only for those challenged by poverty, but also for the rich and middle class. Yet with that said, the major premise of the opinion piece remains the hope the writer suggests comes from education reform.

He recognizes the only pathway to the promise of America for our citizens remains the promise of education opportunity.

For the most part, the community of Bridgeport recognizes the purity of the premise. Stakeholders, elected officials, and business, faith-based and nonprofit leaders have embraced the mantra that we should maintain "great" expectations in Bridgeport.

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As superintendent, I often point with pride to what students are accomplishing at a growing number of our schools. Educators who work fearlessly on behalf of their students -- and a growing number of students succeeding not only with state standards and assessments, but also learning the higher-order thinking skills such as problem-solving, creativity and inferential comprehension. On visits to schools, students have expressed to us that they "feel like a CEO or producer." Among others, students have written, produced, recorded and hosted radio shows highlighting their strengths as well as the schools. "Doing a news story is fun," Taheera Rivera, of Beardsley, has said, "because it's something different, and you're doing something that any

other kid could only dream of. We're professionals -- like people that actually work at radio stations. I think that's cool. I think it's awesome."

Beardsley has had the dubious distinction of being among the first schools in Connecticut to have been labeled failing under No Child Left Behind legislation. This year, for the first time, they have made significant progress sufficient for them to reach what is called "safe harbor." We celebrate Beardsley and our other schools that are succeeding beyond expectations.

A Belgian banker on visiting Beardsley, which partners with the NUA, indicated he never expected to see students so focused on learning skills that will enable them to succeed in the global "knowledge economy." Our students are learning to be entrepreneurs, innovators and artists as opposed to graduates who may be test-wise, but lack curiosity and the ability to think critically, reflectively or as an intellectual. Many of our students are becoming comfortable with the incessant concentration required on increasingly complex content. They pursue learning as an act of discovery, as a process, going beyond a fixed focus on grades or test scores. And in so doing, many gain the confidence to do well on tests and grades, as well.

As we spring forward into a new decade, our school community welcomes visits to our schools -- not only to see our successes, but also our challenges. We point to our schools with deep pride for the hope they are providing our community and the next generation of leaders. We know we have much more work to do, but we celebrate the improvements under way.

We welcome all to Bridgeport's school community where we have learned to expect and accomplish great things.

John J. Ramos Sr. is superintendent of [Bridgeport Public Schools](#).

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