



Project Choice Campaign

Improving and Expanding Hartford's Project Choice Program

Prepared for the Sheff Movement coalition
by Erica Frankenberg





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Acknowledgments

This report would not be possible without a number of people, including those interviewed listed in Appendix A. Phil Tegeler from the Poverty & Race Research Action Council provided resources, guidance, and contacts; project interns Christina Ramsey and Katie Brewer from Trinity College and their supervisor Professor Jack Dougherty assisted with some data collection; Chinh Le, Susan Eaton, and Kathryn McDermott have informally talked with me about *Sheff*. I appreciate the assistance of numerous assistants not listed above who helped to coordinate these interviews, particularly Tennille Cintron at CREC. Marcus Rivera was also helpful in sharing data on the program with me. Thomas Kissling edited an earlier draft of this manuscript.

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About the Author

Erica Frankenberg is an advanced doctoral candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. She has authored a report on the racial segregation of public school teachers and is also co-author of a series of reports and articles on school desegregation trends. Recently, Frankenberg helped coordinate and write a social science statement filed with the U.S. Supreme Court in the Louisville/Seattle voluntary school integration cases, regarding the benefits of integrated schools (Ms. Frankenberg's analysis was specifically cited and attached as an appendix to the dissenting opinion of Justice Breyer). Frankenberg helped author a widely disseminated manual on voluntary integration published by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Civil Rights Project at Harvard. She is the co-editor of *Lessons in Integration: Realizing the Promise of Racial Diversity in American Schools* (with Gary Orfield, 2007) from the University of Virginia Press.

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Introduction to the Sheff Movement

The Sheff Movement is a community based coalition that is working to expand and strengthen the range of quality, integrated education programs available to Hartford families under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* school desegregation court decrees. These programs include the “Project Choice” program, which places Hartford children in suburban schools, and a system of 15-20 Hartford-based magnet schools that are open to children from throughout the Hartford Region.

The coalition has recently launched the Project Choice Campaign, a new project to give voice to the network of Project Choice parents and alumni and to expand support for the Project Choice program in the Hartford suburbs. The Campaign kicked off its work with an anniversary conference on December 2, 2006, co-sponsored by the Capitol Region Education Council, celebrating 40 years of the Project Concern/Project

Choice program in Hartford. We are now working to develop committees of supporters in selected suburban towns, with focus groups and some small-scale events, and we are preparing a DVD that includes interviews with alumni and some of the original founders of the Project Concern program. This research report is also a key part of the coalition’s work.

Philip Tegeler of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (and a former lawyer in the *Sheff* case) is helping to oversee the Project Choice Campaign, along with Sheff Movement co-chairs Elizabeth Horton Sheff and Jim Boucher.

The Project Choice Campaign is grateful for funding support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Hartford Courant Foundation, and the City of Hartford.



Executive Summary

The Project Choice program, which provides integrated school opportunities for Hartford schoolchildren throughout the region, is an integral part of the State of Connecticut's response to the 1996 *Sheff v. O'Neill* school decision. The Choice program has been overshadowed by the larger interdistrict magnet school program, but like the magnet program, Project Choice has also lagged in its growth – leaving the state well short of its desegregation goals. Simply put, suburban districts in the region have not yet provided a sufficient number of seats to meet the student demand for the program. However, local districts do not make such decisions in a vacuum – there are important issues of funding, transportation, student support, coordination and capacity that have to be addressed by the state before the program can grow to its full potential. This study explored these issues in depth and includes recommendations to improve and expand the Project Choice program for participating towns and students.

In looking to the next phase of compliance with the *Sheff v. O'Neill* mandate, Project Choice could have a larger role than in the past. This is largely because the program is the most efficient means of placing students in integrated school placements. Typically, an interdistrict magnet school will take several years of marketing and awareness among suburban parents to attain a meaningful degree of racial integration. In contrast, placements in the Project Choice program provide Hartford stu-

dents with immediate access to integrated schools and classrooms – usually in exemplary learning environments.

Though the program's growth has lagged, there appears to be ample capacity in suburban school districts to accommodate additional Project Choice students. Of the 27 participating districts, ten provide less than 1% of their seats to Hartford students, and every district is under 3% of total enrollment. The state of Connecticut's school facility capacity data, which looks at only physical school capacity, suggests there may be thousands of potential seats in already existing suburban schools. This rough capacity data needs to be supplemented by a careful district-by-district review of actual capacity in the suburban districts, to determine fair target goals for each town in the region. If there were greater funding for Project Choice—for faculty, staff, and curriculum materials—suburban districts could use their excess capacity to accommodate more Hartford students.

The slow growth and low suburban participation rates in Hartford's Project Choice program stand in sharp contrast to similar programs in Boston, Minneapolis, and St. Louis. In these cities, suburban districts are taking significantly larger numbers and proportions of students. In Boston's METCO program, for example, Boston minority students account for more than 3% of district enrollment in fourteen suburban districts. One suburban Boston district enrolled 415 METCO students in 2006 (in contrast, the



largest participating district in the Hartford area enrolls 96 Project Choice students). Even at the current low participation rates, Project Choice students make up a substantial percentage of the total Black and Latino enrollment in most participating suburban districts – in other words, without this program, student diversity would decline significantly at many suburban schools. The Choice program, by creating more diverse schools, brings substantial benefits to participating Hartford students and to suburban students and districts. Research on the long term benefits of integration, including studies of Hartford’s Project Concern, shows that students of color in integrated schools are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and graduate from college than their segregated peers. There are also benefits for all students, including white suburban students, such as improved cross-racial understanding and communication skills and a reduction in racial prejudice and bias, as well as improvements in critical thinking skills associated with exposure to a broader cross section of student backgrounds.

In addition to the long term benefits of diversity for students and society, there is recent evidence that Hartford students participating in Project Choice are doing better on standardized achievement tests. More than half of Project Choice students are performing at or above proficiency on state standardized tests in both mathematics and reading, rates that are higher than their Hartford Public School peers and black and Latino students statewide. This is perhaps not surprising, in that many of these suburban schools are high achieving, resource-rich environments with relatively small class size and low percentages of low-income students – which makes it more likely that adequate teaching resources can be devoted to each student’s needs. These recent achieve-

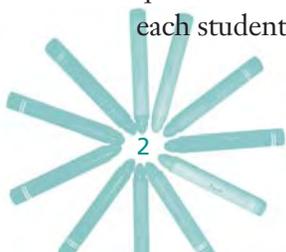
ment results are consistent with achievement studies of Hartford students in the Project Concern program in the 1960s and 70s.

The youngest Project Choice students also show impressive academic gains. In the “Early Beginnings” program, an interdistrict kindergarten program (offering half day kindergarten along with a full day enrichment option in selected suburban districts), Hartford students had large gains in language acquisition.

In trying to ascertain the reasons for the slow growth in the Project Choice program, we interviewed nearly fifty participants and observers in the program and reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the key “stakeholders” in the Project Choice program, including the State of Connecticut, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), the Sheff plaintiffs, the state courts, the suburban school districts, and Hartford families participating in the program. While each of these entities has an important role, our primary conclusion is that responsibility for the program is too diffuse – there is no central “champion” for the program.

The State of Connecticut: One conclusion we reached, as have others, is that the State of Connecticut – through its Commissioner and Department of Education – must play a lead role as the champion for expansion and primary implementer of Project Choice. The state can no longer play a passive role in the Choice program if this program is to significantly expand – it must become an active partner with CREC and the local districts, but it also must lead, fund, monitor, and enforce Choice program obligations. Their obligations include:

Adequate per pupil funding for suburban districts: The recent increase in per



pupil reimbursement to suburban districts will help in expanding the Choice program, but this is still far from adequate. Fair reimbursement for Hartford students will enable suburban districts to fund the teacher training, district coordinators and other program enhancements that are necessary to support Project Choice students in the district and possibly reduce student attrition.

Transportation funding: The recent increase in Project Choice transportation funding from \$2100 per student to \$3250 per student is very helpful, but will not necessarily be adequate to reduce long bus rides until the efficiency of bus routes is increased by larger district enrollments in the program. Until enrollment reaches this point, funding should be maintained at an adequate level to ensure that no students have longer than a one-hour trip to school, and that all students have access to after-school athletics and other extracurricular activities.

CREC program support funding: Even if the state were to more fairly compensate the suburban districts, the state should continue to fund and further expand the innovative and essential support staff and programs that CREC provides: intervention specialists to assist students with the transition to suburban schools; teacher training programs for suburban teachers; and summer and weekend academic support activities for Project Choice students.

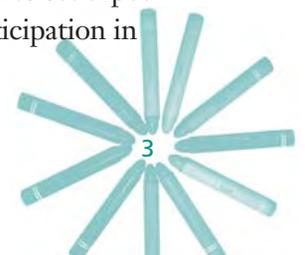
Marketing and parent education: Although demand for seats currently outstrips supply, the publicity and marketing of the Choice program has been overlooked. This is a function that the state

should lead. It is important that there be a twelve-month plan for continuous information dissemination about the program to all Hartford schoolchildren and their families. There should be a particular emphasis to market the program to families with young children (where suburban availability is greatest) and in the Latino community. The parent information centers being proposed to consolidate magnet school fairs, application materials, and other information on magnet school programs should also include full information on the Choice program.

Expand the “Early Beginnings” program: The proven results of this full day integrated kindergarten program should attract both Hartford parents as well as suburban districts looking to expand Project Choice in the lower grades. The state should also look to expand the New Beginnings concept to its statewide preschool initiatives, to help foster integrated experiences for children in pre-kindergarten. State and suburban officials should recognize, however, that the “Early Beginnings” program will not alone be a panacea, as some parents are reluctant to send kindergarten-age children to school on a bus.

A Project Choice Advisory Committee: A standing advisory committee to the Commissioner and State Board of Education should be set up, including all stakeholders in Project Choice, to ensure that a variety of views are received and considered by the state and problems and program needs are dealt with quickly.

Expectations of suburban districts: Only the state is in a position to set expectations for each district’s participation in



the Choice program. The State Department of Education has an important role to play in setting ambitious but fair annual requirements for each town to significantly expand overall regional participation in the Project Choice program.

Capitol Region Education Council

(CREC): CREC was viewed by many people we interviewed as a highly competent administrator of the program. However, as a state grantee, they are not in a position to provide the strong leadership and advocacy that the program needs on the state level. Greater efforts should be devoted to publicity and marketing of the program, as discussed above, and CREC should take additional steps to engage parents and alumni of the program to develop a voice in the region in support of the Choice program – including working directly with the Sheff Movement coalition on parent outreach and engagement.

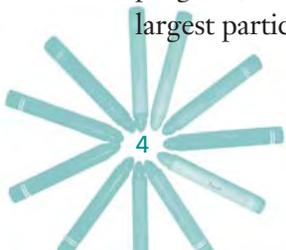
The Sheff plaintiffs and the state courts:

The Sheff plaintiffs can hardly be faulted for the slow growth of the Choice program – they have returned to the trial court three separate times since 1996 to argue that magnet and choice programs are growing too slowly. The state court system, however, has not been quick to support the Connecticut Supreme Court’s mandate. As the implementation of the ruling goes forward, the state courts need to recognize their essential role as part of the implementation process.

The suburban school districts: The major barrier to growth of the Choice program is the failure of suburban districts to offer a larger number of seats to Hartford children. Some Hartford-area districts barely participate in the program, and even the districts with the largest participation rates are far below the lev-

els of participation in other city-suburban programs across the country. This is not an issue of capacity – most districts have ample space to substantially increase participation in the program, and only a few districts have a large enough resident minority school population to be exempt from required participation. The key barriers to greater suburban participation in the Choice program are inadequate per-student funding levels and the lack of clear guidance from the state as to the number of Choice students each district is expected to enroll. Stronger per-student funding would create incentives for suburban participation, and would eliminate the financial objections of some local residents. Clear fair share participation targets from the state would eliminate the notion that suburban participation is “optional” and would defuse undercurrents of concern that a town is doing more than its fair share, or taking “too many” Hartford students.

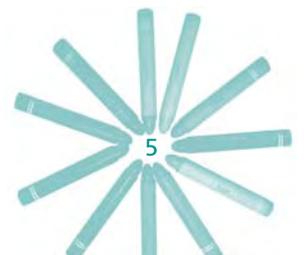
Even without waiting for a strong mandate and enhanced funding from the state, there are additional steps suburban districts can and should take to enhance the program. First, and most obviously, towns should offer the maximum number of seats available for Project Choice students, without waiting for state direction. Nearby districts with particularly low rates of participation should take the lead in this process, and local school board members and other political leaders should set a positive town for participation in the program. In addition, increasing diversity of suburban teaching staff is critical (districts should consider implementing city-suburban teacher transfer programs where towns have difficulty attracting teaching candidates of color), as are focused efforts to engage city parents in school-based activities, including the development of “host family” programs. On-going teacher development programs (like the Hart-

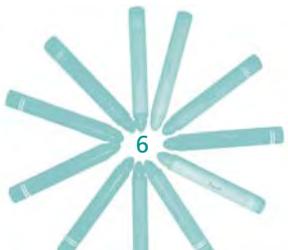


ford tours CREC sponsored this summer) can increase sensitivity of suburban staff to the issues faced by Choice students. St. Louis and Boston both have useful models of professional development and student support for suburban towns to consider; perhaps local universities can collaborate on these important projects.

Hartford families participating in the program: Project Choice would not exist without the Hartford families and students who participate in Project Choice despite the long hours of transportation, and going to a distant school where they may know few others—sacrifices that are often overlooked. Additional support

for Hartford parents to stay connected to their children's schools may be needed, especially where transportation barriers, distance, and work schedules may interfere. Hartford parents in the Choice program are also in a good position to represent and advocate for the Choice program in suburbs and on the state level. All of the participants in the Project Choice program, including CREC, need to work to help give these families a voice so that they too can participate in the implementation of the program and the education of their children. This organizing work has been begun by the Sheff Movement coalition (which sponsored this report), but it will require the support of all the other entities engaged in Project Choice.





Section I: Introduction

In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court declared that the state was in violation of its provision of a “substantially equal education” guaranteed under the state constitution due to the racial and economic isolation of the Hartford schools. Unlike most school desegregation cases, this case was tried under the state constitution (most cases rely on the U.S. Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race). Importantly, this decision declared that the segregation was illegal even though there had been no deliberate segregation of students (e.g., *de facto* segregation).¹

In response, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted Public Act 97-290, which established a two way voluntary integration program, which relied on a regional interdistrict magnet school system, along with a regional “Open Choice” program placing Hartford students in suburban classrooms. This latter program was conceived as an expansion of the long running “Project Concern” program in Hartford, and in July 1998, Project Concern was reconfigured as “Project Choice.”²

However, despite the 1997 magnet and suburban choice legislation, relatively few new spaces opened up in the choice program during the first years of implementation—and few students were actually attending integrated schools. Plaintiffs returned to court several

times to demand a comprehensive plan and seek stricter enforcement of a remedy. Six years later, an interim settlement was reached and adopted by the Connecticut General Assembly. The settlement specified that by June 2007, 30% of minority public school students in Hartford were to be attending “reduced-isolation educational settings”³ through interdistrict magnet schools, the Project Choice program, or interdistrict cooperative grants. As of 2006-07, 2,006 Hartford students were attending racially integrated magnet schools.⁴ Another 1,070 minority students were participating in Project Choice, for a total of 3,076 students out of 21,942 Hartford minority students, for a total of 13.9%. Even including the 3% credit for funding Interdistrict Cooperative Grants (which isn’t tied to the number of students participating, but rather the amount of money the state allocates to interdistrict programs), these programs are just over halfway to the goal set for June 2007 in the 2003 Settlement.

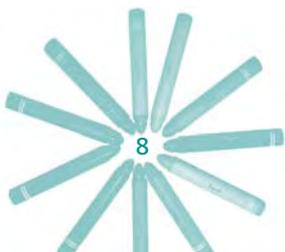
The parties in *Sheff* recently negotiated a new five-year agreement that increases the target percentage of Hartford minority students in reduced isolation educational settings up to 41% by 2011-12.⁵ Based on the state’s progress to date, however, a substantial increase in Hartford students enrolled in the Project Choice program would make it much easier to achieve this goal.⁶

Although all components of the *Sheff* remedy are potentially important contributors to creating integrated schools in the Hartford area, this report will focus solely on the Project Choice program (also called Open Choice⁷). Because the premise of the Choice program is placing students in successful schools that already exist and will have an integrated student body, this program has the greatest potential over the next five years to move Hartford students voluntarily to integrated settings.⁸ The program also has the potential to benefit thousands of suburban students whose schools will also be enhanced by the racial diversity of Hartford students.

The two interrelated guiding questions for this report were:

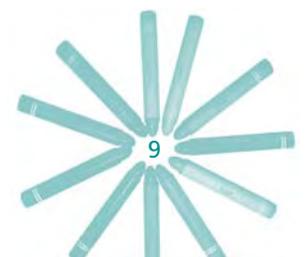
1. What could be done to improve Project Choice for students and participating towns?
2. What has limited the growth of the program and what can be done to substantially increase Project Choice enrollment?

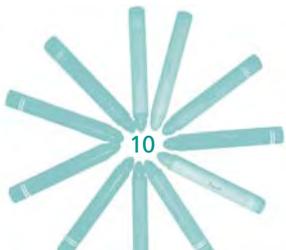
This report is structured as follows. The first section will review the demographics of the Hartford area, including the school districts and Project Choice participants. The second section will discuss the research about desegregation generally as well as specific research on Project Concern and Project Choice. From there, we review similar urban-suburban desegregation programs in three other metropolitan areas in the U.S. Section Five draws on extensive interviews to examine the roles of, in turn: the state, plaintiffs/court, CREC, suburban districts, and Hartford families. Section Six concludes with recommendations for improving Project Choice.



Endnotes

- 1 *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1, 687 A.2d 1267 (1996).
- 2 Project Concern, as Project Choice was originally named, began in September 1966 when 266 students were bused to the suburban districts of West Hartford, Farmington, Manchester, South Windsor and Simsbury. According to the initial 1966 agreement between districts, participating students were tested along with a control group of Hartford students who were not accepted to participate. The positive initial results convinced ten other districts to join the program. Through 1996, approximately 6,000 students had participated in Project Concern, with 1,175 students participating at the peak of the program in the late 1970s and a staff of 12 teachers and 56 paraprofessionals. The program's enrollment declined as, in part, federal funding for integration programs declined beginning in the early 1980s. In July 1998, the program was renamed Project Choice and placed under the administration of the Capitol Region Educational Center (CREC), with several key program changes (including the adoption of a pure lottery admission process, removal of restrictions on students with special learning needs, and a guarantee of attendance within the receiving districts until graduation from the district, provided that Hartford residence is maintained.)
- 3 A reduced isolation educational setting is defined under the settlement as one in which the minority percentage at a particular school is less than 30 percentage points above the percentage of minority students in the entire Sheff region. Although these schools do not have the high isolation as many Hartford public schools, at the same time, a school would be considered reduced isolation if nearly 75% minority—which is not the same as being an “integrated school”. The districts included in the Sheff Region to determine minority percentage are: Avon, Bloomfield, Canton, East Granby, East Hartford, East Windsor, Ellington, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Manchester, Newington, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Suffield, Vernon, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.
- 4 Dougherty, J., Wanzer, J., & Ramsey, C. (June 2007). “Missing the Goal: A Visual Guide to Sheff v. O’Neill School Desegregation.” Hartford, CT: Cities, Suburbs & Schools Research Project at Trinity College; Note, more students were attending magnet schools than this but some magnet schools were not within the racial guidelines specified by the settlement agreement.
- 5 As of the time this report went to press in August 2007, the Phase II settlement had only been proposed but had not yet been approved by the state legislature, which is required by state law.
- 6 The 2003 interim *Sheff* agreement stipulated that 200 Project Choice seats would be added per year; from 2004-05 to 2005-06, the number of students increased by only 42.
- 7 There are also city-suburban choice programs (Open Choice) in New Haven and Bridgeport that are not part of the *Sheff* settlement and are administered by other regional education service providers, but this report will not focus on those programs and the students they serve.
- 8 Substantial growth in the Project Choice program is feasible – there is substantial unmet demand for the program among Hartford families and substantial untapped capacity in suburban school districts throughout the region.





Section II: Demographics of the Hartford Region

Demographics of entire population in Hartford area

Hartford is the second largest metropolitan area in New England, with nearly 1.2 million residents counted in the 2000 Census.¹ Over three-quarters of metro residents (77%) were white, which represents a decline over the last two decades: 88% of area residents were white in 1980. Black and Latino residents constitute approximately 10% of the population; Latino residents have tripled in two decades and the number of Asian residents is five times as large as 1980. Hartford is surrounded by a few racially diverse suburbs and a larger number of extremely white suburbs, in sharp contrast to the overwhelmingly minority urban core. Twenty suburban towns are at least 90% white while just over one-quarter (27.7%) of Hartford residents were white.

In the Hartford area, like many other metropolitan areas, segregation by race is also complicated by economic segregation. According to calculations from a series of economic indicators (e.g., percent in poverty, median income, homeownership, etc) from the 2000 Census, there was a wide disparity between the cities and suburbs in the Hartford area. In fact, Hartford was in the bottom quartile of metro areas across the country in terms of the wide disparity on economic well-being indicators

between the suburbs and the urban center.² As seen in Table 1, although there are substantial variations in the socioeconomic characteristics of the population among suburban towns in the Hartford area, Hartford residents are more likely to live in poverty, have lower annual incomes, and are less likely to own their own homes than residents in any other town.

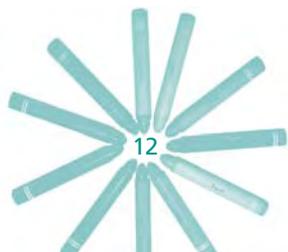
These differences have important implications for public schools since funding for schools is related to a town's property wealth. Further, the level of educational attainment differs substantially, which affects the type of jobs residents can qualify for. Parents with lower educational attainment may also know less about how to effectively advocate for their children with schools or to evaluate the best educational option for their child. In nearly half of Hartford County towns, 90% of residents have at least a high school diploma. In nine towns, at least 40% of residents are college graduates. The two largest cities in the county, Hartford and New Britain, have the lowest percentage of high school graduates, under 70%. Further, only one in eight Hartford residents are college graduates.

Governmental services that were regionalized during the late 1960s include water, waste disposal, and mass transit. Also, in the private sec-

Table 1: Selected Demographic Characteristics of Towns in Hartford County, 2000³

Town	Total Population	White Percent of Population	Median Household Income, 1999	Percent of population in poverty	Percent of Owner-Occupied Housing	Median Value of Homes	Percent HS graduate ⁴	Percent College Graduate
Avon	15,832	94.9	\$90,934	1.7	85.9	\$241,400	95.4	62.0
Berlin	18,215	97.0	\$68,068	2.5	88.3	\$169,100	87.3	30.8
Bloomfield	19,587	40.0	\$53,812	7.6	74.9	\$133,300	84.2	30.8
Bristol	60,062	91.6	\$47,422	6.6	61.9	\$123,700	80.8	16.2
Burlington	8,190	97.4	\$82,711	1.1	94.9	\$198,400	93.8	43.5
Canton	8,840	97.1	\$65,013	2.7	80.6	\$175,900	92.9	43.0
East Granby	4,745	95.6	\$68,696	1.5	81.9	\$165,700	93.0	37.2
East Hartford	49,575	64.7	\$41,424	10.3	57.5	\$110,700	77.4	13.4
East Windsor	9,818	91.5	\$51,092	4.1	65.2	\$129,800	82.4	20.2
Enfield	45,212	89.7	\$52,810	4.0	75.6	\$123,500	83.9	18.2
Farmington	23,641	92.9	\$67,073	4.5	75.3	\$184,800	91.6	49.2
Glastonbury	31,876	93.1	\$80,660	2.1	81.7	\$213,600	93.7	55.0
Granby	10,347	97.5	\$81,151	3.1	88.8	\$180,500	92.9	51.8
Hartford	121,578	27.7	\$24,820	30.6	24.6	\$95,300	60.8	12.4
Hartland	2,012	98.3	\$64,674	2.1	91.7	\$164,300	90.5	28.6
Manchester	54,740	82.8	\$49,426	8.0	56.3	\$122,900	87.5	29.4
Marlborough	5,709	97.5	\$80,265	2.2	90.3	\$178,900	91.9	44.3
New Britain	71,538	69.4	\$34,185	16.4	42.7	\$97,600	69.0	16.6
Newington	29,306	92.5	\$57,118	3.5	80.6	\$141,600	85.5	29.1
Plainville	17,328	93.5	\$48,136	5.1	69.5	\$123,500	84.0	20.2
Rocky Hill	17,966	90.2	\$60,247	2.9	65.5	\$156,900	88.2	37.1
Simsbury	23,234	95.3	\$82,996	2.2	83.8	\$226,300	94.5	61.4
Southington	39,728	96.4	\$60,538	3.3	81.4	\$159,000	86.0	27.2
South Windsor	24,412	91.5	\$73,990	1.8	89.3	\$162,700	91.4	41.6
Suffield	13,552	88.7	\$66,698	3.6	82.1	\$171,700	87.4	34.8
West Hartford	63,589	86.0	\$61,665	4.5	71.9	\$172,300	90.3	53.0
Wethersfield	26,271	93.2	\$53,289	4.4	77.9	\$157,400	83.6	33.3
Windsor	28,237	65.1	\$64,137	3.7	80.3	\$141,100	87.7	30.9
Windsor Locks	12,043	92.5	\$48,837	4.4	75.5	\$120,400	86.4	17.2

Source: Census 2000



tor, the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce was established at this time. There were two notable exceptions to this trend towards regionalization in a state where town boundaries are deeply ingrained: affordable housing and education. In 1967, a proposal to establish a regional housing authority to spread public and affordable housing beyond the city limits of Hartford was defeated by suburban legislators.⁵ Likewise, the recommendation of a Harvard report on the Hartford schools to begin metropolitan busing was rejected by the Hartford School Board. Even when five suburbs agreed to participate in Project Concern, they made clear that this was not meant to be a move towards a “super-district” nor that these districts shared responsibility for the problems of racial isolation and concentrated poverty that were prevalent in the Hartford School District.⁶ The lack of regional efforts for affordable housing and education, combined with riots in the city of Hartford in the late 1960s which helped accelerate the loss of many remaining middle-class residents, meant that the city was locked into increasing racial and economic isolation without the resources of neighboring towns.

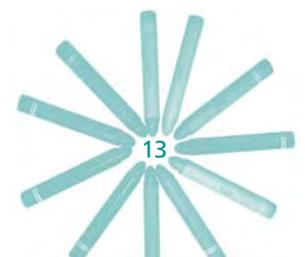
Recognizing this reality, a report released almost ten years ago by an independent, non-profit organization, Connecticut Center for School Change, suggested that the most effective way to meet the Connecticut Supreme Court’s mandate to desegregate schools and create high-quality schools would be to consolidate Hartford with its surround districts into a regional school system (into a system that would be the size of some countywide districts in the South).⁷ From a follow-up report two years later, it seems that this plan received mixed reviews during a public engagement campaign to discuss the proposal. One modified version of the program subsequently sug-

gested was to create several pie-shaped regional school districts that would each incorporate part of Hartford and suburban districts. During interviews conducted for this report, the need for regionalizing schools was mentioned quite a few times. Most people, however, who saw the need for regional education efforts (beyond those provided by RESCs like CREC) realized that it was unlikely that true regionalization would occur in the near future given the importance of town boundaries in Connecticut. Thus, for the foreseeable future, voluntary interdistrict programs (including both magnet schools and Project Choice) will remain the primary vehicle for reducing racial isolation for Hartford-area schoolchildren.

Resident and Student Demographics

Only 18% of school-aged population in the city of Hartford is white, 36% of young Hartford residents are black, and 42% are Latino. In the suburban portion of the metro area, 78% of the under-18 population is white. Not surprisingly, the under-18 white, black, and Latino population in the Hartford metro area live in areas very isolated from other racial/ethnic groups and, mirroring national trends, white youth are the most isolated. The neighborhood where the typical white Hartford child lives is nearly 84% white. The average black or Latino child lives in an area where over 40% of residents are from their own racial/ethnic group.⁸ These trends mean that typically most students, particularly white students in the Hartford metro area, are unlikely to encounter substantial shares of people from other racial/ethnic groups in their neighborhoods.

The Hartford Public Schools had approximately 22,300 students in 2004-



05.⁹ Only 5.3% students were white and two-thirds were receiving free or reduced price lunch (a measure of family poverty). Disparities in academic performance between students in the Hartford school district and suburban districts persist: three times as many Hartford students as suburban students did not meet the goal on the state mastery test in 1997; the average SAT score for Hartford was 300-400 points lower for Hartford students than students in suburban districts; and the cumulative dropout rate was ten times higher for Hartford than surrounding districts. Nearly half of students who entered ninth grade in Hartford in Fall 1992 had not graduated by June 1996.¹⁰

As we see in the table opposite, most districts in the region are small and overwhelmingly comprised of white students. Among districts that take Project Choice students, only Bristol, Enfield, and West Hartford have ten or more schools. Ten districts which enroll Project Choice students have at least 90% white enrollment (Table 2). East Windsor and Windsor are the only districts in which black students comprise at least ten percent of the student enrollment; Bristol and West Hartford are the only districts where Latino students are at least ten percent. In other words, even in districts where there is some racial diversity, there are not large shares of any one racial/ethnic group aside from white students. Additionally, most Project Choice suburban districts have very low percentages of English Language Learner and low-income students.

Project Choice Enrollment

For students to be counted towards the *Sheff* goal, the 2003 *Sheff* settlement requires Project Choice students to be assigned to a school whose minority percentage is less than 30 percentage points above the minority percentage

of the *Sheff* region.¹¹ In 2007, the minority percent of the region was 44%,¹² meaning that there was a cap of 75% minority for participating schools in receiving districts. While some districts' overall racial composition is near the upper limit of minority percent, such as Bloomfield, New Britain, East Hartford, and Waterbury, there are often schools of varying racial composition within districts and these districts may well have schools that would qualify as reduced-isolation educational settings (see Table 2). Although white students can also participate in Project Choice,¹³ since only minority students participating in Project Choice count towards the *Sheff* goals according to the 2003 interim settlement, they are not included in the tables below.¹⁴

Before turning to participation rates disaggregated by district, it is worth examining the combined progress towards the enrollment goals in the Choice Program outlined in the January 2003 Interim *Sheff* agreement. There were a total of 182 new seats offered by suburban districts in 2006-07 (approximately 170 were filled); 124 of those seats were for kindergarten, first, or second grade. The 182 new seats would have been just short of the goal of 200 new seats per year under the interim agreement assuming that all students from the previous year continued in 2006-07. However, as seen in table 3, 46 students graduated in 2005-06 and another 121 left the program for other reasons after October 1, 2005. Thus, there was only a net increase of 8 students from 2005-06 to 2006-07. While having students graduate is obviously an important objective of the program, in order to just maintain the number of students in the program the number of graduates will have to be replaced by an equal number of new seats. In addition, the loss of students due to attrition means even more new seats must be

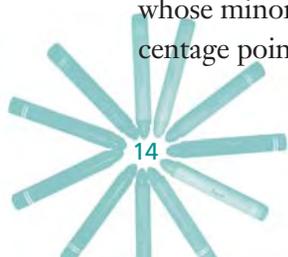


Table 2: Characteristics of Students in Hartford-area School Districts, 2004-05

School District	Number of Schools	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Students Who Are:						English Language Learners
			American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Low-Income	
Avon*	5	3,301	0.1	5.8	2.6	3.0	88.6	1.9	1.7
Berlin*	5	3,352	0.1	3.5	0.7	1.3	94.5	5.7	3.1
Bloomfield	6	2,366	0.1	1.1	87.0	5.9	5.9	38.1	0.0
Bolton*	2	933	0.5	1.4	2.6	1.5	94.0	10.1	0.0
Bristol*	15	9,029	0.2	2.2	7.2	11.4	79.0	27.4	2.0
Canton*	4	1,699	0.0	1.7	2.5	1.9	93.8	3.1	0.7
Cromwell*	3	1,925	0.2	2.7	6.2	5.3	85.6	10.6	4.1
East Granby*	4	888	0.5	2.3	6.0	2.6	88.7	1.0	0.6
East Hartford	16	7,916	0.5	6.1	34.5	30.3	28.7	49.5	4.8
East Windsor*	3	1,586	0.3	3.2	13.4	7.1	76.0	19.4	2.8
Ellington*	5	2,434	0.1	2.4	2.4	1.4	93.7	5.0	1.1
Enfield*	13	6,688	0.2	2.6	6.6	4.3	86.4	21.4	1.4
Farmington*	7	4,369	0.2	6.2	5.1	3.0	85.4	4.6	0.8
Glastonbury*	8	6,628	0.1	6.1	2.5	3.4	88.0	3.3	2.3
Granby*	5	2,225	0.2	0.9	2.5	1.7	94.7	1.9	0.2
Hartford	41	22,296	0.2	0.8	40.4	53.3	5.3	66.6	17.0
Hartland	1	233	1.7	3.0	0.0	2.2	93.1	1.7	0.0
Manchester	15	7,475	0.4	5.3	19.6	17.0	57.8	31.9	2.8
Marlborough	1	636	0.0	2.8	1.7	1.1	94.3	1.3	0.0
New Britain	15	10,936	0.2	2.2	17.9	53.0	26.7	51.3	14.6
Newington*	7	4,624	0.3	6.1	4.9	7.1	81.7	13.4	2.5
Plainville*	6	2,637	0.2	2.1	6.4	5.2	86.1	17.0	3.6
Regional School District 10*	4	2,721	0.1	2.0	0.7	1.9	95.4	2.4	0.1
Rocky Hill*	5	2,486	0.0	7.0	4.6	4.2	84.2	6.2	2.6
Simsbury*	7	5,055	0.1	3.4	3.3	2.0	91.2	3.4	1.3
Somers*	3	1,733	0.0	1.2	1.3	1.0	96.4	2.8	0.2
South Windsor*	7	5,073	0.4	6.5	5.4	3.8	84.0	5.5	1.3
Southington*	11	6,829	0.2	2.3	2.0	3.5	92.0	7.2	1.0
Suffield*	5	2,524	0.1	1.1	1.9	1.5	95.4	4.5	0.2
Tolland	4	3,102	0.4	2.6	1.3	1.3	94.3	3.4	0.7
Vernon*	7	3,989	0.5	5.7	10.5	7.7	75.7	24.6	2.4
Waterbury	30	17,896	0.3	2.0	26.8	40.3	30.6	64.9	11.0
West Hartford*	15	9,940	0.3	9.2	9.6	12.6	68.4	12.1	6.1
Wethersfield*	7	3,722	0.1	3.2	4.2	10.0	82.5	10.8	4.7
Windsor Locks*	4	1,936	0.2	5.1	6.5	3.7	84.6	18.8	2.0
Windsor*	7	4,324	0.4	4.1	47.7	9.2	38.7	26.9	0.0

Source: NCES Common Core of Data, 2005-05

* Indicates district currently has Project Choice students, though several districts have not taken students in quite a few years.

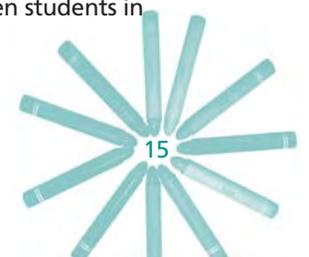


Table 3: Projected and Actual Enrollment in Choice Program After 2003 Sheff Agreement

Year	Projected Enrollment under 2003 Settlement Agreement	Total Number of minority students on October 1	Total Number of minority students on January 1 ¹⁵	Attrition after October 1 until October 1 of succeeding year ¹⁶	Graduates
2003-04	1,000	853	906	104	45
2004-05	1,200	988	1,020	123	40
2005-06	1,400	1,045	1,062	121	46
2006-07	1,600	1,062	1,070		40 (Projected)

Source: Data from Connecticut State Department of Education

Table 4: Applicants for Project Choice for 2006-07¹⁷

Year	Applicants	Accepted Placement	Declined Placement	No Response/Removed	Waiting List
2006-07	609	170	57	158	206

Source: Data from Connecticut State Department of Education

opened—plus the 200 extra seats that would be needed each year for the annual projected growth in the 2003 interim *Sheff* agreement. According to data collected since October 2005, 41% of attrition is due to families moving from the city of Hartford. Nearly 30% return to Hartford schools and another 7% go to magnet schools.

Of the 609 applicants for 2006-07, 57 students declined placement when offered. An additional 158 students were removed from the waiting list, including 118 because there was no response from the parent or guardian when CREC tried to contact them (see Table 4). In 2006-07, there were 206 students on the waiting list for Project Choice including 200 minority students. Although there is a substantial waitlist for Project Choice seats at higher grade levels, there were only 2 kindergarten and first grade students on the waiting list - indicating that districts offered as many seats as there were applicants for in those early grades (this also suggests that the Choice program

should consider stronger marketing efforts in the early grades – see discussion below). However, it is important to note that of all applicants, more ended up on the waiting list than actually getting placed in a suburban school. The number of students on the waiting list has also declined in recent years, from 428 students in 2003-04.

Relative Rates of Participation in Project Choice and Impact on Diversity

Districts participate in the Choice program to varying degrees, whether measured by number of Project Choice students enrolled or as a percentage of district students. The differences in rates of participation by town raise important questions about the unmet capacity of districts to absorb additional students, the relative desirability of placements among participating towns, and the fairness of enrollment variations among towns.

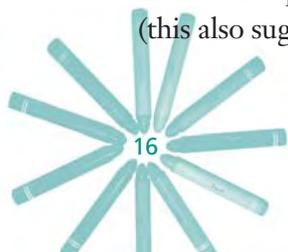


Table 5: Minority Students in Project Choice by Suburban District, 2006-07

Receiving District	Number of Minority Choice Students, 2006-07	Number of All District Students, 2005-06	Choice Students as Percentage of:		
			All Students	Minority Students	Black & Hispanic Students
Avon	41	3,379	1.2	9.8	21.7
Berlin	14	3,343	0.4	7.0	18.2
Bolton	22	931	2.4	37.9	53.7
Bristol	36	9,040	0.4	1.8	2.0
Canton	39	1,719	2.3	34.8	50.0
Cromwell	41	1,967	2.1	13.9	17.2
East Granby	20	905	2.2	20.2	27.1
East Windsor	43	1,563	2.8	10.9	12.8
Ellington	10	2,494	0.4	5.9	9.6
Enfield	78	6,617	1.2	8.0	9.9
Farmington	95	4,277	2.2	13.9	26.6
Glastonbury	42	6,723	0.6	4.6	9.6
Granby	53	2,261	2.3	38.7	48.2
Newington	52	4,604	1.1	5.5	8.6
Plainville	58	2,540	2.3	15.7	17.9
Region 10	8	2,795	0.3	5.7	10.4
Rocky Hill	33	2,556	1.3	7.2	12.7
Simsbury	96	5,057	1.9	19.8	32.2
Somers	18	1,743	1.0	26.1	36.0
South Windsor	55	5,084	1.1	6.6	11.5
Southington	19	6,842	0.3	3.1	4.7
Suffield	23	2,562	0.9	17.3	22.6
Vernon	42	3,936	1.1	4.4	5.8
West Hartford	76	9,986	0.8	2.3	3.3
Wethersfield	13	3,736	0.4	1.9	2.3
Windsor	13	4,223	0.3	0.5	0.5
Windsor Locks	30	1,954	1.5	9.1	13.4
Grand Total	1,070	102,837			

Data from Connecticut Department of Education and NCES Common Core of Data, 2005-06. Note that the latest year of NCES data providing racial/ethnic student counts by district is 2005-06.

In size of Hartford students enrolled, seven districts in the Hartford region have less than 20 Project Choice students (see Table 5). Simsbury enrolls the most minority Choice students at 96, although it's also important to note that Simsbury is one of the larger partici-

pating suburban districts. Districts that take very small numbers of students pose two challenges to the success of the Program: 1) the Hartford students may be tokenized since there are so few students who live in Hartford and/or are students of color in overwhelmingly



white affluent suburban schools and 2) it is not cost-effective to transport such a small number of students to so many different districts. Increasing the number of students taken to a minimum level would create a critical mass of students in schools and districts and would be a more efficient allocation of resources.

In eleven districts, Choice students comprise less than 1% of all students and there isn't a single district in which Choice students comprise even 3% of district enrollment. East Windsor has the highest percentage of Choice students at 2.8% of the district's enrollment; there are seven other districts where Project Choice students comprise at least two out of every one hundred students. While there is some variation among districts, the most important point is that in most suburban districts the number and percentage of Choice students is low, and this cumulatively contributes to the failure to reach the *Sheff* settlement's 2006-07 goal of 1600 students in the Choice program.

Significantly, if every currently participating district increased its participation so that Choice students were only 3% of its enrollment, the program would be able to accommodate 3,100 students (2000 more than the current enrollment). For comparison, in the Boston-area, 13 suburban districts that participate in METCO have Boston students at least 3% of their student enrollment; and two Boston suburban districts have up to 7% of enrollment comprised by METCO students.¹⁸

Table 5 also illustrates the *diversity* that Choice students add to participating suburban districts. Despite low numbers of Choice students in some districts, in six districts Choice students are at least one-fifth of *all* minority students in the district. In ten districts, Choice students are at least 20% of all black and His-

panic students in the district, demonstrating that these districts would lose a substantial share of their racial/ethnic diversity were it not for Choice students.

Although Table 5 shows the numbers of Choice students and percentage of district students who are Choice students currently participating in 2006-07, these numbers have varied substantially over the forty years of Project Concern and now Project Choice, due to changes in the program, funding from the state or federal government, or the perceived capacity of a district given their trends in enrollment of students residing within district boundaries. See Appendix B for the numbers of Project Choice students enrolled in selected suburban districts since the late 1960s.

Capacity

A number of districts, when asked how they determined the number of choice students they took, said that they examined projected enrollments at each school along with the capacity to determine whether they might have empty seats.¹⁹ However, there does not appear to be a uniform, agreed-upon methodology in place for determining the actual capacity of any school or district to provide additional seats to Project Choice students; additionally, the state has not set enrollment targets for Project Choice participation in any individual towns.

At the same time, the State of Connecticut's School Capacity data suggest there is significant room available in many suburban districts to accommodate additional Project Choice students. Before discussing this finding, it is important to say what this is *not* saying. From available data, it is not possible to precisely determine the number of available seats that could be taken by Project Choice students in

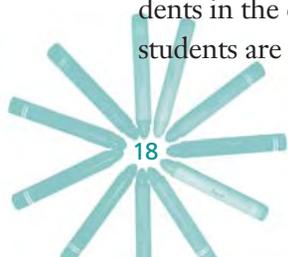


Table 6: 2005-06 School Enrollment as Compared to School Capacity, by Suburban District²⁰

Receiving District	Schools Under Capacity	Schools Between Capacity and 5% over capacity	Schools More than 5% over capacity	Total Number of Schools	Number of Choice Students
Avon	3	0	2	5	39
Berlin	5	0	0	5	11
Bolton	2	0	0	2	20
Bristol	12	3	0	15	46
Canton	3	0	0	3	47
Cromwell	1	0	2	3	45
East Granby	4	0	0	4	24
East Windsor	2	0	1	3	53
Ellington	5	0	0	5	14
Enfield	11	0	1	12	89
Farmington	6	0	1	7	94
Glastonbury	4	0	4	8	45
Granby	4	1	0	5	40
Newington	6	1	0	7	57
Plainville	4	1	0	5	65
Region 10	3	1	0	4	11
Rocky Hill	5	0	0	5	46
Simsbury	7	0	0	7	104
Somers	3	0	0	3	17
South Windsor	2	4	1	7	56
Southington	9	1	1	11	16
Suffield	3	0	1	4	22
Vernon	7	0	0	7	48
West Hartford	11	0	4	15	61
Wethersfield	4	2	1	7	13
Windsor	7	0	0	7	12
Windsor Locks	4	0	0	4	30
TOTAL	137 (80.6%)	14 (8.2%)	19 (11.2%)	170	1125

Sources: Connecticut Strategic School Profile, 2005-06; Connecticut Department of Education, Condition of Connecticut's Public School Facilities-December 2005; author's calculations

participating suburban districts. In addition to the school capacity data, determining the exact space availability in local schools also involves an assessment of physical capacity, number of faculty and staff, student-teacher ratios as required by local board policy or union contracts, books and supplies, assignment of classroom space to specialized uses, and other

considerations. However, a review of school capacity data as determined by the state is a useful starting point—and it strongly suggests the need for a thorough review of local capacity by the state, including the adoption of a uniform methodology for determining the number of seats available by school for Project Choice students in future years.



Using the State of Connecticut’s school facility capacity data and enrollment figures, it appears that four-fifths of all schools in districts that receive Project Choice students have “physical” room available under the official school capacity audit (see Table 6).²¹ As noted above, this analysis does not take into account future enrollment projections or the other resources needed to educate students (e.g., a teacher for every classroom, textbooks, etc), but it does indicate a substantial excess capacity in many suburban districts which can be a future resource for growth in the Project Choice program.

We also analyzed the number of seats above *current* enrollment that would be available if each suburban school were to be filled to its physical capacity, to get an idea of how many more Choice students there was theoretically space for—again, there is much more than simply classroom space that is needed to educate students, but this analysis is helpful in giving us a sense of the upper bounds of the potential scale of the Choice program. In the table below, a positive number means that there are seats available at a given school level in a given district; a negative number indicates that schools are above capacity. As seen in Table 7 opposite, among participating districts,

there are more than 12,000 seats that are physically available if each school were filled to its theoretical capacity. In elementary school alone, there are more than 5,000 seats in excess capacity in Hartford-area suburban schools.

One of the important things to note about this analysis is that there are physical spaces available across elementary, middle, or high schools - meaning that if students were admitted in elementary school, there should be space for those students as they progressed into higher grades. In addition, unless there is an unexpected baby boom or other significant influx of new resident children, one could expect hundreds of new seats to open up every year as students are promoted and the oldest class graduates.

These projections, while obviously not a precise estimate of suburban capacity, suggest that the Project Choice program can accommodate a significant portion of the growth needed to meet the *Sheff v. O’Neill* goals. Further, they point to the urgent need for the state to develop a comprehensive estimate of capacity for Project Choice, so that annual expectations and targets can be set for each district.



Table 7: Number of Students Below School Capacity, by Suburban District and Level of School, 2005-06²²

Receiving District	Elementary School (Grades PK-5)	Middle School (Grades 6-8)	High School (Grades 9-12)	Total Number of Available Seats	Current Number of Choice Students
Avon*	87	59	141	287	39
Berlin	157	173	96	426	11
Bolton ²³	199		80	279	20
Bristol	444	243	532	1,219	46
Canton ²⁴	78		259	337	47
Cromwell ²⁵	-273	-61	67	-267	45
East Granby	102	29	29	160	24
East Windsor ²⁶	-98	212	278	392	53
Ellington*	73	117	79	269	14
Enfield*	511	130	285	926	89
Farmington*	94	22	77	193	94
Glastonbury*	-133	53	-514	-594	45
Granby	35	107	76	218	40
Newington**	223	185	-15	393	57
Plainville	386	-6	231	611	65
Region 10	44	55	116	215	11
Rocky Hill	95	157	82	334	46
Simsbury*	317	115	56	488	104
Somers	102	80	54	236	17
South Windsor	-6	-17	-133	-156	56
Southington	632	133	-157	608	16
Suffield**	255	137	-43	349	22
Vernon	578	50	614	1,242	48
West Hartford	-53	308	21	276	61
Wethersfield*	26	183	58	267	13
Windsor ²⁷	843	207	21	1,071	12
Windsor Locks	609	707	923	2,239	30
TOTAL Student Enrollment Below Capacity	5,327	3,378	3,313	12,018	1,125

Sources: Connecticut Strategic School Profile, 2005-06; Connecticut Department of Education, Condition of Connecticut's Public School Facilities-December 2005; author's calculation

* Elementary school includes students in grades PK-6; Middle School includes 7-8.

** Elementary school includes students in grades PK-4; Middle School includes 5-8.



Endnotes

- 1 Data in this section was taken from Census 2000, as displayed on Lewis Mumford site. Accessed on April 30, 2007 at <http://mumford.albany.edu/census/data.html>.
- 2 For the Hartford MSA, see <http://mumford.albany.edu/census/CityProfiles/Profiles/3280msaProfile.htm> (accessed on April 30, 2007).
- 3 The towns in Table 1 do not correspond perfectly with the districts involved in Project Choice. Burlington, East Hartford, Hartland, Manchester, Marlborough, & New Britain do not take Hartford students in Project Choice. Additionally some participating districts in Project Choice are located in Tolland County.
- 4 High school and college graduates are measured as a percentage of all residents 25 or older.
- 5 Eaton, S. E. (2006). *The Children in Room E4: American Education on Trial*. New York: Algonquin Books.
- 6 August 1971. "Project Concern: Hartford, Connecticut." New York: Center for Urban Education.
- 7 "The Unexamined Remedy." (June 5, 1998). Hartford, CT: The Connecticut Center for School Change.
- 8 Supra note 2.
- 9 This total does NOT include over 1,000 Hartford resident schoolchildren who are being educated in suburban districts through the Project Choice program.
- 10 "Education Statistics for Hartford and Four Suburbs." Accessed on 22 June 2007 at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/ps99/rpt/olr/htm/99-r-0152.htm>. Similar discrepancies were also found in the Boston metro area between students in Boston as compared to surrounding suburbs. (Lee, C. (2004). *Racial Segregation and Educational Outcomes in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.)
- 11 *Sheff v. O'Neill Stipulation and Order, January 22, 2003, Section III.B.5.*
- 12 Supra note 4, Part I.
- 13 The percentage of white students among all Project Choice students must be lower than their share of students in Hartford Public Schools.
- 14 In 2006-07, only seven Project Choice students were white.
- 15 Although the official counts for funding purposes are based on October 1, in order to get closer to the *Sheff* goal, they continue to try to place students through the end of December. Thus, the January count of minority students is used for *Sheff* compliance.
- 16 As of June 23, 2007; 2006-07 data are still being verified. Attrition and graduate counts also includes white Project Choice students.
- 17 The numbers of Choice students at various points in times do not fully reconcile. This is likely a result of the high mobility of Hartford-area students. It also emphasizes the need for a better integrated data system between the state, districts, and CREC to carefully track students.
- 18 See accompanying report, "Boston's METCO Program: Lessons for the Hartford Area".
- 19 This analysis is not meant to imply that this approach is the appropriate way to determine how many Project Choice students to take; it simply reflects the reality of how most districts operate due to the financial constraints of the program. As the plaintiffs' expert, Dr. Leonard Stevens, wrote in his compliance report in March 2004, "If 15 children arrived in a suburban school district on August 15 from Nebraska, there is no question that seats for them would be found when the school year opened. Indeed, if the families of 15 Open Choice applicants relocated from Hartford to the suburbs on August 15, seats for the children of new residents would immediately be found....Currently, a dual standard applies: instant seat availability for resident students, situational availability for Open Choice students." (p.11) Stevens, L.B. (March 2004). *Progress Toward Desegregated Education in Metropolitan Hartford: A Report to the Plaintiffs. Sheff v. O'Neill.* (available at http://www.naacpldf.org/content/pdf/hartford/Sheff_Report_on_Progress.pdf).
- 20 This includes calculations based only on gross physical capacity; this analysis has not considered other factors that are essential to educating students, such as teachers, books, supplies, etc.
- 21 Note: calculations using school enrollment included existing Project Choice students that are currently enrolled in suburban schools.
- 22 This includes calculations based only on gross physical capacity; this analysis has not considered other factors that are essential to educating students, such as teachers, books, supplies, etc.
- 23 One school serves K-8 grade students.
- 24 Elementary school includes students in grades PK-6; Connecticut capacity report did not include middle school (grades 7 and 8).
- 25 Elementary school includes students in grades PK-4; Middle school includes grades 5-9.
- 26 Elementary serves students in PK-4; Middle School serves 5-10; and high school serves grades 9-12.
- 27 Middle School serves students in grades 6-9; high school serves students in grades 9-12.

Section III: Benefits of Racial/Ethnic Integration

In the recent school integration cases considered by the U.S. Supreme Court,¹ more than 50 briefs were filed by approximately 1,000 educational, legal, and academic individuals and organizations citing, among other things, the multifaceted benefits of integrated schools for students who attend them, their communities, and for our democracy.² Although it is somewhat artificial to divide the benefits of integrated schools into discrete categories—because they are often interrelated—research on desegregated schools has focused on social/psychological, academic achievement and attainment, and long-term (life chances) outcomes. Additionally, there appear to be important benefits for communities with integrated schools.

Over 50 years ago, Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport suggested that in order to reduce prejudice, people needed to be in contact with one another with contact structured according to certain conditions. These conditions that Allport suggests are important are:

1. Support of authority for desegregation;
2. Equal status for all groups;
3. Common goals that groups work towards; and
4. Promoting intergroup contact.³

Research in racially integrated schools confirms that, when desegregated schools are

structured according to Allport's theory of equal status contact by allowing for students of different races and ethnicities to be in contact with one another, students can develop improved cross-racial understanding and experience a reduction of racial prejudice and bias.⁴ Some evidence also suggests that diverse classrooms can improve the critical thinking skills of students.⁵

Much of the research about desegregated schools that has entered political and judicial discourse has centered around how students in desegregated school perform on achievement tests, sometimes after only a year in a desegregated school and regardless of the context. Because much of this research is several decades old, it focuses primarily on the achievement of African Americans and finds modest gains for black students in desegregated schools.⁶ A more recent study using a unique longitudinal dataset in Texas found that for black students, a decline in the percentage of black students they attend school with, when cumulated over several years, was related to a substantial increase in their achievement, even when controlling for other school quality factors.⁷ Research on the effects of desegregation for Latino students—the most segregated minority group—is more limited than that for black students, but research generally finds a modest, positive effect on achievement or no effect at all.⁸ Research

on successful Latino students in elite colleges found that the majority of them attended desegregated schools, which connected them with college-going peer networks and gave them confidence in their academic abilities.⁹ Research has also confirmed that the fear that desegregation might harm the test scores of white students is largely unfounded.¹⁰

Looking beyond test-based achievement measures, research has documented long term benefits of integration for students and communities. Students in integrated schools are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and graduate from college than their segregated peers, meaning that integrated schools result in a more highly skilled workforce.¹¹ These students are also connected to social networks that give them information about and access to competitive colleges and higher-status jobs. Perhaps because of this access or the fact that students who attend integrated schools tend to be more likely to attain graduate degrees, labor market studies show that African-Americans who attend integrated schools have higher salaries than their peers from segregated schools.¹² Students who attend racially diverse schools are more likely to be civically engaged after graduation and more likely to feel comfortable working in diverse settings.¹³ Research also indicates that communities with extensive school desegregation have experienced declines in residential integration, which would lessen the need for policies to create desegregated schools.¹⁴ Communities with integrated schools tend to experience higher levels of parental involvement in and support for the schools.¹⁵

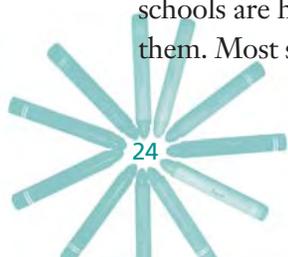
Research continues to show that segregated schools are harmful for students who attend them. Most schools with high concentrations

of minority students are also schools with high percentages of students from low-income families.¹⁶ Many such schools traditionally have fewer educational resources such as qualified and experienced teachers, advanced curricular offerings such as AP classes, and college-going peers.¹⁷ Given usually unequal educational resources, it is perhaps not surprising that research has also found that the achievement and high-school graduation rates of all students in segregated minority schools tends to be lower than their peers in more integrated schools.¹⁸ In areas like Hartford, where racially isolated schools are also schools with high concentrations of poverty, racial integration programs also provide access to more economically diverse and better resourced schools.

Although there is a large body of evidence about the benefits of integrated schools, research has also demonstrated that it matters in how integration is implemented.¹⁹ Research generally suggests that benefits are more likely to accrue when desegregation is voluntary,²⁰ as is the case in the Project Choice program, and when students attend desegregated schools at an early age.²¹

Project Choice/Project Concern Research

Because of the requirement by a participating suburb as a condition for participation, the Project Concern program was initially structured so that research could assess whether the program participants benefited from their experience in suburban schools. From the entire group of students who applied for the program, students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group, students who attend desegregated suburban schools, and those assigned to the control group, or students who remained in segregated Hartford



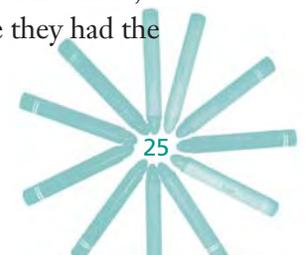
schools. This initial design provided an unusually rigorous experimental design, at least in the first few years, to assess not only the benefits of Project Concern but also of integrated schools more generally. As a result, there have been several studies assessing the academic, social and long-term benefits for students in Project Concern.²² There were both initial studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as well as later studies to assess the program in terms of life chances.

A 1970 report analyzing students' achievement in reading (using results from standardized testing) found that the achievement of students in Project Concern was higher than students from similar backgrounds remaining in the Hartford schools.²³ Students who began school in the suburbs (e.g., had not attended Hartford Public Schools) read at least one grade level above normal. There were also larger gains for students who began in kindergarten or first grade and for students who had spent more years in Project Concern.

There were several studies completed during the 1980s analyzing several types of long-term outcomes. First, a study completed in 1984 followed African-American students who began school in the suburbs in elementary schools through their high school graduation (with a comparative control group of students who attended Hartford Public Schools). There were a number of educational and social benefits found for black students, particularly for male students, who participated in Project Concern. They were more likely to graduate from high school and to complete more years of college. Further, there seemed to a greater sense of interracial comfort for black participants in Project Concern. They were less likely to have sensed discrimination during and after college, less likely to have encounters

with the police or fights, and more likely to have closer contact with whites, such as living in integrated neighborhoods or interacting with more white friends in college. Female students in Project Concern were less likely to have a child before they were 18 than their female peers in Hartford schools.²⁴ A second study using follow-up data seventeen years after students began school examined the type of employment that students obtained. This study concluded that black students who attended desegregated suburban schools worked in professions that had traditionally employed fewer blacks. The students who participated in Project Concern were more likely to be in private sector or white collar jobs while students in the control group (students who went to segregated Hartford schools) were more likely to have government or blue collar jobs.²⁵ Finally, an analysis of participants' self-reported occupational aspirations, work history, and post-graduation activities found that Project Concern students were more likely to have a "consistent" career plan than the control group of Hartford students.²⁶

Anecdotal evidence from recent interviews of Project Concern alumni supports earlier research.²⁷ Alumni were asked, "Do you think that Project Concern had a positive effect on your life?" Several of the most common responses were that they attribute their current success to their participation in Project Concern and that they currently lived in an integrated neighborhood or a suburban district—which research on desegregation's perpetuation effect on students suggests is likely to occur.²⁸ Academically, they felt like they were considerably more advanced than their Hartford friends, and valued education more for their own children. Socially they felt confident in their ability to get along with others, such as college roommates, since they had the



experience of attending schools in which they were from a different background than most of the students. Alumni interviewed detailed difficulties that they encountered as students, but most believed that despite the challenges of the experience at the time, they were better off as a result of their participation.²⁹

There have been few recent studies of Project Choice, but recent test results find positive academic gains among Project Choice participants. According to the 2006 standardized testing results, more than half of Project Choice students are scoring at or above the proficiency level on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Further, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency is higher than the percentage of Hartford students for both math and reading (see Table 8). The gap between Hartford Pub-

lic School Students and Project Choice students is particularly noticeable in reading. Although not shown here, Project Choice students outperform the average percentage of black and Latino students scoring at or above proficiency statewide, for both reading and math, on the CMT and CAPT.

Another recent study used scores on the Connecticut Mastery Test to examine the academic achievement of 5th through 8th grade students in Project Choice as compared to those who applied for the program and did not participate (e.g., students who remained in the Hartford Public Schools). Overall, in math, this research found that students moving to suburban schools initially scored lower than students remaining in Hartford, but became more positive with more time in suburban schools. Reading results were higher for students in suburban schools whereas their writing scores were lower when compared with the Hartford sample.³⁰ As with earlier research, this study finds that students score higher in comparison to their peers remaining in city schools after several years in the suburban transfer program.

Table 8: Achievement Test Results of Students in Project Choice, Hartford Public Schools, and Statewide, 2006

	% at Proficient Level and Above (L3-5)	
	Mathematics	Reading
CMT 2006, Gr. 3-8		
Hartford Open Choice (N=517)	57.8	54.5
CMT 2006, Gr. 3-8 Hartford District Average	46.8	39.0
CMT 2006, Gr. 3-8 State Average	79.3	73.7
CAPT 2006, Gr. 10		
Hartford Open Choice (N=64)	57.8	68.8
CAPT 2006, Gr. 10 Hartford District Average	43.3	49.7
CAPT 2006, Gr. 10 State Average	77.9	79.8

Sources: Connecticut Department of Education; "Connecticut CMT and CAPT Online Reports" Accessed on August 10, 2007 at <http://www.ctreports.com/>.

Initial Research on the Project Choice "Early Beginnings" kindergarten program has also shown positive results for city and suburban resident students alike (see discussion at page 50, *infra*).

The relative dearth of information about the effects of the urban-suburban desegregation program may be a contributing factor to the lack of support for the program by the state. During the 1990s, according to a review of public opinion polls, in Connecticut there was a growing perception from 1990 to 1996 that school desegregation did not improve education for minority students (33%) or white students (19%).³¹ Though 55% of respondents in 1999 thought that more was needed to be



done in order to integrate schools in Connecticut,³² small minorities supported busing white and minority children to create integrated schools (27% in 1996) or creating regional school districts to balance schools (35%). Respondents were most favorable towards magnet schools to balance schools (65% in 1999). White respondents were more favorable to remedies that would keep their children in their community, while a substantial share of minorities supported a remedy that would give children the opportunity to experience other communities.³³ In earlier decades,

the demonstrated benefits of the program—as required by a suburb as a condition for participating—helped to garner support for the program’s expansion.

In Section V of this report, there is further discussion of the different responses from suburban district officials as to why their district participates in the Project Choice program and the benefits they perceive for suburban students. Additionally, Hartford parents share why they chose to participate.

Endnotes

- 1 *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education, et al. and Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, et al.*
- 2 Briefs can be accessed at http://www.naacpldf.org/volint/add_docs/volint_school_amicus.html.
- 3 Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- 4 See also Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L.R., (2000). Does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Recent meta-analytic findings. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 93-114). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.; Killen, M., Crystal, D., and Ruck, M. (2007). The Social Developmental Benefits of Intergroup Contact among Children and Adolescents. In E. Frankenberg and G. Orfield (Eds.), *Lessons in Integration: Realizing the Promise of Racial Diversity in American Schools*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- 5 Bransford, J.D. and Schwartz, D.L. (1999). Rethinking Transfer: A Simple Proposal with Multiple Implications. In *Review of Research in Education*, eds. A. Iran-Nejad and P. D. Pearson. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association: 61-101; A. Wigfield et al., “Development of Achievement Motivation,” in *Social, Emotional, and Personality*, vol. 3, 6th ed. of *Handbook of Child Psychology*, eds. W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, and N. Eisenberg (New York: Wiley, in press).
- 6 See 553 Social Scientists; Schofield, J. W. (1995). Review of Research on School Desegregation’s Impact on Elementary and Secondary School Students. In J. A. Banks and C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (pp. 597-617). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.
- 7 Hanushek, E.A., Kain, J. F., and Rivkin, S. G. (2006). New Evidence about *Brown v. Board of Education*: The Complex Effects of School Racial Composition on Achievement. Working Paper, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- 8 Schofield, *supra* note 6. Horn, C. & Kurlaender, M. (April 2006). The End of Keyes—Resegregation Trends and Achievement in Denver Public Schools. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 9 Gándara, P. G. (1995). *Over the Ivy Walls: The Educational Mobility of Low Income Chicanos*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- 10 *Supra* note 6.
- 11 Camburn, E.M. (August 1990). “College Completion among Students from High Schools Located in Large Metropolitan Areas,” *American Journal of Education* 98 (4): 551-69.
- 12 M. A. Boozer et al., “Race and School Quality since *Brown v. Board of Education*,” in *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Microeconomics*, eds. M. N. Baily and C. Winston (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992): 269-338.
- 13 Kurlaender, M. and Yun, J.T. (2005). “Fifty Years after *Brown*: New Evidence of the Impact of School Racial Composition on Student Outcomes,” *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research and Practice* 6 (1): 51-78.
- 14 Pearce, D. (1980). *Breaking Down Barriers: New Evidence on the Impact of Metropolitan School Desegregation on Housing Patterns, Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America.
- 15 Michael, B. (Ed.) (1990). *Volunteers in Public Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- 16 Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2006). *Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 17 Yun, J.T. and Moreno, J.F. (2006). “College Access, K-12 Concentrated Disadvantage, and the Next 25



- Years of Education Research," *Educational Researcher* 35 (1): 12-19.
- 18 Mickelson, R. (2001). Subverting Swann: First and second generation segregation in Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 215-252.; Swanson, C.B. (2004). *Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.; Lee, C. (2004). *Racial Segregation and Educational Outcomes in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
 - 19 Frankenberg, E. & Orfield, G. (Eds.) (2007). *Lessons in Integration: Realizing the Promise of Racial Diversity in American Schools*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
 - 20 Stephan, W.G. (1984). "Blacks and Brown: The Effects of School Desegregation on Black Students," in *School Desegregation and Black Achievement*, eds. T. Cook et al. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 131-59; L. A. Bradley and G. W. Bradley, "The Academic Achievement of Black Students in Desegregated Schools: A Critical Review," *Review of Educational Research* 47 (1977): 399-449.
 - 21 Mahard, R. E. and Crain, R. L. (1983). "Research on Minority Achievement in Desegregated Schools," in *The Consequences of School Desegregation*, eds. C. Rossell and W. D. Hawley. Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple Univ. Press: 103-25.
 - 22 Like most of the earlier research on desegregation, this research focused on whether there were benefits for minority (usually African-American) students and not on the benefits for white students who were attending desegregated schools. The one exception is a study by Mahan (1968), which found that most suburban parents' attitudes towards the program were favorable, particularly those who had actually had direct contact with the program. Teachers also rated students as above average in terms of both academic and social skills. See Mahan, T. W. (1968). Project Concern: A Supplementary Report on Non-Academic Factors.
 - 23 Crane, T. (1970). A Three Year Summary of Hartford Project Concern (a Program of Urban-Suburban Cooperation). Hartford, CT: Connecticut State Department of Education.
 - 24 Crain, R., Miller, R.L, Hawes, J.A., and Peichert, J.R. (1992). Finding Niches: Desegregated students sixteen years later. Final Report on the Educational Outcomes of Project Concern, Hartford, Connecticut. New York: Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396 035.
 - 25 Crain, R. L., & Strauss, J. (July 1985). School Desegregation and Black Occupational Attainments: Results from a Long-Term Experiment. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools, The Johns Hopkins University.
 - 26 Gable, R. K., Thompson, D. L., & Iwanicki, E. F. (1983). The effects of voluntary desegregation on occupational outcomes. *The Vocational Guidance Quarterly* 31: 230-239.
 - 27 Interviews with Project Concern alumni, December 2006. Sheff Coalition.
 - 28 See Wells, A. S. & Crain, R. L. (Winter 1994). Perpetuation Theory and the Long-Term Effects of School Desegregation. *Review of Educational Research* 64(2): 531-55.
 - 29 See also Banks, D. & Dougherty, J. (2004). City-Suburban Desegregation and Forced Choices: A Review Essay of Susan Eaton's *The Other Boston Busing Story*. *Teachers College Record* 106 (5): 985-998; Project Concern Oral History Interviews (2003). Conducted by students from the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools seminar. Tapes and transcripts deposited at the Hartford Studies Project, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. Available at <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/hartstud>
 - 30 Jacobs, E. (2003). *Educating Inner-City Children in Suburban Schools: A Randomized Study of Majority-to-Minority Transfer and Achievement in Connecticut*. Ithaca, NY: Unpublished Senior Thesis, Cornell University. This study found, however, that there was substantial variation in terms of academic effects of Project Choice when evaluating by students' socioeconomic status, specifically that lower-income Project Choice students had lower academic achievement. Current research underway at the University of Connecticut is examining the outcomes of students participating in Project Choice. Jacobs' study indicates the need for examining the outcomes of different subgroups of students participating in the Choice program.
 - 31 When results were disaggregated by respondents' race, people of color were much more likely to believe that integrated schools benefited students. Connecticut results were also much less favorable towards desegregation than nation public opinion polls.
 - 32 78% of minority respondents believed that more needed to be done, compared with only 51% of white respondents.
 - 33 McMiller, D. L. (2000). Public Opinion and School Desegregation in Hartford, Connecticut. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 33(2): 68-80.



Section IV: Other City-suburban Desegregation Programs

Before turning to a more in-depth analysis of the structure of the Hartford area's Project Choice program, we will first briefly examine three similar programs in other metropolitan areas. METCO, in the Boston area, was established at the same time as Project Concern but is now three times larger than Project Choice. Minneapolis' "The Choice is Yours" Program was established in 2001-02 and has already grown to be larger than Project Choice. St. Louis has had the nation's largest urban-suburban desegregation program serving over 12,000 students. The design of these programs might be informative in assessing potential areas for growth for Project Choice (see Table 9 on page 30 for summary of programs).¹ Interestingly, interviews or analyses of these programs all agree that the ultimate objective—racial and ethnic integration of schools across a metropolitan area—is challenging, particularly given the lack of political support for such objectives. Given the current policy environment, these programs all try to demonstrate to the suburbs, cities, and the state that desegregation is in *everyone's* self-interest.

A. METCO, Boston, Massachusetts²

Program Structure

Boston's urban-suburban desegregation program, METCO (which stands for Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity),³ began in 1966, the same year as Project Concern in Hartford. METCO pre-dated Boston's court-order desegregation, which only pertained to the Boston school district, *not* any of the surrounding suburban districts. In contrast to Boston Public Schools (15% white), participating METCO suburban districts are all at least 70% white, with half of them over 90% white. METCO students comprise anywhere from 1% of a participating district's enrollment to over 7% of total enrollment. In contrast to the Hartford suburbs' low participation rates, fourteen suburban Boston districts enroll METCO students at a level of more than 3% of their total enrollment (see Appendix D).

METCO is a state-funded grant program since it qualifies as a program under the Commonwealth's Racial Imbalance Act,⁴ which funds programs to reduce racial imbalance and isolation in schools. Thus, each year the Legislature must allocate funding. Every participating suburban district (38 total districts)

Table 9: Comparison of City-suburban Desegregation Programs

	Boston	Minneapolis	St. Louis	Hartford
Number of Students	3,300	1,977	8,800	1,070
Participating suburban districts	38	10	15	27
Funding per student	\$3700	Per-pupil allotment	Per-pupil allotment (\$6,430)	\$2000*
Year Began	1966	2001	1983	1966
Magnet schools/ Intra-city choice	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Transportation	Operated by METCO Inc. or provider chosen by district; reimbursed by state	Reimbursed through state desegregation aid; districts provide supplemental funding after-school, in summer, for parents	Operated by state; geocoded area to make transportation more efficient	Operated by CREC; funded by state
Support by service provider	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support services in suburban districts	METCO Director employed by each suburban district	Some districts have parent liaison or support staff for city students	Teacher exchange Specially-designed curriculum materials	On an as-needed basis
Publicity	Annual Lobby Day at State Legislature; coordinated with parents alumni, suburban supporters	School choice videos distributed; paid advertising on radio, TV, billboards, newspapers; parent information centers	Mail brochure with information about participating districts and application to every St. Louis family	Limited advertising a few years ago by CREC
Research on Program	Through annual survey of districts	Done annually by Aspen Associates	Former annual reports by court monitor	Most research is several decades old

* Raised to \$2500 in 2007-08

annually submits a RFP to the state, in which they indicate the number of seats the district will provide for METCO students, which is tied to the funding they request. In 2007, suburban districts were reimbursed \$3,700 for each METCO student they accepted (for comparative purposes, approximately \$12,000 was spent per student in these districts).⁵ Additionally, approximately \$1,700 is allocated for transportation per student; in some districts, METCO Inc. is the transportation provider; for other districts, METCO, Inc. provides support to other districts where another group has bid for the transportation contract. The total funding for the program is approximately

\$17 million and currently there are approximately 3,300 students in the program (including 135 students who attend suburban Springfield districts). Boston Public Schools does not receive any funding for students who participate in METCO.

Funding is a major reason that the METCO program has not expanded in recent decades—both in terms of students accepted and in the number of suburban districts that participate. METCO Inc. prioritizes closing what they term a “funding gap” before they look to expand the program. Likewise, the state depart-



ment of education website acknowledges the financial burden on participating districts:

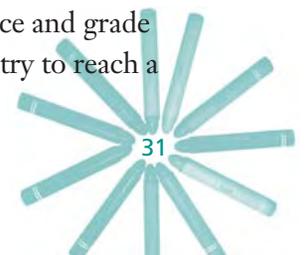
[G]iven the low reimbursement and the present level funding of the program, it is unclear exactly how a school district could join without additional overall funding to the program itself. Although a school district can ‘withdraw’ from the METCO Program, the decision would only be made after careful discussion and consideration. A school district should meet with representatives of METCO Inc. and the Department of Education before making such intentions public.⁶

The state department of education has oversight for the program. In 2003, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education appointed a separate METCO advisory committee, which consists of representatives from METCO Inc., suburban directors, superintendents, and METCO parents. The state also helps in terms of policy decisions and providing special education services to participating students.

Participating suburban districts have a full-time METCO coordinator, called a METCO director, who serves as the contact person in the district, coordinator of METCO-related activities, and the liaison for METCO families. METCO directors are employees of the suburban district. According to a recent report, all METCO directors are people of color, which can help provide an important role model for METCO students in overwhelming white districts.⁷ One role that is common to every director is that they actually place the students in district schools when students are referred to them by METCO Inc. and send out the official acceptance letters.⁸ They serve as a resource for

students making the adjustment from Boston, and for the suburban district to make sure that someone is focusing on the needs of incoming Boston students. Many directors also coordinate matching suburban host families to each METCO student to ease the transition for the Boston family and student into the new district. The directors then are communication assets for the districts—but they also help parents bridge the gap between Boston and an unfamiliar, distant community. According to research, parental involvement levels in suburban districts are quite high, and this may well be due to the efforts of the METCO Directors.⁹

METCO Inc. is a non-profit organization that has been designated as the service provider by the Massachusetts Department of Education. In this role, they handle placements of students in suburban communities, provide support services to METCO students, and coordinate advocacy in support of the program’s funding. METCO Inc. gets 5% of the overall funding for the program for serving as a service provider. One of their primary functions is to take applications and place students. Parents can put their child on the waiting list at any point in time: some add their student shortly after they’re born, and some choose to join the list when they’re about to start school and are looking at what the school options are. The waiting list has approximately 12,000 students. Because of the length of the waiting list—which is several times as large as the number of available spaces in suburban schools—there is little publicity or outreach to eligible families. METCO Inc. annually places approximately 460 students, most of whom are in kindergarten through second grade.¹⁰ The time on the waiting list averages five years, though this varies by student’s race and grade level.¹¹ The program’s goal is to try to reach a



racial composition of METCO students similar to that of Boston Public Schools. However, the program is disproportionately African-American: 77% of students are black.¹²

METCO Inc. also provides support services to students. They employ two social workers, a guidance counselor, and student services administrators. Additional services include providing after-school tutorial programs at METCO Inc, SAT prep courses, exam school prep, and student aid workshops.

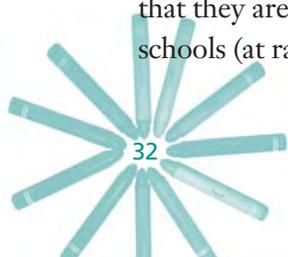
Lobbying is particularly important for the existence of METCO since it is funded by annual state grant, and is thus subject to the whims of the economy and the political process. To try to maintain political support for the program and thus continued funding to support the program's existence, METCO Inc. coordinates an annual lobby day in which supporters go to Beacon Hill to lobby the state legislature and provides information for lobbying activities. One important source of information is presenting annual results from their survey of participating districts to document the success of participating students. Through this data collection, they have been able to demonstrate the importance of the program in raising achievement, graduation and college-going rates for black & Latino students from Boston.

Research Findings — METCO

Ten years ago, Professor Gary Orfield and a team of graduate students at Harvard, at the invitation of METCO, surveyed parents of all students participating in METCO (a sample of over 2,400 parents, or around three-quarters of all parents).¹³ Parents generally indicate that they are very involved with the suburban schools (at rates similar to parental participa-

tion in the Boston schools with their other children) and indicate general satisfaction. Their reasons for choosing METCO were mainly academic related (almost three-fourths indicated this was the most important factor in their decision), though other popular reasons included safety and wanting an integrated education for their child. Over 90% of parents thought that METCO had been a great experience in helping their child learn to get along with students of other backgrounds; an equally high percentage of METCO students agreed with this assessment. Perhaps contributing to their rosy assessment of interracial relations, 85% of students thought that their experience with host families and other suburban families had been excellent. A lower but still an overwhelming majority of parents thought there was good respect for their child's background in their suburban school (though students were less likely to agree with their parents). Further, parents reported some discrimination, though few felt it was serious, particularly among faculty and staff. The highest serious discrimination reported by students was from the suburban police.

Though virtually all alumni agreed (to some extent) that they would participate again or they would want their child to participate in METCO, there was some hesitation.¹⁴ Further, they admitted that they likely would not have answered in the affirmative while they were actually in METCO. Benefits from participating in METCO that the alumni cite including feeling more comfortable with whites (in college, in the workplace) than they believe they would have been without attending the suburban schools. It also gave them access to more prestigious educational and job opportunities. At the same time, there were cultural clashes with white suburbs—feeling as though their peers stereotyped them.



B. Minneapolis, Minnesota

Program Structure

The Minneapolis metro area implemented “The Choice is Yours (CIY) Program” urban-suburban desegregation program in 2001-02 in response to a lawsuit filed by the NAACP against the state of Minnesota. The settlement called for the program to last for four years, through the end of the 2004-05 school year, and to continue on a voluntary basis thereafter. The program is administered by the West Metro Education Program,¹⁵ and the comprehensive settlement also includes an intra-Minneapolis magnet choice option as well. Each suburban district provides orientation and academic support to CIY students; some districts, using federal funding, employ a parental liaison or support staff.

The Minneapolis metro has 6.7% low-income residents but 16.4% of residents are classified poor in the city of Minneapolis—and 2/3 of Minneapolis Public Schools students are on free/reduced lunch. Further, despite having a high white percentage in the metro area, by 2002, 60% of Minneapolis Public Schools were 80-100% minority.¹⁶

The program began in 2001-02 with 472 students. By 2006-07, 1,977 students participated (the program was continued beyond the required end date from the court settlement) and these students enrolled in 9 suburban Minneapolis districts.¹⁷ Eligibility for the program is based on student’s low-income status,¹⁸ and a lottery assigns students to schools based on the choices they submit. Virtually all students receive either their first or second choice school. Currently, half of all participants are African-American, most hailing from two zip code regions in the northern part of the city. Hispanic students are more likely to choose

the intra-district magnet instead of the suburban choice option.

Each suburban district receives the full state per-pupil spending per student as well as the extra compensatory funding that the student would have received if he/she attended the Minneapolis Public Schools. The result of this funding structure is that districts get *more* money for city students than for their own suburban students. Additionally, many districts are facing shrinking enrollment and need extra revenue. This causes some suburban districts to market themselves toward CIY-eligible families. In fact, two inner-ring suburban districts have become *more* racially identifiable with the acceptance of CIY students (who are overwhelmingly nonwhite).¹⁹

The initial goal of 2,500 participants by 2005-06 was not met: there were 1,680 students in the program by 2005-06.²⁰ Several districts did not even enroll half of their allotted slots over the five-year period, possibly because the schools chosen by MPS students were filled and the students were not aware of other options in that district. One contributing factor might be that there were initial problems in name recognition and knowledge of program among those families who were eligible. Even some parents who were participating did not know the name of the program.²¹

Research Findings — Minneapolis

Annual evaluations of the Minneapolis choice program are conducted by Aspen. These evaluations concern both the structure and function of the program and satisfaction with the program. They find that the primary sources of information about school choice options among those who are eligible are their social networks, which can be neighbors, coworkers,

representatives from school or community organization, or friends.²² Very few learned about the programs through the media. These networks are also influential in determining which schools parents apply for. One important factor for parents whose children are eligible for the program, but chose not to participate, is that they prefer that their child attend school closer to home.

The Minneapolis program seems to have a retention problem, though some of this is due to family mobility out of the district. Of 1,435 students who were in CIY at the end of the 2004-05 school year, 1,090 students in 2005-06 returned, or 76% of students. Typically, between 75-85% of students return to suburban schools from end of the previous year while approximately 17% return to Minneapolis schools.²³ Parents of suburban choice students were more satisfied and likely to make the same school choice than eligible non-participants. Additionally, 98% said that they'd recommend the program to others (70% of parents in the survey had already made such a recommendation). Aspen researchers found that free transportation is important: only 1/3 of parents said that they would choose the same school again if they didn't have free transportation. Bus rides range from 3 minutes to 1:45; the average bus ride is 33 minutes.

A majority of parents said that they preferred schools with diverse students and teachers and a school that taught their student about their racial background; however, among parents utilizing choice, there were higher percentages of those valuing cultural heritage who stayed in Minneapolis (vs. moving to suburban districts). Parents also cite academics and safety as important factors in their choices. Interviews with teachers demonstrated that they were less comfortable than parents thought in talking

about race/racism and didn't think students worked well across racial lines; it is unclear whether the program implementation including providing training for teachers about teaching in more diverse classrooms.²⁴

Achievement results are mixed, when comparing suburban choosers vs. their peers who stay. However, there were only two years of data in the most recent survey, and most students had only experienced one year in the suburban school – similar to results of research in St. Louis's city-suburban desegregation program (discussed below).²⁵

C. St. Louis, Missouri, Voluntary Interdistrict Transfer Program

St. Louis has had the largest interdistrict city-suburban desegregation program in the country. It was implemented as a settlement to a St. Louis-area desegregation case, originally filed in 1972, which included suburban districts as defendants as well as the state of Missouri.²⁶ At its peak, 12,400 St. Louis students participated in the aspect of the program that transferred students to suburban districts. The case was taken off the active court docket in 1999 after a settlement was negotiated, which provided for the continuance of both the city-suburban transfer program and a number of interdistrict magnet schools. The program is currently administered by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC), a non-profit organization formed in 1999, which provides placement and transportation services. Just before the 1999 settlement, VICC received just over \$1 million to administer the program. The state under the settlement agreed to pay \$50 million as VICC assumed control of the program, but has not fully complied with its initial promises.



The suburban transfer program began as a pilot program in 1981 with five suburban districts. Under the original 1983 settlement, the state (which was liable for the school segregation) bore the cost of the program including transportation. The state's participation, after many years of fighting the litigation, gave implicit support and endorsement to the program—which encouraged participation by suburbs and students. Each suburban district was reimbursed their per-pupil expenditure for each St. Louis student they took²⁷; St. Louis also received half of its per-pupil funding for each student attending suburban schools. In 1992, this combined to cost the state approximately \$60 million. At its height, 12,700 black city students went to suburban schools in 16 districts through the program.²⁸ Like Hartford, there are other components of the desegregation plan as well: suburban and St. Louis students attended city magnets, which enrolled approximately 14,000 at the program's peak. This meant that nearly half of St. Louis public school students participated in magnets or suburban choice.²⁹

As part of the settlement, school districts had goals that they had to reach, which helped open spaces: districts had to increase their minority percentage 15% in five years, up to 25% black, which was the regional average. Districts had to participate since it was part of the settlement and had to open up seats even if space wasn't available, as the state would help with building costs for suburban districts if necessary. There was an annual report on the progress of the program by district. Each suburban district had a contact person for the program; unlike METCO, this contact also had other responsibilities but they would help resolve problems, provide data to the VICC program, and attended meetings about the program.

Although participation was mandatory for districts, the participation of St. Louis students was completely voluntary. Under the terms of the settlement, only African-American students in St. Louis were eligible to participate in the suburban transfer program. Students were served on a first-come, first-served basis. They were allowed to choose three school districts; if there was not space in that district, they had the option of going to another district or being on the waiting list for the following year. During the placement process, VICC encouraged school districts to meet the families, and the families attended orientation in suburbs.

Recruitment was a major focus of program administrators, who sought to continuously keep the program in the minds of eligible families. Materials were sent to families several times per year; staff went to community meetings; there were public service announcements on TV; and other advertisements. For example, a brochure listing information about every participating school district (including college and high school graduation rates, student-teacher ratios, etc) was annually produced from information supplied by districts and mailed to St. Louis families. Another flyer had stories of successful graduates talking about the importance of the program. Additionally, applications automatically go to every African-American public school student in St. Louis. VICC had one staff member whose focus was on communications and the applications.

One of the initial implementation problems was related to transportation—bus rides were long, sometimes unpredictable. After the state took over transportation and geocoded the area, the average bus ride was reduced to an hour. Students are allowed one roundtrip per day which could be at any time (early morning buses, late buses, etc). At the peak of the pro-

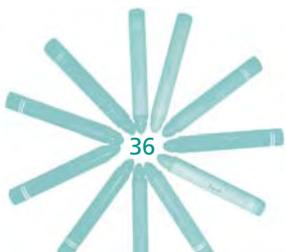
gram, transportation costs were roughly \$30 million. According to feedback the program received from students who had withdrawn, they believed that reducing problems like transportation and social services in the early years helped to improve the attractiveness of the program to encourage student participation.

According to the program director, one of the most difficult things about the program was that students and families were in quite different environments than what they were used to. To try to make the transition smoother, VICC employed five counselors to help St. Louis families and suburban districts adjust and to be an advocate for diversity and the St. Louis students in the schools.³⁰ Support services include professional development workshops to train suburban staff, enrichment programs for transferred students, and a curriculum developed for transferred students.³¹ Most of the money to fund training and other interdistrict programs that had occurred prior to the 1999 settlement no longer exist, however; the former program director believed that a number of suburban districts, as a result of the increased student diversity, altered their curriculum to make it more inclusive of minority history.

Under the 1999 settlement, suburban enrollment targets were gradually reduced (as was recruitment). As of June 2005, just under 8,800

students from St. Louis were participating in the program and attending suburban schools. To replace state desegregation funds, voters approved a tax increase; however, if full reimbursement for St. Louis city students was not available, suburban districts would be given the option to opt out of participating. Additionally, beginning in 2004-05, there were no minimum enrollment requirements for suburban districts and tuition payments were capped at \$6,430. Two suburban districts no longer accept transfer students. Recently, participating districts voted to extend the program for five additional years beyond 2008-09 when the program was originally scheduled to end.³²

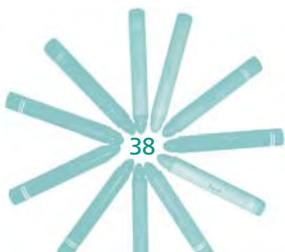
There have been a number of important benefits for participating students. Approximately 60,000 students have participated in the program during its 25-year existence. Nearly twice as many students who attend suburban schools (49%) graduate within four years as do city students who do not transfer (27%). Participating students are also more likely to enroll in higher education and experienced larger achievement gains. A survey of recent participating students who graduated found that 77 percent were planning to attend at least a two-year college.³³ Some research also suggests that racial stereotyping was reduced in suburban schools.³⁴



Endnotes

- 1 There are other plans described in a recent report, however, these three are highlighted because of similarities with Project Choice: METCO has also been in existence for four decades and the programs in the Minneapolis & St. Louis areas have designed their programs in response to segregation challenges in the central cities. See Zoffer, G. and Palmer, E. (Fall 2005). Profiles of Interdistrict Transfer and Voluntary Integration Programs in the United States. Edina, MN: Aspen Associates.
- 2 See accompanying report, "Boston's METCO Program: Lessons for the Hartford Area", for a more in-depth discussion of the METCO program and the lessons for Hartford.
- 3 METCO, which began in Boston and its surrounding suburbs, consists mostly of Boston students, but there are about 100-150 Springfield students who also participate in the program by attending school in suburban Springfield districts. It is administered by the Springfield school districts, and differs from the Boston program in several other ways. Because of these differences, the smaller nature of the program, and the historical roots of METCO in Boston, the Springfield program is not discussed in great detail here.
- 4 Connecticut also has a Racial Imbalance Law, though this addresses only within-district racial imbalance. Massachusetts' Racial Imbalance Act, however, reads in part that "the school committee of any city or town or any regional school district may adopt a plan for attendance at its schools by any child who resides in another city, town, or regional school district in which racial imbalance exists." This plan "shall tend to eliminate racial imbalance in the sending district" and "to help alleviate racial isolation in the receiving district." See Chapter 76, Section 12A of Massachusetts General Laws.
- 5 Another comparison is the funding for Open Choice students in Massachusetts, in which \$5,000 in funding goes with the student to the district they choose. This choice program, however, does not pay transportation costs.
- 6 "METCO Program Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.doe.mass.edu/METCO/faq.asp?section=b> Accessed on April 26, 2007.
- 7 Zoffer, G. and Palmer, E. (Fall 2005). Profiles of Interdistrict Transfer and Voluntary Integration Programs in the United States. Edina, MN: Aspen Associates.
- 8 By law, the suburban districts are not allowed to have any screening procedures for METCO students that differ from other district students.
- 9 Orfield, G., et al. (September 1997). *City-Suburban Desegregation: Parent and Student Perspectives in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 10 By contrast, there were 167 new Project Choice students placed in 2006-07; 114 of these students were in kindergarten through second grade.
- 11 One of the differences in the Springfield METCO program is that students are randomly chosen to participate via a lottery.
- 12 METCO, like Project Choice, tends to be used more often by African Americans. Some officials who were asked about this trend suggested this could be because METCO was begun by African-American activists and rooted within Boston's black community. There might also be at least a perception that suburban districts might be less likely to have programs and teachers who can educate Latino and Asian students whose first language is not English.
- 13 Orfield, G., et al. (September 1997). *City-Suburban Desegregation: Parent and Student Perspectives in Metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 14 Eaton, S.E. (2001). *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- 15 For more information, see the West Metro Education Program's website at <http://www.wmep.k12.mn.us/wmepchoice.html>
- 16 Orfield, M. (Summer 2006). Choice, Equal Protection, and Metropolitan Integration: The Hope of the Minneapolis Desegregation Settlement. *Law and Inequality* 24(2): 269-352, p. 284.
- 17 Only 41% of participants come from Minneapolis schools (come from other districts, private schools, and charter schools).
- 18 One major difference between CIY and other programs is the requirement that students be from low-income families to be eligible to participate. Although this may reduce the poverty concentrations in Minneapolis schools, it would likely need to also consider the racially integrative effects of transferring students if the program is to also address the city-suburban racial segregation disparities that were at the center of the legal case that preceded CIY. See generally Or-

- field, M. (Summer 2006). Choice, Equal Protection, and Metropolitan Integration: The Hope of the Minneapolis Desegregation Settlement. *Law and Inequality* 24(2): 269-352.
- 19 The Choice is Ours: Expanding Educational Opportunity for all Twin Cities Children. Minneapolis, MN: Institute for Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota Law School, May 2006, P. 36-41.
- 20 However, in only four years time, the CIY Program had already surpassed the number of students involved in Project Choice in Hartford.
- 21 Orfield, M. (Summer 2006). Choice, Equal Protection, and Metropolitan Integration: The Hope of the Minneapolis Desegregation Settlement. *Law and Inequality* 24(2): 269-352, p. 316.
- 22 School choice literature suggests that although school choice is predicated on parents making the best choices for their child, the role of networks is often an important influence on school choice—even if not based on full and accurate information. See Holme, J. J. (Summer 2002). Buying Homes, Buying Schools: School Choice and the Social Construction of School Quality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 177-205; Further, higher-status parents are more likely to utilize school choice options (Fiske, E.B. & Ladd, H.F. (2000). *When schools compete: A cautionary tale*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).
- 23 The Choice is Ours: Expanding Educational Opportunity for all Twin Cities Children. Minneapolis, MN: Institute for Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota Law School, May 2006, Table 4-5.
- 24 Palmer, E. A. (2003). *The Choice is Yours After Two Years: An Evaluation*. Edina, MN: Aspen Associates, P. 67-68
- 25 Minnesota Voluntary Public School Choice, 2004-2005, Evaluation Report. Edina, MN: Aspen Associates (2006).
- 26 *Liddell v. Board of Education*
- 27 According to testimony by the program director, the funding was “an extremely critical component” to the success of the program because it both encouraged districts to participate and gave them the funding needed to do a satisfactory job in educating the students. (P. 429)
- 28 In addition to the St. Louis students who transferred to the suburbs and therefore, to integrated schools, approximately 112,000 students annually in suburban districts benefited from the increased diversity in their schools.
- 29 Heaney, G. W. and Uchitelle, S. (2004). *Unending Struggle: The long road to an equal education in St. Louis*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press.
- 30 According to Uchitelle’s testimony, one of the things they tried repeatedly to do (ultimately, unsuccessfully) was to get more funding to increase the number of support staff: 5 counselors for 12,000 students meant that the social workers logged long hours.
- 31 Another related aspect of the settlement (there were five distinct parts of the settlement) was a city-suburban teacher exchange. The teacher transfer was intended at least, in part, to make the adjustment to suburban districts more comfortable for St. Louis students and to increase the percentage of African-American teachers in the suburban districts.
- 32 Hampel, P. (June 23, 2007). Districts vote to extend desegregation program. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Accessed on June 24, 2007 at <http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/education/story/3445AB419C933CC2862573030009E4A1?OpenDocument>.
- 33 Compared to 47% of minority students in Missouri.
- 34 McDermott, K.S., Bruno, G., and Varghese, A. (April 2002). Have Connecticut’s Desegregation Policies Produced Desegregation? *Equity & Excellence in Education* 35(1): 18-27.



Section V: Stakeholders¹

In this section, we will review the roles played by the major “stakeholders” in the Project Choice program – including the State of Connecticut, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), the Sheff plaintiffs and the court, the suburban school districts, and Hartford families participating in the program.

A. Role of the State of Connecticut

The state, as the defendants in *Sheff* and as the entity responsible for the provision of education in the state of Connecticut, bears chief responsibility for the program. Local school boards are agents of the state to carry out their duty to provide public education. Though funding is critically important,² leadership from the state, which has been sorely lacking, is critical as well.

There are actually a number of state actors, each of whom relate to the Choice program in different ways:

- * The Connecticut State Commissioner of Education is a powerful figure in Connecticut education and was mentioned by several people who were interviewed as a key figure in potentially creating more spaces in the Project Choice program. The new commissioner, Mark McQuillan, is from Massachusetts where he was once superintendent of a

suburban district that took the highest percentage of METCO students; however, he was also deputy commissioner in Massachusetts where he was reportedly responsible for “freezing” METCO transportation funding, which threatened the program’s continuation. Former Commissioner Ted Sergi was considered to have had clout with suburban districts and could open up new spots in the program through persuasion; Former Commissioner Betty Sternberg was regarded as largely ineffectual in this role.

- * At the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Bureau of Educational Equity, headed by Jack Hasegawa, has been responsible for the Choice program. Created in 2004, the Bureau reports directly to the Commissioner. Marcus Rivera is directly responsible for Open Choice (along with other responsibilities). Marcus was widely praised in interviews for his tireless persistence with the program and for being supportive with the districts.³

- * The Connecticut State Board of Education is an appointed board by the governor, currently consisting of nine members. Allan Taylor, formerly a member of the Hartford School Board, is the chair. Their legislative impact is small, although their recommendations on specific educational issues receive considerable deference, and the Board could

exert pressure regarding the expansion of Project Choice if so inclined.⁴

- * The Legislature ultimately approves the budget for Project Choice and therefore sets the amount that districts receive for each Project Choice student and the administrative budget received by CREC (Capitol Region Educational Council) as service provider. In particular, the Education and Appropriations Committees have important oversight for the program. The co-chairs of the Education Committee, Representative Andrew Fleischmann and Senator Thomas Gaffey, play a particularly important role.
- * Governor Jodi Rell is, at the very least, an important player in terms of her proposed budget. She could also be an important advocate for the expansion of the program, though it appears that she has rarely commented about Project Choice directly.⁵

Official State Response to Sheff

After the 1996 *Sheff* decision, the Legislature passed P.A. 97-290, “An Act Enhancing Educational Choices and Opportunities” as part of their response. This statutory change in 1997 included a new requirement that each district had to share responsibility for integrated education.⁶ This point was emphasized in several circular letters by state commissioners to suburban school board chairs and superintendents.⁷

The first interim settlement agreement in 2003 was short in length, focusing on the goals that the state would be responsible for. The state committed itself to certain annual benchmarks (e.g., two new magnet schools each year, 200 new Project Choice students) but did not commit to specifics as to how, for example, they

would increase Project Choice by 200 students annually. Unfortunately, many of the problems that are still causing lower participation in Project Choice could have been addressed in that agreement. Involving those who are in charge of the implementation of Project Choice in designing the state’s *Sheff* response would help to ensure that the state’s efforts are targeted most effectively (e.g., providing needed support requested by districts).

The new plan under the proposed second interim settlement agreement is five years in duration. Deputy commissioner of education George Coleman said it would require “greater involvement of the state...assuming responsibility for creating better options”.⁸ This will include creating an information center to help inform families of the different options such as Project Choice or magnet schools.⁹ By 2011-12, the state will fund the programs at more than \$43 million and the goal is to place 41% of Hartford minority students in “reduced isolation” educational settings. The settlement agreement, as of this writing, has not yet been approved by the Legislature, which means that districts did not know whether the reimbursement for students might increase to incorporate into their fall 2007 planning. The biennial budget that was passed in the spring includes line items to fund a *Sheff* remedy for the next two years; the amount in the budget is the exact amount that OPM requested for the first two years of the second *Sheff* settlement (as presented at the Education Committee hearing).

Connecticut Racial Imbalance Act

Connecticut’s Racial Imbalance Act, adopted in 1969 and modified in 1980, governs wide variances in school racial compositions within school districts. It defines a school as imbal-



anced if the minority percentage of students in a given school is more than 25 percentage points away from the district's minority percentage. In the Hartford area, West Hartford has been cited by the state because two schools are out of balance (in this case, the two schools have disproportionately high percentages of minority students).¹⁰ The state could take a district to court if it does not take action to correct the imbalance, though this has only happened once. According to one desegregation expert, the lack of enforcement for districts that are out of racial balance weakens the law.¹¹

A report for the Connecticut State Board of Education in the late 1990s did recognize that the Racial Imbalance Law was relatively ineffective due to the homogeneous nature of most Connecticut districts though it did not recommend any regional approaches to examining racial imbalance.¹² Further, as noted by an education writer, the law “[b]ecause it affects only individual districts and does not require regional efforts at desegregation, [] has virtually no effect on districts that have nearly all white or all minority enrollments.”¹³ Given the fact that, nationally and in Connecticut, segregation *across* school district boundary lines is a larger contributing factor to overall segregation than *within* district segregation, it is unlikely that even if strongly enforced, the law would have much effect on the segregation in the Hartford area.¹⁴

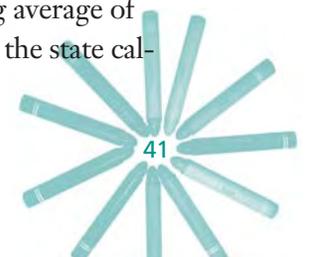
Expanding the State's Role

Ultimately, it seems that the lack of leadership and funding from the state has forced difficult dilemmas for some district leadership: do they try to educate their community about the value of Project Choice or do they try not to spotlight their involvement for fear of unfairly

spotlighting Project Choice students and stirring up opposition from those who object to the low reimbursement rates from the state? These fears, based on the lack of leadership and stereotypes of Hartford students, may weaken district resolve to participate. (The lack of research about the program could also be a contributing factor.) In fact, the perception from the higher-participating districts was that the smaller districts were reluctant to contribute by taking their fair share of Hartford students and may even need to be required by the state. One way to directly address any perceptions held by districts would be to offer sessions at the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education's annual conference to help educate about Project Choice. Another approach may include setting of district-by-district enrollment expectations by the state.

At the same time, however, there certainly were plenty of anecdotes about committed superintendents who worked behind the scenes to encourage their district's participation, even if it meant taking controversial votes by the school board or continually discussing with the board the success of Project Choice students. There were accounts of principals who quietly ensured that Project Choice students were placed with teachers with prior success teaching Hartford students.

Funding: As will be discussed in subsequent sections, adequately funding the program and fairly compensating the districts is imperative. Though it could be argued that the suburban districts could do more to increase their participation through their own financial commitment, the minimal level of funding makes it easy for districts to cite funding as a reason for not participating to a greater extent.¹⁵ For 2005-06, Hartford's state funding average of \$7250 per student. If this is what the state cal-



culates as its share of educating each child in Hartford, this should be what the state provides to suburban districts who educate these Hartford students. With increased funding, the state could also increase responsibility of suburban districts who take Project Choice students such as requiring districts to go through mandatory training, which would help prepare them for Project Choice students as well as the growing numbers of minority students who reside within their district boundary. Ironically, this is an easy program to fund—there are already established districts so no extra funding is needed to build new schools or other infrastructure (as with magnet schools).

The need for a Champion: A repeated theme in interviews was the lack of political will for the program, which many attributed to the lack of a publicly visible advocate or “champion” for the program at the state level.

The impression is that state officials believe that their response is sufficient to respond to *Sheff* despite falling far short of the June 2007 goal.¹⁶ The State Department of Education now works with CREC to make presentations in districts about taking Project Choice students, which includes talking about that district’s capacity, minority percentage, and funding. Yet, as numbers continue to stagnate, without restructuring or a program champion, large numbers of seats won’t be opened up, and there won’t be greater publicity to Hartford families. One state official was surprised that the money set aside for the program was not fully used, despite the lack of active championing by state officials.

With so many partners involved in the program, the result seems to be that no one takes the lead. In the words of plaintiff expert Dr. Len Stevens and as defined in the initial settle-

ment agreement in 2003, the state should serve as “Lead Agency” for this program and magnet schools—it would diagnose problems identified by outside experts, ensure adequate funding, and allow for the exchange of successful ideas and practices among district administrators. It would also involve important efforts towards educating the public and their elected officials as to the need for the program and the support required to effectively operate the program at the level specified by the settlement agreement. While there is always the possibility of crossing the line and creating a backlash to efforts to grow the program in a given community when addressing low levels of compliance, this seems like a distant concern when there is little growth in opening new seats and no real champion for the program.

The proposed 2007 agreement would establish a magnet center jointly between Hartford and CREC to work together in administering magnet schools. This Center or partnership should also include Project Choice (including participating suburban districts), or there should be a separate center to effectively coordinate information and be a “champion” for the program.

Publicity: Although demand for seats currently outstrips supply of seats, the publicity and marketing of the Choice program has been overlooked. This is an important function that the state, as defendant, should lead. In the proposed settlement agreement, the state will operate information centers to inform Hartford families about magnet options; it is crucial that the information centers also include information about Project Choice, and provide opportunities for families to meet with staff from suburban districts. As St. Louis did with year-round publicity, it is important that there is a twelve-month plan for continuous



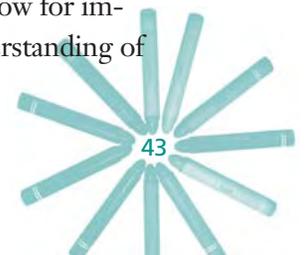
information dissemination about the existence of the program, the experience of students, and the educational options available in participating suburban districts. This information was mailed to every St. Louis household. Since Hartford schools might be reluctant to help advertise a program that would take students from their system, a similar model of contacting families directly might be more effective. This might also be effective for families who have had bad educational experiences themselves and may not feel comfortable going to a school or school system to find out about school choice options.¹⁷ Further, particularly if the funding is increased, there will likely be more seats available and thus more need for publicity. There already is the ability to accommodate all young students who apply, so there should be a particular emphasis to market towards families with young children, perhaps through daycare centers. This could also be done in cooperation with the suburban districts, and coordinated by CREC if there is not internal state capacity to do so. More funding would have to be provided for CREC to take on this task or funding could be provided to an outside advocacy group as well. Without persistence publicity, the program is likely to advantage those who are better connected.¹⁸

Transportation: Most essential is the provision of a more streamlined system of transportation for participating Project Choice students. This will require increased transportation funding, which should not be regarded as a luxury but essential to the success of the program. Currently, there is nearly \$3.7 million budgeted for the next academic year (2007-08) to transport just under 1,100 projected students, which averages out to a cost of roughly \$3,400 per student. In the past, there was pressure from the state not to operate buses unless they were filled with Project

Choice students, but because of the low numbers of students in many suburban schools there aren't enough students to fill a bus, which requires multiple stops. As discussed more in-depth later in this report, long bus rides for many students are a barrier to both student participation and district participation in the program. These long rides are not primarily a function of distance, but of transportation funding and student enrollments in each school. It is doubtful that the transportation burden required of these students would be tolerated if these students were from more wealthy, politically powerful districts. Should it take an hour to transport students to a West Hartford school that is less than 10 minutes from Hartford? Or 90 minutes to a school in Simsbury? Adding 90 minutes on to the beginning and end of each school day makes for long days for children, and cuts into their ability to build friendships or even do their homework. They and their families should not have to sacrifice to save the state money. In addition, there needs to be multiple transportation options, for both early and later buses beyond what is currently offered.¹⁹ This would allow them to more completely avail themselves of the social and academic options available in their suburban district on a basis that is more equitable with resident students.

Organizing and Advocacy for Project Choice at the State Level

One of the problems seems to be the decentralized nature of Project Choice—there are many involved parties and yet no one is responsible for the program overall. To more effectively advocate for the program, it would be helpful to have a permanent advisory committee to the Commissioner set up with the various constituencies represented. It will allow for improved communication and understanding of



how the program operates to all involved.²⁰ There have been numerous committees and task forces in Connecticut with regard to Project Choice²¹ or school segregation in general²² and yet this issue still remains far from resolved. Clearly, unless a committee is given autonomy and the state is obliged to consider its advice, it would be a waste of everyone's time and energy to appoint. Yet, it has the prospect of being the sorely needed voice for the program and the students in it. If such an advisory committee is created, it should include legislative representatives of Hartford and key surrounding districts.

Related, in order to unite the political representatives for participating districts, state representatives should consider organizing a legislative caucus of Hartford and participating legislators. Because all have a vested interest in the funding and success of this program, creating such a caucus will allow for a more united advocacy for the program and its funding. Initially, a suburban legislator advocated for the current funding of the program (\$2,000 per student), and suburban districts stand to gain significantly from future funding increases. It is unlikely that Hartford legislators alone would be able to garner increased funding, but this urban-suburban coalition could be the legislative champion for Project Choice.

B. Role of Capitol Region Educational Council (CREC)

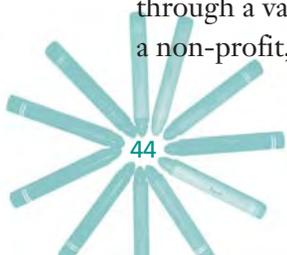
On July 1, 1998, the urban-suburban voluntary desegregation program known as Project Concern came under the direction of CREC, the Capitol Region Educational Council. CREC was founded in 1966 and serves 35 member districts in the greater Hartford area through a variety of educational services. It is a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization, and in

Fiscal Year (FY) 06 had a budget of nearly \$115 million.²³ The budget for Project Choice in FY 06 was \$3.7 million, which includes about \$350,000 to CREC for administering the program (with another \$850,000 allocated for the Early Beginnings program, of which \$360,000 went to CREC); projected figures for FY07 were \$3.9 million for the choice program (\$1.5 million for Early Beginnings). Transportation for 2006-07 was budgeted at just over \$3.7 million.

Other service providers in the state operate similar open choice programs for two other urban areas and their surrounding suburban districts: in New Haven, Area Cooperative Educational Services is the service provider, and in Bridgeport, Cooperative Educational Services is the service provider.

As of spring 2007, the Project Choice office employs six staff members, including several alumni of the Project Concern program. Nessa Oram has been the Project Director for seven years, taking over from long-time director of Project Concern, Mary Carroll. Two people work on student services, which include monitoring student progress, communicating with parents, and working with transportation specialists (bus monitors). There are also two new positions created last year called intervention specialists. There is a database administrator who also provides administrative support for the entire program. Other CREC offices that they work with include the Early Beginnings program and the transportation office. Although the staff has recently expanded with the hiring of the two intervention specialists, staffing levels are below what they were decades ago.

Project Concern, at its height, employed 12 teachers and 56 paraprofessionals to ride the



buses with students and to work in suburban schools to help Hartford students adjust to the new suburban, wealthy, and white environments that they found themselves in. Although there are still bus monitors (called transportation counselors), this position is now a part-time position and does not include time spent in schools to help students adapt. The last paraprofessionals were eliminated in a budget cut by the Legislature in 1997 at the same time funding was increased to suburban districts that accepted Hartford students—although the legislature did not require that the increased funding went to support the educational experience of the Project Choice students. According to researchers, educators in suburban schools, and Project Choice staff, the bus aides were instrumental in helping teachers and students.²⁴ Additionally, during numerous interviews with school administrators and former students who had experience with Project Concern decades ago, the importance of the paraprofessionals in the schools and on the bus rides was repeatedly mentioned. Project Concern also offered tutoring, counseling, and social workers to support Hartford students and to encourage their success in the suburban school districts.²⁵

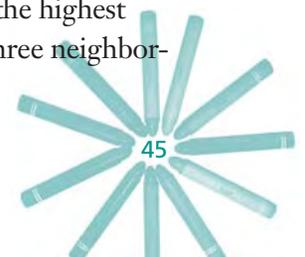
Application Process

One of the most essential roles that CREC plays is accepting applications and placing Hartford students in suburban schools. The Project Choice staff holds open houses, accepts applications, and places students in suburban districts. Approximately 600-700 families apply annually to Project Choice, for one or more children. There is a lottery to select the students who can be accommodated with the slots allotted from the suburban districts, with a preference given to students in schools that have lost accreditation or have

been identified as “in need of improvement” by No Child Left Behind. There is a separate process for students with siblings in Project Choice that is done first, before considering the applications from new families; where possible (when space is available), children are placed in the same suburban district as their older sibling so that families can build relationships with only one district.²⁶

The application itself is simple, although it is only available in English. The application process begins in January, when four open houses are held at CREC, which usually nets about 200-300 applications. The application deadline is in early March, and the lottery is held in early April. After the lottery, the staff then starts at the top of the list and begins placing students in suburban schools depending on availability by grade level. At the end of June, students who haven’t been placed in a suburban school are placed on a waiting list. If students aren’t offered a spot, they have to re-apply the following year if they are still interested in participating. For students already in the program, after their initial placement their first year, suburban districts control their placement into actual schools and classrooms.²⁷

In 2006-07, there were several hundred students on the waiting list for the program (see Table 4). A few years ago, there was \$20,000 of advertising done about Project Choice, and staff was not sure that there was an increase in the number of applications. They have tried to do some outreach to the Hispanic community since there are a low percentage of Hispanic applicants.²⁸ From informal feedback, CREC staff and state officials believe that the Hispanic community is more reluctant to send students far from the city.²⁹ According to analyses of applicants to the choice programs, the highest share of applicants comes from three neighbor-



hoods in northern Hartford, all of which are predominantly African-American.³⁰

Areas for Improvement: Partially due to the way in which suburban districts allocate spaces for Project Choice students—only after they have accommodated all district students—students’ placement can take the entire summer since the program staff can only offer spaces as they are made available by the suburbs. This impacts students and their families because it might mean that families miss a school’s orientation program, which makes it difficult for parents to understand the expectations for themselves and their child. Further, it limits opportunities for students’ summer enrichment in the district they will enroll in.

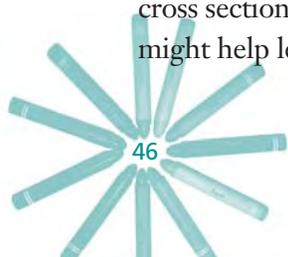
As mentioned, there is very little advertising for the program partially due to the fact that consistently there have not been enough spots for applicants. Through the four decades of the program, there have been a variety of methods in which students have been chosen for the program. Although the program now randomly selects participants among applications submitted (with preferences, as discussed above, for siblings and current school NCLB status), with little advertising, it is likely that everyone is not equally aware of the program and therefore not able to take advantage of the program.³¹ In St. Louis, applications are sent to every African-American resident, along with information about the program several times a year. If CREC and/or the state were to similarly send applications to every Hartford resident along with other outreach efforts, it would help to assure that access to the program is available—and would likely lead to an increase in applications (possibly from a wider cross section of Hartford residents), which might help leverage more financial support

and ultimately open up more spaces in the suburban districts.

Another way to increase access to the program for everyone is to ensure that information and intake sessions are offered at times that are convenient to parents who are working. This year, the two kindergarten intake sessions in May (which were required in order for the child to participate) were held only during the middle of the day during the week. Although there was flexibility for parents if they were unable to make it and requested alternative meetings from CREC, the scheduling of these sessions disadvantages parents who work and have difficulty taking off from work—or who may not realize that they can ask for an alternative intake session.

In a number of interviews, there were suggestions that students should be screened or parents should be required to participate in certain activities in order for their child to continue with the program. These suggestions likely were the result of specific frustrating examples of families who the districts or Choice staff did not feel were committed to ensuring the success of their students. (One suburban administrator did also note that suburban parents also were not always as committed as one would hope to their child’s education.) This program, however, is a public school program and therefore, cannot require any screening or additional requirements that are not required of every family or child who live within the district boundaries.

In interviews with some districts, there were several examples of families whose students were placed in multiple suburban districts and/or schools. As these administrators noted, having children in two separate schools or districts makes the difficulties of a Hartford fam-



ily engaging with a suburban school even more challenging.³² It is the policy of the program that siblings get preference in terms of getting a place in the program and they try to place siblings in the same district. However, this is contingent on space available in the district/school of the current sibling(s) in the program. Again, it is doubtful that this would happen to siblings who happened to reside in the district, so it raises the question of why this is allowed to happen for Choice students. One way to avoid this problem would be to automatically guarantee a space to siblings of any Choice students into the school in which their sibling is in, and remove any contingencies related to whether space is available. Additionally, if, for whatever reason this is impossible, the placement of siblings in separate schools or districts, should be reviewed annually to determine whether it would be possible for a student to transfer (if the family desired).

Finally, every kindergarten and first grade seat opened by suburban districts has been filled in recent years—there haven't been kindergarten or first grade students on the waiting list since 2003-04. This suggests an urgent need to do more recruiting and information sessions targeted at families with young children since suburbs reiterated their desire to bring in students as young as possible. As will be discussed in the next section, transportation is likely to be an important factor for Hartford families with young children that may consider applying to Project Choice.

Transportation

Virtually every person interviewed observed that transportation was a huge problem that still needed to be addressed. As discussed earlier, St. Louis's interdistrict transfer program found that this problem had to be addressed

in the early stages of its implementation in order to attract and retain students. CREC has attempted several systems of transporting students. Currently, they are piloting a new transportation system. With rising transportation costs and persistent frustration with transportation, it would be imperative to review whether there might be a more efficient system. Students in a few high schools and middle schools in selected districts (e.g., close to Hartford) ride public transportation. CREC contracts with three separate bus companies and serves 100 schools. Bus rides for students are from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours or more each way.

This is not simply a matter of a bus ride. Many of these students, from an early age, spend up to three hours on the bus each day. In fact, students are described as straddling three worlds: Hartford, the suburban school, and the bus. Many of the problems in school begin as problems on the bus. (This is likely true for any students riding buses, but since Choice students ride the bus for so long and get on very early, this likely exacerbates this tendency.) Further, there are not now enough transportation counselors (currently there are 21) to go on every bus, so they are assigned at the discretion of the CREC staff. Generally, counselors are assigned for younger students. With the rising costs of benefits for staff, it has been difficult to retain some veteran transportation counselors, which then may lead to inexperienced and less qualified staff on the bus—and result in more problems.

An example demonstrates their importance. In one district, bus personnel (drivers and aides) became so disruptive that a CREC intervention specialist had to mediate a meeting between the personnel and the students at their school. Other personnel have been switched because of

inappropriate actions. Because CREC buses, unlike some suburban schools, do not have video cameras on the bus, it can be harder to ascertain what happens on the buses—making the role of adults on the buses even more important. Again, it is possible that these incidents may occur elsewhere, but given the length of the bus ride that many of these students face, any such incidents make their transition to the suburban school that much more difficult and increase the possibility of either attrition or limiting interest in the program because word would spread among Hartford social networks that the bus ride is very difficult for students who participate in the program. Although it is unclear whether this has been explored, small buses might be more effective in reducing bus problems because students would not have an entire bus to spread out and be beyond the reach of the driver.

There are currently some late buses available so that students can stay after school for extracurricular activities or extra academic help if offered by their school. Interviews with administrators and parents suggest that there is demand for greater availability and that the lack of consistent early and late buses sorely impedes the ability of Project Choice students to fully take advantage of the suburban schools' offerings and to build friendships to fully integrate into the life of the school and community. Some schools, for example, offer morning musical opportunities—chorus or orchestra—before school starts. Others have breakfast. After school, there are academic enrichment opportunities, other extracurricular activities, and sports. However, due to inadequate state funding, the transportation to Hartford for students who want to participate in these activities is extremely limiting.³³ Research has suggested that participation in extracurricular opportunities can be an excellent

way to build interracial friendships, and has also been cited as helping to engage students in school and reduce the potential for dropping out. Additionally, critically needed academic enrichment could be offered to students who need it if there were multiple bus options after school.³⁴

Finally, it is essential that transportation be reliable and on time despite the traffic and weather difficulties. By virtue of their background and where they live, Project Choice students may be seen as different by the other students in their school. If they consistently arrive late to school, it may be even more difficult for students to see similarities with one another. Further, it places students at an academic disadvantage if they lose class time.

Work with Districts

Most of the CREC staff has responsibility to support students in suburban districts, be liaisons for parents, and to help build capacity in the suburban districts. This can include helping to resolve communication problems between parents and schools if there is an adverse relationship; or a school could call the staff and ask them to meet with a student or students who are having either social or academic problems. During interviews, staff members lamented the fact that they often only have time to “put out fires” and that there’s not enough time to do preventative work with students or schools, for example.

Many of the issues handled by CREC staff seemed to revolve around miscommunication and unspoken expectations. Some parents are dealing with a variety of problems, and may have little time available or know-how about how to advocate for their own children. Although many administrators interviewed spoke



of the resiliency and dedication of Hartford families to participate in the program given the many hurdles, there was also a feeling by CREC staff that there was not full understanding of families' decision. According to one, "districts need to understand the sacrifices that families make to participate in the program—that it's not just a free bus ride." This might not just be true for districts, but also for suburban residents and Connecticut Legislators.

For the first time, in August 2007 CREC has offered a two-day summer program for teachers in suburban schools to help them understand the context from where Hartford students come from. This training program included a bus ride of Hartford so that administrators could actually see students' neighborhoods. They hope to make this an annual event, although there is currently no ongoing funding for this program. CREC also holds regular conversations with administrators at suburban districts, and can provide space for district administrators to come into Hartford to meet with the families of students who may be unable to get to suburban schools or to allow them to meet in a more comfortable environment for the family. The State Educational Resource Center (SERC), which has already begun similar work with some districts in the *Sheff* region, could also be a helpful partner in such efforts.

The recent addition of the intervention specialists was repeatedly lauded though there also seemed to be some ambiguity as to their role.³⁵ For example, several administrators wondered aloud at what they could ask the intervention specialists to do. Administrators expressed a desire to have more such staff members so that they could spend more time in their district, building relationships. (This desire for more staff to reduce current staff

workloads was echoed during interviews with several CREC employees.) There was also the hope that these staff could assist district by helping with professional development (SERC might be another option for districts). If more intervention specialists were added to ease the workload of the two current staff, one day per week could be dedicated to helping to build capacity among school faculties and staff. If more funding were available, districts could hire their own (or share) intervention specialist. One key emphasis by district administrators was that if more intervention specialists were hired, it had to be the right kind of person. Implicitly, it seemed they were saying that the two current staff members succeed—in ways that district staff hasn't—because they are highly skilled and have real legitimacy with Hartford families. Thus, simply adding more bodies isn't enough: it matters who are hired in these critical positions.

Early Beginnings

As a result of conversations with suburban district personnel – who expressed a need to enroll students in their district at the earliest grade level possible (and to close the school readiness gaps between Hartford and suburban students, particularly in vocabulary acquisition), three years ago, CREC added a younger dimension to Project Choice called Early Beginnings. Originally CREC intended to bus kindergarten students to half-day kindergarten in their suburban district, and then return the students to Hartford for afternoon enrichment to provide a full-day kindergarten experience. However, as it was implemented, the program was adjusted to keep students in the suburban district the entire day in order to allow students to spend the entire day with their suburban peers. Facilitators for the program were then allocated on a rotating basis to participat-

ing schools and childcare programs. In a few districts that have full-day kindergarten, students attend the entire day and ride the bus like other district students. In other districts, there are existing transportation options from schools to after-school childcare providers that Choice students use.

Early Beginnings has led to important gains for all students in participating classrooms and has encouraged some of the participating sixteen districts to move towards full-day kindergarten. Each district receives an additional \$3,600 for each kindergarten child in Early Beginnings in addition to the \$2,000 per child through Project Choice. This extra funding has allowed one suburban district, for example, to offer a full-day kindergarten as a pilot program for Project Choice students and district students who were chosen by a lottery. Another district has double its participation in the program since Early Beginnings was established.

The program began the first year—with only a month to prepare after funding was approved—with 63 students in suburban schools and 5 certified teachers as facilitators. Each facilitator spends an average of one day per week in each school or program. The facilitators serve an important role: for parents, for schools, for districts. Facilitators are there for the entire class—not just Project Choice children, because the key is to integrate them in with other students. They can share best practices with classroom teachers regarding literacy, which provides a substantial benefit for participating schools. Facilitators can build relationships with Hartford parents, and are an added resource for helping to resolve problems such as those that might result from transportation. As a result, this might help with recruitment for the program since parents may be wary of put-

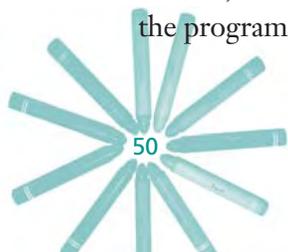
ting young children on buses. Unfortunately, despite extensive recruiting efforts, there are no minority facilitators.

In addition the benefits of additional funding and facilitator time, research on the benefits of the program have helped to convince superintendents of the benefits of Early Beginnings for Hartford students *and* for resident students. Using pre- and post-testing on vocabulary and letter identification, there were large gains for participating Hartford students and more modest gains for suburban students.³⁶ These data have been used to demonstrate to districts that the Program is successful in its goal of improving the academic success of Project Choice students—instead of remembering anecdotal evidence of when a Project Choice student may not have adjusted as well, these data demonstrate that the average Hartford student improves substantially during the course of an academic year. Reports analyzing the data are annually shared with superintendents of participating districts.

Given the success of Early Beginnings, it would be worth exploring expanding to younger children by providing preschool opportunities. Connecticut is looking to dramatically expand early childhood initiatives and funding through all-day kindergarten and preschool. It is imperative to ensure that such initiatives provide adequate space *and funding* for all Project Choice-participating districts.

Improving and Expanding the Program

Based on their daily experiences working with students, families, and schools, CREC staff had many suggestions and valuable insight as to how the program might be improved. A number of suggestions were targeted towards



improving the experience of students; many would require additional funding. One consistent suggestion was to sponsor a four-week orientation program for students before they start the program, to help them learn the expectations of the schools and communities they are going to, to build relationships with other students, and to provide academic enrichment.³⁷ A second suggestion would be to have a building that would be solely dedicated to Choice students – to provide tutoring support, evening sessions, meetings for parents (with suburban schools and with each other), parental education workshops, skill-building workshops, etc. METCO (in Boston) currently has its own building with classroom space and can offer more programming, plus the building serves as a drop-off place if there are problems with transportation.

Some suggestions would be simple to implement and cost little to nothing. For example, each school and/or district should have a contact person who is not a principal or the superintendent—since these people are often difficult to reach due to the many commitments required by their job. Another example was to have a parental support group established in the suburban district. Staff members also had suggestions for how suburbs could be more welcoming—for example, sending out a letter to Project Choice parents every year explicitly welcoming them to come into the school and introducing the principal.

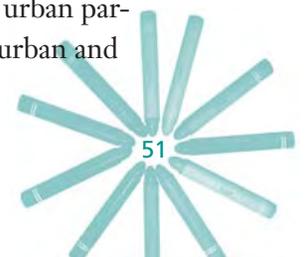
Finally, the importance of adult role models was a common theme in several suggestions from staff members. There were suggestions to reinstate the paraprofessionals used during Project Concern. If paraprofessionals became a part of the program again, these staff could also be given educational development opportunities and eventually groomed into teachers

for the suburban communities that they work in.³⁸ Given the dire lack of faculty of color in most suburban districts in the Hartford area—despite a desire for a more diverse staff from virtually everyone involved—this program could be one step towards improving students' experiences and to creating more long-lasting diversity. Additionally, there was a suggestion that training for districts who take students should be required along with ongoing staff development. It would be important, however, that this not create a disincentive for districts to participate in the program. Such a requirement would also benefit resident students of color, however.

Miscellaneous

CREC retains lobbyists to represent its many initiatives and is also asked to give testimony to the legislature and the courts. Perhaps because CREC operates so many programs, there is not the coordinated lobbying effort in support of Project Choice as we saw with Boston's METCO program (discussed earlier). There are efforts to coordinate both alumni and parents networks, though these tasks are added to the already demanding workload of the CREC staff. The parents' network is not very active and only consists of Hartford parents. An urban-suburban parent group should be built to help bring parents together with a shared focus, and to more effectively organize as a group in support of adequate funding.

An advisory committee for Project Choice could help to become the champion for the program that is currently lacking – and could support the State Commissioner of Education if he or she steps forward as that champion. An advisory committee would include representatives from CREC, suburban and urban parents, suburban districts, alumni, urban and



suburban students,³⁹ and state officials.⁴⁰ This committee should be given a vital role in advising the Commissioner of Education and the courts.

C. Role of Suburban Districts

Though the suburbs are often referred to as a single entity (in contrast to the central city), there are vast differences among suburbs in terms of population characteristics.⁴¹ As seen in Table 1, there are vast differences in the population characteristics of neighboring towns—their racial/ethnic composition, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status. Towns vary in their diversity (or lack thereof) and financial capacity, among other differences in towns' history and context. Municipalities also differ in their history with Project Choice and the number of Project Choice students they have traditionally had in their district (see Appendix B for selected districts' enrollment over time). Although the discussion below will highlight themes among suburban participants, it should be noted that there are many differences because of the differences in their school systems.⁴²

From interviews and review of documents, there seems to be significant support for Project Choice among participating suburban districts.⁴³ There were different reasons enumerated as to why districts participated in the program: districts saw the program as both beneficial for suburban students as well as a chance to help Hartford students take advantage of suburban educational opportunities.⁴⁴ As discussed in Part III, one of the benefits repeatedly mentioned by suburban districts of participating is that Hartford students helped to diversify the enrollment of the suburban districts, many of which are overwhelmingly

white. Parents and educators talked of how much the suburban students gain from having a more diverse exposure in their classrooms, which would be far less available without the program. One educator, in fact, commented that participating in the program provides learning opportunities for both students and adults in the schools. Another mentioned that it positively requires schools to be more attuned to diversity than they otherwise might be. As seen in Table 10, the percentage of minority students increases the minority percentage in every district, of course, but in several districts there is an increase of several percentage points. For example, despite enrolling only 39 Project Choice students district-wide, Canton's minority student enrollment jumps from 4.25% of the entire district enrollment to 6.52% with the addition of these students. Even small increases help to reduce the likelihood of tokenism, which can have harmful social and psychological effects for students.⁴⁵

Suburban districts emphasized that they prefer to take students as young as possible, both for academic and social reasons. Early enrollment gives students a chance to experience the same curriculum as resident students to lessen the adjustment if they switch in after a few years in Hartford, for example, and gives them a chance to form friendships at a very early age. As noted, virtually every kindergarten and first grade student who applied for Project Choice were able to be placed in suburban districts—demonstrating the suburban districts' desire for young students. Well over half of the seats opened in 2006-07 for Project Choice students were for kindergarten and first grade students, while only 37 of the 182 seats offered were sixth grade or higher. One district contemplated full-day preschool for one cohort of students, including Project Choice students, to ensure that early gaps are closed.

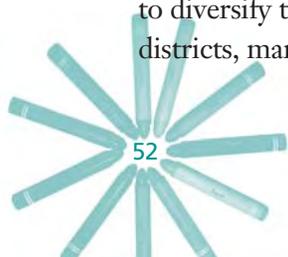


Table 10: Project Choice students' contribution to suburban diversity, 2006-07

Receiving District	Number of Minority Choice Students	All district students ⁴⁶	Minority percent	
			Without Project Choice students	With Project Choice students
Avon	41	3,379	11.1	12.3
Berlin	14	3,343	5.6	6.0
Bolton	22	931	3.9	6.2
Bristol	36	9,040	21.5	21.9
Canton	39	1,719	4.3	6.5
Cromwell	41	1,967	12.9	15.0
East Granby	20	905	8.7	10.9
East Windsor	43	1,563	22.6	25.3
Ellington	10	2,494	6.4	6.8
Enfield	78	6,617	13.6	14.8
Farmington	95	4,277	13.8	16.0
Glastonbury	42	6,723	12.9	13.5
Granby	53	2,261	3.7	6.1
Newington	52	4,604	19.3	20.4
Plainville	58	2,540	12.3	14.6
Region 10	8	2,795	4.7	5.0
Rocky Hill	33	2,556	16.7	18.0
Simsbury	96	5,057	7.7	9.6
Somers	18	1,743	2.9	4.0
South Windsor	55	5,084	15.4	16.5
Southington	19	6,842	8.6	8.9
Suffield	23	2,562	4.3	5.2
Vernon	42	3,936	23.3	24.4
West Hartford	76	9,986	32.1	32.8
Wethersfield	13	3,736	17.9	18.2
Windsor	13	4,223	63.2	63.5
Windsor Locks	30	1,954	15.4	16.9

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education



Continuing Frustration with Structural Issues

The root of most concerns of suburbanites about the program interviewed was related to funding for Project Choice. Despite the districts' support—or perhaps because of—there was frustration that the state did not do more to support the program. Asked one person, “If we can agree that Project Choice is providing a better chance of success [than the Hartford school system], doesn't that also make it at least as worthy an investment as the [state's] support for the established system in Hartford?” Other suburban interviewees wondered why the Legislature was reluctant to fund Project Choice when the schools to take Choice students were already built, teachers hired, textbooks bought *and* had an established record of successfully educating students. There seemed to be a belief that the suburban districts were doing their part, but weren't getting financial or political support from the state.⁴⁷

There was also a widespread sentiment that the state was not requiring all suburbs to participate at similar levels. Skeptics have worried that increasing funding for the program might get districts who are currently not involved to participate for the “wrong reasons”. Certainly, if districts looked at Project Choice as a money-maker only, that would be a source of concern. However, to counter that concern, if increased funding were implemented, there could also be requirements that districts would have to comply with in terms of how the funding is used, professional development offerings, etc. It is not possible to parse out the motivations of participating actors, nor does it necessarily matter, as long as districts are accountable for providing a welcoming, integrated, high-quality education for all students

regardless of whether they live within district boundaries or in Hartford.

Another concern for suburban districts, particularly in accepting older students, is the perceived or anticipated effect that older students might have on a school's status in achieving annual yearly progress (AYP) as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). For example, some area schools have so few minority students that accepting a substantial number of Project Choice students might trigger an additional “subgroup” that they would be held accountable for under NCLB. Second, when older students transfer into suburban schools, there is often a gap between the rigor of their prior education and that of their peers. Further, research has shown in city-suburban transfer programs, achievement results actually decline in the first year (possibly due to the significant adjustment being made by a student) before rising in subsequent years. A way to remove this disincentive would be to provide a waiver for an initial period in exchange for a school accepting a certain number of students. In fact, there is already a safe harbor provision written into the federal law, 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(2)(I), which creates a minimum subgroup expectation that should prevent a suburban school from being penalized for accepting a larger number of Project Choice students. Ultimately, there is a vast research base of educational strategies to improve student learning, and districts providing enriched academic offerings—after school, during the summer, etc—to help entering students if they are behind their resident peers.⁴⁸ It is crucial that districts – or district politicians – be dissuaded from arguing that low income students should be excluded from the district because they might have lower scores; as the *Sheff* case points out, the responsibility for educating low income children is a state re-



sponsibility that is shared equally by Hartford and surrounding suburban districts. Many of the Hartford area's school districts are renowned for the education they provide and it is unlikely they would not be able to meet the educational needs of the students who enter.⁴⁹

Partially due to the low per-pupil funding per student, most districts report that they determine how many seats to offer for Project Choice students by looking at their projected enrollments by grade (by determining how many students will be promoted at the end of the year) and, if there are available seats in any existing classrooms, offer them for Hartford students.⁵⁰ In other words, they will take students if it is convenient for them (though of course this commits them to educating that student through twelfth grade).⁵¹ With enrollment projections for Hartford-area districts are leveling off, if not declining, we should expect an increase in the number of seats available for Project Choice students particularly given the fact that there appears to be excess capacity in many suburban Hartford schools. However, while there may be small increases in the number of students accepted by some districts, it is unlikely to greatly increase the number of students. The recently adopted state funding formula provides larger bonuses for 10 or more students in a school, and Early Beginnings is also funded at a higher level for kindergarten students. Perhaps there should also be a stronger requirement to accommodate Project Choice students in order to qualify for state funding for new construction, as a way of encouraging districts to actively make more room available.⁵²

Faculty

Many of the suburban districts have few faculty of color, which amplifies the “whiteness” of

many suburban schools. District administrators spoke of the struggles of trying to hire teachers of color into schools and communities where these prospective teachers would be in a very small minority.⁵³ Attracting and retaining teachers of color is also a problem nationally.⁵⁴ This lack of faculty diversity may mean an important support for Project Choice participants in schools is not available. Project Concern alumni spoke of the importance of having a teacher or earlier, a paraprofessional, to serve as an advocate for them or to help them through their adjustment. Likewise, in one district a veteran African-American teacher was often called on by students, parents, and even administrators to help work out problems that arose for Project Choice students.

In addition to diversifying faculty, when a student body is more diverse, it is important to provide professional development for teachers. Given the racial, economic, and geographic diversity that is inherent with bringing in Project Choice students, schools need to be explicit in thinking about how this will affect their schools. One educator interviewed talked about the importance of having training as a context for educating and understanding the children in their classroom. A number of administrators spoke of misunderstandings with their faculty in which faculty were well-intentioned but unfamiliar with the culture or practices of minority families. When good intentions go awry, it can damage the relationship between families and the school and potentially affect other Project Choice students as well. Incorporating multicultural training into Connecticut's teacher certification requirements would begin to address the need that every teacher needs to understand the background and particular needs/expectations of students from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds.

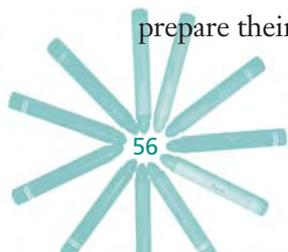


There are a number of existing opportunities for professional development regarding student diversity. The State Education Resource Center (SERC) has offered to facilitate book discussion groups for Project Choice districts. The groups meet four times over the course of the school year to read and discuss Beverly Daniel Tatum's book, *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, and to create an action plan for their school. Selected Project Choice districts were offered the opportunity to participate and in 2005-06, teams from three districts participated; 2 districts continued their discussion within their district this past year. SERC offered technical assistance in implementing action plans to participating districts but no one took them up on this offer. This year, two districts participated; some groups were offered the opportunity but didn't participate. Funding for this professional development does not come from CREC or the *Sheff* budget, though they get recommendations from CREC as to what districts to invite. They have received positive evaluations of this opportunity and how it will help participants better understand Project Choice students. In the coming year, they plan to offer a networking session so that districts can share ideas about what has worked in their districts. The Connecticut Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has offered anti-bias and prejudice training to some suburban districts, both for students and teachers. Some schools have formed equity or diversity committees either among faculty and administrators or sometimes including parents as well. One district offers schools a walkthrough to help them think about ways in which they might not be welcoming to all families.

St. Louis and Boston offer models for suburban Hartford districts contemplating how to prepare their staffs for increasing diversity.

Each suburban Boston district, as mentioned, employs METCO directors, and the METCO Directors Association annually offers a conference for professional development for teachers. METCO Directors, in some instances, can serve as a resource for faculty. In St. Louis, there were several initiatives to assist teachers. First, there was a teacher exchange. This not only helped to expose students to more diverse teachers, but helped teachers to understand the context from which transferring students came. When they returned to their original school, they brought this knowledge and could serve as a resource for the staff. City teachers going into the suburb also helped the integration of St. Louis students coming into predominantly white environments. Second, the staff of the agency administering the transfer program developed curriculum that teachers could use in their classroom and gave workshops to help teachers understand the cultures and expectations of the families of St. Louis students. Ideally, the intervention specialists could help build this capacity within districts—or districts could hire their own METCO-like director whose responsibilities could be more proactively establish partnerships and strategies to support Project Choice students and families adapt and succeed in their suburban schools. These staff could help, for example, figure out how Project Choice students could participate in extracurricular activities, establish mentoring programs, and address other needs that are identified by participating individuals. However, with the intervention specialists employed by CREC already stretched thin, and the lack of resources going to districts, it is likely that more funding would be needed to implement any of these ideas.

In addition to possible solutions suggested by the experiences of St. Louis and Boston, Chicago's "Grow Your Own Teacher" offers an



interesting blueprint for creating a diverse teaching force. Perhaps building on the paraprofessional model used during the years of Project Concern, paraprofessionals could be trained and “grow” into part of the teaching force in the suburban district they work with. This model could meet several existing needs—to provide a link and support in suburban schools for Hartford students and could diversify teaching staffs in the suburban districts. Most of the leaders in suburban districts, like their faculties, are overwhelmingly white. While faculty diversity and training is important, the same is also needed among the leaders of the districts. Some administrators have been part of training offered by the Connecticut ADL or SERC. CREC also hosts an administrators’ conversation every quarter. Particularly since interviews suggested that principals and superintendents were key people to expanding the program, engaging them in conversation and reflection about diversity in schools is critical. The overt stance of a district about the importance of diversity is important for students.⁵⁵ The demands of teaching are time-consuming and supportive leadership can help provide resources for teachers to help them learn—this could be provided internally, by SERC, or if there were funding for more intervention specialists. Offering teachers of Project Choice students professional development opportunities far in advance with the opportunity to share their experiences with others might also be effective.

Innovative Ideas and Practices

One educator reflected on the importance to continually be trying new things, reflecting on one’s teaching practice in relation to including Project Choice students. A key lesson she learned was that it was important to “not rest on your laurels” even if a school has had a

good relationship in the past with Choice families. In fact, many districts have taken Project Choice children for decades, which could beg the question as to whether there is still a need for specific support programs or training for faculty, students, and parents. However, given the transient nature of these communities and of schools, in general, there is a need for continuing education of teachers regarding the Program and the needs of the students; the residents of the benefits and participation in the Program; and building relationships and communication with Hartford parents.

There was general agreement that relationships with Project Choice staff, particularly the program director and intervention specialists, were strong and beneficial. There was a desire for more support—from intervention specialists or reinstating paraprofessionals who rode buses and helped in schools, which would help to alleviate any the burden that sometimes fell to the few district minority teachers.

There are a number of innovative practices individual districts have implemented to enhance the experience of both resident and Project Choice students. They include:

- * Provide breakfast for students since they have to leave home so early (or snacks after school);
- * Provide transportation and dinner so that families can attend evening events such as parent-teacher conferences;
- * Structured, supervised time for Project Choice students pre- and post- school while waiting for the bus to enhance academic skills;



- * Provide tutoring, including in-school tutoring, to catch students up and to try to get students to move into more advanced classes—offering tutoring during school so that it doesn’t conflict with transportation;
- * Offer homework center after school to provide more instructional time;
- * Potluck dinner in Hartford with families, students, and district faculty and administrators;
- * Move activities like chorus meeting during lunch (as opposed to before or after school) so that Project Choice students can also participate;
- * Glastonbury offers foreign language in elementary school, which puts all students on the same footing since they enter equally without any knowledge of the language; and
- * Hiring a liaison to work with Project Choice students after school.

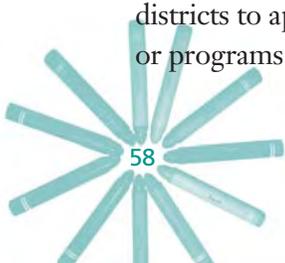
Many educators had great ideas about how they would like to improve the program, ideas that usually weren’t implemented due to the cost or the lack of staff time to implement the idea. The lack of consistent late buses is a continuing barrier to implementing many activities. Some administrators spoke of wanting to pilot different ideas, such as providing pre-school opportunities that many resident students could also experience. Educators in another district suggested devoting staff time to helping Project Choice students find summer job opportunities and college scholarship programs. The state department of education could annually provide the opportunity for districts to apply for grants to pilot such ideas or programs. A requirement of receiving state

grant money would be to document the impact of any pilot program and to reflect on the program or idea implemented with other Project Choice districts. This could allow for a way to pilot and determine best practices for integrating Project Choice students into the suburban districts to improve the entire program, and, in fact, could be useful for other suburban districts around the country that are experiencing growing student diversity.

Families

Suburban districts repeatedly stressed the need for parental⁵⁶ commitment to building relationships with their suburban schools—that participating in the program is not simply putting your child on a bus every morning.⁵⁷ For districts that have been participating in the program for a long time, there was some frustration with some families that may not be as dedicated as families of their resident children, although the distance from families’ homes to the suburban schools could be a significant obstacle to active participation by these families.

In addition to commitment by parents or families, however, suburban districts can also play an important role in trying to make it easier for families coming into a distant, and sometimes unfamiliar, environment.⁵⁸ One simple way is to provide transportation to parents for events. Several schools have hired a bus to pick up Hartford families for parent-teacher conferences, arranged for conferences to be held around the same time, and provided dinner. Another idea is to have a dedicated parent liaison to establish regular communication with Project Choice families. Since these families don’t live in the suburban communities, it may be harder for them to know about what is happening in the school and they may not already know each other from other activities. Finally,



Hartford families spoke of at least mild anxiety at going into the suburban schools, and most of these parents were involved, active parents. Some school administrators also acknowledged that they had, as a result of comments by Hartford parents, realized that in various ways their school was construed to be unwelcoming to Choice families. For these reasons, there have been sporadic instances of suburban schools, districts, or individual teachers set up meetings in Hartford; CREC could help to facilitate these meetings or dinners on a more regular basis. It would help to establish a connection with families on a more equal basis and help suburban educators understand the context of students in Hartford better.

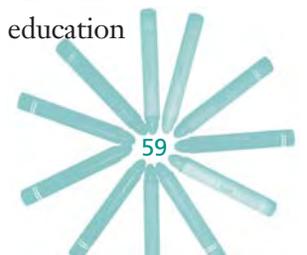
Any parents who have children in multiple schools understand the difficulty of trying to build relationships with faculty in multiple schools, juggling events and teacher conferences that might conflict. For Project Choice families, they may not only have this conflict (within a district) but (in spite of the Project Choice “sibling preference” factor), they may have children going to opposite sides of Hartford in two different suburban districts. Other Project Choice families may have one child in Hartford and another in the suburban district. In addition to the distance that Hartford parents have to travel and any perceived unwelcome in the suburban school, if parents are juggling multiple districts, it complicates an even more challenging situation. Districts need to try to accommodate these families and be understanding of their difficulty in attending events at suburban schools.

Suburban participation in identifying “host families” varies widely by district and even within district. A CREC staff member estimated that half of the districts have host families. In some districts, host families are set up

in schools of older children, but it would make more sense to pair families up with a suburban family when they first enter the district to begin their experience with the district with a resident family. There is wide agreement by parents, districts, and CREC staff that host families could be utilized more effectively, and that districts might not even fully recognize the importance of institutionalizing a way of connection between urban and suburban parents. Host families can function in a variety of ways, but some examples include: providing dinner or a place to stay for students if they are staying late before an evening event, calling Project Choice parents to let them know of school events, and being available to help if a student gets sick at school.

There are a number of reasons that host families could be important for participating district families. Suburban parents spoke eloquently of their experiences with students in the Choice program: the learning that happened as a family as a host family, either formally or on a more ad hoc basis. These adults reflected on the educational benefits for their children but also for themselves as adults. Building a connection would help all parents but especially Project Choice families and would provide opportunity for parents to get to know each other and bond over their commonalities—their children—rather than stereotype each other as the “other”. Host families also help to educate the community about the district’s participation in Project Choice, many of whom may be unaware of the program given the lack of publicity.

One program that has been used for parents in West Hartford is called Love & Logic.⁵⁹ The district spends time working with parents to help them understand how they can be involved in supporting their child’s education



and about building relationships with school staff. According to administrators, they recognize that many parents may have had bad educational experiences themselves so they want to heighten awareness and knowledge of the important role that parenting plays and what good parenting techniques are.

Conclusion

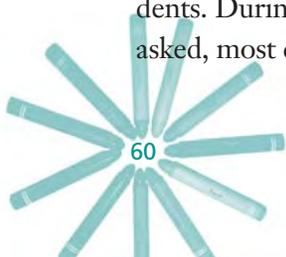
One suggestion for districts is to make sure that diversity initiatives begin early in every school. At the high school level, students are often drawn from many elementary or middle schools, some of which may not have participated in Project Choice or did not have much diversity. Interviews with both urban and suburban students indicate that there exists a good deal of polarization within school (classes, cafeteria, and extracurricular activities). One student suggested that it was students who had attended a predominantly white school that were the most insensitive, even though the district and school believed it was very cognizant of diversity.⁶⁰ Particularly given the stereotypes that exist about Hartford and the unwillingness of students or their parents to go to Hartford, districts must begin educating students early.

Finally, as mentioned elsewhere, it has been surprising to see the extent that there is little known about the outcomes of students in the Program—or whether it has impacted resident students in schools where there are Project Choice students. One district was able to produce college matriculation figures for their graduates (70% of Project Choice students planned to attend college after graduation); more than a decade ago, Farmington published a similar report of Project Concern students. During interviews, when explicitly asked, most district officials admitted to know-

ing little about the outcomes of students though anecdotally, they reflected, that it seemed that Project Choice students may be disproportionately retained in grade (though this wasn't a high number of students) and might be tracked into the lowest rigor courses. If these patterns are true, it would suggest the need for examining why this inequality exists and whether targeted academic or social support could improve the outcomes of these students.⁶¹ Additionally, examining the impact on suburban students—one example is to use the Diversity Assessment Questionnaire that has been used in fifteen districts across the country⁶²—to understand how students' perceptions may change as a result of going to schools with Project Choice students. This information could not only help to improve the program for all students involved, but could help build support for the Project Choice among suburban residents and state officials.

D. Role of Courts and the Plaintiffs

The role of the plaintiffs (and the judicial system) is largely aspirational in regard to Project Choice, although the plaintiffs also can go to court to enforce the agreements if they feel that progress towards the goals is not occurring as quickly as it should. In 2003, the original agreement was set, specifying a goal of 30% of Hartford students in integrated schools by June 2007 and 1600 students using Project Choice to attend integrated suburban schools. In Summer 2007, a new proposed agreement was discussed at hearings before the General Assembly's Education Committee, specifying goals for the next five years as negotiated between the state and the plaintiffs. The plaintiffs, of course, brought *Sheff*, which resulted in the original decision holding the state liable for existing *de facto* school segregation



and the agreement by the state in 1997 to expand Project Choice as part of their response to the decision.

The state court system is an active and indispensable party in the ongoing enforcement of the *Sheff* decision. Though some spoke favorably of the four or five-year plans specifying integration goals, a number of those interviewed expressed regret that the courts didn't use the case, post-1996 decision, to force more integration. The plaintiffs returned to court three times between 1996 and 2006, but were not able to convince Superior Court judges to enforce the 1996 decision or the 2003 Settlement. This failure on the part of the state courts to “back up” the Connecticut Supreme Court ruling with active enforcement has made it difficult to address the constitutional violations found over a decade ago by the state Supreme Court. The new agreement is reputed to have stronger enforcement provisions than the 2003 agreement, but ultimately it will be up to the courts to take assertive action if the state is again in non-compliance.

Some thought that the only expansion of the program would come if the courts compelled the state/districts to expand including through requiring each district to take a certain percentage or “fair share” of the needed growth in regional enrollment of Hartford students (though others expressed the opinion that nothing should be mandated).⁶³ Courts are increasingly reluctant to be seen as “policy-making” and leave this up to the discretion of local officials even when, as in this case, those officials have been found to be in violation of the constitution. Unfortunately, when an issue is politically unpopular, elected officials sometimes lack the will to lead on particular issues.⁶⁴ By putting the fate of the program in the hands of the legislature and school

boards—political bodies that may be hesitant to make a bold move because of fear of losing support of those who elect them—the court potentially missed an opportunity to create real change. In the next round of *Sheff* compliance, the state court system may need to actively exercise its central role in the implementation process to ensure that the defendants—the state of Connecticut—are making as much progress towards the settlement goals as possible. Based on the remarkably slow pace of implementation in Phase 1 of the settlement, the court may want to consider appointment of a special master to oversee compliance, if the new annual goals are not met.

E. Role of Hartford Families

Project Choice would not exist, of course, without the interest of Hartford parents, and the Project Choice students themselves. Although there is no formal role for parents (CREC has a fledgling parent network), it is important to recognize their importance to this program.

Parents

The parents with children in Project Choice spoke highly of the program. They reported that their children loved their schools and are “thriving”. Parents spoke of the well-resourced schools their children attended as a benefit yet they also were aware of the important benefits suburban students gained from being exposed to more diversity through Project Choice. They chose to participate in the program hoping that it would give their children a better education and exposure to diverse students despite bus rides for their children that last from forty-five minutes to an hour and forty-five minutes. One parent said her elementary school aged children arrive home at 5 pm.⁶⁵

The Hartford parents interviewed had heard about Project Choice from a friend or relative, and each of them knew someone who had applied to Project Choice because of their recommendation, indicating the importance of social networks in spreading information about Project Choice to potential applicants. One of the parents had also participated in Project Choice as a child.

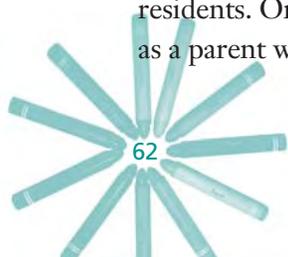
Although parents thought that Project Choice was pretty well-known, they suggested several reasons that others might not want to participate in the program. Because of the long bus rides and the behavior on the buses, parents might not want to put small children on the bus.⁶⁶ Parents suggested that adding monitors to *all* buses would be helpful, and that retired teachers might be effective candidates for such positions. They also suggested that some parents were understandably uneasy about their child feeling isolated in an overwhelmingly white suburban district. Given the small numbers of Project Choice students and minority students in some districts, one way to alleviate this concern would be to increase the numbers of students going into each school so that students don't feel so isolated.

The Hartford parents spoke warmly of the role that CREC staff had played in their experience with Project Choice while opinions were more mixed about the suburban districts. They believed that the CREC staff was very dedicated to making the children's experience as good as possible and realized that CREC's task is "enormous". One of the themes that emerged from conversations with Hartford parents was the lack of feeling comfortable at the suburban schools, partially due to what they perceived as stereotypes about Hartford residents. One parent described her experience as a parent with the district as finding that ac-

ceptance was lacking. She suggested the need for cultural diversity and sensitivity training for suburban staff but also parents and students as well. Other parents commented on feeling excluded by district parents. Several also commented on the need to provide clearer expectations and training for Hartford parents.

These parents, like district officials, acknowledged that Hartford parental involvement in suburban schools was lacking. They suggested that this was partially due to feeling intimidated in the suburban communities and that they didn't fit in. CREC could offer parents counseling or workshops about how to approach suburban schools (e.g., different communication styles) or about the needed parental engagement for educating their child. Their other suggestions included helping to provide transportation to the district, hosting a welcoming event for Project Choice families, providing free after-school care for younger students when there is a school function in the evening, and having schools' parent orientation that is late enough that Hartford parents can also attend. One commonality that each parent mentioned from their own experience was the importance of having a "go-to" person in their child's school to have a way of communicating with the school despite what seemed to be an unwelcoming environment. One parent suggested that this pointed to the need to assign a district buddy parent to each incoming family.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider the context within which Hartford parents are making educational decisions. As discussed earlier, the Hartford public schools have lower achievement outcomes for students, on average, than surrounding suburban districts and, in fact, were taken over by the state a decade ago.⁶⁷ It is now back under its own control, but the



number of schools identified under NCLB as needing improvement was 27 (out of 41 schools in the district). A qualitative study of students in Project Concern (the predecessor to Project Choice) suggested that some of those choosing were making “forced choices” indicating that they chose to participate in the program at least in small part due to a perceived lack of quality and/or integrated educational options in the city of Hartford.⁶⁸ But as long as so many Hartford schools are burdened with extreme levels of student poverty concentration, in the context of unconstitutional state-defined school district boundaries and state-facilitated housing development patterns, parental choice will continue to be defined by unequal educational opportunities, and the Project Choice program will continue to be a necessary choice for many Hartford families.

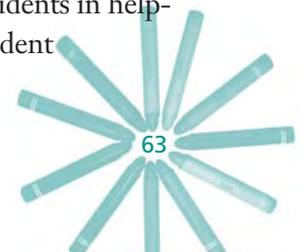
Students

Interviews from alumni of Project Concern and with current students in Project Choice explain the importance of a number of themes discussed.⁶⁹ They offer insight into how the themes impact the actual experiences of students. The dilemma faced by Hartford students going into suburban schools—indicating both the benefits of the experience and the trials students often faced are articulated by two alumni. One remembered, “My mother didn’t give me a choice to come back to Harford [public schools] until about the 9th grade, and by the 9th grade I knew that I was getting a better education in South Windsor.” The other student based on her experience commented about the current status of Project Choice, “you really need adequate support in order to make the program successful and to really support the students... so unless they’re gonna do that, I would say no, don’t enlarge

the program because you’re going to be doing the students a disservice.”

The benefits that the alumni, as students in suburban schools, received were repeatedly mentioned in interviews. One common response was that the students “didn’t know where they’d be” without having participated in the program. Several mentioned that Project Concern was one of the factors they’d chosen to live in a suburban community. Others mentioned the ability to get along with others—in their community, in college, in their workplace—who were different from them. Despite these important benefits from participating in Project Concern, students enumerated a number of difficulties they encountered as students. The lack of support from teachers and staff and their lower expectations for Hartford students were repeatedly mentioned. One student felt that his guidance counselor never expected him to go to college and never offered him advice for preparing for and applying to colleges. Although a few students noted that they had to catch up to what their suburban peers had learned even when they started in elementary school, there were more comments about the difficulty of the social adjustment. For example, one alumna from the early years of the program recalled crying the first day of first grade as she looked around and realized that she was the only black student in the room. Another student remarked on how Project Choice students had to work to disprove the stereotypes that suburban students have about Hartford. At the same time, one student also remarked that his Hartford friends treated him differently—while also looking up to him—because of his education in the suburbs.

Several students commented on the importance of other Project Choice students in helping them adjust. One current student



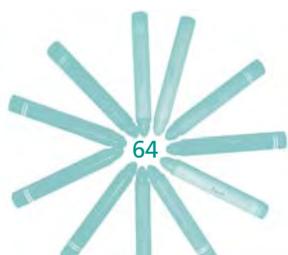
wondered why they couldn't fill the bus (she estimated that there were 10 or so students on the bus) that she rides to school with more people since she has friends who want to go to her school and thinks there is space for them. Two students also thought someone who had been in the program would also be helpful to talk with or to serve as a mentor. This might be a great way to involve Project Concern alumni to help current Project Choice students and to keep them connected with the program. Other types of social support were also mentioned as essential to the experience of students. One student suggested a welcoming committee for new Project Choice students. Some schools may already have this for new students in the district, and could make sure this also encompasses Project Choice students. Offering networking opportunities for Project Choice students and communication with the districts and other Project Choice participants could be helpful. The bottom line, according to several students, was the need to appropriate enough resources to make the program work.

Transportation was a major theme noted by students and alumni. Several alumni mentioned their regret in not being able to participate in after-school activities or sports because of the need to have to catch the bus back to Hartford. Students spoke of wanting to stay late for sports or arts events, but that suburban

parents didn't want to drive Hartford students back to the city at night. They believed that the lack of a late bus took away critical opportunities to make friends and to become a part of the school community. This, one suggested, would help students "bridge the gap". There were also frequent transportation problems. According to one student, she missed the bus because it left early (normally is at 5:45 am) and by the time she found an alternative way to get to school she missed her first class and was given detention. They also commented on the difficulties of the long hours that the transportation and school made for.

Conclusion

Giving Hartford families a role in guiding the implementation of Project Choice might help to make the program more responsive to the concerns that are leading to significant losses of students annually. Though CREC has a small parent network, the state could also benefit from their insight. Additionally, a short annual survey of participating Hartford families could help gather information from a larger group of parents. Information from this survey could guide the state in implementation and also be shared with participating suburban districts for them to revise any relevant policies or programs.



Endnotes

- 1 Section V is based on extensive interviews with Hartford-area residents and officials from March to June 2007 along with a review of relevant documents and data. To preserve confidentiality, general themes that arose during interviews are discussed rather than specific examples. Please see Appendix A for a list of interview participants.
- 2 Although the proposed new settlement goals and education budget promise additional resources, the Governor's budget is still far from adequate to significantly expand the Choice program (see discussion below). There are also valid arguments that the entire funding system for public schools and financial support from the state to communities needs to be overhauled. These issues are being addressed in a separate lawsuit and are beyond the scope of this report except to say that any such reform needs to make sure to explicitly consider the *Sheff* remedies including Project Choice to ensure that financial disincentives do not get replicated in future funding schemes.
- 3 With the appointment of the new commissioner of education, the department is being reorganized. This research was conducted before the reorganization. The deputy commissioner, George Coleman, will now have oversight of *Sheff* response and the equity office will report to him.
- 4 In Massachusetts, the state board of education's recent recommendations to increase METCO's funding has consistently been upheld by the Legislature. Data demonstrating the success of METCO helped to convince the board that the program needed support.
- 5 Interestingly, fellow Republican Governor Mitt Romney made support of METCO a key plank in his K-12 educational goals even before taking office.
- 6 Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-4a(3); One earlier analysis of Connecticut's response to the *Sheff* decision noted that the state emphasized the benefits of diversity for suburban and/or white students not the importance of providing equitable educational opportunities for Hartford students who attended minority isolated, disadvantaged schools. See McDermott, K.A. (July 2001). Diversity or Desegregation? Implications of Arguments for Diversity in K-12 and Higher Education. *Educational Policy* 15(3): 452-473. Of course, in many suburban districts in the *Sheff* region, there remains a small amount of racial diversity among the student enrollment.
- 7 See for example Circular Letter C-20, Series 1998-99 (March 19, 1999 from Ted Sergi); Circular Letter C-15, Series 1999-2000 (March 31, 2000 from Ted Sergi) and Circular Letter C-25, Series 2003-04 (June 4, 2004 from Betty Sternberg).
- 8 Frahm, R. A. (June 7, 2007). State Revising Its Response to *Sheff*. *Hartford Courant*.
- 9 Charter schools also are mentioned as options, which will make it important to enforce the racial desegregation of charter schools, which can themselves exacerbate school segregation. Although reducing racial isolation became one of the criteria for granting charters in 1997, research suggests that states do not always enforce racial balance requirements in charter school legislation. See Frankenberg, E. and Lee, C. (2003, September 5). Charter schools and race: A lost opportunity for integrated education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(32).
- 10 There are four other schools cited across the state as being out of racial balance outside of the Hartford area.
- 11 Cowan, A. L. (April 5, 2007). Wealthy Connecticut District Starts to Grapple with Racial Imbalance. *New York Times*.
- 12 "The Unexamined Remedy." (June 5, 1998). Hartford, CT: The Connecticut Center for School Change.
- 13 Frahm, R. A. (April 5, 2007). State Officials Monitor Racial Makeup As Minority Enrollment Tests Guidelines. *Hartford Courant*, B1.
- 14 Due to the 1997 statutory changes that required all districts to make an effort to reduce racial isolation, the state—as well as any individual—could penalize a district that does not make appropriate effort towards reducing isolation. According to a 2002 article, this had not been done. (See McDermott, K.S., Bruno, G., and Varghese, A. (April 2002). Have Connecticut's Desegregation Policies Produced Desegregation? *Equity & Excellence in Education* 35(1): 18-27.) Thus, Connecticut law indicates that it is unlikely that there would be much support or even a requirement to more evenly distribute students across districts to create more integrated schools. Instead, more favored measures will be magnet schools or city-suburban choice programs that do not force white, suburban districts or parents to change much unless they volunteer to do so.
- 15 Some state officials referred to this as a "bribe" for taking students from Hartford. Such statements indicate the lack of understanding about the financial disincentives and political realities that local superintendents and school boards faced when determining their level of participation, given the many other educational expenses.

- 16 An exception to this is Marcus Rivera, who as mentioned, seems to work tirelessly with CREC to try to open more seats and fill seats when a student may leave the program, and is responsive to participating suburban districts.
- 17 As seen in Table 1 earlier, just 60% of Hartford residents over 25 have a high school diploma and only 13% have a college degree. Thus, it is likely than many families of students may have had difficult educational experiences.
- 18 Assuring the information about the program is available to all is one way to alleviate concerns (which it is unclear as to whether this is actually occurring or not) that Project Choice is creaming the most well-connected students.
- 19 The proposed budget increases the grant from \$2100 per student to \$3250 per student, though this is still below the current costs with the supplemental transportation subsidy.
- 20 To give but one example as to why this is necessary, I was often asked during interviews as I asked questions about different aspects of the program about the role of a staff member, for example, or policy related to the program. Although I have spent several months studying this program, it seemed as though these questions should have been directed elsewhere. I got the distinct impression that there was little communication among various groups.
- 21 "The Recommendations of the Project Concern Task Force." Final Report to the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Education, January 1996.
- 22 In 1987, the report by then-state commissioner Gerald Tirozzi called "A Report on Racial/Ethnic Equity and Desegregation in Connecticut's Public Schools" called for shared responsibility for desegregating Connecticut's public schools, which the report termed had grown up in the "two Connecticut's" that existed: one white and wealthy, the other poor and minority.
- 23 "Making Connections: CREC Annual Report, 2005-06." Accessed at http://www.crec.org/crec/about/documents/CREC_AR.pdf on May 10, 2007.
- 24 See Green, R. (June 23, 1997). In the Wake of Sheff, Project Concern Shrinks. *Hartford Courant* A3.
- 25 Green, R. (July 1, 1998). Quiet End for an Acclaimed Program. *Hartford Courant* A4.
- 26 There is also a separate application process for magnet schools as well (CREC administers some of the magnet schools in the Hartford region). It might be easier for families and increase access to centralize the multiple applications into one.
- 27 Some districts spoke of trying to carefully place students into classrooms where they knew that teachers were well-equipped to teach Project Choice students.
- 28 As of 2006-07, 208 Project Choice students were Latino and 858 were African-American. There were also seven white students (who don't count towards the *Sheff* goal), two Asian students, and 2 American Indian students.
- 29 Analysis of Minneapolis' inter-district and intra-district choice programs shows that Hispanic families are more likely to use choice within Minneapolis and less likely to use choice program to send their children to suburban Minneapolis schools (Supra note 19, Part IV). There is also an under-representation of Hispanic students who enroll in METCO, in the Boston area.
- 30 Dougherty, J. & Estevez, N. (October 11, 2005). Public and Private school choice in greater Hartford: A Brief Overview and Computer Mapping Analysis. Presented at "Who Chooses Schools and Why?" conference. Accessed at <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ/css> on April 23, 2007.
- 31 The parents of Project Choice students each had heard about the program from someone else and knew someone who had applied at their recommendation.
- 32 Family relationship with suburban schools will be discussed in the following section, Part V.D.
- 33 Some of the reasons that providing transportation for Project Choice students is critical is a lack of transportation options for Hartford parents or inflexible work schedules that do not allow for them to pick up their children in distant suburban locations.
- 34 In addition to the need for regular late buses, it is important to have a transportation fund to help provide transportation to Hartford students and their families for special evening events such as parent-teacher conferences, sporting events, or concerts, for example. If such transportation were to be provided, it would also be helpful to provide an opportunity for students and their parents to eat dinner at the school. Host families or the school's parent-teacher organization could possibly help organize transportation and food if there were funding available.
- 35 It is worth noting that seeing as these two staff positions are brand new that may have contributed to the frequency they were mentioned during interviews. The program director's effectiveness was praised when mentioned, but since



she has been involved for many years, she did not always come up during interviews. It would be helpful to have a formal evaluation to understand how and in what ways these intervention specialists have improved the experience of participating students, families, and/or schools—this evaluation could provide critical evidence about the need for more such positions.

- 36 Ideally, this research would also be able to compare participating Hartford students with a control group of Hartford students who weren't accepted into the program. Future research will also evaluate students in years following kindergarten.
 - 37 Suburban interviewees would suggest that their district would be the best place to provide orientation and enrichment (e.g., have students enroll in their summer school so that they can use the same curriculum as district students do). An orientation program such as this could probably split the time that students spend with CREC staff and in their suburban district.
 - 38 The Grow Your own teachers program is a great example of what has been done in this regard. For more information, see <http://www.growyourownteachers.org/>.
 - 39 The lone high school student interviewed for this report was extremely thoughtful with a very clear understanding of diversity and difference—and articulated these issues with more clarity than many adults could. Likewise, the Project Choice students whose interviews were videotaped last December had important insights into needed changes for the program. An advisory committee should include student representatives.
 - 40 Representatives from *Sheff* plaintiffs should also be included on the committee.
 - 41 Orfield, M. (2002). *American Metropolitcs: The New Suburban Reality*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
 - 42 It should also be noted that this research did not include interviews with personnel in districts that currently do not participate in the Project Choice program.
 - 43 Of course, support does not always translate to action. For example, public opinion polls nationally show overwhelming support for desegregated schools but there is far less support for the steps it would take to create integrated schools. And, while districts are supportive, they generally felt like they were doing their fair share in terms of the numbers of students they accepted despite the overall low percentage of students accepted.
- It's hard to know whether this would differ if there were greater incentives for participation.
- 44 Farmington's Board of Education adopted a resolution (P1-8.4) in early 1990s articulating their reasons for participating in Project Choice and guaranteeing equal status for Project Concern students as resident students. Project Choice is considered one of the programs that helps Farmington meet one of their basic goals of education.
 - 45 This analysis likely understates the impact of diversity since it looks across the district instead of individually at the specific schools that Project Choice students attend; in most districts students are concentrated in a selected number of schools, in part, because of the financial incentive given to schools with 10 or more Project Choice students.
 - 46 District enrollment is from 2005-06 because 2006-07 enrollment figures are not yet available but Project Choice student numbers are from 2006-07.
 - 47 A recent article observed, "Because of the local basis on which public education is organized, the political reality for superintendents is that their job depends on the good will of the Board of Education and voters in their own communities, rather than on their contribution toward the education of children from other communities" (McDermott et al., 2002, P. 23).
 - 48 The proposed new funding provides for middle school and high school aged academic support services.
 - 49 The fact that these concerns exist points to the need for appropriately researching the academic success of students in Project Choice; although the concern about test scores (or SAT scores) was mentioned, it is unclear whether this is actually happening.
 - 50 Of course, districts are far more likely to offer seats for younger students where they determine that room is available. An exception to this determination of participation is Early Beginnings, where the increased benefits for the suburbs for participation seem to encourage higher participation.
 - 51 In several instances particularly in fiscally conservative districts, this was referred to as recognizing the political reality in districts and not wanting to stir up any opposition to Project Choice. Another factor mentioned in terms of resistance is that though these districts have growing diversity, the older population in many of the municipalities is overwhelmingly white. This suggests the need for educating the public or marketing the program to the benefits to the community of participating in Project Choice.

- 52 Currently there's a 10% bonus on reimbursement for school construction costs for districts that include room for Project Choice students in those schools. What might be more effective is requiring any district that is building new schools to guarantee room for Project Choice students in order to qualify for any state reimbursement. Additionally, the state could provide supplemental funding for more teachers and/or textbooks on an as needed basis to create more classes in schools where there are vacant classrooms and thus allow suburban schools to welcome more Project Choice students.
- 53 West Hartford, one of the most diverse suburban districts in terms of student enrollment that participate, has less than 5% of teachers that are minority at six of its ten schools. In Glastonbury, only 16 district teachers (out of 496) are nonwhite: 5 African-American; 8 Hispanic; 2 Asian; and 1 American Indian. Further, the entire district leadership team is also white. Information on the diversity of districts' professional staff can be found on their strategic school profiles on the state department's website.
- 54 HB 7344 is currently under consideration by the Connecticut General Assembly to recruit and retain teachers of color. (Bruce Douglas testimony)
- 55 This is one of the conditions identified by Gordon Allport required for equal status contact.
- 56 "Parents" and "families" are used interchangeably throughout. This is primarily due to the fact that interviewees usually discussed the need to build better relationships with parents though certainly other family members or trusted adults could fill this role.
- 57 In the past, students with a lack of parental support or response were dropped from Project Concern (as it was known then). With the restructuring of the program and institutionalized as a formal program under Connecticut's Open Choice program, districts cannot turn away students for any reason other than why they would expel a resident student.
- 58 The Connecticut State Board of Education's position on family partnerships with schools recognizes families and schools as equal partners in a child's learning and expects that schools should take the lead in developing and maintaining such partnerships.
- 59 Several administrators are trainers for the program. For more information, see <http://www.loveandlogic.com/>.
- 60 This student commented, "we like to pretend that we're more diverse than we are."
- 61 Such research would not have to be made public if it were for diagnostic purposes. There is concern among officials that they not highlight Project Choice students separately because it might be stigmatizing to these students, which is a valid concern given the relatively small numbers of students in any given district. However, this information could be collected for district planning purposes and could be combined among all participating suburban districts to examine the effects of Project Choice at the aggregate level. A few district administrators suggested that they would be interested in participating in such research perhaps through a partnership with local colleges or universities.
- 62 Kurlaender, M. & Yun, J. T. (2001). Is diversity a compelling educational interest? Evidence from Louisville. In G. Orfield (Ed.) *Diversity challenged: Evidence on the impact of affirmative action*. (pp. 111-141). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.
- 63 If there was more publicity about the program and more demand from Hartford families, perhaps it would be easier for plaintiffs to make an argument that each suburb should be required to take a certain percentage of students or to shift more of the burden to the suburbs to require them to demonstrate why they can't take more students.
- 64 The classic example of this, of course, is the desegregation of schools in the South following the *Brown* decision. A decade after *Brown* only 2% of black students in the South attended majority white schools, indicating the very slow progress in implementing an unpopular decision at the time.
- 65 Transportation can make it particularly difficult for single parents to have their children participate since their work schedules, Project Choice bus schedules, and other after-school options may not be aligned
- 66 This, of course, is compounded by the fact that most suburban districts want only younger children and open up many fewer seats for older students.
- 67 Special Act 97-4 of the Connecticut General Assembly
- 68 *Supra* note 29, Part III.
- 69 These interviews were conducted in December 2006 with Project Concern alumni and current Project Choice students. They were videotaped as part of an oral history project.

Section VI: Recommendations and Conclusion

How does Project Choice improve and expand to offer the opportunity to more Hartford children to experience integrated, high-quality education? There are a number of recommendations that have been made throughout this report. There are a few worth reiterating here:

1. Leadership

The lack of committed leadership for Project Choice, primarily from the state, has resulted in only modest growth in the number of participating students since the 2003 settlement. In October 2004, there were 988 minority students going to suburban schools through Project Choice. By June 2007, there were 1,070 or less than 100 more. There are individuals dedicated to trying to improve and expand this program, but the lack of commitment to providing leadership, accountability for the success of the program, and appropriate financial resources limits the effectiveness of these individuals. The governor, state commissioner of education, state board of education, or state legislature could each conceivably advocate effectively for Project Choice. Having one entity in charge of the program, committed to its success, would be preferable to the many different entities that now are partially responsible for the program. If political leadership is

lacking, then the plaintiffs or the courts need to make sure that the state as *Sheff* defendants are held accountable for the lack of progress in expanding and improving the program. One way to do this would be to specify certain design requirements in administering Project Choice. In the first settlement agreement (and second currently proposed), the state has insisted on few details as to how Project Choice will be administered, preferring instead to set goals. In St. Louis, a court-appointed monitor ensured that educators were integrally involved in designing and implementing the program and were able to communicate with the judicial system. Perhaps such a model is necessary here if the state, and its agent school boards, will not provide the leadership that is needed for Project Choice's success and expansion.

2. Transportation

As discussed, the current transportation options for Project Choice both are a major barrier to allowing Project Choice students to fully take advantage of the opportunities in their suburban schools and may hinder the lack of involvement by Hartford families because of the onerous bus rides. Transportation was also a major concern mentioned by suburban districts. Though the Legislature appropriated sup-

plemental funding and CREC has tried different approaches to transporting students, the bus rides are still unacceptably long and place an undue burden on students. Providing shorter, reliable transportation routes should be a priority for Project Choice. If needed, like St. Louis and Minneapolis, Hartford could be divided into geographical zones attached to contiguous suburban districts. Additional funding should be allocated to improve the transportation efficiency and, if needed, the supervision on buses. Providing late bus options for all students should also be considered a priority.

3. Funding

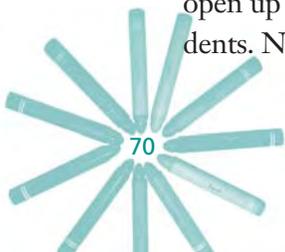
There are two distinct funding issues that need to be addressed, which hinder the success of the program and its expansion:

1. Increased funding to provide proper support for Hartford students making the academic and social adjustment to suburban schools.
2. The need to fairly compensate suburban districts for their participation in Project Choice.

Ensuring enough funding to be able to fully support the students in Project Choice is critical in terms of improving the experience of participating students. There also may be side effects of improvements by decreasing the attrition rate of students (and therefore needing to open up more seats consistently to offset attrition) and by improving the experience of participating suburban districts, who may then decide to open up more seats for Project Choice students. Needed support includes providing

early childhood educational opportunities, in suburban districts if possible; professional development for teachers and administrators; recruiting and retaining faculty and administrators of color; providing liaisons for Hartford students and families in suburban schools; and offering enhanced academic options after school, in evenings, and in summer where transportation is available.

There is also reluctance to substantially expand the program in suburban districts because of the low reimbursement received from the state for each Hartford student. Although it is likely that the current educational funding system will be restructured, a number of suburban districts are facing budget cuts despite the property wealth of some of these districts. In communities that have a reputation for being fiscally conservative, Project Choice could be targeted because of the low reimbursement per student in districts where average per pupil costs are \$10,000 or more. Further, Hartford retains approximately \$3,560 for each student who, through Project Choice, attends a suburban school. Although suburban districts do not want to begrudge Hartford state funding, Hartford gets nearly twice what the suburban districts get for students who do not even attend their schools. In fact, this funding formula actually amounts to a net savings for the state: the Hartford and suburban contributions per Project Choice student are approximately \$5,560 as compared to an average contribution of \$7,200 per child attending Hartford. These savings are more than offset by the transportation costs, but this points to the inequity in the current reimbursement system. Many of the suburban districts are relatively



wealthy, but by revising this formula, it would remove a financial disincentive to fuller suburban participation.

4. Expectation of Suburban Participation

If the recommendations for an increased state role and increased funding were implemented, it would also be important to increase the expectations for surrounding suburban districts. Although Project Choice is a voluntary program for students and families who participate, a result of the 1997 statutory change is to *require* that each suburban district be making progress towards reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of students. Each strategic school profile, for example, has information on schools' diversity efforts. Thus far, although circular letters from the state education commissioner periodically suggest the number of students each district would need to take to meet that year's *Sheff* goal, there have been no numerical goals or expectations set for each suburban district's participation in Project Choice. This allows each district to think that they are doing enough, despite the fact that, as seen earlier, there is excess capacity in surrounding districts and Project Choice is more than 500 seats short of the 1600 seat goal for June 2007—which is more seats than have been added since the 2003 interim settlement. The state should, using capacity information and district size, set annual targets for each suburban district. Ideally, this information would be publicized so that districts can be held accountable for their participation. These targets should be increased in correspondence to the *Sheff* settlement goals.

According to the proposed settlement, in five years, 41% of Hartford students should be in reduced isolation, or integrated, schools. If the expectation is that half of these students are in Project Choice, the program would need to be sending over 4,000 students to suburban schools, or four times the current number of participating students. As seen, there is ample room available and this size is more on par with other areas' city-suburban desegregation programs (e.g., Boston and St. Louis). Additionally, in order to gain state approval for any new school construction project, there should be a requirement that the proposed school will allocate a certain number or percentage of seats for Project Choice students. In other words, it is not simply enough to plan for district resident students and add Project Choice students in where feasible—instead, there should be an affirmative obligation that each district contributes to educating all students in the region in integrated, high-quality schools, given the proper support from the state.

5. Research

The lack of recent research about Project Choice is a barrier to understanding how to better structure the program and may also impede the ability to build suburban and political support for the expansion of the program. Ironically, in earlier decades, some of the most robust research about the benefits of desegregation came from studying Project Concern because of its unique design.

For the last two years there have been annual studies documenting the progress towards the *Sheff* settlement goals by Professor Jack Dougherty and colleagues.

This is an important step towards understanding the demographics of the program and could be expanded to examine the overall racial/ethnic isolation of students in the Hartford-area that resulted in the original *Sheff* decision. Although there might be a lack of political will for school desegregation, the racial isolation of students was the crux of the constitutional violation, and how Project Choice (along with magnet schools) impacts the isolation of students should remain a central focus of future research.

Given the increasing focus on closing the racial achievement gap, and the search to find ways to improve the achievement of black and Latino students, needed research on Project Choice should also examine whether attending integrated, low-poverty suburban schools might be one solution. Thus, it is important to document both academic and social outcomes for Hartford students who participate as compared to a similar sample of Hartford students who remain in the Hartford school system (a good match would be students who apply and don't get accepted to Project Choice). Although much focus is on the academic achievement of students, other benefits of desegregated schools are arguably more important to the success of students such as increased graduation rates, college-going percentage, and exposure to middle-class, racially diverse peer groups.

It is also important to study whether Project Choice benefits students in suburban schools. Educators and parents in the suburbs articulated a number of benefits for participating in Project Choice. To build support for expanding the program in already-participating districts and for partic-

ipation in districts that do not currently participate, it would be important to examine outcomes for resident students as well. Research suggests that some benefits for all students in integrated schools include reducing prejudice and stereotypical thinking; developing critical thinking skills; and giving students the opportunity to learn to work together across racial lines, which can be helpful in future workplace environments, neighborhoods, or with college roommates where they may be exposed to racial diversity. One useful instrument could be the Diversity Assessment Questionnaire that has been used in districts across the country to examine how students may be affected by attending integrated schools.

6. Marketing/Public Educating/Organizing

There needs to be a coordinated effort to help educate the region about Project Choice, its benefits, and what is needed to improve the program. Although this could be done by CREC, it would best be done by an outside group working in coordination with CREC. Ideally, this outreach effort would include marketing to the suburban districts about the importance of participating in the program; a twelve-month recruitment plan for Hartford residents to increase the demand for the program; and organizing and lobbying the legislature for improved funding for Project Choice. Sociological research has consistently shown that educational choice systems tend to be disproportionately accessed by those who are more well-connected because of the lack of complete information about all options. For these reasons and the possibility that more demand could result in more



seats being opened, it is critical that there is a more concerted effort to continually advertise to eligible families (who may be highly mobile in and out of Hartford) about Project Choice, eligibility requirements, and how to apply. St. Louis and Minneapolis offer promising models of how to improve recruitment efforts, while in Boston, METCO's lobbying efforts have been very successful in gaining increased funding for the program. Current students and alumni would be excellent resources to market the program to the suburbs and to eligible Hartford families. Additionally, simply improving the state and CREC's websites about Project Choice, which provide little updated information, could improve the ability to get accurate information about the program.¹

Finally, while these recommendations, if implemented, would open up more seats and improve the experience of families and students, change will likely remain incremental without a wholesale commitment from the state.

Though there are recommendations that could be implemented by CREC or the suburban districts, both entities are working within the context of the state's actions and support. Both subtly and in its provision of resources, the state has signaled a real lack of support or stake in the success of Project Choice. The new *Sheff* agreement, approved by a new Commissioner of Education, signals a possible new style of leadership and ownership on the part of the state, though what counts most are results in expansion and improvement of Project Choice.

Endnote

- 1 See Appendix C for detailed list of possible improvements. Thanks to Christina Ramsey for her analysis of these websites.

True integration in the Hartford area will require more far-reaching strategies than even significant expansion of currently existing interdistrict programs in the Sheff settlement, as many interviewees recognized and hoped for. Designing housing policies to give incentives for residential integration could be effective. Regional solutions to education and housing must also be considered. In the long run, larger school districts would offer the opportunity to create long-lasting, stably integrated schools (as is the case in many countywide school districts in the South, for instance) which might also result in financial savings with fewer educational bureaucracies to support, since each of the 166 districts in Connecticut has its own infrastructure and administrative costs.

Currently, however, plaintiffs' attorneys and state officials have focused on the combination of the regional magnet program and Project Choice to address the continuing segregation in the region. Project Choice plays a key role in responding to the state supreme court's decision, and through the dedication of Hartford families, educators, and administrators, the program offers important educational opportunities to more than 1,000 Hartford students and thousands more suburban students. But in order to meet proposed new settlement goals and offer educational opportunity to all Hartford-area residents regardless of where they may live, the program will need to grow significantly. Strong leadership and support are needed—and needed now.





Appendix A:

List of Interviews Conducted

In conducting research for this report, the following list includes people interviewed for their opinions on Project Choice. I have listed their affiliation for identification purposes only. Their participation does not imply endorsement of any ideas or conclusions in this report by the individuals or their organizations.

1. Allan Taylor, Connecticut State Board of Education
2. Beth Bye, CREC, Early Beginnings
3. Bruce Douglas, CREC
4. Christine Brown, Glastonbury Public Schools Assistant Superintendent (for Curriculum and Instruction)
5. Colleen Palmer, CREC
6. Constance J. Smith, SERC
7. David MacDonald, Hartford Board of Education
8. Diane Ullman, Simsbury Public Schools
9. Dianne Devries, CCJEF Executive Director
10. Elizabeth Horton Sheff, plaintiff and Hartford city councilperson
11. Ellen Rosow-Stokoe, Principal, Morley School, West Hartford Public Schools
12. Eric Crawford, CREC
13. Farmington parents
14. Hartford/Project Choice parents
15. Jack Dougherty, Trinity College
16. Jackie Mendenhall, Teacher, Farmington Public Schools
17. James Thompson, assistant superintendent of Hartford Public Schools
18. Jim Boucher, Hartford City Council
19. Joan Ramsey, Guidance Counselor, Simsbury High School
20. Karen List, West Hartford Public Schools
21. Kelly Lyman, Farmington Public Schools
22. Kim Greene, CREC
23. Lee Erdmann, Hartford Chief Operating Officer
24. Marcus Rivera, CT State Department of Education
25. Maria Ortiz, CREC
26. Mark Zito, Simsbury Public Schools
27. Martha Stone, plaintiffs lawyer
28. Mary Grace Reed, Farmington Board of Education
29. Mike Galluzzo, Farmington Public Schools
30. Nancy Nickerson, Farmington Board of Education
31. Natalie Simpson, Principal, Braeburn School, West Hartford Public Schools
32. Nelba Marquez-Greene, CREC ¹
33. Nessa Oram, CREC
34. Patricia DaSilva, Principal, Buttonball Lane School, Glastonbury Public Schools



35. Peg Beecher, Principal, Bugbee School, West Hartford Public Schools
36. Renita Satchell, CREC
37. Robert Villanova, Farmington Public Schools
38. Sheri James, SERC
39. Tad Diesel, Farmington Board of Education

40. Ted Sergi, former Connecticut commissioner of education

41. West Hartford high school student

42. West Hartford parent

I drew on the taped interviews of Project Concern alumni and Project Choice students conducted in December 2006.

Endnote

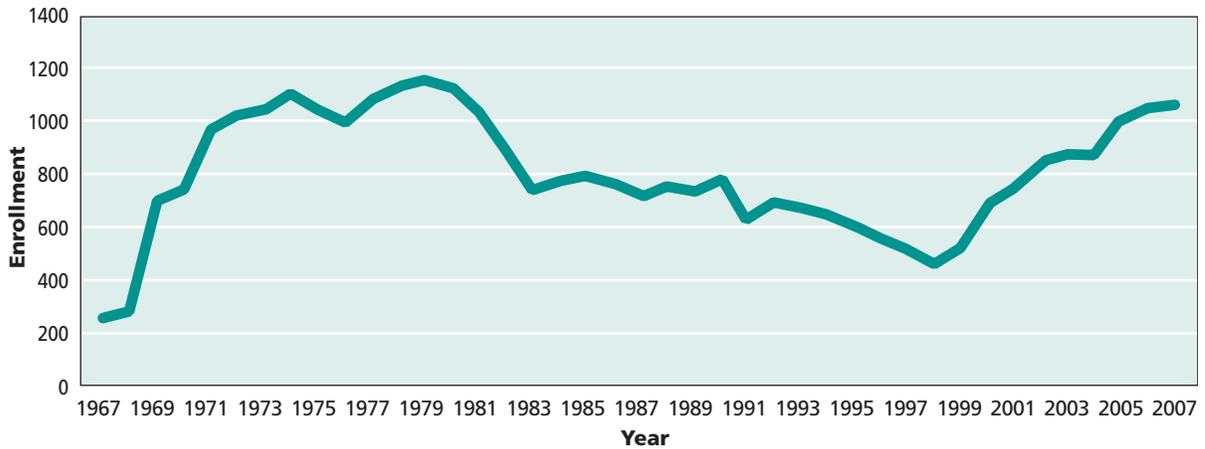
- 1 Colleen Palmer sat in on interviews with CREC staff.



Appendix B:

Participation in Project Concern & Project Choice, 1967-2006, Overall and by Selected Districts

Figure 1: Total Project Concern/Choice Enrollment, School Year Ending 1967-2007



Adapted from Dougherty, J., Wanzer, J., & Ramsey, C. (June 2007). "Missing the Goal: A Visual Guide to Sheff v. O'Neill School Desegregation." Hartford, CT: Cities, Suburbs & Schools Research Project at Trinity College.

Figure 2: South Windsor Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

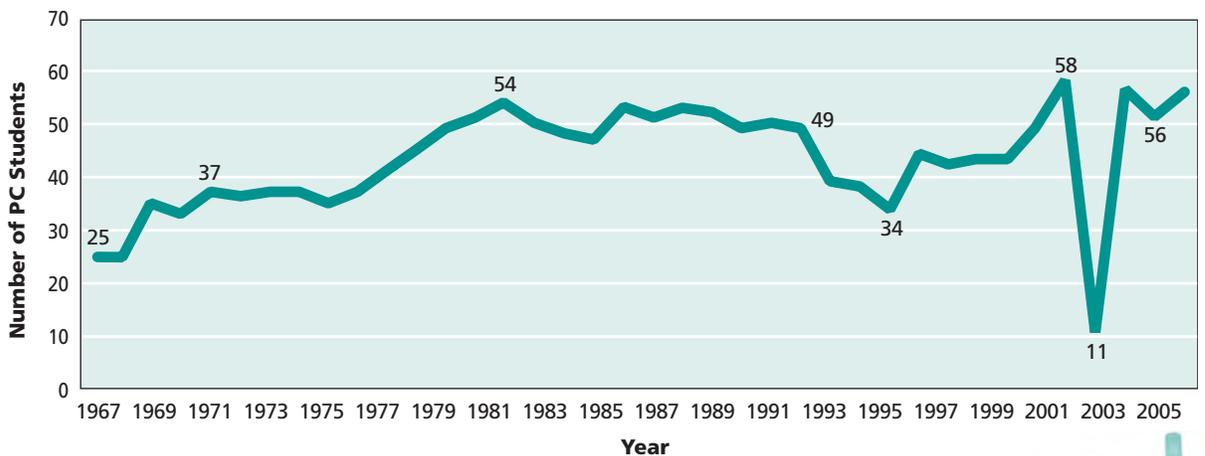


Figure 3: Simsbury Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

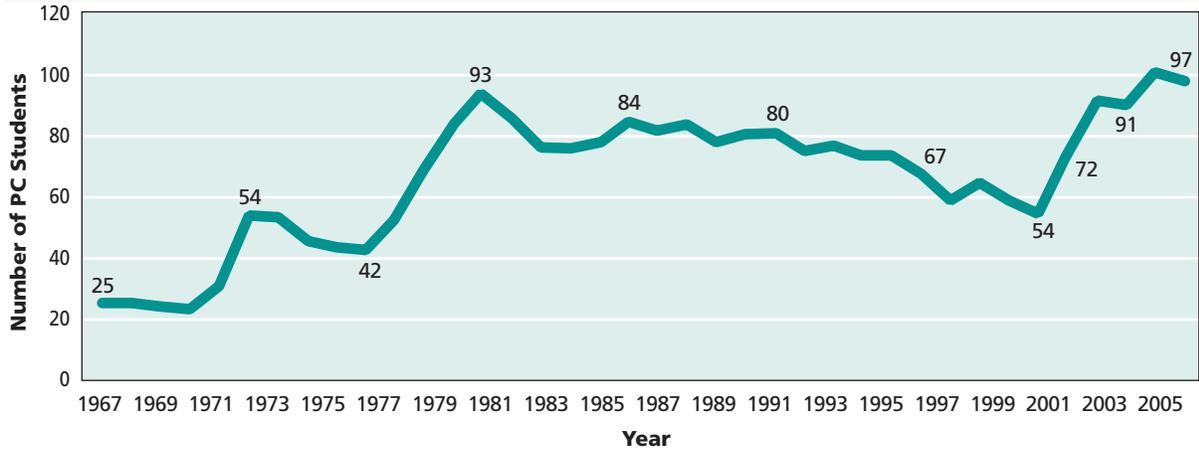


Figure 4: Farmington Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

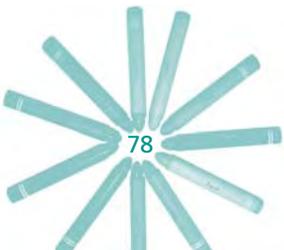
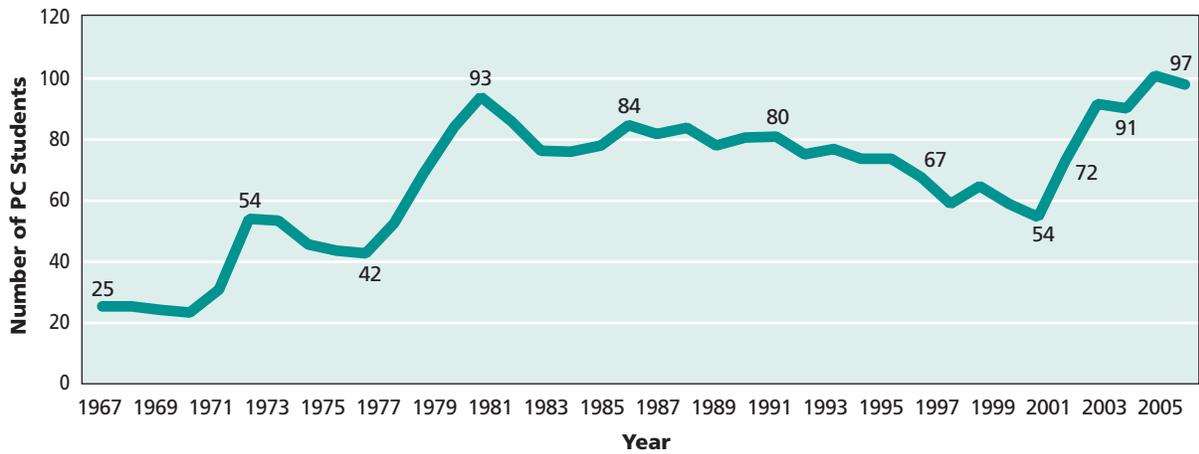


Figure 5: Avon Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

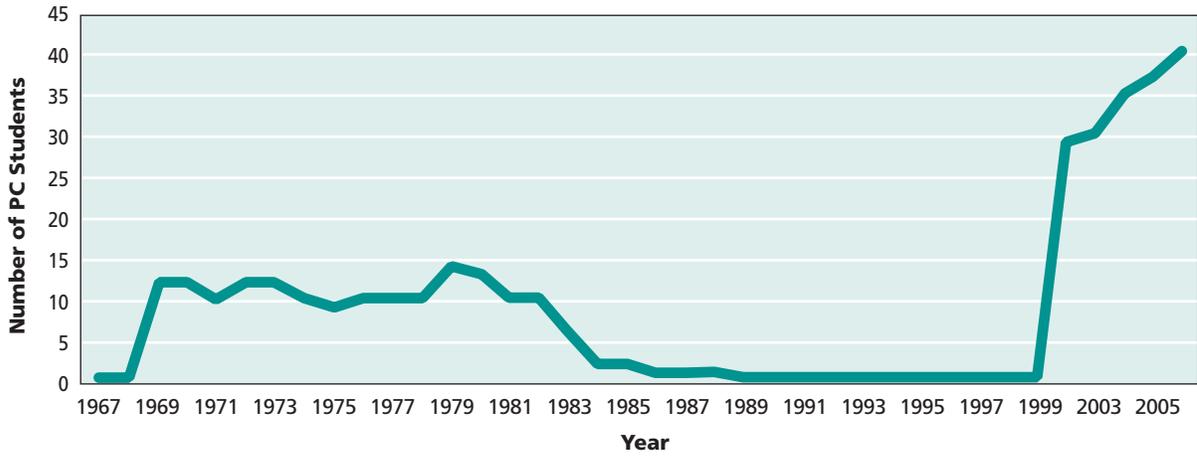


Figure 6: West Hartford Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

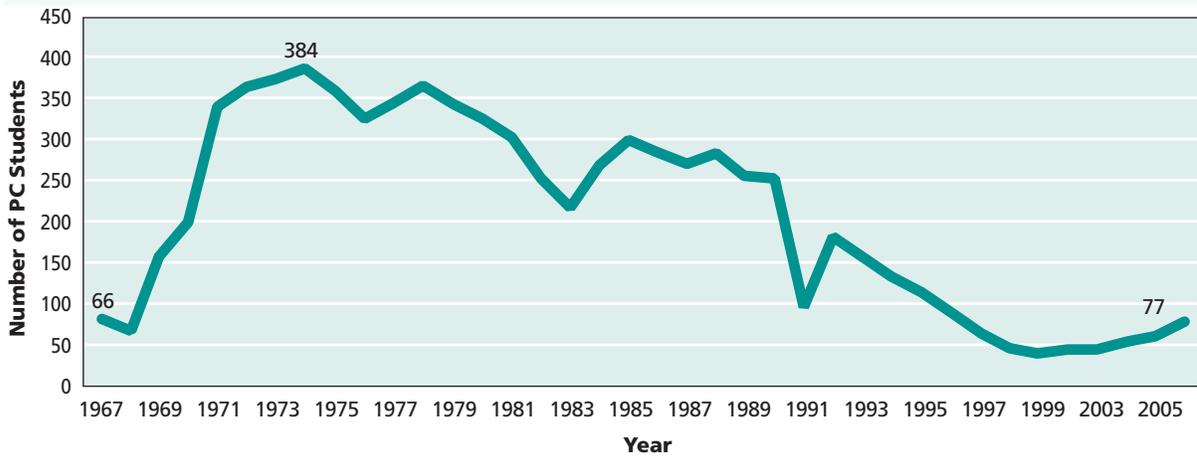


Figure 7: Newington Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006

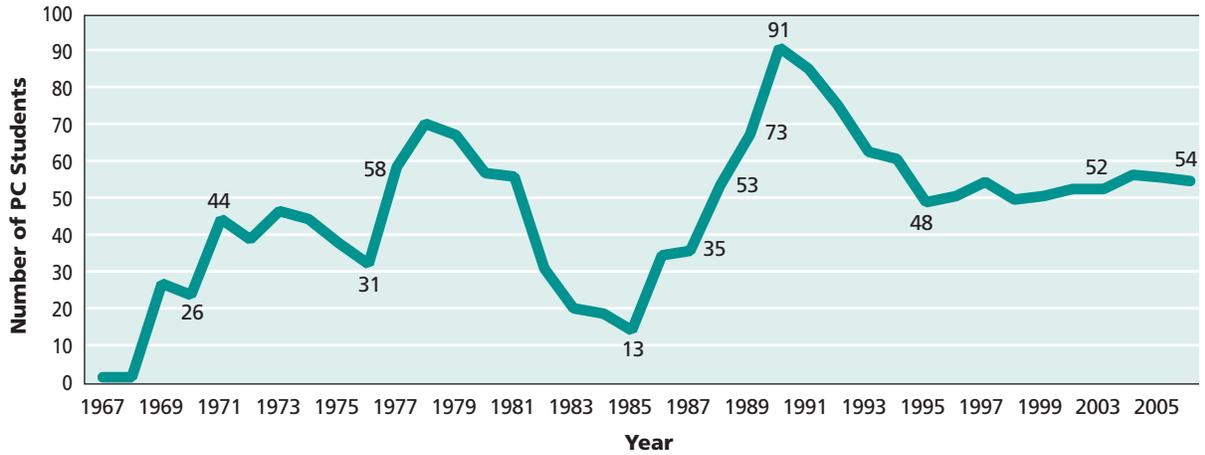
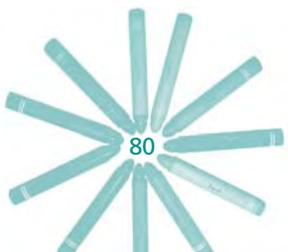


Figure 8: Granby Participation in Project Choice 1967-2006



Appendix C:

Recommendations for Improvements to Websites Related to Project Choice

Project Choice website (CREC):

- 1) Updated information on open houses, meetings (some information about meetings is two years old)
- 2) More information about the application process so parents come to the meetings prepared
- 3) Contact telephone/email for parents, as well as a list of staff and who is responsible for what
- 4) Updated activities, news
- 5) Link to Project Choice application from the *How to Apply* page
- 6) Spanish version needed
- 7) Consider making it easier to find—it's hard to navigate through CREC's website to find the Choice section

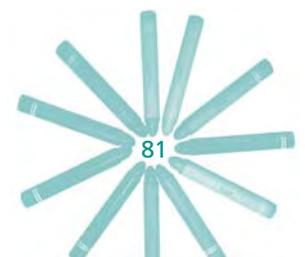
Connecticut State Department of Education Website, Equity Bureau:

- 1) Need a link to apply or to download the application

- 2) Need Spanish version
- 3) Family guide is very lengthy (mentions Project Choice on p 34); create shorter Project Choice-only guide about eligibility and application process
- 4) Consistency in guide and website as to name of the program

Another example: METCO's website

METCO Inc. has an extensive website with lobbying information, parent council information, a list of colleges/universities that graduates attend. They list contact information and a staff directory, with each person's extension and email address. Additionally, there are separate websites for alumni (the METCO alumni association), the METCO Directors, and the State Department of Massachusetts office, all of which are linked from METCO Inc's website. Finally, the URL (<http://metcoinc.org/>) is easy to remember.





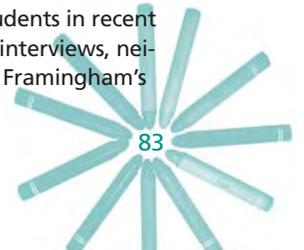
Appendix D:

METCO Students, as a Percentage of District Enrollment & Minority Share, October 2006

METCO Students, as Percentage of District Enrollment & Minority Share, October 2006

District Name	METCO students, October 2006	White percent of students	METCO students as Percentage of:		
			District students	Minority students	Black & Hispanic students
Arlington	94	81.0	2.07	10.88	25.84
Bedford	82	80.0	3.59	17.94	41.25
Belmont	126	76.1	3.38	14.15	40.73
Braintree	42	85.3	0.81	5.53	12.32
Brookline	291	62.0	4.74	12.47	28.89
Cohasset	47	95.4	3.16	68.62	85.31
Concord	106	82.6	5.71	32.79	65.58
Concord-Carlisle	72	84.2	5.73	36.28	69.91
Dover	15	90.6	2.53	26.91	74.40
Dover-Sherborn	21	92.4	1.94	25.51	60.60
East Longmeadow	43	93.4	1.50	22.79	36.68
Foxborough	44	93.0	1.50	21.50	36.70
Framingham ¹	4	67.4	0.05	0.15	0.19
Hampden-Wilbraham	21	92.8	0.56	7.74	12.67
Hingham	39	94.0	1.03	17.12	36.68
Lexington	264	68.8	4.24	13.59	54.36
Lincoln	89	69.8	7.25	24.02	38.38
Lincoln-Sudbury	91	87.8	5.64	46.24	78.36
Longmeadow	46	89.4	1.43	13.47	33.21
Lynnfield	33	92.4	1.44	18.89	41.01
Marblehead	73	93.3	2.33	34.83	48.62
Melrose	120	88.2	3.40	28.83	47.25
Natick	60	86.4	1.31	9.66	21.19
Needham	141	86.6	2.82	21.07	49.52
Newton	415	72.0	3.57	12.74	31.30
Reading	58	92.1	1.34	16.95	47.82
Scituate	58	95.5	1.80	39.98	59.97
Sharon	66	79.9	1.91	9.48	25.07
Sherborn	4	91.8	0.84	10.25	40.02
Southwick-Tolland	18	94.9	0.95	18.54	29.54
Swampscott	43	91.6	1.77	21.02	33.96
Wakefield	47	94.2	1.35	23.21	40.79
Walpole	49	92.8	1.25	17.38	25.03
Wayland	132	80.4	4.59	23.43	58.14
Wellesley	157	82.6	3.39	19.48	44.61
Weston	168	78.7	7.01	32.93	84.51
Westwood	43	90.9	1.42	15.63	37.43

1 It is believed that Framingham is withdrawing from the program, since it has not taken new students in recent years. Framingham is one of the most diverse suburban Boston districts. However, according to interviews, neither METCO Inc. nor the Massachusetts Department of Education has been formally notified of Framingham's withdrawal.







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Project Choice Campaign

An initiative of the
Sheff Movement coalition

**Quality Integrated Education
for All Children**