


OPEN CHOICE

New Fairfield Board of Education

March 4, 2021

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 who are Bridgeport residents have the opportunity to attend school in participating school districts. (Hartford and New Haven have similar programs).
 - ▶ **Open Choice is funded by the State Department of Education.**
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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 (RESC) play in this program?

- ▶ The RESC 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 K-12 are available from mid-January through mid-March for the upcoming school year.

How are spaces for students determined?

- ▶ Participating districts are determined by the feasibility of transportation between the sending district and the receiving district. The RESC coordinates with 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 RESC 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)]

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)]

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.

Does the sending district pay tuition to the receiving district?

No.

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)]

Where we stand today.

The State consideration for the expansion of **Open Choice** to Danbury is advancing. Funding for the potential expansion has been included in the Governor's Budget for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

As it currently stands, funding would support the addition of **fifty (50)** participants from the **DANBURY** area and **fifty (50)** participants from the **NORWALK** area in the 2022-2023 school year.

The budget recommendation for **2021-2022 includes \$275,000.**

The budget recommendation for **2022-2023 includes \$900,000.**

(PD and Community Engagement, RESC Administration, Transportation, District Per Pupil Funding.)

NEXT STEPS for New Fairfield Public Schools

If the Open Choice program remains in the Governor's Budget, the NF BOE will have to decide if they want to participate in the program.

Open Choice students would begin attending New Fairfield Public Schools in the 2022-2023 school year.