

Open Choice Program



<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/School-Choice/CT-School-Choice/Open-Choice-Programs>

Background

- Established as a State strategy to help address the 2003 Sheff vs. O’Neill student desegregation settlement agreement.
- Formalization of a previous informal arrangement between several towns (Project Concern) in the Greater Hartford Area. The Program has since expanded to the Southern part of the State (New Haven and Bridgeport also participate).
- Established by legislation, is intended to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation among students
- It allows urban students (K-12) to attend public schools in nearby suburban towns. It also allows suburban and rural students to attend public schools in a nearby urban center.

Program Details

- Cooperative Educational Services (CES), serves the Bridgeport region and currently six suburban districts participate with Bridgeport. They are Fairfield, Trumbull, Stratford, Westport, Weston, and Easton. Presently, approximately 265 students are participating in the program.
- Students who are Bridgeport residents have the opportunity to attend school in participating school districts when space is available. Students from the suburbs may also elect to go into Bridgeport based on available space. Once enrolled, students attend school in the district through high school.
- Students apply and are chosen through a lottery.
- The state pays a grant of \$3,000 per student enrolled if the number of Open Choice students is less than 2 percent of the total population of the receiving district. The amount increases incrementally with increased levels of participation. There is no cost to parents.
- Transportation costs are paid by the state and arranged through (CES).
- Special Education costs reimbursed to the receiving District upon reconciliation with sending District.

Status, Recommendation & Next Steps

- Darien's participation in the program supports the District's diversity goals and values; addresses our requirement to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; is a productive move in response to regionalization discussions; and exhibits leadership in the diversity and equity arena.
- Until recently, Darien was precluded from participating in the program due to the length of time that a student would be in transit.
- The State Department of Education and Governor have passed legislation expanding the program in our region to include Norwalk and Darien. Other school districts in the area are interested in participating in the program.
- The administration is recommending the District admit students in kindergarten where classroom size permits. Receiving students at the youngest age positions them to be most successful. The district would receive \$3,000 per Open Choice kindergarten student admitted. The District could potentially accept 18-20 kindergarten students (Revenue of \$60K).