

Who Chooses Schools and Why?

October 11, 2005 conference
<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ/css>

Discussion Group Notes (compiled by Trinity student researchers at each table):

We encourage individuals and organizations to collaborate with one another in identifying the highest-priority questions and pooling resources to pursue answers. If we can be of assistance in this process, please contact us.

The conference organizers:

Courtney Bell, U Conn (courtney.bell@uconn.edu)

Casey Cobb, U Conn (casey.cobb@uconn.edu)

Jack Dougherty, Trinity (jack.dougherty@trincoll.edu)

Question: What do we still need to know about public and private school choice in Greater Hartford?

Selected questions shared by tables with the larger group during the conference

Table 8: How influential is the theme/name of a magnet or charter school, (and can that theme overcome the initial lack of attractiveness)?

Table 6: How do state/local policies affect school choice?

Table 6: What is the quality of students' experiences in choice programs?

Table 2: How well are receiving choice program suburban students/teachers prepared for students from Hartford? Are schools and communities prepared?

Table 3: What impact are choice programs overall having on the Hartford Public Schools? How would we define "improvement" in HPS?

Table 7: What is the socio-economic level and educational background of parents who choose?

Table 1: Does parental involvement correlate to the success of a child in a new choice school? Is there a significant gap between suburban and urban parent participation in a choice school?

Table 9: Is there a pattern of attrition among students in choice programs, specifically in magnet schools and Capitol Region Choice Program? Does it vary by demographic groups or urban/suburban residence?

Table 4: How does the level of student achievement (both academic and social) in an assigned neighborhood school affect their likelihood to leave and choose a different school?

Table 5: What impact do choice programs have on neighborhood school children who are left behind? Both overall academic achievement and "community"?

Additional questions discussed at individual tables

Table 1:

- a) Why have choice programs surfaced in the first place?
- b) How much choice is happening that doesn't involve magnet schools?
- c) What would happen if school choice was universal (an open choice system)?
Would all of our concerns be resolved?
- d) Is *Sheff v. O'Neill* still a driving factor in choice programs?
- e) Why is the concept of transportation addressed last in the field of school choice?
How important is transportation, in regards to school choice?
- f) Does parental involvement directly correlate to the success of the child at their choice school? Is there a significant gap between suburban and urban parental participation in choice schools?

Table 2:

- a) How well prepared are *students* for choice options?
- b) How well prepared are suburban choice program students/teachers for receiving students from Hartford? Are communities prepared? Should there be host families?
- c) How well do choice programs work? How can we determine this?
- d) Why is it that (it seems) that the North End of Hartford has been more successful in recruiting students into choice programs? What factors go into recruiting students? How are social networks working more effectively in the North End than the South End?
- e) What can neighborhood schools learn from magnet schools? Why are students leaving neighborhood schools? What can neighborhood schools change to retain students?
- f) How can we force the Greater Hartford region, not just the City of Hartford, to focus on public education for Hartford students?

Table 3:

- a) What impact are school choice programs having on the Hartford public schools? Supposedly school choice was developed to improve public schools but is that really happening? How can we define improvement? Academic, college acceptances?
- b) So much effort has been put into implementing *Sheff* – but has the energy expenditure been disproportionate because not enough is being done for the kids left behind in the public schools? Is the answer really to create more choice programs?
- c) What makes some schools work better than other – is the choice to be there making the difference or is there something inherent in that school (culture, ethos) that make it work?
- d) How can we personalize education? (Teaching philosophies, quality of learning environment)
- e) How can we minimize the advantages that students have when they enter kindergarten? (Parents who encourage them to work hard and do their best, which prepares them better for school)

- f) Magnet schools were intended to be temporary, how can we do something more sustainable?

Table 4:

- a) How does an individual student's achievement level affect their likelihood of applying for school choice programs?
- b) Are there social reasons for choice? (Students who thrive in choice schools but not in assigned schools? Social "misfits" in assigned schools?)
- c) Suburban districts have a limited number of choices; if student's assigned school is not ideal they can not choose another intra-district school.
- d) Inner city parents have many push/pull reasons to choose schools. Other than for "theme school" reasons, why are suburban parents sending their children to choice schools?
- e) Are choice school teachers and staff happier? More eager to work? Allowed more creativity? How does this affect student performance? What does this tell us about performance in non-choice public schools?

Table 5:

- a) What causes the gap between those who accept their placement in the magnet schools and those who don't?
- b) For what reasons are people not accepting CEO scholarships?
- c) What causes CEO program attrition?
- d) Enrollment in CEO program goes down in 7th and 8th grades. Why?
- e) What causes a ten-percent attrition in the Capitol Region Choice Program? Where are people going and why?
- f) How many magnet families move specifically to be in another school district? (receives many change of address forms)
- g) Are the families in school choice programs on the way up the economic ladder? Are they progressing out of Hartford to the suburbs?
- h) How many children in these choice programs are actually graduating from 4-year colleges? How do we measure this?
- i) What is the impact of choice programs on neighborhoods?
- j) What is the impact of choice programs on schools from which students are leaving?
- k) Are schools in choice programs playing by the same rules? Are there equal resources, teacher qualifications, building space, etc between them and the neighborhood schools?

Table 6:

- a) What are the costs of programs? (not monetary costs, other costs) Children receive education, but are they happy? Are they becoming victims? (often these are courageous kids; must look at holistic effects; many of these kids go through; resignation, acceptance, and ambivalence of their choice; experiment done by educators).
- b) Are these band-aid attempts at school desegregation, equality? (just for the numbers?)
- c) At half-day magnet schools (such as Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science) Magnet), where are schools social ties? Social costs? Quality of social experience? Do students have time to socialize? Play sports? Make friends?

- Economic as well as racial isolation?
- d) Is there a way for school choice programs or schools that have choice programs to be funded equally with all other schools?
 - e) Are (suburban) superintendents holding students back from participating in interdistrict magnet schools? Is there a brain drain -- or the reverse?
 - f) How do policies and practices at state, local, and school level affect choice? (Since it's not just parents who affect school choice.)
 - g) Does the application process have a role in school choice? (Is there an entrepreneurial aspect? Are schools trying to affect choice, through marketing, community relations, or selling a "good product"?)

Table 7:

- a) Why is there more support for magnets than charters?
- b) How do the different choice options work with and against each other?
- c) What is being done in classrooms that successfully helps to improve education across the socio-economic spectrum?
- d) Why don't suburban schools accept more students (in the Capitol Region Choice Program)?
- e) What is the educational background and socio-economic level of parents who choose?
- f) How does language affect choice?...break down more specifically by race
- g) How does the concentration of wealth or poverty affect school choice?
- h) What types of recruitment are happening in choice programs?
- i) Are parent representatives from choice programs going to traditional public schools?
- j) Compare districts with "open choice" programs to Hartford.
- k) How do we assist parents in filling out choice program applications?
- l) How are students in choice programs treated at their chosen school?
- m) Does school choice actually help provide more access to resources for urban students?
- n) What role do urban parents play in making decisions regarding school choice policy?
- o) How can starting to integrate at a younger level help improve diversity?
- p) Research about the depletion of social capital

Table 8:

- a) What percentage of Hartford students are actually in magnet schools, and choice programs overall?
- b) How do magnet schools attract suburban students to satisfy Sheff?
- c) For choice programs, why not use SES as a deciding factor, rather than racial status?
- d) What happens to the 62% of students who are left out in the dark of the school choice world?
- e) Who is pushing to leave the neighborhood schools?
- f) How important is a school name or theme to attracting students? For example, "University School" filled very quickly, possibly due to its name.
- g) Is there really a choice, or is the lottery structure inherently biased?
- h) How much do problems with transportation affect school choice?
- i) How will Kinsella Elementary (HPS) do now that it has been designated a school

for the arts? Neighborhood being reconstructed -- will location and attractiveness of school be important?

- j) How important is location and attractiveness to drawing students to a school?
- k) Can location overcome a theme?
- l) How important is reputation -- can a school overcome a rough start?
- m) Need for longitudinal studies
- n) What happens to students that are unable to choose? Do they have poor self esteem?
- o) Is uprooting children a major or minor problem?
- p) What about an open lottery system?
- q) Are the students there for the right reasons?
- r) What kind of child adapts to the new schools and who does not adapt?
- s) Do choice schools encourage competition or do they simply take away from neighborhood schools?
- t) Is there an impact/ difference in the expectations of neighborhood and choice schools?
- u) Who participates in school choice programs? Is it just high-scoring students?

Table 9:

- a) Regarding magnet schools, how do we obtain better support from the schools that are sending their students there?
- b) What specifically are parents looking for in magnet schools?
- c) How do students perform academically when they return to the public school? What are the ways to determine this and look at their success rates?
- d) Are HPS teachers judging students, and expecting them to perform better if they are coming from a school choice program (i.e. "You should have done better on that test if you went to Hartford Magnet Middle School last year...")?
- e) What are students' and parents' attitudes towards race? Do they agree that diversity in race provides for a more successful school?
- f) What are the causes and patterns of attrition that are seen in magnet schools and the Capitol Region Choice Program? Is there any difference in: male vs. female? Race? Culture? Are students of color choosing to withdraw more often so they can go to predominantly non-white schools? What features of districts have students wanting to withdraw?
- g) Does providing transportation make a choice program more successful? Parents from the CRCP are very thankful and never complain about the long rides.
- h) Is there a language barrier that will cause choosing a school to be easier or harder? Do certain parents only apply to certain schools because of the language that they speak?
- i) When will open choice come into effect? How could the city run this effectively to make it happen sooner? Money could follow each student to whatever school they go to (therefore equal money at every school)?
- j) What is the effect of the sibling policy on the schools? Does it create a sub-culture? Or, does it send many students to a school that is not right for them?
- k) What are the perceptions of the sending districts (in HPS) of magnet schools? Do they feel that magnet schools are just taking their top students?
- l) How can magnet schools funding issues be dealt with? Are they having the same problems as the usual HPS?