



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



January 30, 2015

Superintendent Name
Superintendent of Schools
XXX Public Schools
34 XXX Road
XXX, CT 06052

Dear Superintendent Name:

Thank you for your participation in the Hartford Region Open Choice Program. The program offers students opportunities for academic achievement while providing them with a diverse educational setting. Racially integrated schools provide many benefits for all students including improved cross-racial understanding, reduced racial prejudice, improved critical thinking and academic achievement. Diverse schools also improve students' life opportunities by preparing them for a diverse workforce.

Your district's participation in Open Choice assisted the State of Connecticut in increasing enrollment of Hartford-resident minority students in reduced racial isolation settings, as mandated by the Sheff Phase III Stipulation. As we move forward under the stipulated agreement, district commitment to the Open Choice Program is increasingly important and offers a mutually beneficial educational opportunity for both Hartford and resident students. We anticipate your continued support and ask all districts within the Sheff operating region to stretch their opportunities and maximize participation in Open Choice.

The state has set a goal of enrolling 2,600 Hartford students in the Hartford Region Open Choice Program for 2015-16 as a key initiative in meeting the court-mandated Sheff requirements.

Requested Seats:

We are proposing that (town name) enroll an additional xx students for the 2015-16 school year. This level of enrollment will bring (town name) to the X% level of funding. Please be reminded that as your district achieves certain levels of enrollment there are additional financial incentives for your participation in the program. A description of the grants and incentives is provided in *Attachment A*. Please note that you are eligible for additional shared incentives if you declare your seats by March 1, 2015. Also note that the state is again offering the *Capital Funds Grant* of up to \$75,000 for districts that enroll at least twelve (12) additional students. In many district with high levels of participation the various grants and bonuses exceed \$10,000 per student.

To guide your district's decision making about the grades in which you will offer seats for 2015-16, please review *Attachment B*, which provides a chart detailing the applicant pool for your district as of January 28, 2015. The student application deadline is February 27, 2015. As a reminder, there were significant changes implemented in the application process last year that increased the acceptance rate among Open Choice applicants. Highlights include:

- Applicants are able to select and rank up to five (5) suburban public school districts as determined by the area of Hartford they currently reside in, also known as their residential zone.
- Applicants may also apply to attend any district as their fifth choice.
- Applicants may choose to apply to Open Choice only.

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As you consider how many seats and at which grade levels you plan to offer seats, please review Attachment B and keep the following in mind:

- we request that you accommodate the siblings of currently enrolled students and those students who specifically selected your district and only Open Choice whenever possible;
- many districts tend to offer the most seats in kindergarten and first grade. Please carefully review the grades for the Open Choice only, sibling and first choice applicants for your district. These students are specifically interested in your district, which will increase the likelihood of them accepting and enrolling in the district in a timely manner to prepare for the school year;
- if you wish to offer Pre-kindergarten seats, the program you offer must be full-day, must accommodate at least 10 students and **must** be discussed with Connecticut State Department of Education prior to implementation;
- attending a new school in a new community can be difficult for children. To mitigate this issue we urge you to seat multiple Open Choice students in the same classroom, which will provide the students' mutual support and successful transition into their new school environment; and
- if you would like to enroll more Open Choice students than the number specified above, we encourage you to do so. Please note that while **March 1, 2015**, is the due date for seat declarations; you may declare additional seats after that date but those seats will not be eligible for the early declaration incentive bonus described in Attachment A.

Districts are **strongly** urged to declare all seats **prior to Monday, June 30, 2015**, to ensure the smooth transition of students, their records, and transportation routing for the first day of the school year. Students who register after July 30, 2015, will have delayed transportation at the start of the year.

Thank you for your district's continued support of the Hartford Region Open Choice Program. Please e-mail the attached **Seat Declaration** form to barbara.canzonetti@ct.gov by **March 1, 2015**. If information is included that would identify an individual student, the form should be password protected. If you have any questions or would like more detailed information, please contact Glen Peterson at 860-713-6915.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dianna Wentzell
Commissioner of Education

SP:gp

cc: Peggy Roell, Chair, Board of Education
Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer, CSDE
Glen J. Peterson, Director, Sheff Office & RSCO, CSDE
Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools
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Enclosures (2)