

What is Open Choice?

The Open Choice program was established by legislation in 1997 and is intended to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation among students. Through Open Choice, students in the C.E.S. region who are Bridgeport residents have the opportunity to attend school in participating school districts when space is available, and students in surrounding towns have the opportunity to attend school in Bridgeport (Hartford and New Haven have similar programs). Open Choice is funded by the State Department of Education.

What are the purposes of the program?

To improve academic performance; to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation; and to provide a choice of educational programs.

What role does the Regional Educational Service Center (RES-C) play in this program?

The RES-C manages the acceptance and placement process, provides transportation services, and provides as needed support to schools and families. [[CGS § 10-266aa \(c\)](#)]

How do students enroll in the Open Choice Program?

Applications for students entering grades PK-12 are available from mid-January through mid-March for the upcoming school year.

Preschool and Kindergarten participation depends heavily on the models of instructional delivery employed by districts. Transportation is complicated by varied models (e.g., full-day every day, partial day every day, full-day some days, ...)

How are spaces for students determined?

Participating districts are determined by the feasibility of transportation between the sending district and the receiving district. The RES-C coordinates with the superintendents in participating districts each spring to confirm what openings they will offer for the upcoming year. Open Choice is a voluntary program, so a district can offer as few or as many openings as they choose.

How are students chosen for the openings that are offered?

Once the RES-C determines openings for a grade level, a random number generator is used to rank order the applicants for that grade level, and offer the opening to the parents based on the ordering.

How long do students remain in the Open Choice Program?

Once enrolled in Open Choice, a student has the same rights and responsibilities as any other student enrolled in the school, and they are treated in the same manner as any other student. They remain with the district until they graduate, unless they move from the urban community. In that case they enroll in the schools in their new town.

How are students transported to school?

The RESC receives transportation funding from the state, and the coordinator for Open Choice works with the contracted bus company and the families to provide bus service. Since students are not generally from one neighborhood, students usually receive bus service to and from their home address. [[CGS § 10-266aa \(f\)](#)]

Can Open Choice students participate in athletic and/or extra-curricular activities?

Open Choice students may participate in athletic and/or extra-curricular activities with the same conditions and responsibilities that a resident student would have. Transportation for athletics and extra-curricular activities is not provided by the RESC.

What if a student requires special education services?

If the costs are below the student grant, the receiving district pays the cost. If the costs are over the grant, the sending district is billed for and pays the cost. [[CGS § 10-266aa \(i\)](#)]

How is student discipline addressed?

Open Choice students are students of the receiving district and are subject to the same behavioral expectations as resident students.

Can an Open Choice student be “returned” to the sending district?

No. Open Choice students are students of the receiving district, and they remain with the district until they graduate, unless they move from the urban community.

What are the costs to the district?

There is no direct cost to the district. The receiving district receives a grant of \$3,000 per Open Choice student per year which may be used to cover unusual costs. The per student grant rises as the number of Open Choice students as a percentage of the district student population increases [[CGS §10-266aa \(g\)\(2\)](#)]

| Enrollment | Lower % | Upper % | % INCR | \$/Student |
|------------|---------|---------|--------|------------|
| N/A | 0.0 | 1.99 | N/A | \$3000 |
| N/A | 2.0 | 2.99 | N/A | \$4000 |
| N/A | 3.0 | 3.99 | N/A | \$6000 |
| 4000 | N/A | N/A | 50 | \$6000 |
| N/A | 4.0 | N/A | N/A | \$8000 |

What does current participation look like in Connecticut districts?

According to 2018-2019 data released by the Connecticut State Department of Education, **47** districts participate in the Open Choice Program.

Of the 47 participating districts, the average percentage of Open Choice students compared to October 1 district enrollment is **2.34%** (maximum = 7.76% [East Windsor]; minimum = 0.03% [Vernon]). **Twenty-six (26)** districts are reimbursed at the \$3000/student rate; **Seven (7)** at the \$4000/student rate; **Four (4)** at the \$6000/student rate; and, **Ten (10)** at the \$8000/student rate.

What is the Supplemental Reimbursement?

Supplemental funding is built into the annual Open Choice appropriation in accordance with [CGS §10-266aa \(k\)\(1\)](#). In 2018-2019, this amount was approximately \$192 per student for districts with at least ten (10) Open Choice students in the same school.

What happens to the district ECS funding?

For each Open Choice participant, the sending district receives 50% of its regular per-student ECS grant, while the receiving district receives 50% of its regular per-student ECS grant.

How are Open Choice students considered with regards to State Testing?

Open Choice students are considered to be residents of the receiving district in all respects, including reporting as it applies to state-wide mastery examinations [[CGS §10-266aa \(l\)](#)].

Does the sending district pay tuition to the receiving district?

No.

What if a student moves from the sending district (and not into the receiving district)?

Student residency issues would be addressed for an Open Choice student just as they would for any other student in the receiving district.