

NUA Partnership Drives Improvement in Bridgeport, CT, Schools



One of 30 schools in the Bridgeport, CT, public school system, Beardsley School has come a long way since 2000, when it was one of the district's lowest performers and designated in need of improvement based on test scores and other academic indicators.

Beardsley, a K-6 school, was still struggling in 2006 when it began working with the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA) as part of the district's long-standing partnership with the NUA. Beardsley has made steady progress since then, eventually winning the honor of being an NUA National Demonstration School.

NUA interventions focused on student engagement, culturally responsive teaching and practices that elicit high intellectual performances. Instructional practices were chosen by the school leadership team and NUA to address specific challenges that surfaced during the NUA Instructional Assessment process.

In the most recent state testing cycle the efforts paid off with dramatic improvement. In grade 6, for example, 94 percent of students scored at or above proficiency in math and 85 percent scored at or above proficiency in writing.

Beardsley's progress culminated with a special recognition in January, when the school was selected as a Success Story School by the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, a statewide education reform and advocacy group better known as ConnCAN. The recognition was particularly gratifying because ConnCAN recognizes only the Top 10 schools statewide in five categories. Success Story schools must be in the top three in one of the Top 10 lists and be 75 percent low income and students of color.

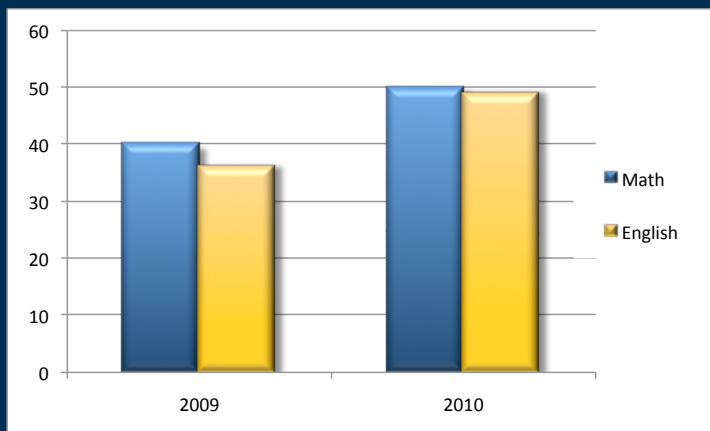
Beardsley Principal Amy Marshall said that NUA helped move Beardsley forward. "Our partnership has changed how teachers approach lessons, the strategies they use, and their attitudes toward students," she says. "NUA classrooms are alive. NUA-trained teachers also understand the importance of relationship building in a classroom and the need to amplify student strengths."

DISTRICT-WIDE SUCCESS STORY

While it was singled out recently by ConnCAN, Beardsley's progress is part of a district-wide success story accelerated by Bridgeport's partnership with the NUA.

Since 2006 NUA has been active in 17 of the 30 elementary and middle schools in Bridgeport. During this time, NUA has focused on improving teacher practices, especially around the content and methods of instruction, student engagement, the expectations of students for high intellectual performances, and relationships between students and teachers, students and their peers, and the school and community.

Bridgeport reached a milestone in 2010. For the first time in a decade, the district demonstrated near uniform improvement in grades 3-8 on the Connecticut Mastery Tests in reading and mathematics. For example, 50 percent of 6th graders met state standards in mathematics, moving from 40 percent in 2009. In English, 49 percent of 6th graders met state standards, moving from 36 percent in 2009.



Bridgeport Superintendent John J. Ramos says that the NUA was the right choice for the district's historically lowest performing schools. "Student engagement in intellectually demanding activities is a hallmark of NUA classrooms," he says. "So is success."