



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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OLR BACKGROUNDER: FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

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This report describes the funding for five public school choice programs: (1) interdistrict magnet schools, (2) charter schools, (3) regional agricultural science and technology centers, (4) the Connecticut Technical High School System, and (5) the Open Choice Program. It updates our report of February 17, 2012 ([2012-R-0100](#)) to incorporate increases in state grants enacted by [PA 12-116](#).

This report refers to Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants towns receive for students attending some of the choice programs described below. It is important to note, however, that the data used in the ECS formula, which includes students enrolled in certain choice programs in each town's resident student count, has not been updated since FY 08. Therefore, the ECS grants towns currently receive do not reflect current student enrollment in choice programs.

INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOLS

Overview

The goal of the interdistrict magnet school program is to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation by attracting students from a number of towns to a school with a specialized theme. Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools operate according to two basic models: "host" magnets, which are operated by the school districts where they are located, and "RESC" magnets, which are operated by regional education service centers (RESCs) or other nonprofit entities, such as colleges and universities, approved by the education commissioner.

Host and RESC magnets are divided into two subcategories: *Sheff* and non-*Sheff* (named after the landmark desegregation court case, *Sheff v. O'Neill*). *Sheff* magnets are interdistrict magnet schools in the Hartford region that help the state meet the requirements it and the *Sheff* plaintiffs agreed to in 2008 and incorporated into a stipulated court order in the case. Interdistrict magnet schools located outside the *Sheff* region, such as those in New London, New Haven, and Bridgeport, are called non-*Sheff* magnets because they are not part of the settlement.

State Operating Grants

- **Host Magnets Generally:** \$3,000 for each student from the host town and \$7,085 for each student from other towns.
- **Hartford Host Magnets:** \$13,054 for each student from outside of Hartford.
- **Non-Sheff RESC Magnets:**
 - RESC magnets enrolling less than 55% of their students from a single town receive \$7,900 annually for each student.
 - RESC magnets enrolling 55% or more of their students from one town (the dominant town) are treated the same as host magnets and receive \$3,000 for each student from the dominant town and \$7,085 for each student from other towns.
 - Edison Magnet School in Meriden, which enrolls more than 55% but less than 80% of its students from Meriden, receives \$8,180 for each enrolled student.
- **RESC-Operated Sheff Magnets:** A RESC-operated *Sheff* magnet that enrolls less than 60% of its students from Hartford receives \$10,443 for each student.
- **Part-Time Programs:** An interdistrict magnet program that operates less than full-time, but at least half time, receives 65% of the above amounts.

ECS Grants

Each sending town, including the host town if applicable, receives an Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant for each of its students enrolled in a magnet school.

Tuition from Sending Districts

- Many magnet schools require sending towns to pay per-student tuition for each student enrolled in the school. Amounts vary based on the state grants the magnet school operator receives. By law, tuition cannot exceed the difference between the magnet school's per-pupil operating cost in the previous year and its state operating grant.
- Hartford host magnets are barred through FY 13 from charging tuition.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Overview

A charter school is a nonsectarian public school organized as a nonprofit corporation and operated independently of a local or regional board of education. The State Board of Education (SBE) grants and renews the charters, usually for five years and, as part of the charter, may waive certain statutory requirements applicable to other public schools.

Connecticut law allows both state and local charter schools, but currently all Connecticut charter schools are state charter schools. Thus, only the funding for state charter schools is described here.

State Operating Grants

- State charter schools receive annual state operating grants of \$10,500 per student for FY 13.
- The grant is scheduled to increase to \$11,000 for FY 14 and \$11,500 for FY 15 and subsequent fiscal years.

ECS Grants

State charter school students are not counted for purposes of ECS grants, thus local districts receive no ECS grants for students attending state charter schools.

Tuition from Sending Districts

State charter schools are not allowed to charge tuition.

REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CENTERS

Overview

The law allows local school boards to make agreements to establish regional agricultural science and technology centers, formerly known as vocational agriculture centers, for their students in conjunction with their regular public school systems. Local school boards that do not offer agricultural science and technology training must designate a school that their students interested in such training may attend. The agriculture centers serve secondary school students in grades nine to 12.

State Operating Grants

- The state provides an annual grant of \$1,750 for each student enrolled in a center as of October 1 of the preceding year.
- For centers with more than 150 out-of-district students, the state adds a supplemental grant of \$500 per student.
- A center that no longer qualifies for the \$500 supplemental grant receives a gradually decreasing phase-out grant for four successive years after it ceases to qualify.
- For a center that is not eligible for either a full \$500-per-student supplemental grant or a phase-out grant, the state provides a supplemental grant of \$60 per enrolled student.
- If any funds remain after the above distributions, all centers receive an additional \$100 per enrolled student.

- After all the above funds are used, any remaining funds are distributed to districts operating centers with more than 150 out-of-district students. Allocations are based on the ratio of the number of out-of district students over 150 in each center to the total number of out-of-district students over 150 in all centers in the state.

ECS Grants

Towns receive an ECS grant for students attending agricultural centers in their own or another district.

Tuition from Sending Districts

- Agriculture centers may charge tuition up to a maximum of 82.5% of the ECS foundation amount, or \$7,992 per student per year.
- Tuition for students enrolled in shared-time programs is prorated. (In a shared-time program, students take regular high school academic courses at their home high school and agriculture training at the agricultural center.)

CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Overview

The Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) is a state-run system that provides academic and trade technology instruction. Secondary students receive a comprehensive high school education in conjunction with training in 38 trades. Post-secondary students have access to full-time or part-time apprenticeship instruction or training in aviation maintenance or medical and dental occupational areas.

State Funding

- CTHSS school operations are funded by the state through the regular state budget process.
- Preparatory and supplemental programs, including apprenticeship programs, are funded from the nonlapsing Vocational Education Extension Fund, which includes all proceeds from operating the programs plus rental fees for CTHSS facilities.

ECS Grants

CTHSS students are not counted for purposes of ECS grants, so local districts receive no ECS funding for students attending CTHSS schools.

Tuition from Sending Towns

- Sending towns pay no tuition to the CHTSS system when their students enroll in CTHSS schools.
- Certain post-secondary programs, such as the licensed practical nurse program, charge students tuition.

OPEN CHOICE PROGRAM

Overview

Open Choice is a voluntary interdistrict attendance program that allows students from large urban districts to attend suburban schools and vice versa, on a space-available basis. Its purpose is to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; improve academic achievement; and provide public school choice.

State Funding

The state pays a school district that accepts students (“receiving district”) the following grants:

- \$3,000 per student to districts where Open Choice students are less than 2% of the district’s total student population,
- \$4,000 per student for districts with 2% to 3% Open Choice enrollment, or
- \$6,000 per student for districts with Open Choice enrollment of at least 3% of total enrollment or, for a district with more than 4,000 students, if the education commissioner determines the district increased its Open Choice enrollment by at least 50% as of October 1, 2012.

If actual enrollment in the program is lower than the number of students for which funds were appropriated, the first \$500,000 of the excess money is used for supplemental grants of up to \$1,000 per student. These supplemental grants are distributed pro rata to receiving districts for any students who attend a school that enrolls at least 10 Open Choice students. Excess funds over \$500,000 and up to \$1 million are distributed pro rata to districts that increased their numbers of out-of-district students enrolled compared to the prior year.

ECS Grants

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.

Tuition from Sending Districts

Sending towns pay no tuition to receiving towns for any Open Choice student.

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