

# Credit Bridgeport for new approach

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## Editorial

Give Bridgeport school administrators credit for one thing. They're not satisfied with the status quo, and are willing to try something new to get students where they need to go.

The latest proof comes with the expansion of the school system's Total Learning approach, a program that is designed to consolidate gains by urban students in preschool programs, such as Head Start, as they move forward by offering smaller class sizes, a longer school day and more contact with teachers. Total Learning has spread from a beginning of one classroom at Columbus School to 16 classrooms across eight city schools.

Using a variety of techniques, the program melds music, art, drama and movement into a comprehensive instructional approach. A complementary system, Total Learning helps drive home concepts already included in the curriculum. Students give it high marks, and teachers say it makes learning simultaneously fun and effective.

And it's not the only innovation the district is pursuing. A program in conjunction with the National Urban Alliance aims to rethink the learning process entirely, teaching children not just how to read or do math, but rather how to think and how to reason. A connection with educators in Israel has given rise to new hope that positive developments are in the offing.

There's no guarantee that either approach or any other is a panacea, but what's important is that administrators are not closing the door on innovation. Only by expanding the reach of teachers and students can the schools find the right path to reach the most young people.

It's never been a secret that the Bridgeport school system has serious problems. In one of the state's poorest cities, that much is, sadly, inescapable. But for all the problems, officials recognize that nothing will improve by sticking with what has let them down over the years. There is no shortage of alternate teaching methods and differing tactics to reach young people, and part of the school system's goal must be to cast a wide net and find what works.

In the end, there's only so much a school system can do. So much of what children can handle in school stems from what they deal with at home, and the reach of teachers and administrators goes only so far. But with innovations like Total Learning, officials are showing they're willing to do whatever they can to make a difference. The city's young people deserve nothing less.