



## Public Schools of Choice

### Overview

Connecticut offers a number of public schools of choice, including charter schools, magnet schools, agricultural science and technology centers (i.e., “vo-ag centers”), and technical high schools (now known as the technical education and career schools). These alternatives are available to students who choose to attend a school other than their traditional public school. These schools educate approximately 63,000 students or roughly 12% of the 535,025 public school students in the state.

### Charter Schools

A state charter school is a public, nonsectarian, nonprofit school established under a charter that operates independently of any local or regional board of education. Charters are run by governing councils made up of private citizens. No member or employee of a charter school governing council may have a personal or financial interest in the assets, real or personal, of the school. The State Board of Education (SBE) grants charters to state and local charter schools, but local charters are first approved by the local board that hosts the charter school ([CGS § 10-66aa](#)). Connecticut has only one local charter school. Charter schools are given flexibility from certain requirements that other public schools must meet. For example, they are permitted to employ some teachers who are not state-certified ([CGS § 10-66dd](#)).

### Magnet Schools

An interdistrict magnet school is a public school designed to promote racial, ethnic, and economic diversity that draws students from more than one school district; offers a special and high-quality curriculum; and requires students to attend at least half-time. Magnets are operated by school districts, regional education service centers (RESCs), or other entities ([CGS § 10-264\(a\)](#)). The largest number of interdistrict magnet schools are located in the greater Hartford region as part of the state’s response to the *Sheff v. O’Neill* desegregation Supreme Court ruling.

Type of Choice Schools	Number of Schools*	Students Enrolled*
Charter Schools	24	10,187
Magnet Schools	86	39,018
Vo-Ag Centers	19	3,518
Technical High Schools	17	10,729

\* 2017-2018 school year  
Source: State Department of Education

## Vo-Ag Centers

A regional vo-ag center is usually embedded in, or hosted on the campus of, an existing public high school and offers an agricultural science and technology curriculum, which may include vocational aquaculture courses, in addition to the standard high school curriculum. It serves a region of multiple local school districts ([CGS §§ 10-64 to -66](#)). Each center must have a consulting committee that consists of school board members from each of the towns that send students to the center and the committee must assist in evaluating the center ([CGS § 10-64\(a\)](#) and [Conn. Agency Regs. § 10-64-1](#)).

### Where the Money Goes

School Type	Sending Districts (i.e., home districts)	Receiving School of Choice	
	Receives state per pupil Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant?	Receives tuition for students from sending district?	Receives state per student operating grant to the school?
Magnet School	Yes	Yes (in most cases)	Yes
Charter School	No (except for the one local school district charter)	No	Yes
Technical High Schools	No	No	No (system is state funded)
Vo-Ag Centers	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Technical High Schools

A technical high school (formally called a “technical education and career school”) is a state-operated, regional public high school that provides vocational education and hands-on experience in specific career areas in addition to the standard high school curriculum. Each school serves a region of multiple local school districts. The technical high school system is governed by its own statewide board of education ([CGS §§ 10-95 to -99g](#), as amended by [PA 18-182](#), §§ 7-12 & 17-21).

## Why Do We Have So Many Types of Schools?

Each of the four types of schools has a unique history. Each evolved separately. The oldest is the technical high school system that has been state-run and -funded since 1917 when federal legislation required each state to designate a board to oversee its statewide vocational system in order to receive federal funds. The legislature created the vo-ag program as we know it today in 1933 to create the option of vocational-agricultural education on a statewide basis. Interdistrict magnet schools were created in statute in 1993 ([PA 93-263](#), §§ 1, 6 & 8-10) and then expanded when the *Sheff v. O’Neill* desegregation ruling came down in 1996. Charter schools were first authorized in statute in 1996 ([PA 96-214](#)) to encourage innovation in education and provide examples of best practices for the existing school districts.

By state law, every school district must offer at least one technical high school and one vo-ag program as an option to their students. In much of the state, students also have the option of applying for at least one magnet school. Charter schools, which are primarily in the cities, also offer open enrollment to students from districts outside the charter school’s host district.

*As a complement to great traditional public schools, Connecticut’s public schools of choice have a variety of educational programs that offer challenging, relevant, and rigorous curriculum and instruction, as well as creative and flexible environments that value each student’s unique abilities, talents, interests, and learning styles, regardless of racial, ethnic, or economic backgrounds.*

**State Board of Education’s Five-Year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-2021**

**Learn  
More**

“Comparison of Charter, Magnet, Agricultural Science Centers, and Technical High Schools,” OLR Report [2018-R-0030](#)

“Acts Affecting Education,” OLR Report [2018-R-0143](#)

