

Canton Public Schools Board of Education

Position Statement

Open Choice Program

June 2011

The Greater Hartford Region Open Choice Program is part of a statewide choice program that offers students the opportunity to attend public schools in suburban towns, and suburban students the opportunity to attend public schools in Hartford at no cost to the student's family. Its purpose is to improve academic achievement; reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; and provide a choice of educational programs for children.

Participation in the Open Choice Program is by choice. As of 2010, approximately 1,300 Greater Hartford Open Choice students attend school in 29 districts in more than 130 schools. The program is open to children in Kindergarten through Grade 12. Hartford resident students may apply to attend public schools in the surrounding suburban participating districts and suburban students may apply to attend a public school in Hartford. Transportation is provided at no cost to families who live in Hartford. Transportation may be provided for suburban students who attend Hartford schools. Children who reside outside of the Greater Hartford area may apply, but may not receive transportation if accepted into the program. Enrollments are offered by school districts on a space-available basis by grade, and a lottery is used to place students into available slots. Families may not pre-select districts. The majority of Open Choice graduates attend post-secondary education programs, including four-year colleges such as Northeastern University, Howard University, the University of Connecticut, Clark University, the University of Hartford, and Johnson & Wales University.

The Greater Hartford Open Choice districts include: Avon, Berlin, Bolton, Bristol, Canton, Cromwell, East Granby, East Windsor, Ellington, Enfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Newington, Plainville, Portland, Region 10 (Burlington, Harwinton), Rocky Hill, Simsbury, Somers, South Windsor, Southington, Suffield, Vernon, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.

The Canton Board of Education enthusiastically participates in the Open Choice program. The Mission of the Canton Public Schools is *to prepare productive, tolerant, and responsible citizens with the character and independence to embrace and contribute to the world*. Our hope is that students graduating from the Canton Public Schools will be prepared to live in a global society demonstrating respect and understanding of diverse cultures. During the 2010-2011 school

year, 53 students participated in this program in Canton. All of the students in our School District benefited from the cultural diversity that students bring with them as students share their diverse perspectives with each other in a variety of ways. Wherever students grow up, they will ultimately have to survive and thrive in a multicultural world made even smaller by instant communication and rapid transportation. Betsy Rogers, 2003 U.S. National Teacher of the Year, declares that an education that helps students understand multiple cultures must become a part of our curriculum K-12. The student who is prepared for the future will need to be grounded in not only the culture of his or her own country but in the histories, cultures, people, and languages of the world. All students, wherever they live, need a more global perspective. The Canton Public Schools is able to work toward these goals by our participation in the Open Choice program.

The Superintendent of Schools offers the number of available seats to the Open Choice office based upon enrollment at each grade level. It is the preference of the District to enroll students as early in the educational process as possible, preferably beginning in Kindergarten. Our District offers *Early Beginnings*, a pilot extended day Kindergarten program for students in the Open Choice program as well as Canton residents chosen by lottery. The overarching goal of this program is to successfully integrate Kindergarten students in Open Choice settings and to improve the academic achievement of our Kindergarten students. Students receive both social and academic instructional support to meet the rigorous goals of the Canton Public Schools and the Connecticut State Department of Education.

The Board of Education is committed to providing support to allow students to participate in all extracurricular activities. It is our goal to have every Open Choice student become partnered with a Canton resident family who can host him/her during transition times between evening events and assist in the transition to a new environment in Canton. Various activities are planned throughout the year to facilitate the bond between students and families. Students have the opportunity to extend their learning by participating in after school tutoring and in extracurricular clubs and activities. Later transportation is provided so that students can take advantage of these opportunities.

It is the hope of the Canton Public Schools Board of Education that our participation in the Open Choice program will continue to grow and expand so that all of our students will continue to achieve academically at high levels and be exposed to diverse cultures preparing them to be respectful, responsible citizens in a global community.