

FY 23 Questions - Open Choice
January 08, 2022

#	Question	Response	Source								
RC's 5 - 10 Elementary											
1	What is the K-12 enrollment model with Open Choice students?	<p>Yes, see attached schedule. Open Choice Projection Assuming 4 students are added in Kindergarten at Hindley, Holmes, Ox Ridge and Tokeneke and no other students are added in future years, Tokeneke would break a section in FY25 and FY26 based on current enrollment projections. Hindley, Holmes and Ox Ridge would remain the same.</p> <p>The second tab of Open Choice Projection shows additional students being added in subsequent years in Kindergarten. As the document shows we could add 72 students between FY24 and FY28 without breaking a section assuming the current enrollment forecast. It would also bring MMS enrollment to 1,124, which is below the peak enrollment seen in FY11. As shown above this would include the tipped section at Tokeneke in FY25 and FY26. Should Tokeneke Open Choice Students be removed from the forecast to avoid breaking a potential section in the future it would drop to 84 students. Royle would be able to absorb Open Choice students in FY26, 27 and 28. However, each year's recommended Open Choice students would depend on updated enrollment figures each year.</p>	BOE								
2	What is the incremental cost for Open Choice students at all levels, elementary, middle and high school?	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Grade</th> <th>Materials</th> <th>Tech</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>K</td> <td>\$140</td> <td>\$270</td> <td>\$410</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Grade	Materials	Tech	Total	K	\$140	\$270	\$410	BOE
Grade	Materials	Tech	Total								
K	\$140	\$270	\$410								

1st	\$140	\$270	\$410
2nd	\$125	\$270	\$395
3rd	\$118	\$330	\$448
4th	\$108	\$330	\$438
5th	\$108	\$330	\$438

The above reflects the per student cost for materials and technology for each open choice student. The materials represent consumables, periodicals, paper, textbooks, classroom reference based on the elementary allocation of resources. Technology represents either the K-2 Tablets or Chromebooks for the 1:1 program at the elementary school.

As the student progresses through the system should they participate in intramurals, theater, athletics those per student costs would apply as well.

Providing no class section is broken, there are no direct costs for salaries or benefits for staff, transportation is paid for by C.E.S. through a State grant and Special Education services are billed back to the home district.

3 How are other districts dealing with the impact of COVID on kindergarten and Open Choice enrollment?

Participation in Open Choice is being considered this year in Wilton and for 2023-2024 in New Canaan. Fairfield, Westport and Weston have been strong supporters of the program. Westport and Weston are shifting some of their seats to Norwalk beginning next year to reduce transit time for students.

Generally, 2-8 students a year with the exception of Fairfield, who take more students as required for their State required imbalance

BOE

		<p>plan.</p> <p>K enrollment is definitely a consideration for districts and managing class sizes is important. Some districts reported higher Kindergarten enrollment. Generally, districts accept students in Kindergarten where they have capacity.</p>	
4	What is the deadline for committing to the number of Open Choice Students that we accept?	<p>Applications Opened in Norwalk Region January 15, 2022</p> <p>April 15, 2022 Requested seat commitment from districts</p> <p>May 15, 2022 Final seat date commitment from districts</p>	BOE
5	How is transportation addressed for after school activities?	The District would need to develop an independent plan or partner with C.E.S. to arrange transportation for after school activities.	BOE
6	Is there a maximum number of students that MMS can handle?	<p>Based on enrollment projections adding 16 open choice students in FY23 would create enrollment of 1,068 in FY29, 1,078 in FY30 and 1,100 in FY31.</p> <p>This is still lower than peak enrollment at the MMS in FY 16 of 1,170.</p>	RTM ED
7	Can C.E.S. attend a Special BOE meeting to answer questions about the program?	C.E.S. will attend the BOE meeting on Monday, January 24th.	BOE
8	Please send out the previous presentation on Open Choice.	<p>Previous Open Choice Presentation</p> <p>Previous Superintendent Open Choice Testimonies:</p> <p>March 9, 2009</p> <p>February 21, 2017</p> <p>March 3, 2021</p>	BOF
9	What is included in the \$2,240 that we budgeted for Open Choice	The \$2,240 includes funding based on the elementary allocation of resources. This includes textbooks, consumables, paper, classroom	BOE

	students?	reference and periodicals.	
10	How does ECR reimbursement work with Open Choice?	If a student attends an Open Choice School District, the receiving district is the nexus and reports the student for the SEDAC on October 1 for the Federal Child Count. For the Excess Cost Grant they will bill back the sending district, which can then apply for the grant.	BOF
11	Do we share the cost of special education for these students?	Special Education services are billed back to the sending district (Norwalk). Typically, if a student is in need of special education services the Darien SESS department will contact the sending district's SESS department to determine appropriate services. Once agreed, services are then billed to the sending district and reimbursed less the initial \$4,000 (\$3000 plus \$1000 year one bonus) grant.	BOE
12	How are students chosen for this program?	There is a selection process determined and managed by C.E.S.	RTM ED
13	Is there professional development planned for teachers relating to Open Choice?	In addition to the District's current efforts to support teachers with professional learning related to diversity, equity and inclusion, CES offers professional development to support the staff with successful program implementation.	BOE
14	Have we engaged with students and teachers about Open Choice? Especially high school students?	Participating in the program would directly address concerns expressed by current and former students regarding their lack of exposure to diversity in experiences and learning as Darien students. The program is enthusiastically supported by the elementary principals.	RTM ED
15	Can you include a comparison with the ABC program including the rollout of that program?	The ABC Program was established in Darien in 1981 as part of a national non-profit program giving talented minority students the opportunity to attend DHS. The program is application based and successful minority scholars admitted to the program reside in Darien, making those students Darien residents. Eight girls attend DHS through the program.	RTM ED

		<p>The ABC Program was designed to provide Darien students with friendships with students from different backgrounds. Its success reflects positively on Darien’s values and diversity.</p> <p>All funds are privately raised.</p>	
16	Is Darien allowed to raise money to support this program?	Funds can be raised to support these students in the same manner that other fundraising in the District takes place.	RTM ED
17	What are the long-term benefits of Open Choice?	<p>Research cites several benefits of learning in a diverse environment including social-emotional benefits, comfort working with diverse populations, intellectual self-confidence, student leadership, success in the global economy and opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Specifically:</p> <p>Racially and socioeconomically diverse schools offer students important social-emotional benefits by exposing them to peers of different backgrounds. The increased cross-cultural dialogue that results from these interactions are beneficial for civil society.</p> <p>When school settings include students from multiple racial groups, students become more comfortable with people of other races, which leads to a dramatic decrease in discriminatory attitudes and prejudices.</p> <p>Integrated classrooms can improve students’ satisfaction and intellectual self-confidence.</p> <p>Learning in integrated settings can enhance students’ leadership skills.</p> <p>Diverse classrooms prepare students to succeed in a global</p>	BOE

		<p>economy.</p> <p>Integrated classrooms encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity.</p>	
18	How does the Open Choice selection process work?	Norwalk resident students are invited to join the Darien Public Schools if identified in the selection process. Interested families apply for the OCP program through Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.). The selection process determines who will fill the predetermined number of available seats indicated by receiving school districts. Each sending school city holds an independent selection process. Not all students who apply are guaranteed a seat in the OCP. Should families choose not to accept the district placement if their child is selected, they may decline the placement, thereby losing their place in the queue. Once students are enrolled they are guaranteed their seat through graduation.	RTM ED
19	What were the meetings and dates that open choice was discussed?	<p>Video recording of Open Choice segment of BOE Meeting November 24, 2020</p> <p>Video recording of Open Choice segment of BOE Meeting January 12, 2021</p> <p>Video recording of Open Choice segment of BOE Meeting October 26, 2021</p>	BOE
20	How many children does Darien send to State funded programs such as, but not limited to, Rogers International in Stamford, AITE or Brien McMahon Center for Global Studies?	<p>4 Students at Center for Global Studies in Norwalk</p> <p>5 Students at Rogers International in Stamford</p> <p>4 Students at AITE in Stamford</p> <p>3 Students at JM Wright Technical School</p>	BOE

21	<p>Do we have room to take in more students now and in the future? Are we at max capacity across the district? Are we maxed out at MMS? Do we expect we could/would be in 6 years when the first class with Open Choice students would be headed to MMS?</p>	<p>MMS is currently projected to be 61 students below its peak enrollment of 1,159 in FY11. We expect to be at 1100 students by the time the proposed open choice students reach 8th grade.</p>	RTM ED
22	<p>Are we confident that our enrollment projections are as accurate as they can be? And do they indicate there is room for OC students to start in K in FY23 and continue through DHS?</p>	<p>In years in which the district has used a demographer the projections have been over 99% accurate, while the years in which the district's in house enrollment model has been used have been 96% accurate.</p>	RTM ED
23	<p>Do our existing enrollment projections factor in all of the new projects in development/under construction in town?</p>	<p>Yes, they factor in the new developments in town.</p>	RTM ED
24	<p>Is it always better to have fewer students in a classroom? Our elementary class size standards identify "low end, optimal and high end", suggesting that 'low' does</p>	<p>Darien's class size guidelines are aligned with best practices in teaching and learning. The introduction of the Open Choice Program to Darien preserves these guidelines and the high-quality instruction that our entire learning community expects. In the context of the guidelines, optimal, by definition, indicates most favorable. For budget purposes, class size is calculated using the high end guidelines.</p>	BOE

	<p>not necessarily mean better. Please explain.</p>		
25	<p>How much will the state provide per student, \$3K or \$4K?</p>	<p>In year one of program implementation the State pays \$3,000 plus a \$1,000 year one bonus per student to Darien. Following the implementation year, 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; \$4,000 per student enrolled if the number of Open Choice students is greater than or equal to 2 percent but less than 3 percent of the total population of the receiving district; or \$6,000 per student enrolled if the number of Open Choice students is greater than or equal to 3 percent but less than 4 percent of the total population of the receiving district; \$6,000 per student if enrollment is greater than 4,000 students and the number of students in the program increased by 50 percent; and \$8,000 per student enrolled if the number of Open Choice students is greater than or equal to 4 percent of the total student population of the receiving district.</p>	BOE
26	<p>Where does the \$23K per student per year number come from and why can't we assume that the BOE budget will have to increase by: number of OC students X \$23K each year (plus appropriate annual increases)?</p>	<p>The \$23k per student number comes from the state issued NCEP (Net Current Expenditure Per Pupil). It is important to note that not all expenses in your operating budget are included in the NCEP (such as home to school transportation) and expenses not in our budget are included in the NCEP (In-Kind Services from Town, select capital expenditures).</p> <p>The reason we would not have to increase our budget by \$368,000 (16 students at \$23k) is because there are fixed expenses within our NCEP that would not change with the addition of Open Choice students. Items such as utilities, copier contract, out of district tuition, out of district transportation, in-kind services, health insurance are all items that would not change with the addition of Open Choice students. The main cost</p>	BOE

		driver would be if a section is broken and a staff member would have to be hired. We have recommended added Open Choice students where enrollment projections show capacity to add without tipping a section.	
27	How much will it actually cost annually to students in the Open Choice Program?	The amount to educate Open Choice students will vary based on grade level. Based on Darien's budget it would be approximately \$410 per student in Kindergarten for materials and technology.	BOE
28	If we do not fund Open Choice in FY23, where would those funds be redirected? Or, from where have they been taken? In short, is something being taken away to add this?	Nothing is being taken away by adding Open Choice. If the BOE elects not to participate in Open Choice or reduce the recommended amount we would have to reduce the revenue budgeted of \$3,000 per student and reduce the per pupil allocation in the elementary school \$140 per student.	BOE
29	<p>What is the threshold for giving this program a proper chance in year 1?</p> <p>Please confirm: starting from year 1, the OC students would be factored into the ongoing enrollment numbers. Therefore, if year 2 saw more first graders than anticipated at a particular elementary school, we will accept that the unanticipated enrollees broke a section versus the OC</p>	<p>There is no threshold or requirement for program participation. If the program goal is to diversify learning experiences for students in Darien, the number of students participating will contribute to supporting that goal.</p> <p>Ideally, four students per school would allow for the placement across two classes with two Open Choice participants in each class or one student in each of the four classes. This decision will be made by each school as it considers the placement of all students and actual enrollment numbers.</p> <p>Open Choice students will be factored into the ongoing enrollment numbers. Once enrolled students will be considered DPS students and not the cause of breaking sections.</p>	BOE

	students breaking a section.		
30	<p>Will the host schools need support to optimally welcome these students and help them integrate? Who will provide that? How is that funded?</p>	<p>District professional development and our partnership with CES will provide support. District PD is already budgeted to support DEI, this will not add to that.</p>	BOE
31	<p>Will the OC students be able to participate in extracurriculars at school AND in Darien community programs with their peers/classmates (i.e., youth soccer, daisy troops, etc.)? Who will coordinate that? How is that funded?</p>	<p>Yes, participation in after school activities is an important component of the program, partnership and student experience. The Open Choice Liaison will have a role in coordinating these efforts. The District will need to develop a plan for transportation with C.E.S. if that becomes necessary. This may be an added programmatic expense.</p>	BOE
32	<p>Do we believe that ongoing or lasting Covid effects on our schools/kids would make this the wrong time to launch this program? Or might those effects do anything to jeopardize the success of this program?</p> <p>I.e., if kids are still having to spread out at lunch, the teacher/driver shortages continue, are we</p>	<p>The administration believes that there is an opportunity to enhance teaching and learning in our schools through this program. Darien resident and Norwalk resident students benefit from this partnership, with or without Covid. We can manage the number of students proposed as we intentionally do not break sections or unnecessarily tax the system.</p>	BOE

	overtaxing the system?		
33	Please share any relevant info. on successes/experiences/growing pains other districts have faced in implementing Open Choice that could help us prepare.	This video offers program highlights from the perspective of some Hartford Region Open choice participants. Similar to what we've heard from our current students, there are challenges students experience as a result of their differences. However, the challenges are outweighed by the successes and opportunities. Successful districts commit to the program, welcome students and families as their own and make every effort to work together to ensure student success.	BOE
34	Please explain how this can or will provide some diversity in our district.	Norwalk is demographically different from Darien. Welcoming students from a community that is demographically different diversifies our student population.	BOE
35	Are there any concerns that there could be safety risks for the incoming students?	Incoming Norwalk resident students would be part of the same culture and climate that our Darien resident students experience. We continue our work in this area and believe that the diverse background and experience of learners will offer progress in this direction.	BOE
36	Are there any other/similar programs to consider? Are there other ways to provide these same benefits other than Open Choice?	There are no parallel educational programs to Open Choice.	BOE
37	How is this NOT regionalization?	Regionalization is the combining of towns to create a school district that is overseen by a Board with representatives from all towns included in that regional district. It also includes combining central office staff. K-12 regionalization is often promoted with the goal of reducing costs by leveraging economies of scale and eliminating duplication of services.	BOE

		Welcoming a predetermined number of students to Darien will classify those students as DPS students. There is no change in school governance structure as there would be if regionalization was a factor.	
38	How will the Open Choice Liaison be chosen? What will this person do?	This stipended position will be advertised in the same manner as other vacancies in the District. Candidates will be interviewed by the administration. This person will serve as the primary liaison between the District and C.E.S. and the District and the Open Choice Families. The person will identify the potential needs of these students and families and work with the administration to ensure that these needs are met. These needs will include anything from obtaining additional school supplies, supporting families so that they are able to attend after school events and connecting students and families to additional resources that may be available to them.	RTM Education
39	Open Choice Program comment: Although these student costs are “non-break” in next year’s budget, what if they do cause a new section “break” next or the following years....Please provide incremental cost under both break and non-break scenarios. Perhaps this could be presented as a range of costs?	When the district breaks a section the cost would be that of the additional teacher. Typically for a new section we budget at the Master, Step 10 level, which next year would be \$72,807 plus health insurance benefits of \$22,232, payroll taxes of \$1,055 for a total of \$96,094.	RTM Education