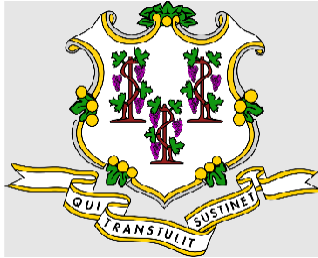


STATE OF CONNECTICUT PROCUREMENT NOTICE



Request for Proposals (RFP) For Review of
The Regional Transportation System Regional School Choice Office (RSCO)
School Choice Programs RFP #850

Issued By:

Connecticut State Department of Education

July 9, 2024

The Request for Proposal is available in electronic format on the State Contracting Portal by filtering by Organization for Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)

<https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTSource/BidBoard> or from the CSDE's Official Contact:

Name: Sandi Casberg
Phone: 860-713-6960
E-Mail: sandi.casberg@ct.gov

The RFP is also available on the CSDE's website at <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/RFP/Request-for-Proposals/2024-RFPs>

Responses must be received no later than

August 30 2024, at 5:00 p.m. EDT

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

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The Connecticut State Department of Education is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

The CSDE reserves the right to reject any and all submissions or cancel this procurement at any time if deemed in the best interest of the State of Connecticut (State).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Section I — GENERAL INFORMATION	3
A. Introduction	3
B. Instructions.....	4
Section II — PURPOSE OF RFP AND SCOPE OF SERVICES	7
A. CSDE Overview.....	7
B. Service Overview	7
C. Scope of Services Description	8
D. Performance Measures.....	13
E. Contract Management/Data Reporting	13
Section III — PROPOSAL SUBMISSION OVERVIEW	14
A. Submission Format Information	14
B. Evaluation of Proposals	15
Section IV — PROPOSAL SUBMISSION OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS	17
A. Cover Sheet	17
B. Table of Contents.....	17
C. Executive Summary	17
D. Main Proposal Submission Questions.....	17
E. Attachments.....	19
F. Declaration of Confidential Information	19
G. Conflict of Interest – Disclosure Statement	20
H. Statement of Assurances	20
Section V — MANDATORY PROVISIONS.....	21
A. Standard Contract Provisions	21
B. Assurances.....	21
C. Terms and Conditions	21
D. Rights Reserved to the State	22
E. Statutory and Regulatory Compliance	23
Section VI — APPENDIX.....	26
A. Abbreviations / Acronyms / Definitions.....	26
B. Statement of Assurances	27
C. Proposal Checklist	28
D. Additional Relevant Forms (if applicable)	29
1 – Attachment A – Cover sheet.....	29
2 – Attachment B – Budget	30
3 – Attachment C – Budget Narrative	31
4 – Attachment D – Transportation Zone Map.....	33
5 – Attachment E – Initial RSCO Transportation Study	34

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

■ A. INTRODUCTION

- 1. RFP Name and Number.** Review of Regional School Transportation System for RSCO School Choice Programs – RFP #850.
- 2. RFP Summary.** The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE or the Agency) is seeking competitive written proposals from qualified transportation vendors or consulting firms with expertise in analyzing regional transportation systems. The selected vendor or consulting firm will evaluate the RSCO School Choice transportation system considering ridership values, efficiencies, cost, and make recommendations for adjustments to the transportation system to encourage student participation in school choice programs while increasing efficiency and minimizing ride times and cost.

Background

The State is party to a Stipulation and Order in the matter *Sheff v. O'Neill*, which was entered by the Court on March 21, 2022, as a Comprehensive School Choice Plan (CCP). The Connecticut Supreme Court decided the case on July 9, 1996, and held that the Hartford students of color attended Hartford neighborhood schools that were racially, ethnically, and economically isolated in violation of the Connecticut Constitution. The Court assigned responsibility to the Executive and Legislative branches to implement measures to remedy the violation. The Plaintiffs and State Defendants have entered into a series of court ordered stipulations to address the goals of the litigation and reduce the isolation of Hartford students of color by creating opportunity to attend desegregated schools. The CCP is the most recent court ordered stipulation and reflects the final resolution in the *Sheff v. O'Neill* case.

The key commitment in the CCP includes meeting the Demand of Hartford-resident students of color for placement in a reduced-isolation educational setting. The CCP identifies the following Voluntary Interdistrict Programs as the primary means to meeting Demand: the Open Choice program, which allows students to transfer between Hartford and the suburban school districts when such transfers contribute to the reduction of racial and ethnic isolation; Interdistrict Magnet Schools which presently include Hartford and suburban host magnet schools and regional magnet schools; charter schools; Hartford Region Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) high schools; and Hartford Region Agricultural Science and Technology Education (ASTE) Schools. These Voluntary Interdistrict Programs are the instruments employed under the CCP to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation and, given the interdistrict structure of these programs, require a regional transportation system that encourages and supports the participation of Hartford and suburban students throughout the Greater Hartford Region, while increasing efficiency, and minimizing ride times for all students.

Initially, 22 towns located within Hartford County were identified as the “Sheff Towns” for purposes of two-way participation in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs. However, subsequent stipulations expanded the reach of participation to 43 towns to include non-Hartford students from other towns within the Greater Hartford Region. In addition, a small fraction of students currently enrolled in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs reside in other counties, such as Middlesex and Windham Counties.

The CSDE currently contracts with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) to administer the regional school transportation system. CREC, in turn, manages contracts with three vendors to provide the necessary transportation services and manages 800 bus routes to transport 14,000 students to 188 schools in 43 school districts across 1,100 square miles.

In addition to the obvious challenges from the extensive geographic area involved in the transportation system, bell times, ride time, transportation reliability, safety and limited access to walkable bus stops impact acceptance rates and student retention in school choice.

Given the known transportation-related challenges within the Sheff system, the CCP requires the State to contract for completion of two transportation studies - an initial study to analyze the impact of transportation services on family decision-making about school choice and a second study to reassess transportation and fiscal efficiencies considering the recommendations and conclusions from the first study. The first study was completed in December of 2023 and a report was issued to the CSDE on December 30, 2023. This RFP for a second study is intended to procure a qualified transportation vendor or a consulting firm to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the school choice transportation system and make recommendations for transportation and fiscal efficiencies while ensuring transportation practices and policies do not inadvertently create disincentives for participation in choice programs based on the findings from the first study.

- 3. RFP Purpose.** The intent of this RFP is to retain a qualified transportation vendor or a consulting firm with expertise in analyzing regional school transportation systems to evaluate and make recommendations on the RSCO School Choice transportation system considering ridership values, efficiencies, and cost, with the goal of supporting student participation in school choice while increasing efficiencies and minimizing cost and ride times.
- 4. Commodity Codes.** The services that the CSDE wishes to procure through this RFP are as follows:
 - 91000000: Personal Service

■ B. INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Official Contact.** The CSDE has designated the individual below as the Official Contact for purposes of this RFP. The Official Contact is the **only authorized contact** for this procurement and, as such, handles all related communications on behalf of the CSDE. Proposers, prospective proposers, and other interested parties are advised that any communication with any other CSDE employee(s) (including appointed officials) or personnel under contract to the CSDE about this RFP is strictly prohibited. Proposers or prospective proposers who violate this instruction may risk disqualification from further consideration.

Name: Sandi Casberg
Phone: 860-713-6960
E-Mail: Sandi.Casberg@ct.gov

Please ensure that e-mail screening software (if used) recognizes and accepts e-mails from the Official Contact.

- 2. Registering with State Contracting Portal.** Respondents must register with the State of CT contracting portal at <https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTSource/Registration> if not already registered. Respondents shall submit the following information pertaining to this application to this portal (on their supplier profile), which will be checked by the CSDE Contact.
 - Secretary of State recognition – Click on appropriate response
 - Non-profit status, if applicable
 - Notification to Bidders, Parts I-V
 - Campaign Contribution Certification (OPM Ethics Form 1): <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Fin-PSA/Forms/Ethics-Forms>

3. RFP Information. The RFP, amendments to the RFP, and other information associated with this procurement are available in electronic format from the Official Contact or from the Internet at the following locations:

- CSDE’s RFP Web Page
[Department of Education - RFPs](#)
- State Contracting Portal (go to CTsource bid board, filter by “Education, Department of”)
<https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTSource/BidBoard>

It is strongly recommended that any proposer or prospective proposer interested in this procurement check the Bid Board for any solicitation changes. Interested proposers may receive additional e-mails from CTsource announcing addendums that are posted on the portal. This service is provided as a courtesy to assist in monitoring activities associated with State procurements, including this RFP.

4. Procurement Schedule. See below. Dates after the due date for proposals (“Proposals Due”) are non-binding target dates only (*). The CSDE may amend the schedule as needed. Any change to non-target dates will be made by means of an amendment to this RFP and will be posted on the State Contracting Portal and, if available, the CSDE’s RFP Web Page.

- RFP Released: July 15, 2024
- RFP Conference: Not Applicable
- Letter of Intent: August 2, 2024
- Deadline for Questions: August 16, 2024
- Answers Released: August 19, 2024
- Proposals Due: August 30, 2024
- (*) Proposer Selection: September 20, 2024
- (*) Start of Contract: October 15, 2024

5. Contract Awards. The award of any contract pursuant to this RFP is dependent upon the availability of funding to the CSDE. The CSDE anticipates the following:

- Total Funding Available: Up to \$300,000
- Number of Awards: 1
- Contract Term: October 15, 2024, to April 30, 2025

6. Minimum Qualifications of Proposers. To qualify for a contract award, a proposer must have the following minimum qualifications:

- **Transportation Knowledge:** The consulting firm or qualified transportation vendor should have a demonstrated track record and expertise in transportation systems, preferably with experience in educational transportation.
- **Comprehensive Evaluation Experience:** Previous experience in conducting comprehensive evaluations of transportation systems, preferably in the context of school choice programs.
- **Project Management Skills:** Effective project management capabilities to ensure the evaluation is conducted efficiently, within established timelines, and meets the specified objectives.
- **Educational Understanding:** Familiarity with the unique challenges and requirements of school transportation, including knowledge of school schedules, afterschool programming, and tiered bus routes; as well as awareness of and adherence to relevant regulations and policies governing school transportation systems, ensuring that recommendations align with legal requirements.

- **Best Practices Knowledge:**
 - Knowledge of industry best practices in school transportation to provide recommendations aligned with proven strategies for efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
 - The ability to think creatively and propose innovative solutions to address challenges and improve overall transportation efficiency.
- **Financial Analysis Expertise:** Expertise in financial analysis and budgeting to assess costs, identify areas for improvement, and recommend strategies for cost containment.

7. Letter of Intent. A Letter of Intent (LOI) is required by this RFP. The LOI is non-binding and does not obligate the sender to submit a proposal. The LOI must be submitted to the Official Contact by e-mail by the deadline established in the Procurement Schedule. The LOI must clearly identify the sender, including name, postal address, telephone number, and e-mail address. It is the sender’s responsibility to confirm the CSDE’s receipt of the LOI. Failure to submit the required LOI in accordance with the requirements set forth herein shall result in disqualification from further consideration.

8. Inquiry Procedures. All questions regarding this RFP or the CSDE’s procurement process must be directed, in writing, via e-mail to the Official Contact before the deadline specified in the Procurement Schedule. The early submission of questions is encouraged. Questions will not be accepted or answered verbally – neither in person nor over the telephone. All questions received before the deadline(s) will be answered. However, the CSDE will not answer questions when the source is unknown (i.e., nuisance or anonymous questions). Questions deemed unrelated to the RFP or the procurement process will not be answered. At its discretion, the CSDE may or may not respond to questions received after the deadline. The CSDE may combine similar questions and give only one answer. All questions and answers will be compiled into a written amendment to this RFP. If any answer to any question constitutes a material change to the RFP, the question and answer will be placed at the beginning of the amendment and duly noted as such.

The CSDE will release the answers to questions on the date established in the Procurement Schedule. The CSDE will publish any and all amendments to this RFP on the State Contracting Portal and on the CSDE’s RFP webpage. At its discretion, the CSDE may distribute any amendments to this RFP to prospective proposers who submitted a Letter of Intent.

9. RFP Conference. An RFP conference will not be held.

10. Proposal Due Date and Time. The Official Contact is the **only authorized recipient** of proposals submitted in response to this RFP. Proposals must be received by the Official Contact on or before the due date and time: **August 30, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. EDT.**

Proposals received after the due date and time will be ineligible and will not be evaluated. The CSDE will send an official letter alerting late respondents of ineligibility.

An acceptable submission must include the following:

- One (1) conforming electronic copy of the original proposal.
The proposal must be complete, properly formatted and outlined, and ready for evaluation by the Screening Committee.
The electronic copy of the proposal must be e-mailed to the official Agency Contact for this procurement. The subject line of the e-mail must read: Review of Regional School Transportation System for RSCO School Choice Programs. Required forms and

appendices may be scanned and submitted as PDFs at the end of the main proposal document. Please ensure the entire e-mail submission is less than 25MB as this reflects the Agency's server limitations. Respondents should work to ensure there are no additional IT limitations from the provider side.

11. Multiple Proposals. The submission of multiple proposals is not an option for this procurement.

12. No Promotion: The proposer selected to perform the services which are the subject of this request for proposals shall be prohibited from promoting its own products or services in any reports or recommendations prepared as a part of its services.

II. PURPOSE OF RFP AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

■ A. CSDE OVERVIEW

The CSDE is the administrative arm of the Connecticut State Board of Education. Through leadership, curriculum, research, planning, evaluation, assessment, data analysis and other assistance, the Department helps to ensure equal opportunity and excellence in education for all Connecticut students. The Department is responsible for distributing funds to all Connecticut public school districts and operates the RSCO that administers the application and placement systems for interdistrict choice schools within the Greater Hartford Region in accordance with the 2022 CCP in the *Sheff v. O'Neill* case.

Mission: CSDE's mission is to provide - through leadership and service - insight, expertise, training, encouragement, and resources to assist those in the education and related communities to succeed in helping all Connecticut students become effective lifelong learners, able to reach their personal and career goals and become involved, productive, confident, and satisfied members of society.

■ B. SERVICE OVERVIEW

- CSDE is seeking a consulting firm or qualified transportation vendor to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current regional school choice transportation system.
- The Voluntary Interdistrict Programs in the *Sheff* Region (collectively referred to as, "*Sheff* Voluntary Interdistrict Programs") include (1) Open Choice, a program that allows Hartford students to attend public schools in nearby suburban towns and suburban students to attend public schools in Hartford, (2) 43 Interdistrict Magnet Schools in Hartford and neighboring suburban communities, including Avon, Bloomfield, East Hartford, Enfield, Glastonbury, Manchester, New Britain, Rocky Hill, South Windsor, West Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor, and (3) 3 Hartford Region CTECS Schools (AI Prince Technical High School in Hartford, EC Goodwin Technical High School in New Britain, and Howell Cheney Technical High School in Manchester), and (4) 3 Regional Agricultural Science Centers (DF Harris Sr. Agriscience Center at Bloomfield High School in Bloomfield, Glastonbury Regional Agriscience and Technology Center in Glastonbury, and Suffield Regional Agriscience Center in Suffield) which are a part of this voluntary effort. Currently, more than 20,000 Hartford and suburban students across more than 50 towns in the Hartford region participate in these programs. Two of the magnet schools within the system operate on a half-day schedule: 1) The Greater Academy of the Arts Half Day Magnet School in Hartford; and 2) The Early College Advanced Manufacturing Pathway at Goodwin University offers a half-day morning and a half-day afternoon program.
- Free bus transportation is provided to most participating Hartford (including prekindergarten students) and suburban (kindergarten through grade 12) students within the

transportation zone at an annual cost to the state of more than \$70 million. A copy of the RSCO Transportation Zone is attached as **Attachment D**. Less than one percent of participating students are issued Connecticut Transit System Metro bus passes and a small percentage are transported by parents (including suburban resident prekindergarten students) who are compensated at the end of the school year at a rate of \$5 per school day for transporting their students to and from school upon submission of an application and proof of certain eligibility requirements. The majority of students transported to the various Voluntary Interdistrict Programs are transported using school buses or livery vehicles through contracted services.

Both Hartford Public Schools (HPS) and the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) have contracts with a number of vendors to provide transportation services to students participating in choice programs. HPS provides transportation services for Hartford-resident students attending magnet schools in the City of Hartford, while CREC provides transportation services throughout the Greater Hartford Region as indicated in this RFP pursuant to the contract with the CSDE. These transportation services are supported by multi-year contracts.

- CSDE seeks a consulting firm or qualified transportation vendor that is knowledgeable about urban and suburban interdistrict school transportation systems, to analyze the current transportation practices in the *Sheff* Region, has the expertise to provide recommendations to maximize transportation efficiencies and reduce costs while ensuring continued participation in choice programming.

■ C. SCOPE OF SERVICE DESCRIPTION

1. Perform a comprehensive examination of the current regional school choice transportation system to identify strengths and weaknesses, and areas of improvement, modification, or elimination. The examination should include:
 - a review of current transportation practices and policies;
 - an analysis of historical and current data from the CSDE and CREC, as the transportation administrator;
 - an analysis of current transportation costs and spending for transportation administration and busing services;
 - expansion forecasting for projected enrollment;
 - an examination of tiered bus routes, school schedules (to include bell time alignments), transportation zone size and scope, ridership numbers and trends, and programmatic requirements;
 - an analysis of traffic conditions and patterns, including the examination of traffic volume and congestion. Evaluate the impact of these factors on ride times and bus stop times to identify correlations and trends;
 - a comprehensive assessment of the student transportation system in the Greater Hartford region of Connecticut to gauge its capacity effectively. Specifically, investigate the availability of bus vendors and drivers;
 - an analysis of afterschool programming, current late bus capacity and usage, transportation costs for afterschool/weekend transportation services to support athletics and extracurricular programming, extracurricular expansion plans, and associated routing requirements; and
 - an assessment of current and historical transportation complaint logs, and student attrition from school choice programs.
2. Recommend improvements to the regional school choice transportation system that will support student enrollment in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs in the *Sheff* Region. Recommendations should be documented in a comprehensive, data-driven report and should:
 - identify industry best practices and relate such practices to adjustments to the transportation design;
 - seek to enhance transportation services, maximize operational efficiencies, and optimize

cost savings, while supporting participation in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs as informed by the findings from the first transportation study;

- address family decision-making in choosing to apply to and attend a Voluntary Interdistrict Program;
- address student attrition from unreliable and/or challenging transportation services;
- include strategies to shorten ride times for all students and provide opportunities for neighborhood stops as a regular option for families within the transportation zone,
- propose modifications to the size and orientation of the transportation zone;
- detail options to support late buses and transportation services for student participation in afterschool programming and extracurricular activities; and
- identify strategic linking of geographic areas with specific voluntary interdistrict schools as a means of increasing transportation efficiencies. Alternatives to school bus transportation may be sought and recommended as appropriate.

3. Develop a written plan based on the comprehensive evaluation of the current transportation system and recommended strategies for improvements to the regional school choice transportation system. The proposed plan must include enhanced transportation services based on best practices, resources needed, and maximizing operational efficiencies, optimized cost savings, and an analysis of the potential impact on school schedules.
4. The work plan developed in response to this RFP must address the scope of services in this section and incorporate the tasks listed in the table below, including a description of how each task will be delivered. Each task should consider the unique characteristics of the Voluntary Interdistrict Program options available to students in the Greater Hartford Region.

Tasks	Deliverables
Review current transportation practices and policies.	A detailed report summarizing the current transportation practices and policies, providing insights into their effectiveness and recommended areas of improvement.
Analyze historical and current data from the CSDE and CREC, as the transportation administrator.	Detailed analysis report presenting insights derived from historical and current data obtained from the CSDE and CREC.
Analyze current transportation costs and spending for transportation administration and busing services.	Cost analysis report providing an overview of current transportation costs and spending, including detailed breakdowns for transportation administration and busing services.
Perform expansion forecasting for future projected enrollment.	Expansion forecasting report outlining projected enrollment figures and associated implications for the transportation system.
Examine tiered bus routes, school schedules (to include bell time alignments), Transportation Zone size and scope, ridership numbers and trends, and programmatic requirements.	Detailed report analyzing tiered bus routes, school schedules, Transportation Zone characteristics, ridership statistics, and programmatic requirements.
Conduct an analysis of traffic conditions and patterns, including the examination of traffic volume and congestion. Evaluate the impact of these factors on ride times and bus stop times to identify correlations and trends.	Report summarizing the analysis of traffic conditions and patterns, encompassing assessments of traffic volume and congestion. Include findings on the impact of these factors on ride times and bus stop times, highlighting correlations and trends observed.

Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the student transportation system in the Greater Hartford region of Connecticut to gauge its capacity effectively. Specifically, investigate the availability of bus vendors and drivers.	A detailed report presenting the outcomes of the comprehensive assessment of the student transportation system in the Greater Hartford region of Connecticut. Include an evaluation of the system's capacity, focusing particularly on the availability of bus vendors and drivers.
Analyze afterschool programming, current late bus capacity and usage, transportation costs for afterschool/weekend transportation services to support athletics and extracurricular programming, extracurricular expansion plans, and associated routing requirements.	Analysis report providing insights into afterschool programming, late bus capacity and usage, transportation costs for extracurricular activities, and associated routing requirements.
Assess current and historical transportation complaint logs, and student attrition from school choice programs.	Assessment report evaluating current and historical transportation complaint logs, as well as student attrition data from school choice programs.
Identify industry best practices and relate such practices to adjustments to the transportation design.	A detailed report outlining industry best practices in student transportation to include recommendations for adjustments to the transportation design to optimize safety, efficiency, and effectiveness.
Seek to enhance transportation services, maximize operational efficiencies, and optimize costs, while supporting participation in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs as informed by the findings from the first transportation study.	A detailed report including targeted strategies to enhance the quality and accessibility of transportation services, streamlining operational processes to improve efficiency and identify opportunities for cost optimization. Recommendation will focus on supporting and facilitating participation in Voluntary Interdistrict Programs leveraging insights from the initial transportation study.
Address family decision-making in choosing to apply to and attend a Voluntary Interdistrict Program.	An analysis report examining factors influencing family decisions to apply to and attend Voluntary Interdistrict Programs, with recommendations for addressing these factors.
Address student attrition from unreliable and/or challenging transportation services.	Report providing solutions to mitigate student attrition resulting from unreliable or challenging transportation services.
Include strategies to shorten ride times for all students, and provide opportunities for neighborhood stops as a regular option for families within the RSCO Transportation Zone.	Report outlining strategies to shorten ride times for students and implement neighborhood stops within the RSCO Transportation Zone.
Propose modifications to the size and orientation of the RSCO Transportation Zone.	Report providing recommendations of proposed adjustments to the size and orientation of the transportation zone, with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of the transportation system within the RSCO Transportation Zone.
Detail options to support late buses and transportation services for student participation in afterschool programming and extracurricular activities.	A report detailing available options to support student participation in afterschool programming and extracurricular programming through late bus and/or other afterschool transportation options.

<p>Identify strategic linking of geographic areas with specific voluntary interdistrict schools as a means of increasing transportation efficiencies. Alternatives to school bus transportation may be sought and recommended as appropriate.</p>	<p>A report including strategic suggestions for establishing geographic linkages between areas and voluntary interdistrict schools, with the objective of streamlining transportation operations and reducing travel time. The report must include consideration of alternative transportation options where feasible and appropriate, providing comprehensive recommendations for enhancing efficiency across the transportation network.</p>
<p>Submit a final report summarizing key findings, recommendations, and implementation plan from the evaluation of the regional school choice transportation system.</p>	<p>Final report providing cohesive overview of the entire process and proposed improvements.</p>

1. Organizational Expectations

The successful proposer will have:

- substantial knowledge and experience with pupil transportation, the Greater Hartford Region, and the system of school choice offerings coordinated through RSCO;
- clearly defined project objectives, outlining the specific goals and outcomes the proposer aims to achieve through the evaluation;
- a well-defined evaluation plan that outlines the tasks, activities, and timelines of the evaluation process;
- clearly established timelines and milestones for key phases of the evaluation, ensuring that the project progresses on schedule and meets specified deadlines;
- sufficient personnel, technology, and financial resources, to facilitate a thorough and comprehensive evaluation;
- active collaboration with the SDE to align the evaluation with the unique needs, goals, and priorities of the school choice transportation system; and
- commitment to cultural sensitivity and awareness, recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of the communities involved in the school choice transportation system.

2. Service Expectations

The successful proposer will:

- collaborate with RSCO to ensure alignment with the contract requirements, gather relevant data, understand specific needs and objectives, and incorporate feedback throughout the process;
- conduct meetings with stakeholders to address their concerns, gather input, discuss findings, and ensure that the study outcomes align with the needs and priorities of all involved parties;
- conduct a comprehensive assessment of current transportation practices and policies, analyzing their effectiveness, and providing recommendations for improvement. Deliverables include a detailed report summarizing findings and recommendations;
- analyze historical and current data from CSDE and CREC and provide a detailed analysis report presenting insights derived from the data and perform expansion forecasting for future projected enrollment trends. Deliverables include detailed analysis reports and expansion forecasting reports outlining implications for the transportation system;
- analyze current transportation costs and spending, identifying areas for optimization, and provide recommendations for cost-effective solutions;
- analyze bus routes, school schedules, Transportation Zone characteristics, and ridership trends, alternative transportation solutions to optimize routing and

scheduling. Deliverables include a detailed report with recommendations for efficiency and effectiveness;

- analyze Connecticut’s street traffic and interstate highway patterns in the Greater Hartford Region and determine its impact on bus transportation routes and ride times;
- analyze and determine if CT has enough bus transportation companies to support an expansion of the current transportation system;
- develop targeted strategies, recommendations and implementation plans to support participation in voluntary interdistrict programming taking into consideration family decision-making factors as well as identifying strategic linkages between geographic areas and interdistrict schools;
- evaluate the afterschool programming late bus capacity, transportation costs for extracurricular activities, and associated routing requirements. Deliverables include an analysis report with insights and recommendations for enhancing transportation services to support extracurricular activities; and
- provide a comprehensive final report that includes a cohesive overview of the current school choice transportation system including proposed improvements by summarizing key findings, recommendations, and recommending an implementation plan based on the evaluation of the regional school choice transportation system.

3. Staffing Expectations

The successful proposer will have:

- staffing with substantial knowledge and experience with pupil transportation, transportation routing, the Greater Hartford Region, and the system of school choice offerings coordinated through RSCO;
- a clear staffing model with defined roles, responsibilities, and expertise for the evaluation of the regional transportation system as required by the scope of work, including data analysts, transportation specialists, project managers, and other relevant positions; and
- clearly defined lines of supervision and management, indicating who will oversee the evaluation process, coordinate team efforts, and ensure that project objectives are met. Provide resumes of key personnel.

4. Data and Technology Expectations

Computer Hardware/Software:

The successful proposer will:

- ensure access to sufficient and up-to-date computer hardware, including servers/workstations capable of handling large volumes of data;
- utilize advanced data analysis software, database management systems, and geographic information system (GIS) software to process, analyze and visualize transportation system data efficiently;
- utilize geocoding software to evaluate transportation routes and zones; and
- access advanced software for complex visualizations to present work plans, data analyses, transportation routes and zone modifications, and evaluation recommendations.

5. Financial Expectations

Provide any documentation that supports the organization’s past, present and future financial stability. This may include any financial support up to and including audited financial statements.

6. Budget Expectations

The budget for this project is up to \$300,000. The successful bidder must provide a detailed budget narrative and itemized detailed budget of costs associated with the requested services.

■ D. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The following performance metrics highlight key priorities that will be analyzed with providers/vendors collaboratively during the life of the contract. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather an indication of significant performance metrics of interest to the CSDE. The CSDE looks forward to working with providers/vendors to define additional important performance metrics.

- **Timeliness:** Follow the established timelines for completing each task and associated deliverables as agreed upon by RSCO and the contractor.
- **Accuracy of Data Analysis:** Ensure accuracy and reliability of data analysis to generate meaningful insights and recommendations.
- **Comprehensiveness of Reports:** Ensure that reports are covering all relevant aspects of the assigned tasks outlined in Section C of this RFP that provide a holistic understanding of the school choice transportation system's strengths, challenges, and strategies for improvement.
- **Quality of Recommendations:** Ensure that recommendations are well-founded, practical, and tailored to address the specific challenges and opportunities identified in the analysis.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Ensure effective stakeholder engagement throughout the transportation study process soliciting input, addressing challenges, and ensuring alignment to priorities.
- **Adherence to Industry Best Practices:** Ensure that industry best practices in student transportation are followed and that recommended adjustments to the school choice transportation system design align with safety, efficiency, and effectiveness standards.

■ E. CONTRACT MANAGEMENT/DATA REPORTING

As part of the State's commitment to becoming more outcomes-oriented, the SDE seeks to actively and regularly collaborate with providers/vendors to enhance contract management, improve results, and adjust service delivery and policy based on learning what works. Reliable and relevant data is necessary to ensure compliance, inform trends to be monitored, evaluate results and performance, and drive service improvements. As such, CSDE reserves the right to request/collect other key data and metrics from providers/vendors.

- The Regional School Choice Office will collaborate with the successful proposer regarding the evaluation of current transportation services and such collaborations may include periodic meetings to troubleshoot challenges, review data to identify opportunities for improvements to services and to ensure desired outcomes.
- The successful proposer will provide timely reports to CSDE that communicate key metrics regarding transportation services, including at a minimum:
 1. Two interim reports to be submitted at an agreed upon time to include an outline of tasks, timelines, progress of data collection and updates on the analysis of transportation related data, and highlighting findings and providing any preliminary conclusions.
 2. Conduct a final evaluation to assess the impact of implemented improvements and identify any outstanding issues.
 3. Submit and present a comprehensive final report summarizing key findings, recommendations, and an implementation plan from the evaluation of the regional school choice transportation system to the CSDE, providing a cohesive overview of the entire process and proposed improvements and challenges.
- Reports should include data visualization charts and graphs to illustrate trends and patterns.

III. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION OVERVIEW

A. SUBMISSION FORMAT INFORMATION

- 1. Required Outline.** All proposals must follow the required outline presented in Section IV – Proposal Outline. Proposals that fail to follow the required outline will be deemed non-responsive and not evaluated.
- 2. Cover Sheet.** The Cover Sheet is Page 1 of the proposal. Proposers must complete and use the Cover Sheet form provided by the CSDE in Attachment A.
- 3. Table of Contents.** All proposals must include a Table of Contents that conforms with the required proposal outline.
- 4. Executive Summary.** Proposals must include a high-level summary, not exceeding 2 pages of the main proposal and cost proposal. The summary must also include the organization’s eligibility and qualifications to respond to this RFP.
- 5. Attachments.** Attachments other than the required Appendices and Forms identified in the RFP are not permitted and will not be evaluated. Further, the required Appendices or Forms must not be altered or used to extend, enhance, or replace any component required by this RFP. Failure to abide by these instructions will result in disqualification.
- 6. Style Requirements.** THIS IS AN ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION.

Submitted proposals must conform to the following specifications:

- Paper Size: 8.5”x11” format
 - Page Limit: None specified; however, the Executive Summary is limited to 2 pages and the main proposal is limited to 20 pages. Additional attachments are permitted, but total submission shall not exceed 25MB.
 - Font Size: 11 point minimum
 - Font Type: Arial, Tahoma or Verdana
 - Margins: 1”
 - Line Spacing: 1.5 Spacing
- 7. Pagination.** The proposer’s name must be displayed in the header of each page. All pages, including the required Appendices and Forms, must be numbered in the footer.
 - 8. Packaging and Labeling Requirements.** N/A
 - 9. Declaration of Confidential Information.** Proposers are advised that all materials associated with this procurement are subject to the terms of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the Privacy Act, and all rules, regulations and interpretations resulting from them. If a proposer deems that certain information required by this RFP is confidential, the proposer must label such information as CONFIDENTIAL prior to submission. The proposer must reference where the information labeled CONFIDENTIAL is located in the proposal. *EXAMPLE: Section G.1.a.* For each subsection so referenced, the proposer must provide a convincing explanation and rationale sufficient to justify an exemption of the information from release under the FOIA. The explanation and rationale must be stated in terms of (a) the prospective harm to the competitive position of the proposer that would result if the identified information were to be released and (b) the reasons why the information is legally exempt from release pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) § 1-210(b).

10. Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement. Proposers must include a disclosure statement concerning any current business relationships (within the last three (3) years) that pose a conflict of interest, as defined by C.G.S. § 1-85. A conflict of interest exists when a relationship exists between the proposer and a public official (including an elected official) or State employee that may interfere with fair competition or may be adverse to the interests of the State. The existence of a conflict of interest is not, in and of itself, evidence of wrongdoing. A conflict of interest may, however, become a legal matter if a proposer tries to influence, or succeeds in influencing, the outcome of an official decision for their personal or corporate benefit. The CSDE will determine whether any disclosed conflict of interest poses a substantial advantage to the proposer over the competition, decreases the overall competitiveness of this procurement, or is not in the best interests of the State. In the absence of any conflict of interest, a proposer must affirm such in the disclosure statement. *Example: "[name of proposer] has no current business relationship (within the last three (3) years) that poses a conflict of interest, as defined by C.G.S. § 1-85."*

■ B. EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

- 1. Evaluation Process.** It is the intent of the CSDE to conduct a comprehensive, fair, and impartial evaluation of proposals received in response to this RFP. When evaluating proposals, negotiating with successful proposers, and awarding contracts, the CSDE will conform with its written procedures for POS and PSA procurements (pursuant to C.G.S. § 4-217) and the State's Code of Ethics (pursuant to C.G.S. §§ 1-84 and 1-85). Final funding allocation decisions will be determined during contract negotiation.
- 2. Evaluation Review Committee.** The CSDE will designate a Review Committee to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this RFP. The Review Committee will be composed of individuals, CSDE staff or other designees as deemed appropriate. The contents of all submitted proposals, including any confidential information, will be shared with the Review Committee. Only proposals found to be responsive (that is, complying with all instructions and requirements described herein) will be reviewed, rated, and scored. Proposals that fail to comply with all instructions will be rejected without further consideration. The Review Committee shall evaluate all proposals that meet the Minimum Submission Requirements by scoring and rank ordering the proposals and make recommendations for awards. The Commissioner of Education will make the final selection. Attempts by any proposer (or representative of any proposer) to contact or influence any member of the Review Committee may result in disqualification of the proposer.
- 3. Minimum Submission Requirements.** To be eligible for evaluation, proposals must (1) be received on or before the due date and time; (2) meet the Proposal Format requirements; (3) meet the Eligibility and Qualification requirements to respond to the procurement, (4) follow the required Proposal Outline; and (5) be complete. Proposals that fail to follow instructions or satisfy these minimum submission requirements will not be reviewed further. The CSDE will reject any proposal that deviates significantly from the requirements of this RFP.
- 4. Evaluation Criteria (and Weights).** Proposals meeting the Minimum Submission Requirements will be evaluated according to the established criteria. The criteria are the objective standards that the Review Committee will use to evaluate the technical merits of the proposals. Only the criteria listed below will be used to evaluate proposals. The weights are disclosed below.
 - Organizational Profile (15%)
 - Scope of Services (30%)
 - Staffing/Organizational Capacity (15%)
 - Data and Technology (10%)
 - Work Plan (20%)
 - Budget and Budget Narrative (10%)

Note: As part of its evaluation of the Staffing Plan, the Review Committee will review the proposer's demonstrated commitment to affirmative action, as required by the Regulations of CT State Agencies § 46A-68j-30(10).

- 5. Proposer Selection.** Upon completing its evaluation of proposals, the Review Committee will submit the rankings of all proposals to the Commissioner or Agency Head. The final selection of a successful proposer is at the discretion of the Commissioner or Agency Head. Any proposer selected will be so notified and awarded an opportunity to negotiate a contract with the CSDE. Such negotiations may, but will not automatically, result in a contract. Any resulting contract will be posted on the State Contracting Portal. All unsuccessful proposers will be notified by e-mail or U.S. mail, at the CSDE's discretion, about the outcome of the evaluation and proposer selection process. The CSDE reserves the right to decline to award contracts for activities in which the Commissioner or Agency Head considers there are not adequate respondents.
- 6. Debriefing.** Within ten (10) days of receiving notification from the CSDE, unsuccessful proposers may contact the Official Contact and request information about the evaluation and proposer selection process. The e-mail sent date or the postmark date on the notification envelope will be considered "day one" of the ten (10) days. If unsuccessful proposers still have questions after receiving this information, they may contact the Official Contact and request a meeting with the CSDE to discuss the evaluation process and their proposals. If held, the debriefing meeting will not include any comparisons of unsuccessful proposals with other proposals. The CSDE may schedule and hold the debriefing meeting within fifteen (15) days of the request. The CSDE will not change, alter, or modify the outcome of the evaluation or selection process as a result of any debriefing meeting.
- 7. Appeal Process.** Proposers may appeal any aspect the CSDE's competitive procurement, including the evaluation and proposer selection process. Any such appeal must be submitted to the CSDE head. A proposer may file an appeal at any time after the proposal due date, but not later than thirty (30) days after an agency notifies unsuccessful proposers about the outcome of the evaluation and proposer selection process. The e-mail sent date or the postmark date on the notification envelope will be considered "day one" of the thirty (30) days. The filing of an appeal shall not be deemed sufficient reason for the CSDE to delay, suspend, cancel, or terminate the procurement process or execution of a contract. More detailed information about filing an appeal may be obtained from the Official Contact.
- 8. Contract Execution.** Any contract developed and executed as a result of this RFP is subject to the CSDE's contracting procedures, which may include approval by the Office of the Attorney General. Fully executed and approved contracts will be posted on State of Connecticut Contracting Portal and the CSDE website.

IV. REQUIRED PROPOSAL SUBMISSION OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

- A. Cover Sheet**
 - B. Table of Contents**
 - C. Executive Summary**
 - D. Main Proposal**
 - E. Attachments**
 - F. Declaration of Confidential Information**
 - G. Conflict of Interest - Disclosure Statement**
 - H. Statement of Assurances**
-

A: Cover Sheet

The Respondent must use a Cover Sheet provided in Appendix D: Additional Relevant Forms

Legal Name is defined as the name of provider, vendor, CT State agency, or municipality submitting the proposal. *Contact Person* is defined as the individual who can provide additional information about the proposal or who has immediate responsibility for the proposal. *Authorized Official* is defined as the individual empowered to submit a binding offer on behalf of the proposer to provide services in accordance with the terms and provisions described in this RFP and any amendments or attachments hereto.

B: Table of Contents

Respondents must include a Table of Contents that lists sections and subsections with page numbers that follow the organization outline and sequence for this proposal.

C: Proposer Executive Summary

The page limitation for this section is 2 pages briefly describing how the Respondent meets the eligibility and qualification criteria outlined in the Proposal Overview and a brief overview of why the Respondent should be selected for the activities highlighted in the scope of services.

D: Main Proposal Submission Requirements To Submit a Responsive Proposal:

*****Please note the maximum total page length for this section is 20** (all appendices and other attachments should be referred to in section D and then placed in section E.) The Agency Review Committee will not read proposals longer than 20 pages in this section.

Strengths and Qualifications of Agency & Staff

Organization Description and History: Provide a general overview of your organization including its history and prior experiences engaging with relevant key stakeholders.

- A. Overall Qualifications: Provide a general overview of your organization. What sets your organization apart from your competitors? Why is your organization uniquely qualified to conduct this scope of service?
- B. Experience: Describe the extent of your organization's experience conducting similar services for a public organization. How does that experience relate to the services sought in this proposal?
- C. Management Plan: Describe how management will provide high quality service; the overall management plan for the proposal should speak in terms of systems, procedures and controls that will ensure the partnership will meet its goals and purpose, and how all tasks will be completed in a timely manner.

Scope of Services

- A. Describe the proposed services in detail sufficient to demonstrate an understanding of the work to be performed, the partnership needs and the desired results. Proposals must address all of the elements listed in the Scope of Service, and should describe the agency's philosophy, strategies, and techniques for integrating each component, paying particular attention to various Voluntary Interdistrict Program options.

Staffing/Organizational Capacity

- A. Project Staff: Describe the team that would provide these services. Indicate key staff to be assigned to the program by name (if known), title, qualifications, and job descriptions.
- B. Organizational Chart, Capacity: Indicate, through an organizational chart and supporting narrative, the lines of authority and responsibility related to the proposed program and its components. Include all project staff as well as all management level staff either dedicated to or accountable for each phase of this project. In two pages or less, summarize the relevant qualifications, including experience and expertise of the organization. Factors that should be discussed include adequacy of financial resources, and overall technical skills and experience that will enable and ensure that required work is to be done.

Data and Technology

- A. access to contemporary and ample computer hardware including services and workstations to manage substantial data volumes;
- B. ability to utilize advanced data analysis software, database management systems and GIS software to efficiently process, analyze and visualize transportation system data;
- C. ability to utilize database management systems for systematic organization and storage of program evaluation records;
- D. ability to demonstrate compatibility and integration with transportation management systems for real-time data collection on bus routes, schedules, ridership, and other pertinent factors. Furthermore, the firm is encouraged to use mobile applications or devices for on-the-go data collection, facilitating direct input by field personnel if applicable;

- E. ability to utilize reporting tools to generate comprehensive reports based on the evaluated data. Reports should present key findings and recommendations in a clear and accessible format, with the capability to customize reports based on the specific requirements of stakeholders; and
- F. ability to safeguard sensitive information related to transportation routes, student data, and other confidential data. Proposers are expected to implement robust data encryption measures.

Work Plan

- A. Methodology: Provide a detailed description of your organization's ability, approach, and methodology for this project in line with the RFP objectives and key elements outlined in the scope of service.
- B. Implementation timeline: Provide an implementation timeline for your project including key milestones related to the scope of service. Include estimates of the timeframe of implementation.

Financial Profile

- A. Fiscal Stability: What is the fiscal health of your organization? Provide any documentation that supports the organization's past, present, and future fiscal stability. This may include any financial support up to and including audited financial statements.

Cost Competitiveness and Budget Narrative

- A. Complete a budget proposal in its entirety that will enable the effective delivery of the proposed services.
- B. Present a detailed cost narrative that explains the basis and rationale for the costs proposed. Provide assumptions or calculation approaches used to develop the cost proposal.

E: Attachments

Attachments other than the required attachments identified are not permitted and will not be evaluated. See the Proposal Checklist in Appendix VI for a list of relevant attachments. Further, the required attachments must not be altered or used to extend, enhance, or replace any component required by this RFP. Failure to abide by these instructions may result in disqualification.

- a. Résumés of Key Personnel
- b. Audited Financial Statements, if included

F: Declaration of Confidential Information

If a proposer deems that certain information required by this RFP is confidential, the proposer must label such information as CONFIDENTIAL prior to submission. The proposer must reference where the information labeled CONFIDENTIAL is located in the proposal. *EXAMPLE: Section G.1.a.* For each subsection so referenced, the proposer must provide a convincing explanation and rationale sufficient to justify an exemption of the information from release under the FOIA. The explanation and rationale must be stated in terms of (a) the prospective harm to the competitive position of the proposer that would result if the identified information were to be released and (b) the reasons why the information is legally exempt from release pursuant to C.G.S. § 1-210(b).

G: Conflict of Interest – Disclosure Statement

Proposers must include a disclosure statement concerning any current business relationships (within the last three (3) years) that pose a conflict of interest, as defined by C.G.S. § 1-85. A conflict of interest exists when a relationship exists between the proposer and a public official (including an elected official) or State employee that may interfere with fair competition or may be adverse to the interests of the State. The existence of a conflict of interest is not, in and of itself, evidence of wrongdoing. A conflict of interest may, however, become a legal matter if a proposer tries to influence, or succeeds in influencing, the outcome of an official decision for their personal or corporate benefit. In the absence of any conflict of interest, a proposer must affirm such in the disclosure statement. *Example: "[name of proposer] has no current business relationship (within the last three (3) years) that poses a conflict of interest, as defined by C.G.S. § 1-85."*

H: Statement of Assurances

Proposers must include the Statement of Assurances provided in Section VI-B. Sign and return and place after Conflict of Interest-Disclosure Statement.

V. MANDATORY PROVISIONS

■ A. STANDARD CONTRACT PROVISIONS

Proposer's may view the [Comptroller's Office PSA Terms and Conditions](#), which includes generic state contract requirements.

■ B. ASSURANCES

By submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, a proposer implicitly gives the following assurances:

- 1. Collusion.** The proposer represents and warrants that the proposer did not participate in any part of the RFP development process and had no knowledge of the specific contents of the RFP prior to its issuance. The proposer further represents and warrants that no agent, representative, or employee of the State participated directly in the preparation of the proposer's proposal. The proposer also represents and warrants that the submitted proposal is in all respects fair and is made without collusion or fraud.
- 2. State Officials and Employees.** The proposer certifies that no elected or appointed official or employee of the State has or will benefit financially or materially from any contract resulting from this RFP. The CSDE may terminate a resulting contract if it is determined that gratuities of any kind were either offered or received by any of the aforementioned officials or employees from the proposer, contractor, or its agents or employees.
- 3. Competitors.** The proposer assures that the submitted proposal is not made in connection with any competing organization or competitor submitting a separate proposal in response to this RFP. No attempt has been made, or will be made, by the proposer to induce any other organization or competitor to submit, or not submit, a proposal for the purpose of restricting competition. The proposer further assures that the proposed costs have been arrived at independently, without consultation, communication, or agreement with any other organization or competitor for the purpose of restricting competition. Nor has the proposer knowingly disclosed the proposed costs on a prior basis, either directly or indirectly, to any other organization or competitor.
- 4. Validity of Proposal.** The proposer certifies that the proposal represents a valid and binding offer to provide services in accordance with the terms and provisions described in this RFP and any amendments or attachments hereto. The proposal shall remain valid for a period of 180 days after the submission due date and may be extended beyond that time by mutual agreement. At its sole discretion, the CSDE may include the proposal, by reference or otherwise, into any contract with the successful proposer.
- 5. Press Releases.** The proposer agrees to obtain prior written consent and approval of the CSDE for press releases that relate in any manner to this RFP or any resultant contract.

■ C. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, a proposer implicitly agrees to comply with the following terms and conditions:

- 1. Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action.** The State is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action employer and does not discriminate in its hiring, employment, or business practices. The State is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act of

1990 (ADA) and does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission to, access to, or operation of its programs, services, or activities.

- 2. Preparation Expenses.** Neither the State nor the CSDE shall assume any liability for expenses incurred by a proposer in preparing, submitting, or clarifying any proposal submitted in response to this RFP.
- 3. Exclusion of Taxes.** The CSDE is exempt from the payment of excise and sales taxes imposed by the federal government and the State. Proposers are liable for any other applicable taxes.
- 4. Proposed Costs.** No cost submissions that are contingent upon a State action will be accepted. All proposed costs must be fixed through the entire term of the contract.
- 5. Changes to Proposal.** No additions or changes to the original proposal will be allowed after submission. While changes are not permitted, the CSDE may request and authorize proposers to submit written clarification of their proposals, in a manner or format prescribed by the CSDE, and at the proposer's expense.
- 6. Supplemental Information.** Supplemental information will not be considered after the deadline submission of proposals, unless specifically requested by the CSDE. The CSDE may ask a proposer to give demonstrations, interviews, oral presentations or further explanations to clarify information contained in a proposal. Any such demonstration, interview, or oral presentation will be at a time selected and in a place provided by the CSDE. At its sole discretion, the CSDE may limit the number of proposers invited to make such a demonstration, interview, or oral presentation and may limit the number of attendees per proposer.
- 7. Presentation of Supporting Evidence.** If requested by the CSDE, a proposer must be prepared to present evidence of experience, ability, data reporting capabilities, financial standing, or other information necessary to satisfactorily meet the requirements set forth or implied in this RFP. The CSDE may make onsite visits to an operational facility or facilities of a proposer to evaluate further the proposer's capability to perform the duties required by this RFP. At its discretion, the CSDE may also check or contact any reference provided by the proposer.
- 8. RFP Is Not An Offer.** Neither this RFP nor any subsequent discussions shall give rise to any commitment on the part of the State or the CSDE or confer any rights on any proposer unless and until a contract is fully executed by the necessary parties. The contract document will represent the entire agreement between the proposer and the CSDE and will supersede all prior negotiations, representations or agreements, alleged or made, between the parties. The State shall assume no liability for costs incurred by the proposer or for payment of services under the terms of the contract until the successful proposer is notified that the contract has been accepted and approved by the CSDE and, if required, by the Attorney General's Office.

■ D. RIGHTS RESERVED TO THE STATE

By submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, a proposer implicitly accepts that the following rights are reserved to the State:

- 1. Timing Sequence.** The timing and sequence of events associated with this RFP shall ultimately be determined by the CSDE.

- 2. Amending or Canceling RFP.** The CSDE reserves the right to amend or cancel this RFP on any date and at any time, if the CSDE deems it to be necessary, appropriate, or otherwise in the best interests of the State.
- 3. No Acceptable Proposals.** In the event that no acceptable proposals are submitted in response to this RFP, the CSDE may reopen the procurement process, if it is determined to be in the best interests of the State.
- 4. Award and Rejection of Proposals.** The CSDE reserves the right to award in part, to reject any and all proposals in whole or in part, for misrepresentation or if the proposal limits or modifies any of the terms, conditions, or specifications of this RFP. The CSDE may waive minor technical defects, irregularities, or omissions, if in its judgment the best interests of the State will be served. The CSDE reserves the right to reject the proposal of any proposer who submits a proposal after the submission date and time.
- 5. Sole Property of the State.** All proposals submitted in response to this RFP are to be the sole property of the State. Any product, whether acceptable or unacceptable, developed under a contract awarded as a result of this RFP shall be the sole property of the State, unless stated otherwise in this RFP or subsequent contract. The right to publish, distribute, or disseminate any and all information or reports, or part thereof, shall accrue to the State without recourse.
- 6. Contract Negotiation.** The CSDE reserves the right to negotiate or contract for all or any portion of the services contained in this RFP. The CSDE further reserves the right to contract with one or more proposer for such services. After reviewing the scored criteria, the CSDE may seek Best and Final Offers (BFO) on cost from proposers. The CSDE may set parameters on any BFOs received.
- 7. Clerical Errors in Award.** The CSDE reserves the right to correct inaccurate awards resulting from its clerical errors. This may include, in extreme circumstances, revoking the awarding of a contract already made to a proposer and subsequently awarding the contract to another proposer. Such action on the part of the State shall not constitute a breach of contract on the part of the State since the contract with the initial proposer is deemed to be void *ab initio* and of no effect as if no contract ever existed between the State and the proposer.
- 8. Key Personnel.** When the CSDE is the sole funder of a purchased service, the CSDE reserves the right to approve any additions, deletions, or changes in key personnel, with the exception of key personnel who have terminated employment. The CSDE also reserves the right to approve replacements for key personnel who have terminated employment. The CSDE further reserves the right to require the removal and replacement of any of the proposer's key personnel who do not perform adequately, regardless of whether they were previously approved by the CSDE.

■ E. STATUTORY AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

By submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, the proposer implicitly agrees to comply with all applicable State and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, the following:

- 1. Freedom of Information, C.G.S. § 1-210(b).** The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) generally requires the disclosure of documents in the possession of the State upon request of any citizen, unless the content of the document falls within certain categories of exemption, as defined by C.G.S. § 1-210(b). Proposers are generally advised not to include in their proposals any confidential information. If the proposer indicates that certain documentation, as required by this RFP, is submitted in confidence, the State will endeavor

to keep said information confidential to the extent permitted by law. The State has no obligation to initiate, prosecute, or defend any legal proceeding or to seek a protective order or other similar relief to prevent disclosure of any information pursuant to a FOIA request. The proposer has the burden of establishing the availability of any FOIA exemption in any proceeding where it is an issue. While a proposer may claim an exemption to the State's FOIA, the final administrative authority to release or exempt any or all material so identified rests with the State. In no event shall the State or any of its employees have any liability for disclosure of documents or information in the possession of the State and which the State or its employees believe(s) to be required pursuant to the FOIA or other requirements of law.

- 2. Contract Compliance, C.G.S. § 4a-60 and Regulations of CT State Agencies § 46a-68j-21 thru 43, inclusive.** CT statute and regulations impose certain obligations on State agencies (as well as contractors and subcontractors doing business with the State) to ensure that State agencies do not enter into contracts with organizations or businesses that discriminate against protected class persons.
- 3. Consulting Agreements Representation, C.G.S. § 4a-81.** Pursuant to C.G.S. § 4a-81 the successful contracting party shall certify that it has not entered into any consulting agreements in connection with this Contract, except for the agreements listed below. "Consulting agreement" means any written or oral agreement to retain the services, for a fee, of a consultant for the purposes of (A) providing counsel to a contractor, vendor, consultant or other entity seeking to conduct, or conducting, business with the State, (B) contacting, whether in writing or orally, any executive, judicial, or administrative office of the State, including any department, institution, bureau, board, commission, authority, official or employee for the purpose of solicitation, dispute resolution, introduction, requests for information, or (C) any other similar activity related to such contracts. "Consulting agreement" does not include any agreements entered into with a consultant who is registered under the provisions of chapter 10 of the Connecticut General Statutes as of the date such contract is executed in accordance with the provisions of section 4a-81 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Such representation shall be sworn as true to the best knowledge and belief of the person signing the resulting contract and shall be subject to the penalties of false statement.
- 4. Campaign Contribution Restriction, C.G.S. § 9-612.** For all State contracts, defined in section 9-612 of the Connecticut General Statutes as having a value in a calendar year of \$50,000 or more, or a combination or series of such agreements or contracts having a value of \$100,000 or more, the authorized signatory to the resulting contract must represent that they have received the State Elections Enforcement Commission's notice advising state contractors of state campaign contribution and solicitation prohibitions, and will inform its principals of the contents of the notice, as set forth in "Notice to Executive Branch State Contractors and Prospective State Contractors of Campaign Contribution and Solicitation Limitations." Such notice is available at https://seec.ct.gov/Portal/data/forms/ContrForms/seec_form_11_notice_only.pdf
- 5. Gifts, C.G.S. § 4-252.** Pursuant to section 4-252 of the Connecticut General Statutes and Acting Governor Susan Bysiewicz's Executive Order No. 21-2, the Contractor, for itself and on behalf of all of its principals or key personnel who submitted a bid or proposal, represents:
 - (1) That no gifts were made by (A) the Contractor, (B) any principals and key personnel of the Contractor, who participate substantially in preparing bids, proposals or negotiating State contracts, or (C) any agent of the Contractor or principals and key personnel, who participates substantially in preparing bids, proposals or negotiating State contracts, to (i) any public official or State employee of the State agency or quasi-public agency soliciting bids or proposals for State contracts, who participates substantially in the preparation of bid solicitations or requests for proposals for State contracts or the negotiation or award of

State contracts, or (ii) any public official or State employee of any other State agency, who has supervisory or appointing authority over such State agency or quasi-public agency;

(2) That no such principals and key personnel of the Contractor, or agent of the Contractor or of such principals and key personnel, knows of any action by the Contractor to circumvent such prohibition on gifts by providing for any other principals and key personnel, official, employee or agent of the Contractor to provide a gift to any such public official or State employee; and

(3) That the Contractor is submitting bids or proposals without fraud or collusion with any person.

Any bidder or proposer that does not agree to the representations required under this section shall be rejected and the State agency or quasi-public agency shall award the contract to the next highest ranked proposer or the next lowest responsible qualified bidder or seek new bids or proposals.

- 6. Iran Energy Investment Certification C.G.S. § 4-252(a).** Pursuant to C.G.S. § 4-252(a), the successful contracting party shall certify the following: (a) that it has not made a direct investment of twenty million dollars or more in the energy sector of Iran on or after October 1, 2013, as described in Section 202 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010, and has not increased or renewed such investment on or after said date. (b) If the Contractor makes a good faith effort to determine whether it has made an investment described in subsection (a) of this section it shall not be subject to the penalties of false statement pursuant to section 4-252a of the Connecticut General Statutes. A "good faith effort" for purposes of this subsection includes a determination that the Contractor is not on the list of persons who engage in certain investment activities in Iran created by the Department of General Services of the State of California pursuant to Division 2, Chapter 2.7 of the California Public Contract Code. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to impair the ability of the State agency or quasi-public agency to pursue a breach of contract action for any violation of the provisions of the resulting contract.
- 7. Nondiscrimination Certification, C.G.S. § 4a-60 and 4a-60a.** If a bidder is awarded an opportunity to negotiate a contract, the proposer must provide the State agency with *written representation* in the resulting contract that certifies the bidder complies with the State's nondiscrimination agreements and warranties. This nondiscrimination certification is required for all State contracts – regardless of type, term, cost, or value. Municipalities and CT State agencies are exempt from this requirement. The authorized signatory of the contract shall demonstrate his or her understanding of this obligation by either (A) initialing the nondiscrimination affirmation provision in the body of the resulting contract, or (B) providing an affirmative response in the required online bid or response to a proposal question, if applicable, which asks if the contractor understands its obligations. If a bidder or vendor refuses to agree to this representation, such bidder or vendor shall be rejected and the State agency or quasi-public agency shall award the contract to the next highest ranked vendor or the next lowest responsible qualified bidder or seek new bids or proposals.
- 8. Access to Data for State Auditors.** The Contractor shall provide to OPM access to any data, as defined in C.G.S. § 4e-1, concerning the resulting contract that are in the possession or control of the Contractor upon demand and shall provide the data to OPM in a format prescribed by OPM [or the Client Agency] and the State Auditors of Public Accounts at no additional cost.

VI. APPENDIX

A. ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS / DEFINITIONS

BFO	Best and Final Offer
C.G.S.	Connecticut General Statutes
CHRO	Commission on Human Rights and Opportunity (CT)
CSDE	Connecticut State Department of Education
CT	Connecticut
DAS	Department of Administrative Services (CT)
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act (CT)
IRS	Internal Revenue Service (US)
LOI	Letter of Intent
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
OPM	Office of Policy and Management (CT)
OSC	Office of the State Comptroller (CT)
PSA	Personal Service Agreement
POS	Purchase of Service
P.A.	Public Act (CT)
RSCO	Regional School Choice Office
RFP	Request For Proposal
SEEC	State Elections Enforcement Commission (CT)
U.S.	United States

- *contractor*: a private provider organization, CT State agency, or municipality that enters into a POS contract with the Agency as a result of this RFP.
- *proposer*: a private provider organization, CT State agency, or municipality that has submitted a proposal to the Agency in response to this RFP. This term may be used interchangeably with respondent throughout the RFP.
- *prospective proposer*: a private provider organization, CT State agency, or municipality that may submit a proposal to the Agency in response to this RFP, but has not yet done so
- *subcontractor*: an individual (other than an employee of the contractor) or business entity hired by a contractor to provide a specific service as part of a PSA with the Agency as a result of this RFP

B. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES

Connecticut State Department of Education

The undersigned Respondent affirms and declares that:

1) General

- a. This proposal is executed and signed with full knowledge and acceptance of the RFP CONDITIONS stated in the RFP.
- b. The Respondent will deliver services to the Agency at the cost proposed in the RFP and within the timeframes therein.
- c. The Respondent will seek prior approval from the Agency before making any changes to the location of services.
- d. Neither the Respondent or any official of the organization nor any subcontractor the Respondent or any official of the subcontractor organization has received any notices of debarment or suspension from contracting with the State of CT or the Federal Government.
- e. Neither the Respondent nor any official of the organization, nor any subcontractor of the Respondent nor any official of the subcontractor organization, has received any notices of debarment or suspension from contracting with the State of CT or the Federal Government.

Legal Name of Organization:

Authorized Signatory

Date

C. PROPOSAL CHECKLIST

To assist respondents in managing proposal planning and document collation processes, this document summarizes key dates and proposal requirements for this RFP. Please note that this document does not supersede what is stated in the RFP. Please refer to the Proposal Submission Overview, Required Proposal Submission Outline, and Mandatory Provisions (Sections II, III, and IV of this RFP) for more comprehensive detail. **This is a tool for proposers to use.** It is the responsibility of each respondent to ensure that all required documents, forms, and attachments, are submitted in a timely manner.

Key Dates

Procurement Timetable		
The Agency reserves the right to modify these dates at its sole discretion.		
Item	Action	Date
1	Letter of Intent Due	August 2, 2024
2	Deadline of Questions	August 16, 2024
3	Answers Released	August 19, 2024
4	Proposals Due	August 30, 2024
5	Proposer Selection	September 20, 2024
6	Start of Contract	October 15, 2024

Registration with State Contracting Portal (if not already registered):

- Register at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTSource/Registration>
- Submit required forms:
 - Campaign Contribution Certification (OPM Ethics Form 1): <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Fin-PSA/Forms/Ethics-Forms>

Proposal Content Checklist

- Cover Sheet** provided in Appendix D: Additional Relevant Forms
- Table of Contents**
- Executive Summary:** 2 pages, maximum
- Main proposal (20 pages maximum) answering all questions with relevant attachments.** Proposers should use their discretion to determine whether certain required information is sufficiently captured in the body of their proposal or requires additional attachments for clarification.
- IRS Determination Letter** (for nonprofit proposers)
- Two years of most recent annual audited financial statements; OR any financial statements prepared by a Certified Public Accountant** for proposers whose organizations have been incorporated for less than two years.
- Proposed budget**, including budget narrative and cost schedules for planned subcontractors if applicable.
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement**
- Statement of Assurances**

Formatting Checklist

- Is the proposal formatted to fit 8 ½ x 11 (letter-sized) paper?
- Is the executive summary of the proposal within the 2-page limit?
- Is the main body of the proposal within the 20-page limit?
- Is the proposal in 11-point and Arial, Tahoma or Verdana font?
- Does the proposal format follow normal (1 inch) margins and 1.5 line spacing?
- Does the proposer's name appear in the header of each page?
- Does the proposal include page numbers in the footer?
- Are confidential labels applied to sensitive information (if applicable)?

D. Additional Relevant Forms

Attachment A – Cover Sheet

Review of Regional School Transportation System for RSCO School Choice Programs RFP# 850

BIDDER'S LEGAL NAME	
BIDDER'S ADDRESS	
BIDDER'S FEIN	
CONTACT PERSON	
CONTACT'S TITLE	
PHONE(S)	
E-MAIL ADDRESS	

We have read the Request for Proposals and fully understand its intent and contents. We certify that we have adequate personnel, insurance, equipment, and facilities to fulfill the specified requirements. We understand that our ability to meet the criteria and provide the required goods or services shall be evaluated by a Selection Committee.

It is further understood and agreed that all information included in or attached to our proposal that is required by the Request for Proposals or otherwise shall be public record upon delivery to CSDE. In addition, we are aware that CSDE reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

I certify that the information contained in this proposal is accurate and presented in good faith to the best of my knowledge. I further certify that I am authorized to submit this proposal and will abide by the conditions set forth in the Request for Proposal.

Submitted by: _____
Authorized Official's Signature

(Authorized Official Printed Name)

(Date)

(Title)

(E-mail Address)

Attachment B – Budget

Bidder	
Project Title	
Total Project Cost	

Codes	Descriptions	Budget Amount
100	Personal Services - Salaries	
200	Personal Services - Employee Benefits	
300	Purchase Prof Tech Services	
500	Other Purchased Services	
600	Supplies and Materials	
890	Other Objects	
940	Indirect Costs/Administrative Services	
	Total	

Attachment C - Budget Narrative

Code	Object	Total
100	<p>Personal Services – Salaries. Amounts paid to both permanent and temporary employees including personnel substituting for those in permanent positions. This includes gross salary for personal services rendered while on the payroll of the bidder.</p> <p>Specify titles and salary information (hourly rate, total to be charged to the project, etc.)</p>	
200	<p>Personal Services – Employee Benefits. Amounts paid by the bidder on behalf of employees; these amounts are not included in the gross salary but are in addition to that amount. Such payments are fringe benefit payments and, while not paid directly to employees, nevertheless are parts of the cost of personal services.</p>	
300	<p>Purchased Professional and Technical Services. Services which by their nature can be performed only by persons or firms with specialized skills and knowledge. Included are the services of consultants, auditors, programmers, etc.</p>	
500	<p>Other Purchased Services. Amounts paid for services rendered by organizations or personnel not on the payroll of the bidder (separate from Professional and Technical Services or Property Services). Include expenses related to communications, travel (hotel, airfare, meals, etc.), insurance coverage, printing and binding - publication costs.</p>	
600	<p>Supplies & Materials. Amounts paid for consumable goods, office supplies, transportation supplies, software, etc.</p>	

890	Other Objects. (Miscellaneous Expenditures) Expenditures for goods or services not properly classified in one of the above objects.	
940	Indirect/Administrative Costs. Costs incurred by the bidder, which are not directly related to the project but are a result thereof. Include management fees (with breakdown) and other indirect or administrative costs.	
	Total	

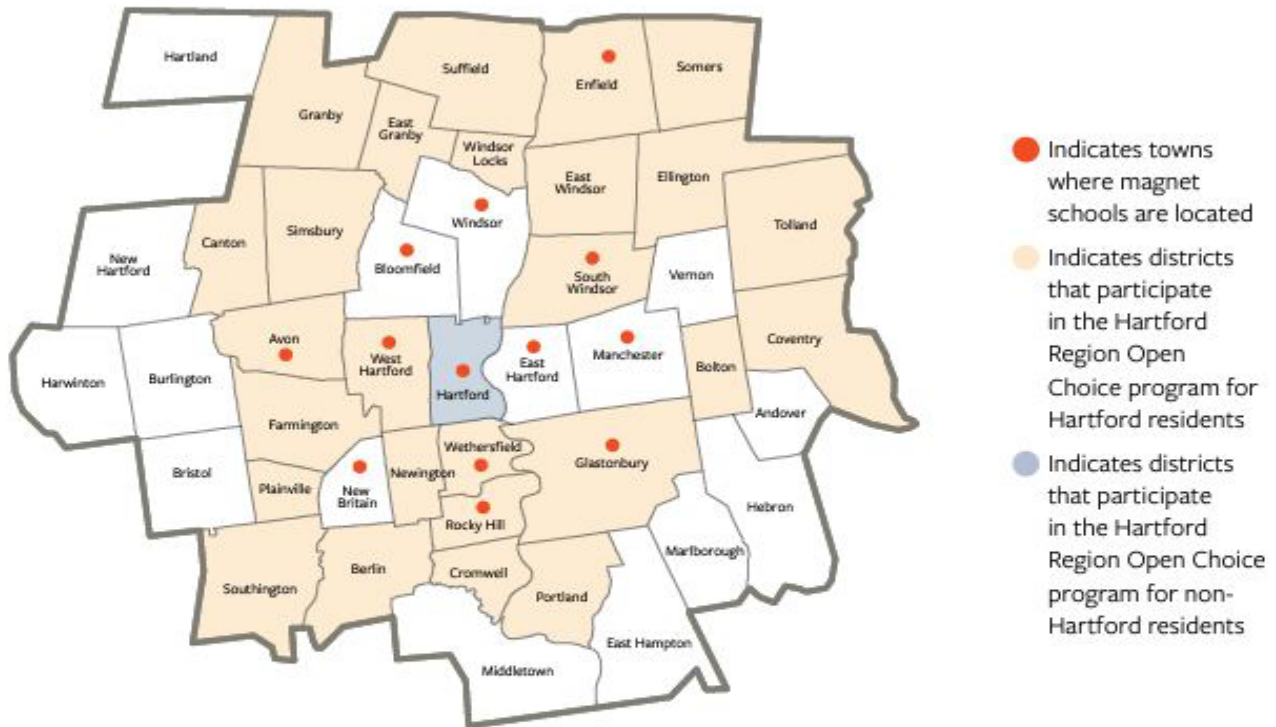
Additional space, if needed, to provide a detailed cost narrative that explains the basis and rationale for the costs proposed. Use the space below to include assumptions or calculation approaches used to develop the cost proposal.

Attachment D - RSCO Transportation Zone Map

Transportation Information

The RSCO Transportation Zone establishes borders for transporting students to RSCO School Choice schools and programs within the Greater Hartford Region.

For additional information, contact the RSCO Transportation Office by email at rscotransportation@crec.org, by telephone at **860-524-4077**, or visit its website at crec.org/transportation/rsco.php.



Transportation Zone Towns

- Andover
- Avon
- Berlin
- Bloomfield
- Bolton
- Bristol
- Burlington
- Canton
- Coventry
- Cromwell
- East Granby
- East Hampton
- East Hartford
- East Windsor
- Ellington
- Enfield
- Farmington
- Glastonbury
- Hartford
- Hartland
- Harwinton
- Hebron
- Granby
- Middletown
- New Britain
- New Hartford
- Manchester
- Newington
- Marlborough
- Plainville
- Portland
- Rocky Hill
- Simsbury
- Somers
- Southington
- South Windsor
- Suffield
- Tolland
- Vernon
- West Hartford
- Wethersfield
- Windsor
- Windsor Locks

RSCO Transportation Study Report

Submitted by

Casey D. Cobb

Charles Wentzell

Kelly Farrell

University of Connecticut

December 30, 2023

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a multi-method analysis of school transportation in the Greater Hartford School Choice program. The study was commissioned by the Connecticut Department of Education's Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) per the *Sheff* Comprehensive Choice Plan (CCP).¹ The CCP calls for a reassessment of the transportation program "to ensure that present practices do not inadvertently create significant disincentives for participation in Choice programs" (p. 36). The report presents four sets of studies, followed by our recommendations based on the findings.

Study 1

The first is a qualitative study of interviews with parents about their family's experience with transportation to and from school. Our case study design allowed for exploration of the conditions, processes, and beliefs that shape families' experiences with transportation which, in turn, informs their decisions to enroll their children in a magnet or Open Choice school. We identified five emergent themes from the analysis of interview data. They included: *bus stops, parent adaptations and personal transportation, after school extracurriculars, communication, and sacrifices for school opportunities.*

Of the 44 parents interviewed, 71 percent expressed a concern with transportation. Five parents in our sample removed their child from the Choice program at least in part due to a transportation issue. By far the most common complaint involved bus stops. Fifty-nine (59) percent of parents referenced problems with the bus stop, particularly central stops. Complaints included the distance to the stop from home, the nature of the commute to the stop, and contextual aspects of the stop location itself. Bus transportation was significantly less accessible for suburban magnet parents who lacked personal transportation. Two-thirds (68 percent) of parents we interviewed drove their children either directly to school or to the bus stop each day. A handful of parents mentioned that they were disappointed that extracurricular activities at school were inaccessible to their children due to lack of transportation. Other families who were offered transportation for after-school activities expressed their frustration, mentioning that the bus was often unreliable. Approximately half of the parents (48 percent) mentioned that the communication system between the transportation service and parents was unreliable. Even though 71 percent of parents communicated that they had a concern with some aspect of school transportation, many felt the education their children were receiving outweighed the challenges they were facing and continue to send their child/ren to Open Choice or magnet schools.

Study 2

The second study is a quantitative analysis of RSCO Transportation bus complaint logs from the 2022-23 school year. We descriptively analyzed complaints by ticket source, ticket date, and complaint type. More than three-quarters (77.4 percent) of the complaints were submitted by phone, followed by the

¹ Permanent Injunction, *Sheff v. O'Neill*, Superior Court, judicial district of Hartford, Docket No. HHD-CV17-S040566S (January 27, 2022). Retrieved from <https://ctschoolfinance.org/resource-assets/Sheff-Permanent-Injunction.pdf>.

online web form (15.5 percent), and email (4.0 percent). Unsurprisingly, most complaints were issued early in the school year, a time when buses and families are adjusting to the new routine. As the year progressed, complaints tapered off. Most complaints fell under the categories of “bus/vehicle driver,” “late or no notification of delays,” and a category labeled as “other.” However, we observed some misalignment between the assigned category and the actual complaint. Part of the issue was that some of the categories overlapped with one another (e.g., “central stops” and “stop location”). Another could be that certain complaints implicated more than one reason code but only one could be selected. “Stop location” and “central stops” were not prominent concerns, at least as recorded in the complaint database. Improving upon the complaint system could help better inform school transportation officials.

Study 3

The third study is a quantitative analysis of student travel times to bus stops and schools for 10,186 students who had received first-round offers to either a magnet ($n=9,421$) or Open Choice school (765) in 2022-23. We estimated bus ride times using bus route schedules and geospatial techniques, and reported these by student resident group (i.e., Hartford or Suburban), choice program, and sending district. We also disaggregated data by distinct ride time thresholds. Ride times over 30 minutes were considered a “long” ride and any ride over 60 minutes were deemed “very long.” Among Open Choice students, 88.1 percent had a *long* expected bus ride, and 18.6 percent had a *very long* expected ride, compared to 72.3 percent and 11.0 percent, respectively, for magnet school students. Relative to Hartford-resident students, suburban magnet students generally have longer bus rides with a median of 39 minutes compared to 36 minutes for Hartford-resident students.

Based on “bus stops” as a prominent theme that emerged from parent interviews, we analyzed the theoretical distance students would have to travel to reach their bus stops from their homes. This also allowed us to evaluate theoretical walkability for students to stops. The results showed a wide range of travel times for students, with the widest difference being between Hartford students (in both magnet schools and Open Choice) and suburban magnet students. Hartford-resident Open Choice students had the lowest median walking distance to their stop (2 minutes). Hartford-resident magnet students had a median walking travel of 4 minutes, with a slightly higher range of distances. Suburban students in magnet schools had a median walking travel time from home to their bus stop of 35 minutes. More than half (54.5 percent) of suburban students in magnet schools had a walking travel time of 30 minutes or more, indicating that for most of these students walking to their bus stop would be difficult, if not unfeasible.

Study 4

Finally, the fourth section is a set of quantitative analyses examining the degree to which travel distance to school was related to parent decisions to accept or decline a lottery placement offer. As in study #3, we used the lottery data as the basis for the analysis. The lottery data contained placement offer “accept/decline” fields, which we linked to (theoretical) estimated travel times from student home address. We found a moderate inverse relationship ($r= -.453$) between estimated median driving time and magnet seat acceptance rate per sending town. This suggests that, generally, when travel time increases, acceptance rates decrease – but not in a perfect linear fashion. While suburban and Hartford students who accepted magnet placement offers had an overall lower median estimated travel time than students who actively declined¹⁷ (15 minutes vs. 17 minutes, respectively), this difference was relatively small, especially in comparison to the between-school differences and between sending districts for magnet students.

In our logistic regression model, we five variables to predict parent acceptances. We found that the strongest predictor of accepting a lottery magnet seat was the school ranking variable in the lottery application. For every standard deviation unit increase in school preference score, the odds of accepting a magnet seat increase by 49.7 percent. The next strongest influence on accepting was being a Hartford resident, which increased the odds of accepting a magnet seat by 41.5 percent. The remaining variables exhibited a negative influence on parents' decision to accept a seat, with being a RI student having the strongest relationship. Notably, driving time to school had virtually no effect on parent decision making, after taking into account the remaining variables in the model.

Summary of Suggestions Based on Findings

We offer recommendations for policy and practice and other ideas for consideration to improve the school transportation experience for students and parents. Beyond practical consequences, we consider the implications for equity and fairness for families participating in Choice.

- Improve conditions for getting students to and from the bus stop.
- Ensure all stop locations are safe.
- Recalibrate the complaint type categories in the RSCO online complaint form.
- Make the online complaint form more prominent and accessible on the website.
- Recalibrate bus notification system to improve efficiency.
- Ensure all families have access to bus notification mechanisms.
- Involve families and students in developing transportation policies.
- Look into other transportation models.
- Communicate transportation options to prospective Choice parents.
- Consider walking chaperones for younger students.
- Explore offering free discounted or public transit passes for age-appropriate students.
- Investigate further regionalizing school choice.

Introduction

Proponents of school choice argue it levels the playing field for students who otherwise would not have access to quality schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Others find school choice to be more of an illusion, working for some families and not others (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Pattillo, 2015). Research has shown how race and class can either enhance or constrain choices available to families (Phillips et al., 2012). Racially minoritized and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by the constraints (Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). Even among those who participate in school choice programs, sacrifices are often made. For students, these may include longer school commutes, less sleep, or loss of connection with neighborhood friends. For parents, getting their child to and from school may take time away from work or require expending scarce resources on a car or gas. For school choice to realize its promise, policies must preempt or minimize such potential barriers.

Despite being an integral component of school choice, student transportation is often an overlooked or at best underexamined feature. One of the major factors affecting parent participation and satisfaction with school choice is ensuring their child safe travel to and from school. Attending a school outside the local district typically coincides with an increased transportation burden for students and their families. Some families participating in school choice drive their children to school themselves, provided they have the means to do so. Families without this option, or who prefer not to drive their child, rely on bus transportation to a choice school or may not participate in choice altogether. Even those who use bus services may feel compelled to drive their child to a centralized stop. All of this is to say that school choice transportation raises questions of practicality and equity.

Research on mobility justice suggests that unequal access to transportation—and, sometimes, a need to travel long distances to reach desirable schools—can make transportation a key factor in shaping equitable access to schools in choice-oriented settings (Bierbaum et al., 2021) (as cited by Valant & Lincove, 2023, p. 535)

For voluntary choice programs designed to desegregate schools, access to safe, affordable, and efficient bus transportation is paramount to achieving the desired outcome. This report presents findings from a mixed-method investigation on transportation in the Greater Hartford School Choice program. The program is overseen by the Connecticut State Department of Education’s Regional School Choice Office (RSCO). Our study focused on the perspectives of families participating in the program and how they and their children experienced travel to school. In addition to interviews with families, we drew on several other sources, including transportation complaint logs collected by the bus contractor, busing schedules, school choice lottery data, as well as reviews of RSCO transportation documents and the relevant research literature. The study assists the state's obligation to meet Commitment #33 of the *Sheff* Comprehensive Choice Plan,² which calls for a reassessment of the transportation program “to ensure

² Permanent Injunction, *Sheff v. O’Neill*, Superior Court, judicial district of Hartford, Docket No. HHD-CV17-S040566S (January 27, 2022). Retrieved from <https://ctschoolfinance.org/resource-assets/Sheff-Permanent-Injunction.pdf>.

that present practices do not inadvertently create significant disincentives for participation in Choice programs" (p. 36).

The report is organized as follows. We begin by summarizing the literature on school choice transportation, followed by a brief overview of the RSCO Greater Hartford School Choice program and its associated transportation services. Next, we present analytic approaches and findings from our multi-method design; they are organized by data sources including parent interviews, bus complaint logs, student location and bus ride data, and student magnet lottery data. We end by offering policy and practice recommendations and other ideas for consideration.

Research on School Choice Transportation

Distance to school is an important consideration influencing family decisions regarding school choice, regardless of grade level or the type of school (Burgess et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2005). All other things equal, long commutes are generally worse than short ones, given earlier wake-up times for some students, the extra stressors for students enduring long rides, less time for homework or extracurricular activities, and likelihood for increased absenteeism.³ Other issues may factor into how students and families experience bus transportation, including the reliability and timeliness of pickups and drop-offs, bus stop locations, the distance between home and bus stop, the number of stops or transfers, the availability of after school late buses, and of course the experience on the bus itself as it relates to issues of comfort and safety.

Influence of Transportation and Distance on School Choice Participation

Increasing evidence suggests that transportation significantly influences school enrollment choices. Teske et al. (2009) surveyed 600 parents of K-12 children from lower-income backgrounds in Denver and Washington DC, which included both school choosers and parents sending their children to neighborhood assigned schools. Among the respondents, 38 percent highlighted transportation as an issue influencing their school choices. Notably, 27 percent identified a preferred school that they did not pursue due to transportation-related concerns. In Denver, families with children attending their neighborhood assigned schools prioritized "location/convenience" nearly five times the rate of those who chose schools outside their locally assigned one (44 percent compared to 9 percent) (Teske et al., 2009, p. 16).

In their study of kindergarten students in New York City, Trajkovski et al. (2021) found that having reliable school transportation or living close to the school improves the likelihood of parents participating in school choice. Cordes and Schwartz (2018) explored the link between transportation and school choice among elementary students in New York City, finding that bus riders show a higher tendency to attend a choice school over their zoned school. Stein et al. (2020) and Blagg et al. (2018) found that extended or taxing school commutes prompted certain students to transfer to schools nearer their homes. Yettick (2016) discovered that location, rather than school ratings, emerged as the primary factor for parents' initial selection of schools, especially among low-income parents.

³ There may be some positive aspects to longer bus rides (e.g., families who do not have access to before or after school daycare); however, even these potential benefits have their own tradeoffs.

Stein et al. (2021) analyzed public transit commute times in Baltimore and found that high school students with commutes exceeding an hour were approximately three times more inclined to switch schools compared to those with commutes under 10 minutes. Further, they reported:

[S]tudents who do change schools, on average, attend new schools that are closer to home but less likely to have been ranked highly [in the top 5] in their initial choice application. It is possible that these associations could be even stronger if we had measures of actual commuting behavior and not just travel estimates (p. 142).

A survey among parents of K-6 students in the city of St. Paul, MN, and adjacent suburban Roseville Area Schools indicated that school choice resulted in longer school commute distances and decreased levels of walking and bicycling to school (Wilson et al., 2010). At the time, St. Paul was home to 34 intra-district magnet schools while Roseville had one intra-district magnet school. The study also found that magnet school students typically had a longer commute distance, with a median travel distance of 2.7 miles for magnet compared to 1 mile for neighborhood schools.

Lincove and Valant (2018) examined commute times by school bus, car, and public transit among a sample of 17 charter and district-run schools in New Orleans (Lincove & Valant, 2018). Car travel was by far the shortest commute time (median time of 14 minutes), followed by school bus (35 minutes) and public transit (minutes); car travel time also exhibited the least variability. In their analysis of morning bus ride time for 120,000 New York City elementary students, Cordes et al. (2022) found that the typical bus ride lasted around 21 minutes, with most students having commutes of less than 30 minutes. Only 6.1 percent of students had long bus rides of between 45 to 60 minutes, while rides exceeding one hour affected 3.3 percent of bus riders. However, they also found an unequal impact on students of color who participated in school choice:

Students with very long bus rides are disproportionately Black and almost exclusively attend district choice or charter schools. Commute times negatively impact both attendance and chronic absenteeism, particularly among students in district choice schools, for whom long and very long commutes decrease attendance by 0.330 and 0.625 percentage points and increase the probability of chronic absenteeism by 1.8 and 3.2 percentage points, respectively (Cordes et al., 2022, p. 690).

Lenhoff et al. (2023) researched student transportation in choice-rich Detroit public schools. Slightly more than half (53 percent) of the students were eligible for school-sponsored transportation (i.e., school bus or public bus passes). They found that roughly half of the students who were eligible to ride the bus never did so.

There is also some evidence that bus access and use is related to student race and socioeconomic status (Weinstein et al., 2022). Research on school bus transit in New York City reported that Black students were less likely to use school buses compared to White students, even when both groups resided at similar distances from school (Weinstein et al., 2022). Additionally, other studies have indicated that Black students tend to commute to school by car, while students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more prone to using the bus (Rhoulac, 2005).

Distance and Attendance

Some evidence suggests choice students who take the bus exhibit higher attendance and are less likely to be chronically absent [once enrolled] (Cordes et al., 2019; Gottfried, 2017). Gottfried (2017) found that reliable school transportation was associated with higher academic and non-academic outcomes, such as attendance. Cordes et al. (2022) reported that longer commute times were related to lower attendance and higher chronic absenteeism in New York City district choice schools. Other research demonstrated that long commutes were associated with reduced sleep and exercise for students (Voulgaris et al., 2019).

Equity Considerations

School desegregation programs that operate under voluntary school choice are intended to promote educational equity. Research shows that historically marginalized groups participating in school choice generally face longer commutes (BurdickWill, 2017; Corcoran, 2018; Cowen et al., 2018; He & Giuliano, 2018; Scott & Marshall, 2019; Stein et al., 2017). If under-resourced families are disparately burdened by transportation issues or, worse yet, they avoid participating altogether due to difficulties with transportation, equity remains elusive. Transportation equity research can help inform the degree to which educational access and transportation equity are at odds (Bierbaum et al., 2021). For some students, commute times can be long because choice schools are often located lengthy distances from student residences. Returning home from school can also be complicated by limited late bus options for students participating in after-school activities. Relieving burdens on choice students leads to more fair and reasonable transportation experiences and could invite increased participation in choice. Additionally, household structure and social networks are influential in shaping how students commute to school (Bierbaum et al., 2021). Single-parent households or those with two working parents tend toward car usage due to its flexibility in managing complex travel logistics (Makarewicz, 2013; Mandic et al., 2017). While women often serve as primary caregivers and frequently accompany children to school, regardless of transportation mode, challenges in work schedules and safety perceptions hinder walking and cycling to school (He, 2013; Lidbe et al., 2020).

The Greater Hartford School Choice Program

School choice is designed to improve educational outcomes and provide educational equity for students in highly segregated schools. In Hartford, voluntary public school choice is offered through interdistrict magnet schools, vocational schools, charter schools, and an interdistrict student transfer program. This study focuses on the interdistrict magnet schools and Open Choice program in the Greater Hartford region, two programs overseen by RSCO. Both programs are designed to desegregate racially, ethnically, and economically stratified schools as part of the longstanding *Sheff v. O'Neill* (1996) settlement agreement.

Greater Hartford is home to 43 interdistrict magnet schools ranging in grade levels and academic or curricular foci. Most magnet schools are operated by either Hartford Public Schools (Hartford Host Magnets) or the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC Magnets). CREC oversees the Hartford-area Open Choice program⁴, an urban-suburban student transfer program that encourages students from

⁴ <https://schoolstatefinance.org/resource-assets/Connecticuts-Open-Choice-Program.pdf>

Hartford to attend one of several suburban⁵ school options within their geographic zone, and suburban students to attend a school in Hartford. In 2022-23, more than 20,000 Greater Hartford students attended the two largest interdistrict choice programs -- magnets and Open Choice. Aggregate magnet school enrollment is about seven times that of Open Choice. Seats are made available by school districts on a voluntary basis.

School choice applications are administered through an annual lottery managed by RSCO. Interested families submit applications indicating their school preferences and can rank up to five schools per magnet and Open Choice programs. Student placement is dictated by several factors, including preferences for applicants with siblings enrolled in a choice school. In addition, a primary placement factor involves a measure of family socioeconomic status (SES). The current guidelines for placement call for new cohorts to be assigned to schools such that they enroll no more than 60 percent students from SES Tier A (lower income students) and no lower than 30 percent students from SES Tier C (higher income students). The settlement stipulation includes other requirements, such as meeting Hartford-resident demand targets and ensuring enrollment in an interdistrict magnet does not exceed 75 percent from any single school district, including Hartford. While the RSCO lottery offers placements to schools, families may decline offers and do so at reasonably high rates; in the 2019-2020 lottery, Hartford-resident students declined a first-choice magnet school offer 43.3 percent of the time while Suburban students declined at the modestly higher rate of 56.7 percent (Cobb & Connery, 2021).

Influence of Transportation on RSCO Participation⁶

Families participating in voluntary school choice programs are particularly reliant on safe and efficient transportation services. Busing in the Greater Hartford School Choice Program is highly complex given the geographic spread of the region, the number of students requiring transportation, and the number of schools involved. The RSCO transportation zone constitutes 43 municipalities in metro Hartford. Any one magnet school may enroll students from dozens of municipalities in and around Hartford. Some students attending interdistrict choice schools make multiple transfers to get to their destinations, as centralized stops may be necessary to efficiently transport students. Last year, RSCO transported over 14,000 students to 180 schools across metro Hartford.⁶

A previous RSCO analysis of why families declined a lottery seat suggested transportation, although not the main reason, influenced their decisions (Cobb & Connery, 2021). The study found that 17.5 percent of parents who actively declined their first-choice (i.e., top-ranked choice indicated by applicant) magnet school placement offer cited transportation or travel as a concern. Of these decliners, 10.9 percent referenced a transportation issue⁷ and another 6.6 percent indicated the school or district was too far

⁵ An important note about our use of the term “suburban” throughout this report. We use it to reference suburban municipalities and districts, even though there is variation in their geography and degree of “urbanicity.” There are ostensibly “inner ring” municipalities around Hartford and an extended “outer ring” (some considered “exurbs”).

⁶ Source: <https://www.crec.org/transportation/rSCO.php>

⁷ Transportation: not available (3.9%), pick-up/drop-off times inconvenient (3.9%), not available until after school starts (1.6%), centralized stops are too far away (1.0%), bus stops for siblings in choice in different locations (.5%). Source: Cobb & Connery, 2021, Table 15a, p. 22.

away. A similar study examined reasons why students voluntarily left a RSCO magnet school (Cobb et al., 2021). In that analysis, 45 parents (representing 57 children who left) were asked their reason(s) for leaving. Transportation ranked fourth among reasons, cited by 22 percent of parents.

The two prior studies suggest that transportation influences participation in the Greater Hartford Regional School Choice Program. Of course, there are limitations to such inferences about how large a role transportation plays in parents' participation in RSCO. For instance, we did not know the degree to which transportation affected decisions for families who did not apply to the lottery.

We focused on conducting a qualitative analysis of parental experiences with transportation through interviews as detailed in this report. From this, we additionally worked to support and contextualize themes that emerged in interviews by using secondary datasets concerning both parental complaints and student transit details. We present the findings of these analyses followed by recommendations to help mitigate possible negative impacts that transportation related issues may have on school choice decisions, as well as to build on existing strengths to improve student transportation going forward.

Study 1: Parent Experiences with School Transportation

For this qualitative analysis, we employed a case study design that allowed us to investigate how parents⁸ of students in interdistrict choice experienced transportation to and from school – as embedded in a real-world social context (Yin, 2018). Our case study design allowed for exploration of the conditions, processes, and beliefs that shape families’ experiences with transportation which, in turn, shapes their decisions to enroll and continue to enroll in their child/ren to Open Choice and/or magnet schools. Primary data were collected via parent interviews.

This analysis was guided by two overarching research questions:

1. How do parents of children enrolled in an interdistrict magnet or Open Choice school experience school transportation?
2. How and to what degree do their experiences influence their participation in Choice programs?

Analytic Approach

RSCO provided a database containing student information on the interdistrict magnet or Open Choice school that they attended alongside parent contact information. This information included students who attended magnet or Open Choice schools at any time between the 2017-18 and the 2022-23 school years. Using stratified random sampling, we selected students across various municipalities, schools, and grade levels.

We employed rolling random selection – contacting 25 to 50 parents at a time – to obtain a sample size sufficient to achieve data saturation (Glazer & Strauss, 2017). This occurred over a span of five months, from June to November 2023. In total, over 500 parents were contacted via phone through text message, or email, asking for their participation in a short interview about their transportation experiences. As an incentive, we offered a \$25 gift card for their time. We were mindful of our sample’s representation as we scheduled participants. Thus, midway through the project, we adjusted our sampling frame to increase participation from Hartford residents, who were underrepresented in our sample. Response rates were low, generating 44 participants, but not altogether inconsistent with other forms of survey research.

We conducted virtual or phone interviews with all 44 parents, who collectively represented 71 children who were current or former magnet or Open Choice students. We asked parents about their

⁸ For brevity, throughout this report we use the term “parents” to more broadly refer to parents, caretakers, or guardians.

experiences with school transportation and to what extent transportation affected their decision-making process regarding initial and continued participation in choice programs. Of the 44 parents interviewed, 18 were Hartford residents and 26 were suburban parents (Table 1). Ten (10) of the Hartford parents sent their children to Open Choice, 5 sent their children to a magnet school, 2 sent their children (siblings) to both a magnet and Open Choice school. Among the suburban parents, most (84.6 percent) were enrolled in a magnet. Five parents had withdrawn their child/ren from the Choice program.

Table 1. Parent Interview Sample (n=44)

Residence	Magnet		Open Choice		Magnet & OC		No Longer in Choice		Total N
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Hartford	5	18.5%	10	100.0%	2	100.0%	1	20.0%	18
Suburban	22	81.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	80.0%	26
Total	27	100.0%	10	100.0%	2	100.0%	5	100.0%	44

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013). Each participant was interviewed once for approximately 15-20 minutes. See Appendix A for the interview protocol. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, with all identifiable information removed.

Transcript data were analyzed thematically via a process that included multiple rounds of inductive coding. Following systematic procedures, we moved from narrow units of analysis (e.g., significant statements) to broader units (e.g., meaning units) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal was to understand and describe how families experienced school transportation.

We engaged in an initial phase of inductive coding to follow themes surfacing from the data. We organized this first phase of coding in a codebook, including for each code a definition, an example, notes, and a frequency count. Following this first phase of coding, we conducted a second phase of focused coding to find prominent emergent themes pertinent to the research questions (Miles et al., 2014). During this process we refined the codebook and wrote analytic memos. This iterative process also included frequent returns to the data set to ensure a closer and more accurate interpretation of the data. After coding all data, we created a variety of matrices to help develop interpretations and check for disconfirming evidence (Miles et al., 2014). Finally, to limit research bias in analysis and interpretation of data, we conducted peer debriefing and engaged in reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We accomplished this by cross-checking codes and member checking of emergent themes to avoid bias and increase trustworthiness and dependability.

Findings

Through our coding process and subsequent analysis, we identified five distinct themes that emerged from the interview data. These included: *bus stops, parent adaptations and personal transportation, after school extracurriculars, communication, and sacrifices for school opportunities*. We expound on each below.

Bus Stops

Of the 44 parents interviewed, 59 percent referenced problems with the bus stop⁹ as an issue with transit for their students, particularly with regard to central stops. Complaints included the distance to the stop from home, the nature of the commute to the stop, and contextual aspects of the stop location itself.

Distance to the stop was a major concern for parents in our sample, who often noted that the location of the bus stop was too far from their home for their children to walk. This was particularly common for parents of suburban students attending magnet schools. One parent said that “it would be nice if they picked up at the house and that would be, you know, especially if there’s a lot of kids in the same neighborhood, you know, it just would be closer.” Another suburban parent located in the same town said that after enrolling their son in the school choice program it had become inconvenient because they now “have to like bring him to...a bus stop instead of just sending him, you know, to the corner.” When asked if their son could walk to his new bus stop for the magnet school, they noted that even though it was geographically close it wasn’t walkable due to a forest in between their home and the stop making the distance much farther than the distance as the crow flies.

Some parents were specifically concerned with the safety of stops location or the walk to them. One Hartford parent described their child’s stop as particularly unsafe in “a really bad area. Drugs. It’s prostitutes... It’s just really kind of hidden. And kind of dangerous.” The same parent said she didn’t “feel like the bus system really considers location when they’re putting bus stops” and that her daughter had been followed home one night from the stop, prompting the parent to demand a stop change.

Worries about safety, particularly early in the morning or on later afternoon stops, were not unique to Hartford parents. A parent of a suburban student attending a magnet school noted that even though they had a stop “right down the street...I still don’t have a walk there because it’s dark at night and on the corner.” Similarly, another parent specifically worried about her children’s stop being across a busy road in the dark. In her words the walking trip was “unsafe because of the time that they [her children] have to be there.” She also informed us that the public library that had served as a safe spot for her children had been closed.

Parents worried about stop safety were sometimes concerned about busy roads at or on the way to the stop. One parent with multiple children enrolled in magnet schools said she worried about one of her kids crossing a particular busy road if they wanted to walk to their stop. Another parent whose child’s bus stop was in a different location along the same major road noted that there were “no sidewalks on that street,” and that in order to wait for the bus, they had to rely on pulling into a driveway off the road because there was nowhere else to stand or wait.

In some cases, parents were specifically inconvenienced by the location of a bus stop in terms of its impact on their routine and work schedule. One suburban parent said it was “so hard to get them there

⁹ The families we interviewed did not always distinguish between centralized, neighborhood, or home bus stop locations. Thus, we use the generic term “bus term” throughout.

[the bus stop] and then back in the morning or in the evening trying to pick them up is difficult.” Another parent of an elementary school student said she’d had problems with the centralized stop and her own schedule, saying “when parents are waiting at a bus stop, that is not their own home or not in their neighborhood, that they might have, like scheduling a conflict if the bus is even 10-15 minutes late.”

Some parents, even though most remained in choice, said they preferred the transportation options offered by the traditional public school system, or that these options were more convenient to them. This appeared to be particularly the case when local schools offered either neighborhood or door to door transportation, and the magnet program limited them to stops that were further away. One parent of multiple Magnet Choice students said that their local district would “pick the kids up in a reasonable location where they could walk to,” as opposed to the magnet transportation stop, which was too far away to travel by foot. Similarly, another parent in the same district said that when her child attended the local school system, “the bus would pick her up right at the corner of where we live, so it was much easier for me to be able to maneuver getting her to school, picking her up.”

Some parents much preferred their local transportation options but were still intent on keeping their children enrolled in a magnet program school. However, other parents preferred their local options for transit so much that they had withdrawn or planned to withdraw their students from a magnet after graduating the school they had been in. One suburban parent who had chosen not to pursue further magnet enrollment after her children finished an early childhood magnet said that this decision was “partly also just because they’re in a town school, we get the luxury of, like, a very convenient pickup spot.”

In fact, some parents expressed regret that they had enrolled their children in school choice in the first place due to these issues. One suburban parent said that due to the difficulty of the distance to the bus stop, along with other issues with the transit system, that if she was redoing her school choice she “definitely would have kept my kids in [Local District], like in the public school, because it would have brought a lot less stress to my family.” Another parent in a similar situation said that looking back at her school choice decision she “would definitely choose to have just kept them in the school where they could use the public [school] transportation for our family. It would just make it so much easier.”

One Hartford parent with a student attending a magnet school worked to get a bus stop changed saying she “fought for this one, but it’s at the corner now of our streets. It took me a long time to get that bus stop.” In a few different instances the bus stop was convenient for parents when it was near or in a childcare center that coordinated with the choice school. This parent mentioned, “I bring them to a daycare in town. And then from the daycare, they’re bused to school.”

Parent Adaptations and Personal Transportation

School transportation is significantly less accessible for Hartford Open Choice parents when a parent does not have personal transportation. A large majority of parents we interviewed (68 percent) drove their children either directly to school or to the bus stop each day. Whether driving was a necessity or preference among parents, the task often brought on burdens. For example, one Hartford parent who sends her children to Open Choice and magnet schools said, “So the past three years, they rode the bus. Well, yeah, except for last year I had so many complications with one of them that I started driving them

to school most mornings. And then this year I am driving them to school.” She explained that their family made the decision to move to Hartford to, “have more education choices and so that [their] transportation wouldn't be that long.”

One suburban parent spoke about her children having school disruptions from car issues, noting that they “went through a period last year where our car broke down and like I said, it's not walking distance, so CREC didn't really offer any other, you know, alternative in terms of getting them to school. So they missed maybe like a week of school. So it's kind of inconvenient.” She said that when she reached out, she was given few options. “When I didn't have a car, there was just really no options. And the school had no resources for me, either. They told me to maybe take a Uber or do this or do that. But they didn't like help with that in any way.” She said that “even though they say every kid should have the choice of what school they want to attend, it's not really a choice if you don't have a car,” which echoed the sentiments of multiple parents.

Another parent expressed similar worries about potential issues with a family vehicle, saying that in the case of a breakdown, “I would try to either have someone else come and help me bring him, or maybe call an Uber. Those are the only options I can think of. But if it was more of a long-term thing, I would probably have to put him back into the [District] system and take him out of the CREC program.” Again, this echoed parent sentiment that without car transit, many students would be unable to participate in school choice. A third parent in a similar situation was forced to circumvent the bus system entirely and take her child to school each day. She expressed that she

...felt like that's the way to shut out some of the parents who honestly have no, no option. There is no option for me. Other than to take her myself. Because there's absolutely no way, based on my schedule, (one), (two) based on where I live, for us to be able to get her bus to school, it's just no option. And then on top of that. I'm being told, well, you'll either have to take her or she can't be in school.

A theme that appeared multiple times was that parents had to leverage connections and make other personal adaptations in order to navigate gaps they perceived or experienced in the transit system. One parent said that in inclement weather they “have a relationship with one of the businesses in [Local Mall], and so we've always told him that, you know, at the very least he could go into that business to be warm or if it's snowing and you need to wait for us.” A Hartford parent explained, “it was like a couple of times where their bus would, like, completely miss their stops or I would not even get a phone call. The only way I would even know sometimes would be from my aunt who actually worked at the bus company.” Through these parents' adaptations, they were able to alleviate the gaps they experienced.

After School Extracurriculars

A handful of parents mentioned that they were disappointed that extracurricular activities at school were inaccessible to their children due to lack of transportation. A parent whose child was enrolled in Open Choice raised the availability of after school activity as a potential issue of equity, saying that “if you ask any of the Hartford family parents about our kids, especially the kids, they would tell you that there are barriers to their participation [in] after school activities. So not equitable.” She specifically spoke about the possibility of Hartford students missing out on opportunities for developing

connections with peers in the district through after school extracurricular activities, such as clubs or sports. She also worried that the system as it was “singled out” Hartford students in Open Choice noting that when they missed out on these opportunities “then everybody also knows who the Hartford kids are.”

Other families who were offered transportation for after-school activities expressed their frustration, mentioning that the bus was often unreliable. One suburban parent explained,

So there was an after school bus for certain after school activities. Horrible. Several times the bus didn't show up to pick them up from the after school activity. So I was waiting at the bus stop and I was texting her and calling her and she's like, no, there's no bus here. And I'm like, hey, I'm just going to come pick you up and then when I got to the school, the coordinator would be like, I have no clue where the bus is. The bus never came, or the bus was supposed to pick them up at 4. Sometimes it would show up at like 5. I just got in the habit of just picking her up.

Another suburban parent said, “His bus sometimes does not pick him up from the school until as late as 5:30 or even 6:00. And so you can imagine he's the last stop... So we when he has after school activities, we have no idea, really, what time he's actually going to arrive.”

Furthermore, some of these parents brought up their concern that transportation interfered with local activities or extracurriculars because buses showed up late. One suburban parent said it was hard to get her daughter to certain programs and that “she's missing out on stuff because you don't know when the bus is going to be early or when it's going to be late.” Another parent noted that “the only thing that is really hard for us [about transportation] is after school sports.” They specifically singled out that their town had only one late bus for all students in Hartford magnets, and so if an activity's schedule did not align with that one bus, they would have to miss it.

Communication

Approximately half of the parents (48 percent) mentioned that the communication system between the transportation service and parents was unreliable. One Hartford parent said, “So like sometimes we get the call, and it would say 10 to 20 minutes from your scheduled stop time, but it was already 10 to 20 minutes from our scheduled stop time.” Some parents sought alternative ways to receiving better information about where their child was, for example, getting contact information of the bus driver. A suburban parent said,

They finally found a permanent driver that I exchanged phone numbers with so that way we could actually communicate, and she would say, ‘Hey. I'm running late today’ and then I would get on the phone and I would call the bus company and say, ‘how come my driver can tell me at 7:00 that she's going to be late, but you are not sending out a notification’. She was really good about at least communicating and that's that was my biggest issue with the transportation. There was no communication. We would be sitting there, and it would be 7:30 and we would not get a notification.

Other parents felt the need to buy students devices such as phones or GPS watches to help track them. A Hartford parent said that the bus “was consistently outside of that window, enough that none of us came at the beginning of that window. It was consistently outside of that window enough that I bought a GPS watch for my kids, so I would know where they were. There were days when they would be 40 minutes late.” Incidentally, vehicle GPS tracking services are provided by two of the three RSCO Transportation bus companies, but no parents in our sample referred to it.

A Hartford parent mentioned that they tried to reach out to the bus company to talk about how to improve communication. However, they were unhappy with the outcome.

[W]hen I called the bus company and I asked to sit down with somebody to see if we could find or create a possibility, I felt really shut down when they were like, ‘No, we don't have anybody visit because of COVID.’ This was last year when I feel like it was getting to be mostly just the choice of a company, not because of COVID. So I guess, yeah, I felt really shut down. I felt not supported. I felt like there wasn't any way they were going to help find possibilities for my children.

Sacrifices for School Opportunities

Despite 71 percent of parents communicating that they had some concern with school transportation, many felt the education their children were receiving outweighed the challenges they were facing. One suburban parent said,

I want to say yes to transportation like is a huge benefit, but... [I'm] making all these sacrifices to get my kid to school so that they can have a better experience. It was hard those couple of years. The thing is, is that my kids really need to go to that school. They do not fit in in our local school and the magnet schools are truly a blessing to my family and so to get them there, I would do anything but at the same time, transportation is such a huge benefit to my family. Like truly... this is the best.

A Hartford parent who sends their children to an Open Choice school mentioned,

If there was no transportation, I would have to consider even moving to [Town]. Which I would do because I love the school system. But maybe they would be going to a different school that's a little bit closer. So yeah, if there was no transportation, they probably wouldn't be going to that school.

Twenty-two (22) percent of parents expressed positive feelings about their bus stop location, mainly parents in suburban districts with door-to-door or nearby bus stops. A suburban parent noted, “it certainly made it easier because we live in the same town as the magnet school. We get door to door transportation.” Likewise, another parent said, “It consists of us walking to the bus stop at the end of our mailbox and the bus meets us there.”

However, for a small number of parents we spoke to (5 parents), their experience with transportation was so negative that they decided to remove their child from the Open Choice or magnet school program. A suburban parent mentioned,

We were in a position where we had to choose whose education is more important and it's a horrible way to put it but, we have one son, our oldest, who's very computer technology design. He flourished. He's in AP classes. I'm like this is important for him. He needs this type of education. Our youngest. He's more about community and sports and he'll end up going to a trade school. So I'm like, alright, you know having him back in [Local District] won't kill him for the next three years.

Another suburban parent mentioned that she had made the choice to not continue enrolling her child in magnet schools in part “because they're in a town school, we get the luxury of... a very convenient pickup spot.” She specified that this was a major factor in her decision process. Another parent living in the same town said that she specifically pulled her kids from the magnet school program “because of the transportation issues.”

Conclusion

Interviews with parents revealed students and family experiences with school transportation. We found that the themes most frequently raised by parents included bus stops, parent personal adaptations and transportation, after school extracurriculars, communication, sacrifices for school opportunities. Key issues that emerged from the findings include, stop distance from home, safety of bus stops, need for parent adaptations to alleviate transportation access issues, unreliable busing for extracurricular activities or no busing for extracurricular activities, and an unreliable transportation communication system. We provided recommendations at the end of the report to address these problems.

Limitations of Qualitative Study

The findings from parent interviews are based on parents who were willing or able to speak with us. We made extensive efforts to recruit parents to the study, but only a small fraction of parents we randomly contacted ended up participating. Thus, we cannot be certain the parents in our sample are necessarily representative of all parents whose child attends a magnet or Open Choice school. Finally, parents do their best to explain their experience with transportation to and from school, but this is based on their view and absent from the perspective of the school. Nonetheless, the parent views represented here revealed some distinct patterns overall.

Study 2: Bus Complaint Logs

Bus Complaint Logs

The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) serves as the transportation contractor on behalf of RSCO. During the year, the CREC Transportation Office fields travel-related complaints from parents. Parents can submit their complaints by phone, email, or an online web form. Customer service representatives record complaints in a database, assigning each a ticket ID for record keeping and ongoing resolution. Each ticket also includes the date of the initial complaint, the school in which the student attends, a brief description of the complaint and any actions in response, and a code categorizing the nature of the complaint. The latter represent predetermined categories such as “bus/vehicle driver,” “central stops,” and “excessive lateness;” the categories are either selected by families using a dropdown list on the online form or, in the cases of phone calls or voice messages, are assigned by CREC.

Analytic Approach

RSCO provided us access to the 2022-23 complaint dataset, which contained 1,285 unique complaints. For each complaint there were typically 2-3 records documenting correspondence with parents or other transportation personnel. For instance, customer service representatives would issue notes such as “returned call to family” or describe in detail their actions in response to the complaint. Often the records indicated the situation was resolved with no further action required. In total there were 6,148 records for the 1,285 complaints. Nearly 85 percent of the 1,285 complaints were resolved or closed with three or fewer ticket documentations.

We descriptively analyzed complaints by ticket, generating frequency distributions for key fields such as complaint ticket source, ticket date, and complaint type.

Findings

More than three-quarters (77.4 percent) of the complaints were submitted by phone (Table 2), followed by the online web form (15.5 percent), and email (4.0 percent). Complaints were also disaggregated by the students’ school. Magnet schools that had at least 20 complaints are listed in Table 3. The list is ordered by “complaint per student ratio” to account for school size (but *not* the number of students bused to that school). Some schools received relatively more complaints than others. Reggio Magnet School of the Arts had the highest complaint per student ratio,¹⁰ followed by Ana Grace, Museum Academy, Aerospace and Engineering Elementary, and Glastonbury-East Hartford School for Global Citizenship. These schools serve elementary grade levels, which may partly explain their higher rate of complaints; that is, parents and guardians of young children may be more apt to be concerned for their child’s welfare.

¹⁰ Incidentally, we heard from Reggio parents in our interview sample that Reggio transportation worked well for suburban families living nearby, and not as well for those living far away from the school.

Table 2. Complaint Submission Source, CREC Transportation Database, 2022-23

Source	N	%
Call, Inbound	995	77.4
Call, Outbound	28	2.2
Email, Inbound	51	4.0
Email, Outbound	3	.2
In Person	3	.2
Web Form	199	15.5
Letter, Inbound	1	.1
Other	2	.2
Skype	1	.1
Voice Mail, Personal	2	.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,285</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Table 3. Transportation Complaints by Student Magnet School Destination (minimum 20 complaints), 2022-23

Magnet School	No. of Complaints	School Enrollment	Complaint per Student Ratio
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts	70	514	0.14
Ana Grace Academy of Arts Elem Magnet	96	863	0.11
Museum Academy	57	513	0.11
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elem	64	578	0.11
Glastonbury-East Hartford Elem Magnet	50	495	0.10
Internat'l. Magnet School for Global Citizenship	30	494	0.06
University of Hartford Magnet	30	510	0.06
Environmental Sciences Magnet at Mary Hooker	29	556	0.05
Discovery Academy	27	520	0.05
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	39	768	0.05
Kinsella Magnet School of the Performing Arts	22	465	0.05
Classical Magnet School	20	445	0.04
PSA Civic Leadership High School	21	496	0.04
Academy of Science and Innovation	30	756	0.04
Sports And Medical Sciences Academy	20	530	0.04
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School	24	642	0.04
MLC for Global and International Studies	26	709	0.04
CT River Academy	21	664	0.03
Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy	27	963	0.03

Table 4 shows the categories of complaints that were either selected on the online form by the family member or, in cases in which a phone call was received, were issued by CREC Transportation customer service representatives. Most of the complaints fell under “bus/vehicle driver,” “late or no notification of delays,” and a category labeled as “other.”

In reviewing the descriptions of the complaint entered for each ticket, we noticed some did not necessarily align with the reason code. Part of the issue could be that some of the categories overlapped with one another (e.g., “central stops” and “stop location”). Another could be that certain complaints implicated more than one reason code but only one could be selected. “Stop location” and “central stops” were not prominent concerns, at least as recorded in the complaint database. Incidentally, this contrasts with what we learned from the parent interviews, where bus stops were raised as a significant issue. We suspect the complaint system categories may be diffused to the point where stop location could be classified ¹¹ In other words, bus stop complaints may not all be captured under the “stop location” and “central stop” codes.

¹¹ Here is an example from a complaint ticket classified as a “bus/vehicle driver” problem: “Parent called stating that the driver is dropping her student off in an unsafe location at the intersections of Lyme St &”

Table 4. Complaint Codes Recorded in CREC Transportation Complaint Database, 2022-23

Complaint Code	N	%
Bus Monitor	53	4.1
Bus Schedule	95	7.4
Bus/Vehicle Driver	502	39.1
Central Stops	13	1.0
CREC Athletics	1	.1
Excessive Lateness - AM or PM Transport	27	2.1
Late or No Notification of Delays	255	19.8
No notification received of route or stop change	16	1.2
No Response	6	.5
Other	142	11.1
Route Too Long	20	1.6
Stop Location	62	4.8
Student	93	7.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,285</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Unsurprisingly, most complaints were issued early in the school year (Table 5 and Figure 1), a time when buses and families are adjusting to the new routine. As the year progressed, complaints tapered off. Figure 2 shows complaints by month and by complaint type; “bus/vehicle driver” complaints, although declining over the school year, remained an issue throughout to a degree.

Table 5. Complaints by Month of Occurrence, 2022-23

Month	N	%
August	29	2.3
September	356	27.7
October	235	18.3
November	122	9.5
December	90	7.0
January	110	8.6
February	89	6.9
March	100	7.8
April	59	4.6
May	62	4.8
June	21	1.6
July	12	.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,285</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Figure 1. Complaints by Month of Occurrence, 2022-23

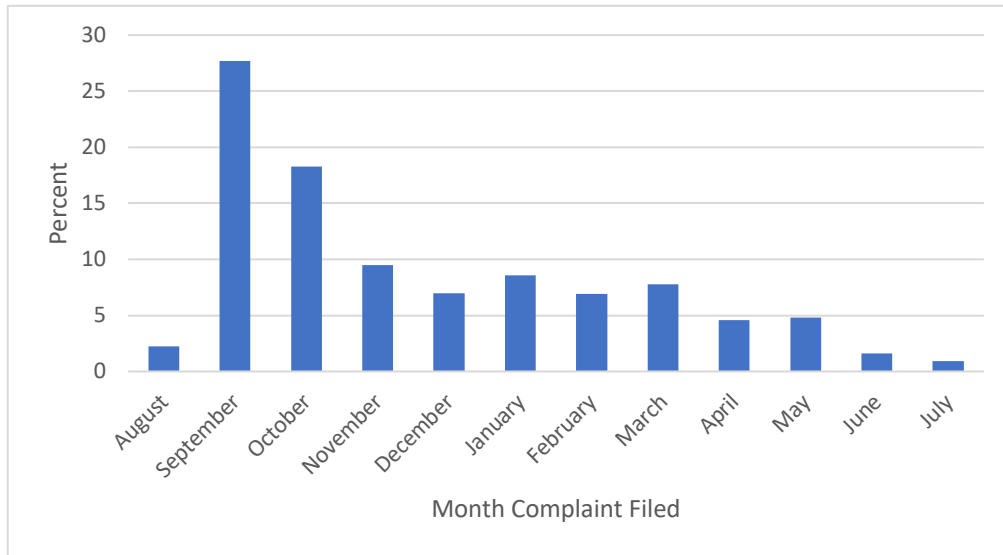
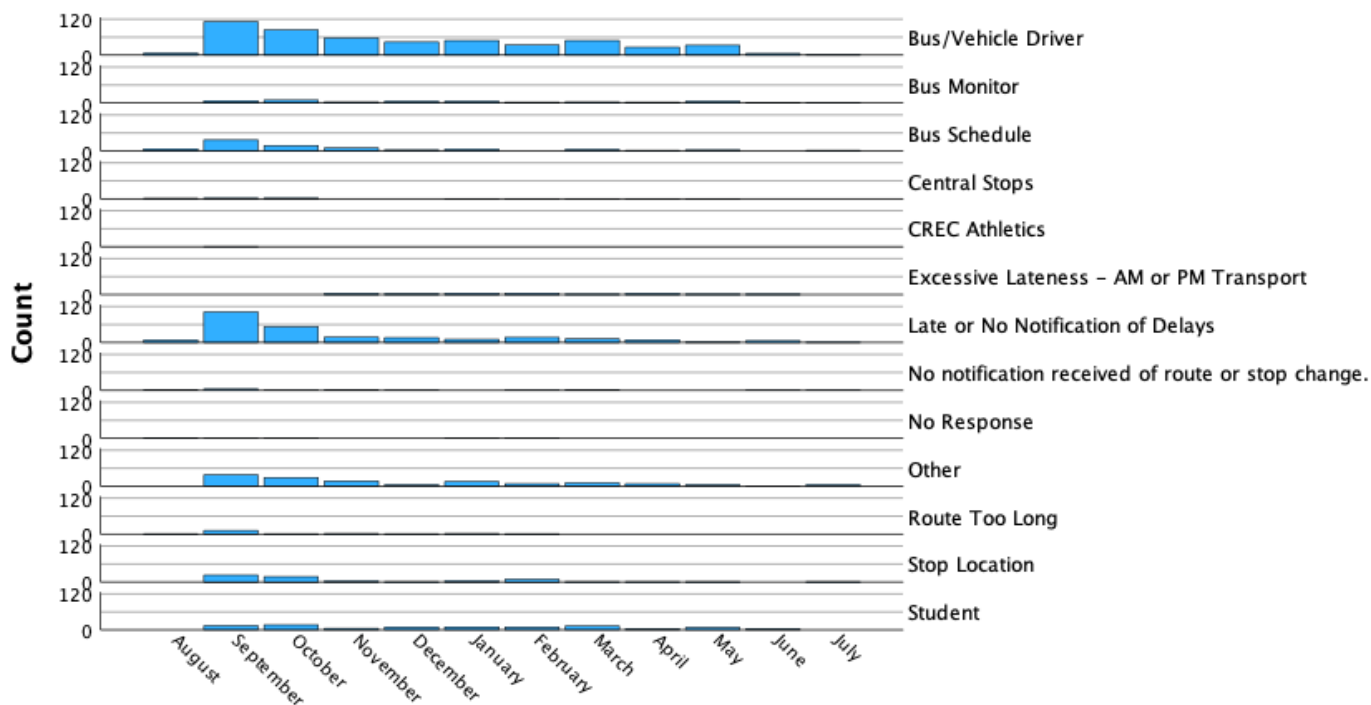


Figure 2. Complaint Type by Month of Occurrence, 2022-2023



More on Complaint Descriptions

We did not analyze each recorded complaint as there were a substantial number. Below we offer two examples of what the complaints look like in the log. We use them as illustrations to provide a window into the system. Coincidentally, they also capture instances of some of the more common concerns we learned from the parent interviews.

The first is a complaint a parent submitted through the online form and, incidentally, selected the “bus schedule” category.¹² The parent has two children attending different magnet schools and parent expresses a concern with one of the stop locations. According to the record logs, the parent submitted an appeal to the RSCO Transportation email and offers a possible solution.

The pick up/drop off location is 3.1 miles and 45-1hr walk through extremely busy roads and intersections i.e [lists 2 intersections]. I do not have a car to drive him. My son leaves at 5:15am while it is still dark outside. Sidewalks are not 100% present, there are large hills, the weather is bad and this is extremely unsafe for any child to walk through. This leaves my child at risk of car accidents hypothermia, asthma attacks and kidnappings. Please allow us to work together to come up with a location that fits the current route while also ensuring that my child is safe to get to his bus stop and home each day.

¹² Later, a customer service representative changed this to “stop location” and issued a new ticket ID.

The parent subsequently appeals the stop location and requests a new stop.

I've submitted numerous requests for route changes as I do not have a vehicle to transport my children to a bus stop 2-3 miles away.

...

Requesting stop location [streets A & B]

The second example is a complaint called in by a parent concerned with a late bus and the timeliness of receiving a notification. Because it was called in by a parent, the description was recorded by a customer service representative.

Parent [Name] called in looking for an ETA to student [Name] bus stop location, parent stated the bus is constantly late without receiving notification in a timely manner, sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn't. at 8:09am the bus company put in...

East, 8:09 AM

[XXX XXX] BUS [XXX] Spare driver will be at 1st stop in 4mins. Running 5-10 mins otw

It is about a 15min gap between stop locations Parent pick up time is for 7:52am, parent opted to bring her students to school instead of being late parent wanted to put this complaint in hoping for some resolution regarding this matter.

The customer representative documented an additional response:

I reached out to the parent of [student] at [phone number] to find out how's things have been going with her student's route, parent didn't answer so I left a detailed voicemail explaining to reach out to the company with any other updates or concerns regarding her student bus route.

Summary

The complaint log system offers parents a way to immediately share transportation concerns with the bus company. In our review of a random sample of about 10 percent of the complaints, it appears CREC customer service representatives often can react in a timely manner and are able to resolve the issue. In some instances, communication was delayed or impeded, likely due to having to navigate through several layers of the bus ecosystem. The log data can provide useful information to transportation personnel looking to improve upon the transportation experience for students and families. But the feedback from the complaint logs is only as good as the quality of records. There seem to be areas for improvement in recording the nature of the complaints in the system.

Study 3: Student Travel Times to Schools and Bus Stops

Study 3A: Student Travel Times to Schools

We conducted a series of geospatial and statistical analyses using bus schedules, bus routes, and student address data provided by the RSCO Transportation Office.

Analytic Approach

Using bus schedules for students enrolled in a Choice program, we generated expected bus ride times. Although the expected times do not represent actual times of travel, we assume these are reasonably close estimates of actual time traveled to school. The initial dataset included 12,182 students --10,359 enrolled in magnets and 1,823 in Open Choice in the 2022-23 school year. For our analysis, we examined students attending interdistrict magnet schools operated either by Hartford or CREC. The 1,134 students enrolled in magnets overseen by other operators were excluded from the analysis.

We conducted descriptive analyses of the expected bus ride times by student resident group and choice program, as well as sending district for magnet students. Because bus stops were a major concern among parents we interviewed, we also used the dataset to estimate student distance to their stops to evaluate theoretical walkability for students. Estimates of walking travel time to stop was produced for a representative sample of students and used to assess the feasibility of walking to their bus stops from their homes.

Findings

Expected Bus Ride Times

Table 6 displays expected bus ride times across a variety of groups. The expected median bus ride from stop-to-school for magnet students was 38 minutes, with suburban students exhibiting a slightly longer median ride time (39 minutes) relative to Hartford students (36 minutes). Hartford Open Choice students had the longest median expected ride time at 44 minutes.¹³

We also disaggregated data by distinct ride time thresholds. That is, we deemed ride times over 30 minutes a "long" ride and any ride over 60 minutes to be "very long." Among Open Choice students, 88.1 percent had a *long* expected bus ride, and 18.6 percent had *very long* expected ride time,

¹³ Cordes et al. (2022) noted that there is no universal agreement on what constitutes a long ride for students traveling to school, and so created their own definitions of long (45-60 minutes) and very long (>60 minutes).

compared to 72.3 percent and 11.0 percent respectively of students in magnet schools. For students in magnet schools, suburban students generally take longer bus rides with a median of 39 minutes compared to 36 minutes for Hartford students.

Table 6. Expected Bus Ride Times by Choice Program and Student Resident Group, 2022-23

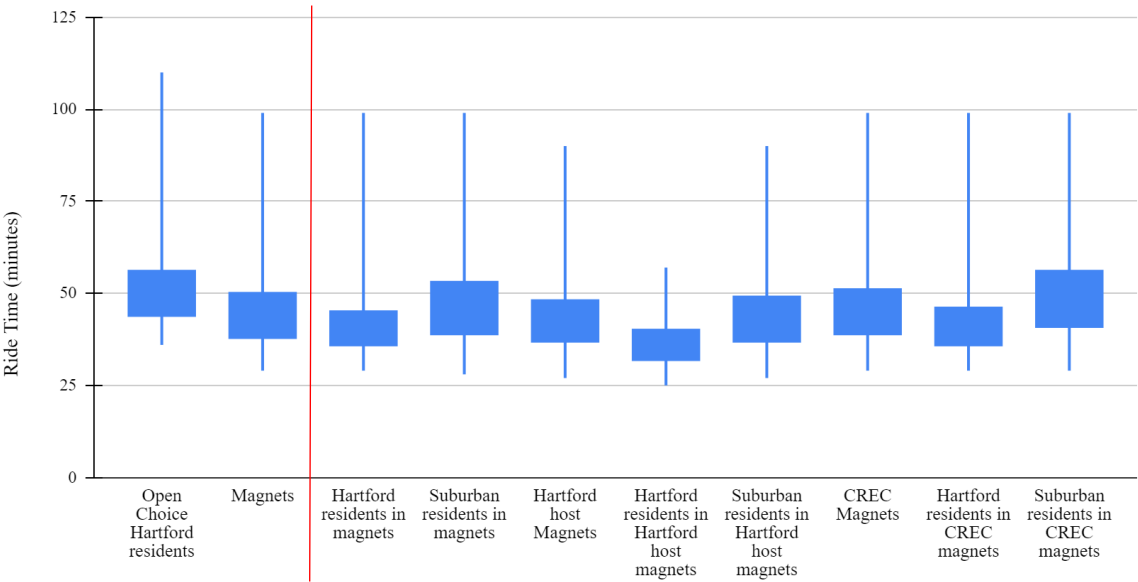
Choice Program by Resident Group	Median Expected Bus Ride Time (Minutes)	Median Absolute Deviation	Percent of Students with Ride Time ≥ 30 min	Percent of Students with Ride Time ≥ 60 min	N (known bused students)
Open Choice Hartford residents	44	10	88.1	18.7	1,823
Magnets	38	15	72.3	11.0	10,362
Hartford residents	36	8	73.3	5.2	3,726
Suburban residents	39	12	71.8	14.3	6,634
<i>Hartford Host Magnets</i>	37	10	68.8	7.5	3,649
<i>Hartford residents</i>	32	7	60.8	0.0	332
<i>Suburban residents</i>	37	11	69.6	8.3	3,317
<i>CREC Magnets</i>	39	11	74.2	12.9	6,711
<i>Hartford residents</i>	36	8	74.5	5.7	3,394
<i>Suburban residents</i>	41	13	74.0	20.3	3,317

These trends align with the location of most magnet schools in the metro Hartford area. Suburban students entering the Hartford metro to attend magnet schools and Hartford students leaving Hartford to attend Open Choice schools in the suburbs would unsurprisingly have longer travel times than students traveling within metro Hartford. In addition to having the lowest median travel time (32 minutes), Hartford residents attending Hartford hosted magnets show the narrowest distribution of expected ride times, particularly when compared to Open Choice students and suburban residents attending magnet schools. Interestingly, suburban residents attending Hartford Magnets had a median expected ride time (37 minutes) below the overall median for magnet students (38 minutes) and below the median for suburban students in CREC magnets (41 minutes) with a generally narrower distribution. This might suggest that regionality plays a role in terms of which Hartford hosted magnets suburban students apply to and attend, with some preference to schools located within the parts of metro Hartford easily accessible from a student’s home district. On the other hand, CREC magnet schools may have more students “passing through” the Hartford metro.

Figure 3 displays the distributions of estimated bus ride time by choice program and resident group using box and whisker plots. While median scores are useful (column 2, Table 6), box plots allow for direct comparisons across groups in terms of spread and central location of scores. The boxes represent the middle 50 percent of the score distribution (i.e., 25th to 75th percentile). A horizontal line is typically included within the box to represent the median, but our program did not produce it. We drew in lines for Open Choice and Magnet distributions as an example. The distributions in Figure 3 are all positively skewed, meaning most scores are bunched to the lower ride times side, and the remaining scores are

more dispersed all the way to the maximum ride time. The first two box plots show that Open Choice and magnet students have similar spread and concentration of estimated bus ride times, although Open Choice students have a generally longer ride.

Figure 3. Expected Bus Ride Times by Choice Program and Resident Group, 2022-23



In addition, expected bus ride time for magnet school students was examined by sending district. Table 7 shows all districts sending at least 30 students to magnet schools as organized by median expected bus ride time. The variation across districts was considerable, and likely heavily explained by district proximity to central Hartford, where the bulk of magnets are located. Students from Tolland, for example, had a median expected ride time of 62 minutes, with 100 percent having a “long” expected bus ride and 60.6 percent with a “very long” bus ride time. On the other end of the spectrum, students from West Hartford had a median expected ride time of only 24 minutes, with 39.4 percent having long bus rides and 7.4 percent having very long ride times. Notably, while West Hartford had the lowest median expected ride time, Plainville (median 35.5 minutes) and Wethersfield (median 26 minutes) tied for the lowest percentage of students with very long expected bus rides with 0 percent. Students from a given district likely would be attending different magnet schools, and as such some variance at the school level should be expected within districts.

Table 7. Expected Bus Ride Times for Suburban Magnet Students by Sending District (Sending 30 or more students), 2022-23

Sending District (30 or More Students)	Median Expected Bus Ride Time (Minutes)	Percent of Students with Ride Time ≥ 30 min	Percent of Students with Ride Time ≥ 60 min	N
Berlin	53	77.1	43.8	48
Bloomfield	33	61.7	9.8	379
Bristol	55	97.0	36.5	233
Cromwell	37	94.3	17.0	53
East Hartford	35	60.8	8.8	1,240
East Windsor	38	67.7	6.5	31
Ellington	46	91.1	26.8	56
Enfield	49	80.4	30.4	204
Farmington	32	58.8	2.9	34
Glastonbury	47.5	76.9	15.4	52
Hartford	36	73.3	5.2	3,728
Manchester	37	72.4	10.9	997
Middletown	49	97.2	20.6	141
New Britain	43	83.6	11.6	1,116
Newington	32	56.9	12.7	102
Plainville	35.5	78.3	0.0	46
Rocky Hill	37	58.1	11.3	62
South Windsor	41	66.7	13.3	105
Southington	39	95.2	14.3	63
Tolland	62	100.0	60.6	33
Torrington	55	100.0	35.9	78
Vernon Rockville	42	74.4	17.4	207
West Hartford	24	39.4	7.4	203
Wethersfield	26	36.4	0.0	129
Windsor	29	47.0	3.8	419
Windsor Locks	42	75.3	12.9	93

Figure 4 shows box plots by sending district. Differences in both spread and central tendency are evident across districts. As noted above, the location of sending districts in relation to most magnets likely explains some of the ride time differences.

Figure 4. Expected Bus Ride Times for Suburban Magnet Students by Sending District (Sending 30 or more students), 2022-23

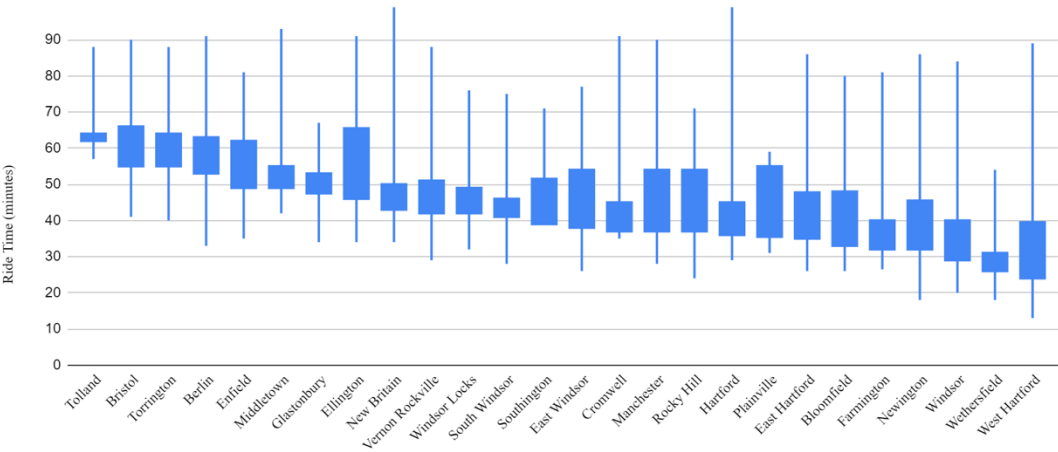
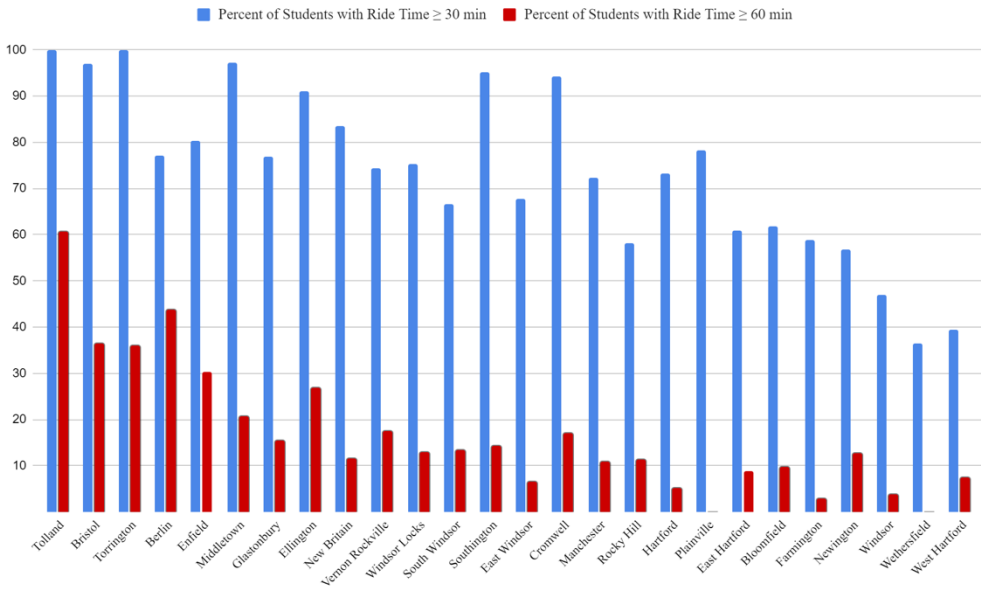


Figure 5. Percent of Magnet Students with Long and Very Long Bus Ride Times in Suburban Districts (Sending 30 or more students), 2022-23.



How do Estimated Bus Ride Times Compare to Traditional Public Schools?

To get a sense of how ride times for RSCO students compared to students attending their local (non-choice) schools, we generated expected bus ride times for students in a small sample of districts. We selected New Britain, South Windsor, and Vernon/Rockville to represent a range of geographies in the *Sheff* region and because their district bus route data were publicly available. Using 2021-22 bus route information for the afterschool drop-off, we calculated the time between students’ scheduled departure from school and scheduled drop-off time at their bus stop. A possible limitation to our measure was that

we mathematically assumed one student per stop location, which may be an inaccurate measure. Overall, however, this should have minimal impact for the purposes of comparing ride times on a basic level. New Britain students traveling to a district school had a median expected travel time of 12 minutes, compared to 43 minutes for New Britain students traveling to magnet schools. South Windsor students transported within district had an expected median ride time of 14 minutes, compared to 41 minutes for students going to magnets. Finally, Vernon/Rockville district students had a median ride time of 17 minutes compared to 42 minutes for magnet students. In all three cases, attendance in magnet school programs represented a substantial increase in expected bus ride times for students; this is thoroughly consistent with the research literature, which demonstrates choice students experience longer bus rides than what they would have attending their neighborhood-assigned district school (Corcoran, 2018).

Study 3B: Student Distance from Home to Bus Stop

Based on “bus stops” as a prominent theme that emerged from parent interviews, we analyzed the theoretical distance students would have to travel to reach their bus stops from their homes.

Analytic Approach

We selected a representative sample of 2,500 students from the total population of students attending magnet programs and Open Choice in the 2022-23 school year to analyze the distance between student home locations and their bus stops. The magnet sample was created starting by randomly selecting 500 suburban students in Hartford Host magnets using a random number generator. The resident town for each student was noted, which then allowed matching to a random student within suburban students in CREC magnets from the same town, creating a sample with 500 students with the same distribution of sending districts between CREC and Hartford magnet students from outside Hartford. This was done to decrease the possible effects of individual town on the measurement of stop distance. From there, a sub-sample of 1,000 students from Hartford attending magnet schools was created using 300 students from Hartford magnets and 700 Hartford students from CREC magnets. The imbalance in this sub-sample was due to the limited number of students receiving school bus transportation from Hartford attending Hartford Host magnet schools (a total of 332 students). Finally, 500 Hartford-resident students from the Open Choice program were randomly selected.

A code process using an embedded version of the Google Map Application Programming Interface (API) was used to determine the walking travel time between a student’s home and their bus stop¹⁴. The macro calculated the shortest-travel time walking path between the two locations using the API given average conditions, not factoring in time of day or conditions such as weather, traffic, or other factors. Due to the computer power required, estimates of walking times were completed in limited quantities over time to avoid “overheating” the system. In some cases, no viable walking path could be mapped most likely due to random computational error. In total, just over 1 percent of cases produced this error. These cases were dropped from the sample and their spot was resampled randomly from previously unselected cases in the same sending town to preserve the representative sample.

Findings

The results of the analysis show a wide range of travel times for students, with the widest difference being between Hartford students (in both magnet schools and Open Choice) and suburban magnet students (Table 8). This is to some degree unsurprising as the nature of Hartford as a city makes walkability to stops more likely. Hartford students in Open Choice had the lowest median walking distance to their stop with 2 minutes, with a relatively tight distribution of travel times as can be seen in Figure 8. Hartford students in magnet schools had a median walking travel of 4 minutes, with a slightly higher range of distances.

¹⁴ All identifying student data outside of home and stop location were removed from this data before processing. Address data remained solely within the data sheet and was internally processed by the embedded Google Maps API.

Table 8. Median Estimated Walking Time for Home-to-Bus Stop Travel by Choice Program and Resident Group, 2022-23

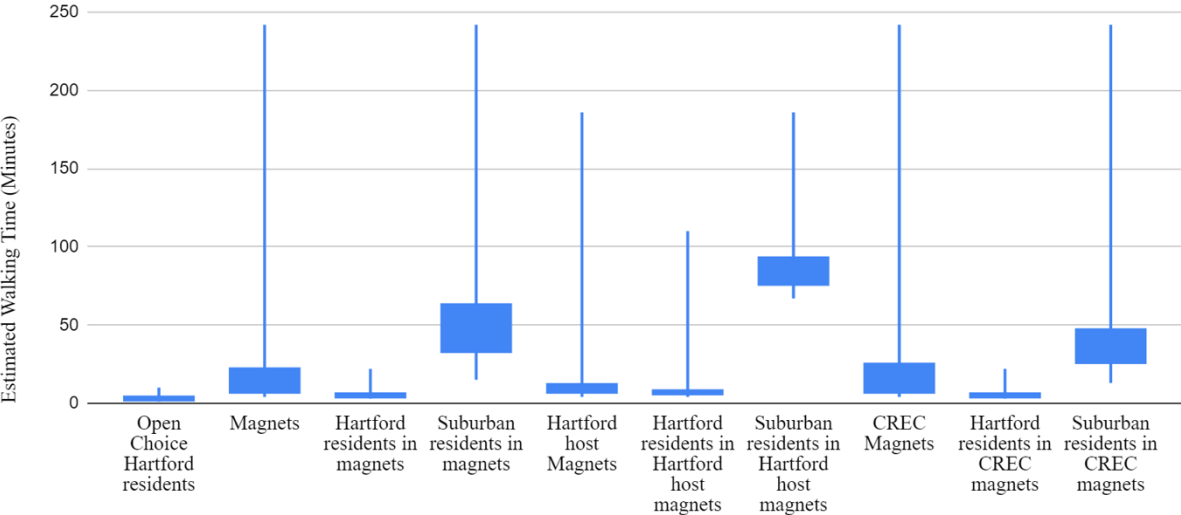
Program and Resident Group	Median Expected Walking Time Between Home and Bus Stop (min)	Median Absolute Deviation
Open Choice Hartford residents	2	1
Magnets	7	5
Hartford residents	4	2
Suburban residents	35	24
<i>Hartford Host Magnets</i>	7	4
<i>Hartford residents</i>	6	2
<i>Suburban residents</i>	78	65
<i>CREC Magnets</i>	7	5
<i>Hartford residents</i>	4	1
<i>Suburban residents</i>	27.5	16.5

Suburban students in magnet schools had a median walking travel time from home to their bus stop of 35 minutes. The range for these students varied a sizeable amount. The distribution for these times had a heavy positive skew – with several extreme outliers on the high minute end. The median absolute deviation of 24 for suburban residents in magnets reflects this. The mode for magnet school students was 15 minutes of walking travel while the mean was 59 minutes. A 15-minute walk might be considered reasonable depending on the age and circumstance of some students, however 54.5 percent of cases of suburban students in magnet schools had a walking travel time of 30 minutes or more, indicating that for the majority of these students walking to their bus stop would be at the very least difficult if not unfeasible entirely. Again, the data does not indicate whether a given student typically walks to their bus stop or not in reality, however we presume that excessive estimated walk times would ostensibly require students to be driven.

Within the sample, there emerged extreme cases where the theoretical walking travel time between a student’s home and bus stop was multiple hours, sometimes even four or more. These cases were directly examined using the Google Map API macro to view the detailed walking directions. In many cases, these extreme travel times were the result of some obstacle (e.g., highways, unpathed woods, bodies of water) in the way of the direct path to the bus stop. It is perhaps more useful to consider these high travel time stops as being just effectively unwalkable, rather than considering the actual duration of the trip itself. When controlling for these cases, the median absolute deviations of the sample does not shift substantially, suggesting that the high variability shown in for suburban residents in magnet schools persists regardless of outliers.

The data show that many suburban students attending magnet schools live outside of a feasible walking distance from their bus stops, which aligns with the complaints about stop distance and walkability that emerged from interviews with parents. Based on these factors, it is most likely reasonable to say that the median suburban family cannot participate in Magnet School Choice without consistent access to a car or other form of personal transportation.

Figure 6. Estimated Walking Time for Home-to-Bus Stop Travel by Choice Program and Resident Group, 2022-23 (cases with estimated walking time > 250 minutes removed)



It is perhaps useful to frame student *home-to-bus stop* travel time alongside their expected *bus stop-to-school* bus rides. Considering residents of Hartford are likely to be able to walk to their bus stops, adding the medians of the expected ride times and estimated walking travel times gives us an approximation for total transit time, not including waiting at stops. Hartford residents in open choice have a median expected bus ride of 44 minutes and a median *home-to-bus stop* walking travel of 2 minutes, for a total of 46 minutes expected for transit each way. Hartford students in magnets have a median expected ride time of 36 minutes with an estimated stop distance of 4 minutes for an estimated 40 minutes of total transit each way. The median suburban student attending a magnet program would have an estimated walking distance to their stop of 35 minutes and a bus ride time of 38 minutes indicating a total travel time of 1 hour and 13 minutes without considering wait time at their stop. Considering a 35-minute walk is outside the range of feasibility for many students, this estimate is likely high as many suburban students are likely to be driven to their stop locations. With that said, students are often directed to arrive at their bus stop up to ten minutes before and be prepared to wait ten minutes after their pick-up time, possibly adding 20 minutes of waiting. It may therefore be reasonable to suggest the median suburban student attending magnet schools dedicates an hour or more of their day to travel, each way, assuming they take the bus.

Study 4: School Travel Times and Parent Lottery Decision Making

We were interested in learning the degree to which travel distance to school was related to parent decisions to accept or decline a lottery placement offer. Our analysis was similar to the expected bus ride times above but uses a different dataset. The lottery data contained placement offer “accept/decline” fields, which we linked to (theoretical) estimated travel times from student home address. We also considered the estimated commute times by Open Choice receiving district and magnet school sending districts. We did so to explore possible tendencies or patterns in estimated commute times occurring at the district level.

Analytic Approach

We used RSCO lottery data to estimate driving time between the home location and school of 10,186 students who had received first-round offers to either a magnet (n=9,421)¹⁵ or Open Choice school (765) in 2022-23.¹⁶ We linked these data to parent lottery offer decisions. We were also able to aggregate lottery offer acceptance rates by the offered magnet school or Open Choice district for subsequent analyses.

As in the prior analysis of student home-to-bus stop, we used a macro embedded form of the Google Maps Web API. The Google Map API was used to determine the driving time without consideration of time of travel or traffic conditions. The estimated driving time from student home to placement school served as a rough proxy for commute time. Although it does not represent the actual commute time a student would experience traveling to school, it provides a hypothetical proximity-to-school measure parents may consider as they make their decision on the placement offer. Our measure is superior to a simple distance-to-school measure, such as a “as the crow flies” measurement or even distance in miles by vehicle. Our measure takes into account typical driving speeds based on roads, stop lights and stop signs, and the like. Another advantage of using estimated driving time is that it serves as a common metric to compare parents; the drawback is beyond obvious walking distances/times, we do not know how the child would eventually get to school – by bus or car. Although most would likely be bused, these are parent decisions based on their individual circumstances.

One would expect that bus stop locations would also play a role in parent decision making, although, it is unlikely parents would know the bus stop location at the time of the placement offer. They also would not likely know the bus route and its actual transit time. Another limitation of using estimated driving time is it does not accurately estimate bus ride times. Bus ride times are also a function of the number of stops, student travelers, and traffic congestion at the times of travel. For longer estimated travel times by the method we used, the longer the hypothetical bus ride due to presumably more stops along the way. Buses also simply travel more slowly than cars. Thus, our estimated driving time measures are used as a means to an end – that is, to assess the relationship between proximity to school and seat

¹⁵ One application was missing necessary information, which led to our final n=9,421.

¹⁶ We could not estimate driving time for 15.3 percent of students.

offer acceptance rates). Nonetheless, they have some value in isolation, so we present our commute estimates in Appendix B, along with comparisons between Open Choice receiving districts (Figure B1), magnet school sending districts (Figure B2), and magnet school offered (Table B1).

We conducted a separate set of analyses on the 2022-23 lottery data sample to examine relationships between observable factors that could influence parent decisions. We began by looking at bivariate relationships – two variables at a time. For instance, we examined the relationship between school rank and parent decisions. Subsequently, we employed a binary logistic regression to assess the relationship between parent decisions and a host of predictor variables simultaneously. In the model, the dependent variable was the decision by parents to either accept or decline a magnet seat (declines also include administrative declines). The variable was coded as 0=decline and 1=accept. The model is designed to estimate the independent relationship (i.e., “effect”) each predictor variable has on the outcome, while controlling for the remaining predictors. Our model included five predictor or explanatory variables: school preference ranking on lottery application, SES tier (higher score means higher income), reduced-isolation student status,¹⁷ Hartford resident status, grade span of the choice school, and estimated driving time.

Findings

There was a moderate in strength, inverse relationship ($r = -.453$) between estimated median driving time and magnet seat acceptance rate per sending town (Table 8) as visualized in Figure 7. This suggests that, generally, when travel time increases, acceptance rates decrease – but not in a perfect linear fashion. Students who accepted their placement had a median estimated travel time that aligned with the general sample at 15 minutes; however, parents who actively rejected their placement offers had a median estimated driving time of 17 minutes. When including cases of “administrative declines” with decline placements, the median was again aligned with the overall sample median of 15 minutes. When examining only cases with an estimated ride time of less than 30 minutes, the overall median was 14 minutes. Students who accepted placement had a median of 14 minutes under these conditions, while students who declined their placement had a median of 15 minutes. For Hartford-resident Open Choice students, there was a slightly smaller difference between students who accepted their offer (median = 22 minutes) and those that rejected (median = 23 minutes). There was no difference in median estimated travel distance for either group when applying the cutoff of 30 minutes estimated travel time.

While suburban and Hartford magnet students who accepted placement offers had an overall lower median estimated travel time than students who actively declined¹⁸ (15 min vs. 17 min, respectively) this difference was relatively small, especially in comparison to the between-school differences (Table 9) and between sending districts (Table 10) for magnet students. Beyond this, when including cases of

¹⁷ “Based on the Hartford-resident demographics and the goal of reducing isolation, a “reduced isolation student” is a student who identifies as White, Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander, or two or more of such races, and does not identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino.” (p. 5 of the Comprehensive Choice Plan)

¹⁸ We refer to “active declines” as when parents indicate they are declining the offer. When a parent does not respond to the offer, for whatever reason, RSCO considers that an “administrative decline.”

“administrative” declines in with student declining offers directly, there was no difference between medians of students accepting and declining placement. In addition, there was a substantially weaker inverse relationship (virtually no relationship) between accepted offer rate and median estimated travel time when grouped by school ($r = -.055$) compared to when grouped by town ($r = -.453$) (see Figures 7 and 8 below for a comparison of their visual relationships). There was also a slightly positive relationship between the number of placements offered to students per sending district and the acceptance rate of offers per town. Together, this may suggest that distance has a larger impact on the choice to accept or reject offered placement in some districts compared to others.

The weaker relationship when sorted by schools could also be explained by the idea that certain schools have strong regional draw. This could be viewed similarly to how in college athletics, top tier programs often are perceived as having control over their local pool of talent when it comes to recruiting prospective student athletes. In the case of magnet schools, it is possible that some schools have similar pull for applicants in a given subsection of the capital region which would make travel time less of a factor. For example, the Montessori Magnet at Annie Fisher School is located in the northwest of Hartford near the West Hartford border. It may exert effectively regional draw for students in suburbs north and west of Hartford, or who are along the route 291 corridor, for whom moderate differences in perceived distance to the school might have little effect. On the other hand, the Montessori Magnet at Batchelder might have higher regional draw for students towards the south of Hartford, such as Newington, New Britain, or Rocky Hill. For students outside of these regional zones, distance may be a larger factor in their decision making in terms of accepting or rejecting an offered placement, leading to the relationship observed between sending district median estimated travel time and acceptance rate despite the relatively small difference in median estimated travel times between students accepting or rejecting placement.

In view of these factors, it may be reasonable to presume that consideration of travel distance occurs in advance of parent decisions in the face of a placement offer. . It is certainly possible that distance is considered by most families in advance of applying to schools, and that many families prioritize applying to schools that are within the comfortable range of travel for their needs.

Table 9. Estimated Travel Time Between Student Home and Offered Magnet School Placement by Offering School

Offering Magnet School	Median Estimated Drive Time (min)	Offer Acceptance rate	N (Placement offers)
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	19	66.7	221
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary	17	52.3	320
Academy of Computer Science and Engineering	22	60.5	325
Academy of Computer Science and Engineering MS	11	72.5	531
Academy of International Studies	20	51.4	327
Academy of International Studies Elementary	14	69.5	302
Academy of Science and Innovation	19	64.3	258
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts	23	72.2	208
Betances Learning Lab	11	56.5	330
Betances STEM Magnet School	13	58.2	144
Breakthrough Magnet School, North	15	64.2	173
Breakthrough Magnet School, South	12	52.6	124
Capital Preparatory Magnet School	13	38.4	331
Classical Magnet School	12	39.9	165
Connecticut IB Academy	17	51.4	109
Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin	10	51.3	311
Discovery Academy	11	70.5	154
Early College Advanced Manufacturing	10	67.2	18
Environmental Sciences Magnet at Hooker	15	59.9	246
Glastonbury/East Hartford Magnet School	16	66.8	316
Global Experience Magnet School	24	72.4	178
Great Path Academy at MCC	15	77.2	165
Greater Hartford Academy of Arts (HD)	19	51.9	342
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	14	55.8	138
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School	17	54.5	190
Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy	13	57.7	250
Hartford PreKindergarten Magnet School	12	79.6	308
Kinsella Magnet School of Performing	13	64.7	299
Montessori Magnet at Batchelder	9	66.7	189
Montessori Magnet at Fisher	15	45.2	161
Montessori Magnet School (CREC)	16	53.3	177
Museum Academy	14	49.0	198
Pathways Academy of Technology and Design	11	70.7	157
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts	20	52.5	240
Riverside Magnet School at Goodwin	11	58.8	239
Sport and Medical Sciences Academy	14	60.3	207
STEM Magnet at Annie Fisher School	15	61.5	179
University High School of Science and Engineering	16	46.1	158
University of Hartford Magnet School	14	40.8	255
Webster Micro Society Magnet School	10	42.1	246
Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School	15	59.9	232

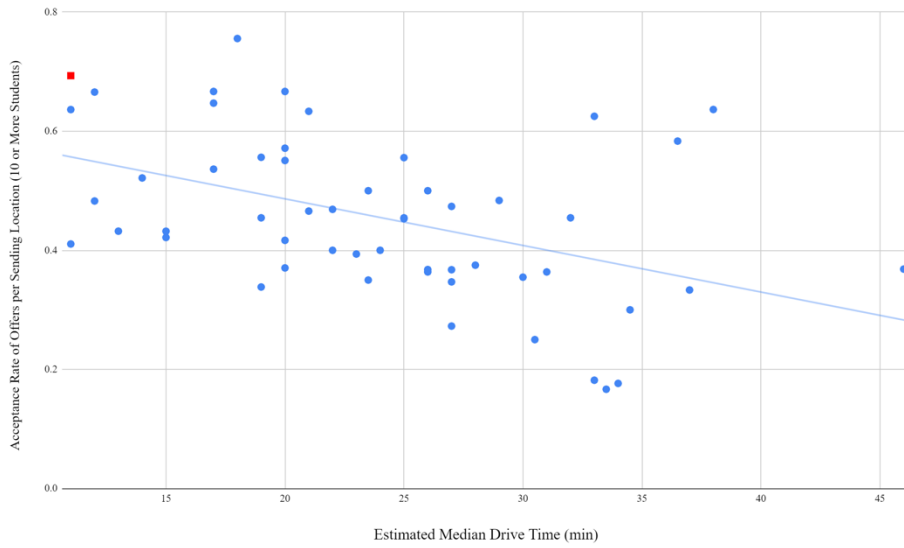
Table 10. Estimated Travel Time Between Student Home and Offered Magnet School Placement by Student Location

Student Location (Locations with <10 Students excluded)	Median Estimated Drive Time (min)	Offer Acceptance rate	N (Placement offers)
Avon	20	55.1	69
Berlin	24	35.0	40
Bloomfield	12	66.6	338
Bolton	20	57.1	21
Bristol	29	48.4	153
Burlington	33	62.5	24
Canton	31	36.4	11
Cheshire	32	45.5	11
Colchester	34	16.7	18
Collinsville*	33	18.2	11
Coventry	28	37.5	24
Cromwell	22	46.9	64
East Granby	17	64.7	34
East Hampton	30	35.5	31
East Hartford	11	63.6	767
East Windsor	22	40.0	30
Ellington	26	36.8	68
Enfield	23	39.4	127
Farmington	20	37.0	54
Glastonbury	13	43.2	162
Granby	26	50.0	24
Hartford	11	69.3	3748
Manchester	17	53.6	662
Marlborough	24	50.0	12
Meriden	27	34.7	49
Middletown	25	45.3	117
New Britain	19	55.6	606
New Hartford	38	63.6	11
Newington	15	43.2	125
Plainville	21	63.3	30
Plantsville	25	45.5	11
Portland	24	40.0	30
Rocky Hill	19	33.8	133
Simsbury	18	75.6	45
Somers	34	17.6	17
South Glastonbury*	17	66.7	33
South Windsor	15	42.1	242
Southington	27	36.7	49
Stafford Springs	35	30.0	10
Suffield	25	55.6	18
Tolland	27	47.4	19
Torrington	46	36.8	38
Unionville	26	36.4	33
Vernon Rockville	21	46.6	161

Wallingford	31	25.0	16
Waterbury	37	33.3	42
Weatogue	20	41.7	12
West Hartford	12	48.3	319
West Simsbury	20	66.7	15
West Suffield*	27	27.3	11
Wethersfield	11	41.1	151
Willington	37	58.3	12
Windsor	14	52.1	280
Windsor Locks	19	45.5	55

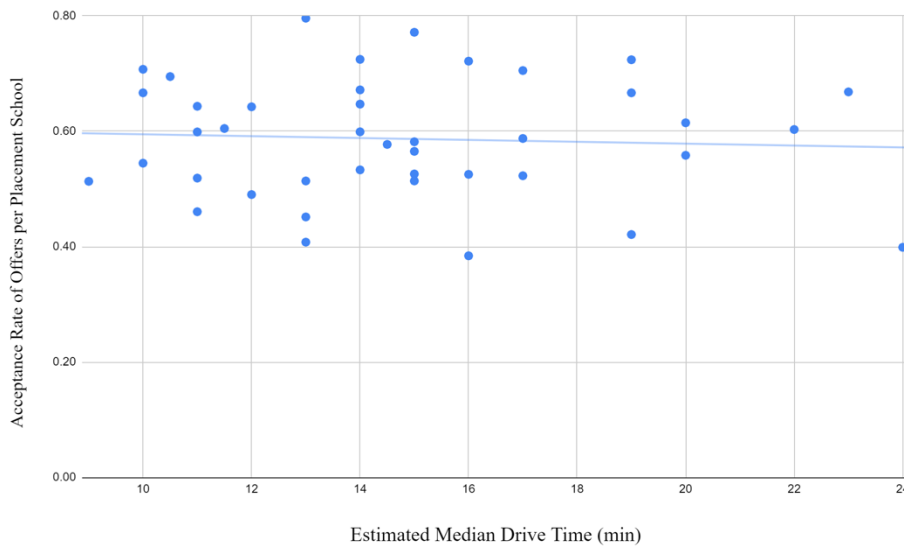
*Indicates a sending location with at least 10 students that is part of a larger town or district

Figure 7. Magnet Placement Offer Acceptance Rate by Estimated Median Drive Time per Sending Location (Districts with fewer than 10 students offered placement excluded)



(Hartford noted by red square)

Figure 8. Magnet Placement Offer Acceptance Rate by Estimated Median Drive Time per Offering School



Lottery Data Analysis (First-Round)

The lottery data set afforded us another opportunity to determine the extent to which travel to school influenced parent decisions in the face of a placement offer to either a magnet or Open Choice school. A multivariable model was developed to isolate the potential impact of estimated travel times on acceptance rates.

Descriptive statistics are provided below for all variables in our model. Seventy-two (72) percent of the sample were not deemed reduced-isolation students (Table 11). A little less than half the sample (42.9 percent) lived in Hartford (Table 12). The sample included students from a range of SES tiers, with lower-income Tier A students representing 44 percent (Table 14). Table 15 shows the grade levels of the schools to which families applied; a sizable amount applied to an early childhood school (27.9 percent). Lastly, Table 16 displays the school rankings listed by parents on the lottery application.

Table GG shows the distribution of outcomes for first-round lottery offers. Nearly sixty percent (57.6 percent) of the offers were accepted and 18.4 percent were actively declined by parents. Another 24.0 percent were administratively declined by RSCO after not receiving a response from parents. For our model, we collapsed active declines and administrative declines.

School ranking indicated by parents on the lottery application are summarized in Table HH. Parents can rank up to five magnet schools and five Open Choice schools on their application. (A small percentage of rankings (< 1 percent) in the data set were above 5, for an unknown reason.) For our multivariate model, we reverse-coded these rankings so that a higher value reflected a stronger preference; this transformation makes for easier interpretation of the results.

Table 11. Reduced-Isolation Student Status, 2022-23 Lottery

Reduced-Isolation	N	%
Not RI	8,045	72.0
RI	3,133	28.0
	11,178	100.0

Table 12. Hartford Resident Status, 2022-23 Lottery

Hartford Resident	N	%
No	6,384	57.1
Yes	4,794	42.9
Total	11,178	100.0

Table 14. SES Tiers, 2022-23 Lottery

Tier	N	%
A (low)	4,925	44.1
B (med)	2,806	25.1
C (high)	3,447	30.0
	11,178	100.0

Table 15. Grade Span of Applying School, 2022-23

School Grades	N	%
<i>PK3-PK4</i>	3,115	27.9
<i>Elementary K-5</i>	2,473	22.1
<i>Middle School 6-8</i>	2,263	20.2
<i>High School 9-12</i>	3,327	29.8
	11,178	100.0

Table 16. School Rank on Lottery Application

Rank	N	%
1 st	7,853	70.3
2 nd	1,491	13.3
3 rd	812	7.3
4 th	548	4.9
5 th	398	3.6
6 th	46	0.4
7 th	12	0.1
8 th	9	0.1
9 th	5	0.0
10 th	4	0.0

Table 17. First-Round Lottery Placement Offer Outcomes for Magnets and Open Choice

Offer Outcome	N	%
Accepted	6,443	57.6
Admin Decline	2,680	24.0
Declined	2,055	18.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>11,178</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Figure 8 displays clustered bar charts that portray the relationship between driving time and parent magnet offer decision. Driving times were collapsed into three categories. As emphasized above, these are estimated driving times from home to school but are *not* estimated bus ride times. Notably, living closer to an offered magnet school does not necessarily lead to higher acceptances relative to being farther away. In fact, oddly, longer rides are more likely to be accepted. This analysis considers only two variables and does not account for other likely influencers, such as choice ranking of school. (Later, we incorporate other observables that may influence parent decision making in a multivariate model.)

Figure 8. Parent Decisions by Estimated Driving Time to School, 2022-23

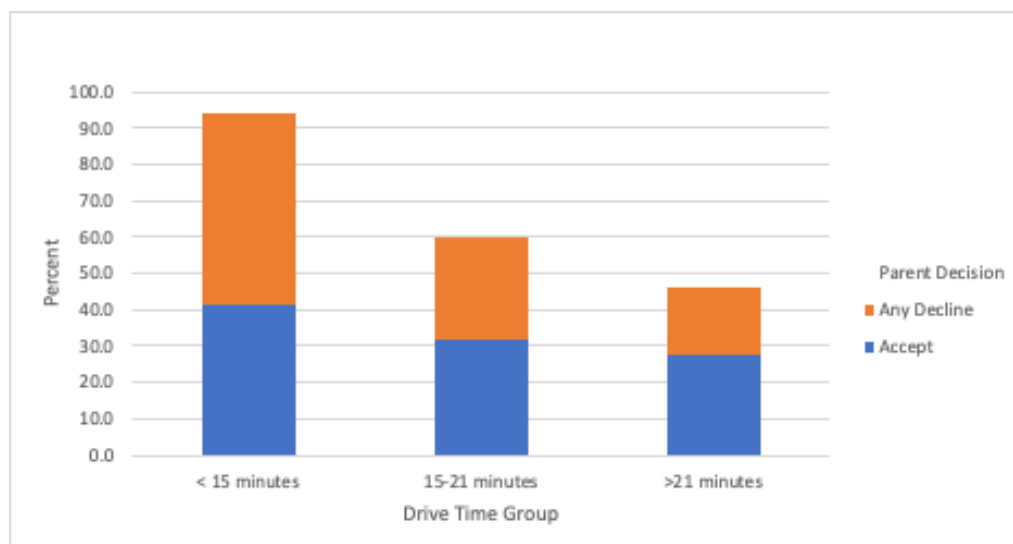
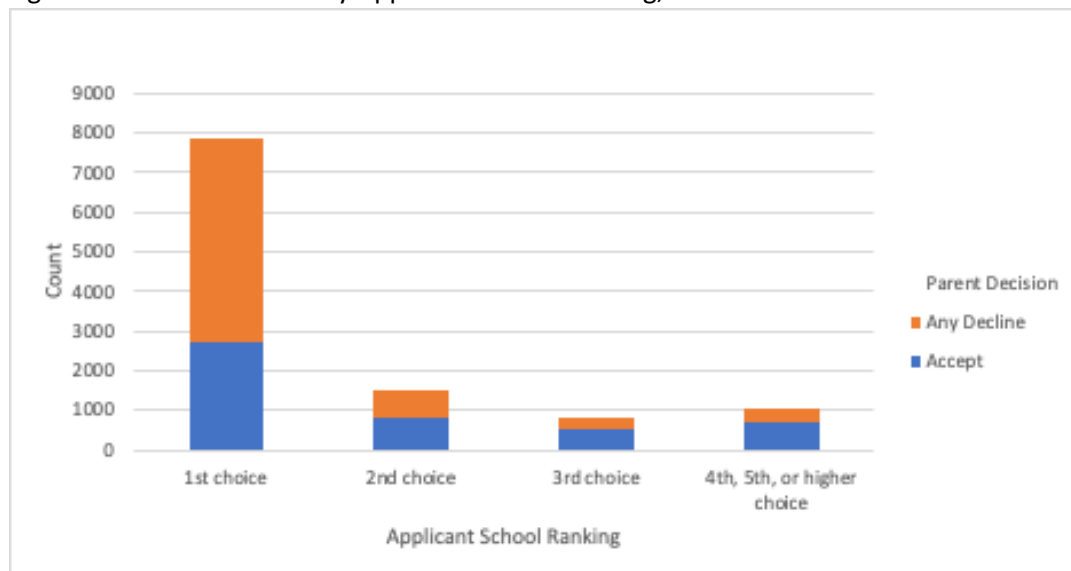


Figure 9 shows the relationship between parent decisions on lottery offers to a magnet school and their ranking of that school. Most (70.3 percent) first-round offers were to “first-choice” schools; however, less than half those offers were accepted. One could read this figure as implying driving time has a slight negative influence on accepting a seat. This is contrary to what one might expect.

Figure 9. Parent Decisions by Applicant School Ranking, 2022-23



Next, we turned to multivariate techniques to discern relationships among six predictor variables on parent decision making.

The results of the binary logistic regression are summarized in Table 17. The columns labeled B and $Exp(B)$ in Table 17 help inform the contribution of each variable, on average, on the likelihood of an offer acceptance. B represents the standardized regression coefficient for each variable, while holding the remaining variables constant. Positive coefficients indicate a positive relationship with a decision to accept; negative coefficients suggest the opposite influence. Generally, the larger the value of the coefficient, the stronger its influence on the decision outcome. $Exp(B)$ represents the odds ratio is the predicted change in odds for a unit increase in the predictor. The “exp” refers to the exponential value of B . When $Exp(B)$ is less than 1, increasing values of the variable correspond to decreasing odds of the event's occurrence. When $Exp(B)$ is greater than 1, increasing values of the variable correspond to increasing odds of the event's occurrence.

Table 17. Results of Binary Logistic Regression, Parent Decision to Accept a Magnet Offer as Influenced by Five Predictor Variables

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Driving Minutes Home to Applying School	-.020	.003	53.676	1	<.001	.981
	RI Student	-.367	.054	45.836	1	<.001	.693
	Hartford resident	.347	.062	31.176	1	<.001	1.415
	SES Tier	-.174	.035	24.601	1	<.001	.841
	School Preference	.403	.020	403.992	1	<.001	1.497
	Constant	-2.814	.215	171.963	1	<.001	.060

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Driving Minutes Home to Applying School, RI Student, Hartford resident, SES Tier, School Preference.

The strongest predictor of accepting a lottery magnet seat, at least in this particular model, is school preference.¹⁹ We can convert the odds ratios listed in the last column (Exp(B)) to probabilities. Thus, for every standard deviation unit increase in school preference score, the odds of accepting a magnet seat increase by 49.7 percent. The next strongest influence on accepting is being a Hartford resident, which increases the odds of accepting a magnet seat by 41.5 percent. The remaining variables exhibit a negative influence on parents' decision to accept a seat, with being a RI student having the strongest relationship. Driving time to school has virtually no effect on parent decision making, after taking into account the remaining variables in the model.

The five predictor variables explained parent decisions with a modest degree of accuracy. One way to gauge model fit is to examine the classification table (Table 18). The table indicates that the model accurately predicted "declines" 43.9 percent of the time, while it accurately predicted "accepts" at a much higher rate of 81.6 percent of the time. The level of accuracy from our model is not surprising given the range of influences on parent decision-making that were not captured by our five-variable model, successfully predicting the decision outcome for 65.7 percent of cases.

¹⁹ This variable was reverse coded to make interpretation easier; originally, lower scores (e.g., 1, 2) reflected a *higher* preference.

Table 18. Classification Table for Binary Logistic Regression

Classification Table^a

Observed		Predicted		Percentage Correct	
		Decline	Accept		
Step 1	Parent Decision	Decline	1739	2224	43.9
		Accept	1005	4452	81.6
	Overall Percentage				

a. The cut value is .500

Limitations

Our analyses of bus routes, travel times, and lottery decisions in this section remains limited to learning from families who either already participated or, in the case of the lottery, were interested in participating in a Choice program. We did not capture families who did not apply to the lottery and do not know the degree to which transportation played a role in their non-participation. In our logistic regression analysis, we did not disentangle magnet offers from Open Choice offers.

Summary

In summary, our quantitative analysis generally aligned with the themes present in our interviews with parents. Certain groups, such as Hartford students in the Open Choice program and suburban students in interdistrict magnets, possibly face large burdens in terms of student transportation. For Hartford students in Open Choice, total ride time and distance to school is especially high, possibly leading to reduced opportunities in after-school activities and the like. For suburban students in interdistrict magnets, the distance to their bus stops was especially far, echoing the concerns around bus stop locations brought up by parents in interviews. In addition, the analysis suggests that where transportation plays a factor in school choice decisions, it may largely occur either before the application process, or once students are enrolled and experiencing transportation directly. The lottery data suggests that once offered a placement, distance is a much smaller factor compared to personal ranking of school in the application process. Regionality may matter to a large degree when students are considering the schools they apply to in the first place, and so do not consider distance as heavily when deciding to accept or reject placement offers.

Conclusions and Implications

Beyond the practical consequences, we consider the implications for equity and fairness for families. Using a transportation equity lens, we learned that certain groups of students and their families, especially those who are poor or minoritized or both, bear a greater burden in attending a school of their choice. Long bus rides, multiple bus stops, limited afterschool late busing, and excessive burden on families to drop off and pick up their child at the bus stop are among the main concerns.

RSCO commissioned this study to assess Choice program transportation, particularly from the perspective of parents who are the primary decision makers with regard to student participation. Our inquiries looked into possible disincentives associated with school transportation to participate in Choice—participation in the form of accepting or declining a placement offer or leaving the program once enrolled. We were cognizant of RSCO’s obligation to adequately meet parent demand for attending an interdistrict school of choice and view the evidence from the perspective of its influence on participation in the program, initial and continued.

In this section, we bring together findings from our multiple analyses in the form of meta themes. They represent prominent, cross-cutting findings grounded in one or more of our data sources (i.e., interview analysis, complaint log analysis, bus route and bus stop analysis, statistical modeling of lottery data). We also discuss their implications, focusing on parent decision making in choice and transportation equity. Transportation issues are inevitable in any large-scale busing enterprise. RSCO Transportation has made concerted efforts to minimize travel disruptions and offers several mechanisms to assist parents with travel. For instance, it offers an electronic notification system to inform parents via phone, email, or text of any route delays and issue phone calls in case of a busing incident or accident. Although not universally offered or used, a GPS tracking service is freely available for parents to locate their child’s bus in real time. In the beginning of the school year, when the most transportation problems generally occur, RSCO has front-loaded customer service representatives to meet the high load of consumer inquiries. Other efforts include offering daily travel reimbursement under certain conditions for families who drive their child to school. That said, a number of transportation concerns surfaced in our multi-method analysis.

Bus Stop Locations and Commutes a Prominent Issue

Parents noted concerns with bus stops in the interview sample and complaint logs. The concerns involved both the stop location themselves and the commute from home to the stop. Some parents expressed concerns with bus stop venues, finding many of them unsafe due to high traffic, poor lighting, or other dangerous conditions, all of which were compounded by long wait times. Parents also were concerned with their child’s commute to the bus stops, citing long walks, unsafe routes (traffic, seedy areas, darkness in the early morning or late afternoon, exposure to harsh weather conditions). For many, the commute to the assigned stop was not walkable or deemed not walkable for their child, and so they felt compelled to drive their child. This worked fine for some parents but presented a heavy

burden on others. Many noted it interfered with their work schedule or resulted in unexpected extra expenses.

Personal Car Almost a Precondition

We got the sense that for some parents, a car was an absolute necessity to participate in a Choice program. Of course, this was not a universal need, but a good number implied there was no other option for them other than to drive their child to the bus stop or to the school itself. Usually it was some combination of the bus schedule not fitting into their work schedule, dissatisfaction with the bus stop location or commute to get there, accommodating a sibling's transportation or child care needs, or accommodating an afterschool activity. The convenience afforded by a car is consistent with other research on school transportation (e.g., Lenhoff et al., 2023).

Distance to School only Minor Influence on Participation, but Significant Impact on Equity

We learned that, generally, the distance to school did not hold a substantial influence on parent participation in choice. A significant caveat is that our parent data included only those who had or were already participating in choice either by enrolling their child in a choice school or applying to the lottery. We found from most of analyses that school proximity from the home has limited influence on participation. However, distance to school raised issues of inequity. Choice program parents and students endured, on average, much longer commutes to school. For bused students, combining the time to get from home to the bus stop with the bus ride to school added up substantially for some students.

Inequitable Distances and Commutes to School

Hartford Open Choice students are faced with the longest distances from stop-to-school via our analysis of *expected* bus ride travel times. When factoring in that many suburban students are likely driven to their bus stops, Open Choice students likely face the longest total home-to-school travel as well. Hartford magnet students have shorter commute time to school than Open Choice students from Hartford. This is not particularly surprising given the geographic spread of Open Choice schools; however, the choice zones have been an attempt to reduce those distances and commute times and Open Choice students from Hartford still have longer commutes.

Suburban magnet students are traveling farther to magnets, on average, than Hartford magnet students; we think this is at least partly due to the need to travel through congested or slower traffic areas in Hartford. For instance, suburban students in CREC magnet schools have the longest time relative to Hartford Host magnets. Suburban CREC magnet students stand out with a median expected ride time of 41 minutes and 20.3 percent of those students have a ride of greater than 60 minutes. CREC has only 7 magnets in central Hartford and with many more situated in the second ring. This may be because regionality plays less of a role in recruitment and applications for these schools than for Hartford Host magnets. Some Hartford Host magnets, particularly on the edges of the Hartford Metro, appear more likely to have lower estimated median driving times, supporting the idea that they may

exert a higher local draw compared to CREC magnets in the second ring who may draw students from farther away.

We witnessed *some* effects of distance of school on parent participation in choice, but likely the influences are already baked into decisions to enter lottery in the first place and list schools that are feasible for them. Ultimately, though the realities of transportation and bus stops aren't realized until enrolled in the program. We see an exception of distance mattering most when we examined from the perspective of sending district, again supporting the idea of regional draw. Distance, unsurprisingly, may matter most for students who are farthest away from metro Hartford for whom bus rides would be exceptionally longer, and personal adaptations (i.e. driving to school, carpooling, responding to delays or changes in schedule) would be more complicated.

Based on our analyses, distance to schools was not a major barrier to participation in choice. Our data did not, however, represent families who were making decisions about applying for a school a choice. Many non-participants undoubtedly eschew school choice because of their preference to attend schools close to home. Further, we suspect lottery parents considered travel distance prior to applying. We did, however, find significant disparities in ride times to school between students attending intra-district magnet schools and their local peers in traditional public schools. While to some degree this is to be expected, it is certainly a factor that may impact decisions for some families.

Economic Accessibility

Our analyses suggest that, because of transportation [concerns], participation in choice was at least in part a function of household resources. For school choice to be truly accessible to all families, transportation factors should not prevent them from enrolling their child in a desired Choice school. But based on our interview data, it seems that it did. At the worst, parents pulled their child from the Choice program. Other parents remained in Choice but were unfairly burdened for their participation. We heard from several parents who used personal transportation or who otherwise made personal sacrifices to get their child to school. Either by preference or perceived need, many of these parents drove their child to the bus stop or school. Only those parents who had the baseline means to do so could afford the time and resources required to do so. Suburban families, in general, are economically better off than Hartford families. They also have fewer single-parent households. Suburban families are more apt to be able afford childcare, be at bus stops waiting for bus with child, and have personal transportation, and finally, can be more adaptive to unforeseen circumstances and can offer time – flexible extra as opposed to relying on school transportation. Some parents, particularly stay-at-home moms, have the freedom to drive their child and access to a car. Because of this, one could argue Choice is more accessible to them relative to families with fewer resources.

In their study of families in choice-rich Detroit, Lenhoff et al. (2023) note:

The second most common daily mode to school after your own car was “multiple modes,” when parents indicated more than one daily mode to school. Students who used multiple modes may be uniquely disadvantaged. They had the lowest average family income of all transit modes at \$20,640, and they had among the lowest car ownership at 51%. This suggests that families

without cars may be coordinating several different transportation modes for their children as they can find them. (p. 13).

Recommendations & Ideas for Consideration

In this section we offer recommendations for policy and practice. Our recommendations are based on our quantitative and qualitative analyses, and in some cases are supported by additional information, including our reviews of RSCO Transportation materials and the school transportation research literature. Our intention is to offer ideas for program improvement and future areas of discussion. Policy makers should continue to look for ways to improve upon transportation from the perspective of parents and students. The transportation ecosystem is more than just bus routes and schedules; it involves the entirety of how parents may experience it, from wake up to the return home. Even small changes may mean a lot to students and their parents, and possibly increase the likelihood of participating and persisting in the school choice program. Finally, we encourage policy makers to examine transportation through a mobility justice framework, which considers how transportation may be experienced differently by different populations (Bierbaum et al., 2021). Achieving equity for all is not just for equity's sake, doing so will also open accessibility to choice.

Recommendations

Improve Conditions for Getting Students from Home to the Bus Stop

A major complaint among parents was the home-to-bus stop experience. We suggest RSCO target improvements in the neighborhood and centralized bus stops. Parents desired stops that were closer and more convenient. It may be worth exploring possible improvements; for example, increasing the number of bus stops or implementing a shuttle service. For instance, a survey of Detroit families reported that 74 percent of parents indicated that it would be “very helpful” or “helpful” to have bus pick-up at their house, and 56 percent indicated it would be “very helpful” or “helpful” to have a pick-up stop within 0.25 miles of their house (Lenhoff et al., 2023). There is some research that suggests busing students who are normally required to walk to school reduces absenteeism (Sattin-Bajaj, 2018).

Ensure All Stop Locations Are Safe

There was some concern about the safety of some stop locations. Parents expressed multiple concerns about stop safety. These concerns ranged from busy streets without sidewalks, dark or poorly lit areas, a lack of shelter from weather, all the way to possible crime or violence at the stop location itself. We suggest RSCO strategically place stops, particularly centralized stops that may be a distance away from students' neighborhoods, in locations with sidewalks, active lighting, public infrastructure, and other features that increase the safety of students waiting at or traveling to them. In addition, we encourage RSCO to continue to be responsive to parent concerns about specific locations and act quickly to re-evaluate in the case of safety concerns.

Recalibrate the Complaint Type Categories in the RSCO Online Complaint Form

Parent transportation complaints are recorded and stored in a RSCO database, providing the opportunity to periodically assess service quality and to identify areas for improvement. Some of the 12 categories potentially overlap or are broader in scope than others. The fairly commonly applied “Other” category yields little information as framed. An analysis of the description of the issue listed alongside each complaint category suggests some mis-categorization based on the current categories. For instance, “Bus/Vehicle Driver” often contained descriptions of issues that went beyond the actual driver. The clearer the recorded complaint type, the more accurate the feedback provided to the service contractor.

Make the Online Complaint Form More Prominent on the Website

RSCO Transportation offers several channels for parents to submit a transportation complaint. Most complaints are issued via phone calls to the customer service office. The online complaint form could be made more accessible on the main page of the website, perhaps next to the customer service phone number (<https://www.crec.org/transportation/rSCO.php>). As it stands, parents would have to know that the form exists under the general “Forms” link in the side menu.

Revisit Bus Notification System to Improve Upon Efficiency

The notification system does not always appear dependable or timely for families. Perhaps this is due to some inherent delays in the process; for instance, a bus driver must first make a determination that they will be running late, then notify a central dispatcher who may also be tied up taking calls from other bus drivers or even families, and the dispatcher then presumably sends a blanket notification to all families on the route in question.

Ensure Families have Access to All Bus Notification Mechanisms

RSCO Transportation offers notification services to families when buses are running late or there are incidences such as a vehicle breakdown. Phone calls are made in those instances and families also appear to have the option to receive text and emails if they make such arrangements with CREC Transportation. In addition, a GPS tracking app is also available for First Student and DATTCO families to monitor the location of their child’s bus in real time. A third bus provider, Transportation Management Services, is intending to provide a GPS service (currently listed as “coming soon” on the RSCO Transportation website). Because this seems like an invaluable resource for families, it may be worth gathering data on the extent to which families are accessing and using these services; there may remain unknown impediments to their access and proper use.

Involve Families and Students in Developing Transportation Policy

Involve parents and students actively in shaping transportation policies. Beyond simply hearing from those most impacted by school transportation, engaging parents and students genuinely in policy development is prudent. Policy makers could “look to the creative resources families use to solve their transportation problems for potential answers” (Lenhoff et al., p. 356). They could also be “active participants in designing information about the transportation resources available and ensuring that their peers have a deep understanding as they make school enrollment decisions” (p. 356).

Look to Other Models for Innovative Approaches

Explore travel innovations attempted in other cities with rich histories of school choice (see, for example, Vincent et al. (2014). For instance, Denver.... “Additionally, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) provides schools and families with access to a “SchoolPool” program. SchoolPool matches families at a school or nearby schools based on the proximity of household residences. After being matched, families can organize carpools, biking or walking groups, or group travel via public transit in order to get to school. Nearly 70 schools across the greater Denver area actively participate in the SchoolPool program. In the 2013–14 school year, SchoolPool provided over 15,000 family matches” (<https://waytogo.org/for-commuters/schoolpool>). SchoolPool also used in Charlottesville (Vincent et al., 2014).

Communicate Transportation Options to Prospective Choice Parents

Parents making decisions about which schools to apply to, and how to rank them, may benefit from specific information on travel time and bus stops. Parents undoubtedly factor distance to school as they consider schools of choice. They may be less likely to know about bus transit schedules and travel times, or what options are available to them before and after school.

Ideas for Consideration

Walking Chaperones

For younger students who have a long walk to a bus stop or who live too close to their school to be bused, adding a chaperone to walk with students may help reduce parent fears about children walking in high traffic areas unaccompanied by an adult. It may be worth exploring if there are opportunities for groups of students to walk together with a chaperone. The nature of Greater Hartford School Choice, with students at any one magnet school coming from widely dispersed areas, may not lend itself to this option. If, however, clusters of students are within walking distance of either their school or a bus stop, it might be worth looking at the Walking School Bus model²⁰ (National Center for Safe Routes to School, 2006) or less formal neighborhood-initiated programs. Kang and Diao (2022) found that walking school bus programs are feasible even in a low-density suburban setting.

Public Transit Passes

For older students, public transit may present a feasible alternative to busing or driving to school. Of course, this is not a universally viable option for students, as the transit route has to align with the student’s path to school. Parents and students have to be comfortable doing so, as well. If this were at all a useful option for students, RSCO could help negotiate free or discounted passes. This practice has

²⁰ See http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/

been shown to be difficult to implement in some cases, however, and the research is mixed on successes for students (e.g., Fan & Das, 2016; McDonald et al., 2004). Wexler et al. (2021) found that the Minneapolis Go-To Student Pass Program substantially reduced excused absences among participating students.

Further Regionalization of Choice Programming

Without substantively reducing choices, regionalizing school choice even more so than is done now could lead to shorter travel times, more clustering of students to transport, and overall greater efficiencies in transportation. The evolution of the interdistrict magnet schools in the *Sheff* region over the past two decades has resulted in a substantial number of new schools being built. They span various grade levels, locations, and curricular themes. For instance, interdistrict magnets include twelve different grade configurations. One could view their evolution as haphazard, to a degree. Open Choice offers options across metro-Hartford and into the outer ring and exurbs. RSCO introduced four geographical zones in Hartford to help regionalize choice sets for families; this undoubtedly assisted transportation to be more efficient and deliver shorter commutes. More recently, RSCO established, where possible, magnet school pathways so that students could envision their entire PK3-12 journey; pathways also give magnet students some assurance that when they grade out of an elementary magnet, for instance, it isn't left to pure chance that they could enroll in an upper-grade magnet. Given the number of magnet schools, RSCO could explore the potential for clustering or grouping them (akin to the zoning concept). It could not only promote efficiencies in areas like transportation, it could create more of a neighborhood-type school feeling for students and families. Specific schools could also recruit in neighborhoods, for instance. Like a clustering approach. It might help achieve Sheff goals if you target neighborhoods that are Tier C? The only concern is the spread of possible neighborhoods in the suburbs; but I guess that's also the point, to try and gain some efficiencies. Could look for a proof of concept here by targeting schools that are way out of compliance in terms of RI and try intentionally recruiting in batch in those census blocks that help meet the RI goals (e.g., target Tier C); it is akin to reverse-engineering.

Revisit the 20-minute Wait Time Window

The expectation that students/families should arrive at a bus stop 10 minutes earlier and potentially wait 10 minutes after the scheduled pickup time is prominently noted in the *RSCO Transportation Family Information Handbook*. The policy also indicates "The bus does not have to wait until the scheduled pickup time before leaving the bus stop" (p. 12). To be sure, these guidelines may be standard operating procedure for bus transportation writ large. It did raise the question whether families and students are fully aware of these guidelines – and also how much they come into play. Most parents and students are savvy enough to make adjustments to the actual bus schedule; therefore, the 20-minute window may not be a major issue. Nevertheless, we suggest examining early/late pick-up and drop-off records for all bus stops over an adequate sampling period to assess how often a 20-minute window is needed, how often buses do arrive early, and which tend to arrive consistently early or late. At the very least make sure parents have received this message about what constitutes "on time" status for buses.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study offer a point of departure for additional targeted research to learn more about the RSCO transportation ecosystem.

- Using a survey or focus groups, gather feedback from Choice students on how they experience the commute to and from school. Speaking to students may reveal unforeseen benefits and drawbacks of various modes of transportation. They could also speak to the morning and afternoon routines and how those may affect sleep or activities after school, school-sponsored or otherwise. Does their ride hinder or facilitate completing homework? For those who ride the bus, what is their experience like?
- Survey parents who participate in a Choice program to reach a larger sample or a targeted sample based on the findings here. Several distinct themes emerged from our interview analysis that would inform survey generation. For instance, gather data on parent mode(s) to school. Often times in survey research it is wise to first conduct open-ended queries through interviews and observations to inform subsequent surveys, which are dominated by closed-ended items. In other words, it is difficult to anticipate what topics to ask parents about without getting a better sense of what they are through open-ended techniques. Surveys are typically dominated by closed-ended items.
- Survey a sample of parents who have not participated in the choice lottery. Doing so would capture sentiments of families who have opted not apply to determine the extent to which transportation factors play a role.

¹⁴ See http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol with Prompts - Parent and Caregiver

1. What is your relationship to the child/ren?
2. What grade is/are the child(ren) in? Which school do they attend?
3. How many years has the child attended this school?
4. How does your child/ren get to school?
5. Describe your morning routine on a school day. *Some questions to consider:*
 - a. What time do you wake up?
 - b. How much time does the bus take to get to your home?
 - c. What time does it arrive?
 - d. How long do you wait at the stop?
 - e. Where do you go afterwards?
6. What happens when your child misses the bus?
7. Describe the bus stop experience.
8. What has your child said about their busing experience?
9. Has your child been to a different school, if so what was the busing experience?
10. If yes, How has the busing experience been different between this school/previous schools or this year/previous years?
11. How was transportation a factor in your decision making process around school choice?
12. Describe your typical return from school process?
13. What are some abnormal days like?
 - a. Missed bus
 - b. Snow/weather
 - c. Late Bus
14. What else do you think I/we should know about your experience?
15. Knowing what you do now about school transportation, if you were to redo your school choice process, would transportation impact your decision?

Appendix B

Figure B1. Estimated Commute Time Between Home and Open Choice Seat Offer for Hartford Residents by Receiving District (20 or More Students)

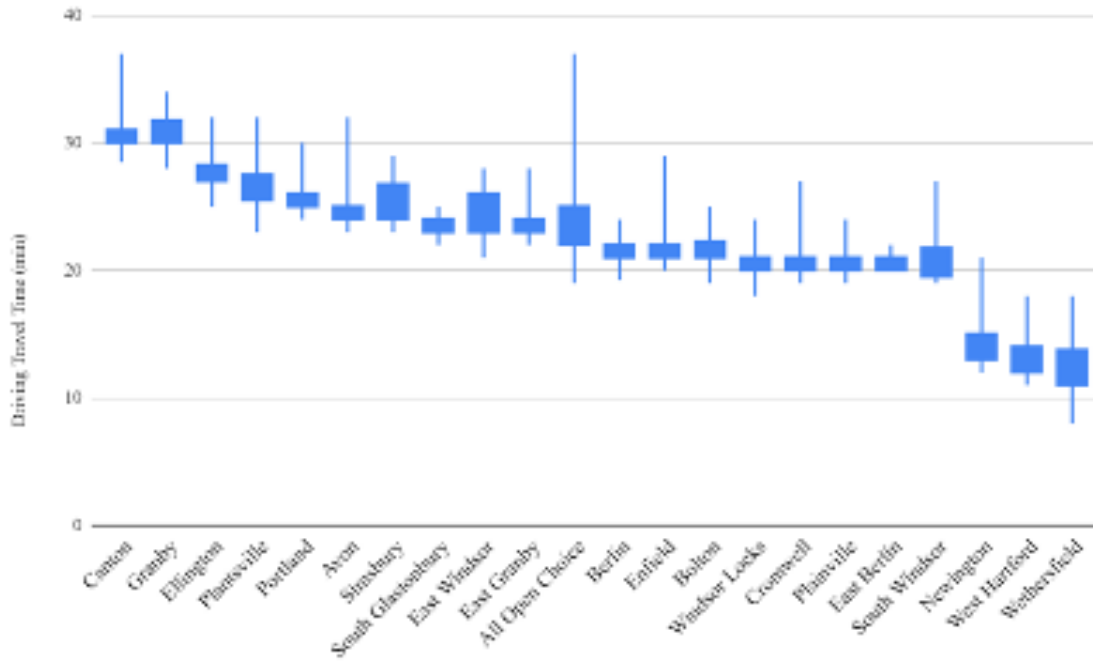
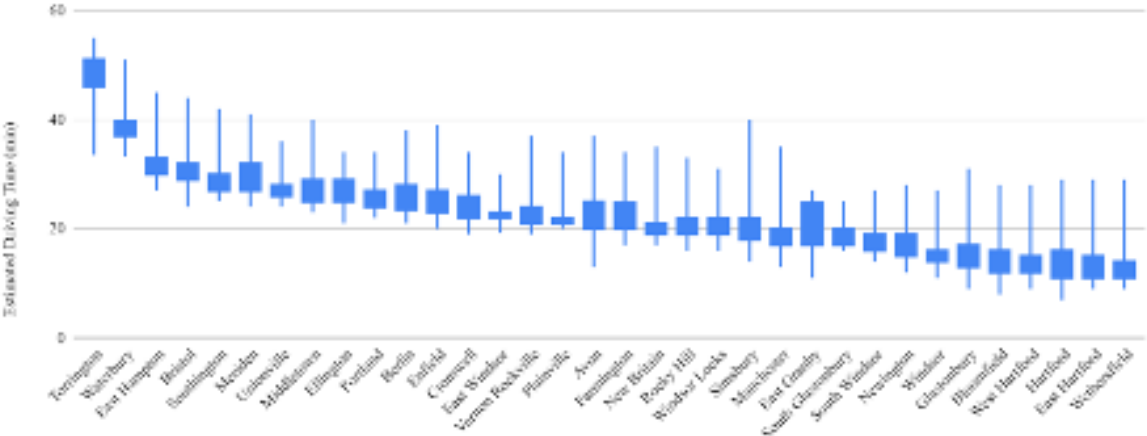


Figure B2. Estimated Commute Time Between Home and Magnet School Seat Offer for Hartford and Suburban Students by Sending District (30 or More Students)



The median estimated travel time for all students offered a magnet seat was 15 minutes. When broken down by magnet school, we observed considerable variation around that overall median. Multiple schools had an estimated median of over 20 minutes, including Reggio Magnet, which produced the highest frequency of complaints in the complaint analysis. The highest estimated median travel was Global Experience Magnet School with 24 minutes (Table 7). 86.5 percent of students had an estimated travel time of 15 or more minutes, while 26.4 percent had estimates of 30 or more minutes, which was the highest percentage for both lengths of estimated travel time relative to any other school. On the other end of the spectrum, the Montessori Magnet at Batchelder had the lowest median estimated travel time of 9 minutes, but did not have the lowest percentage of students with expected travel of either greater than or equal to 15 or 30 minutes (32.3 percent and 5.3 percent, respectively). Of schools with N >100, Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin had the lowest percentage of students with estimated travel of 15 minutes or more with 22.2 percent and a median of 10, while Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School had the lowest percentage of students with estimated travel of 30 minutes or more with 0 percent, and a median of 15 minutes. To some degree, these differences on the lower end of the estimated travel spectrum may indicate that regionality or distance might have a stronger impact on the pool of applicants for some schools than others.

Table B1. Estimated Travel Time Between Student Home and Offered Magnet School Placement by Offering School

Offering Magnet School	Median Estimated Drive Time (min)	Percent ≥ 15 min	Percent ≥ 30 min	N (Placement offers)
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	19	83.3	19.0	221
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary	17	74.4	11.9	320
Academy of Computer Science and Engineering	22	87.1	13.5	325
Academy of Computer Science and Engineering MS	11	32.4	3.0	531
Academy of International Studies	20	78.0	12.8	327
Academy of International Studies Elementary	14	49.3	2.3	302
Academy of Science and Innovation	19	68.2	7.4	258
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts	23	85.6	22.1	208
Betances Learning Lab	11	37.6	2.1	330
Betances STEM Magnet School	13	47.2	7.6	144
Breakthrough Magnet School, North	15	54.3	4.0	173
Breakthrough Magnet School, South	12	37.9	2.4	124
Capital Preparatory Magnet School	13	40.8	3.6	331
Classical Magnet School	12	50.3	2.4	165
Connecticut IB Academy	17	67.9	6.4	109
Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin	10	22.2	2.3	311
Discovery Academy	11	29.2	5.2	154
Early College Advanced Manufacturing	10	22.2	0.0	18
Environmental Sciences Magnet at Hooker	15	25.6	2.4	246
Glastonbury/East Hartford Magnet School	16	63.6	2.8	316
Global Experience Magnet School	24	86.5	26.4	178
Great Path Academy at MCC	15	38.2	3.6	165
Greater Hartford Academy of Arts (HD)	19	71.1	14.0	342
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	14	49.3	10.9	138
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School	17	55.3	14.2	190
Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy	13	43.2	6.4	250
Hartford PreKindergarten Magnet School	12	37.1	1.0	308
Kinsella Magnet School of Performing	13	43.5	7.7	299
Montessori Magnet at Batchelder	9	32.3	5.3	189
Montessori Magnet at Fisher	15	50.3	5.0	161
Montessori Magnet School (CREC)	16	53.1	4.0	177
Museum Academy	14	48.5	3.0	198
Pathways Academy of Technology and Design	11	30.6	1.9	157
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts	20	80.8	12.1	240
Riverside Magnet School at Goodwin	11	26.4	0.8	239

Sport and Medical Sciences Academy	14	45.9	6.8	207
STEM Magnet at Annie Fisher School	15	54.7	5.0	179
University High School of Science and Engineering	16	54.4	5.1	158
University of Hartford Magnet School	14	49.8	6.3	255
Webster Micro Society Magnet School	10	50.0	7.7	246
Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School	15	51.3	0.0	232
