



B U I L D I N G

Knowledge & Confidence

**How Achieve Hartford's
Choice Education Program
Assists Capital City Parents**

July 28, 2011

Lourdes Fonseca
Paul Diego Holzer

Acknowledgements

Achieve Hartford! wishes to thank the hardworking staff of the Hartford Public Schools Choice Office, the City of Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation and all the community-based pre-school providers they support, and the CT Department of Children and Families for their partnership in this work of engaging Hartford families on school choice.

Achieve Hartford! also wishes to thank Fairview Capital Partners for their generous support of the technology needed to carry out this program, and for the commitment of their staff as volunteer "parent choice advisors."



Achieve Hartford! is an independent nonprofit organization of business and community leaders established to be a catalyst for education reform and community involvement in the Hartford Public School District. Our goal is to increase the number of students graduating college and career ready. We accomplish this goal by monitoring reform efforts and driving accountability in the Hartford Public School District, and by informing and engaging the community.

221 Main Street
Third Floor
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 244-3333
www.achievehartford.org

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Achieve Hartford! recently completed the baseline year of operation of its Choice Education Program. Evolving from the initial goal two years ago of providing Hartford families with up-to-date information on schools through the *SmartChoices* website, Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program was created to address the reality that many families cannot access and fully utilize information online without assistance. Information and training related to school choice needed to be brought out to parents in their communities, and – using mobile technology and the *SmartChoices* website as tools – the Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program has delivered just that, and more.

The purpose of Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program is to help families gain the **knowledge** and **confidence** they need to effectively navigate school choice in Hartford on behalf of their children. The intended outcome is not only to help *more* families make *more* informed choices, but also to help families in Hartford become familiar with the school district processes they need to understand in order to have a sustained, positive relationship with the education system in the long term.

All indicators point to a very successful first year of operation, with outcomes that include:

- **More than 80 visits to community-based pre-school providers and Hartford schools,**
- **More than 50 pre-school staff trained, and**
- **More than 900 families empowered to make informed decisions on behalf of their children.**

This report presents both a detailed explanation – and evaluation – of the 2011 Choice Education Program administered by Achieve Hartford! on behalf of Hartford parents and school children. The report also documents best practices and key factors necessary to running a successful outreach program of this kind, as well as some systemic challenges present in carrying out this work.

Achieve Hartford! recognizes that this work cannot be done without strong partnership among many education stakeholders in our city, including: the Hartford Public Schools, the City of Hartford, State agencies, community-based organizations, and the Hartford families themselves. We look forward to continued collaboration with partners and to taking this program to the next level next year. Whereas this past year we could have reached approximately 1,500 families, we hope that in years to come, we have the opportunity to reach all of the over 4,000 families that participate in HPS school choice each year.

Thank you.

PART 1:

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVE HARTFORD!'S CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Hartford Education Reform Context

Alongside the District's strategy of decentralizing school level decision making by increasing the autonomy of principals, another major reform strategy has been the *All-Choice System of Schools*, launched in 2008. Creating a system of choice is fundamentally based on the development of a diverse portfolio of schools. The system is then activated by a choice application process that allows every parent to select the schools that best match the needs and interests of every child. Key to the success of choice efforts throughout the country is good information in the hands of parents and individual assistance when they need it to navigate the choice process ([Opening Doors, How Low Income Parents Search for the Right Schools](#), January 2007, Center on Reinventing Public Education). Both of those needs are addressed by Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program.

History and Scope of Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program

In 2010, through efforts to conduct research on the impact of the SmartChoicesHartford.org website on parents, we observed firsthand that families in Hartford were in need of an educational intervention prior to filling out the Hartford Public School choice application – both in terms of gathering information on schools and in filling out the HPS choice application online. That same year, utilizing our pre-existing partnership with ConnCAN on *SmartChoices*, we partnered with The Voices of Women of Color (VOWOC) to conduct outreach to parents in both the South End and North End of Hartford. VOWOC staff – as well as ConnCAN staff – brought technology and expertise to places where parents already congregated, including schools, community-based pre-school providers, churches, supermarkets, barber shops, beauty salons, community centers, and even living rooms.

Feeding off the success of those joint efforts in early 2010, Achieve Hartford! then developed an in-house program to target outreach to parents throughout Hartford. Though there are three separate choice processes in Hartford, the program focused only on the Hartford Public Schools choice process, which targets the vital academic transition points – when children are moving into kindergarten, into middle school, or into high school – when selection of each student's next school is mandatory. Achieve Hartford!'s program, called the Choice Education Program, was launched in November 2010.

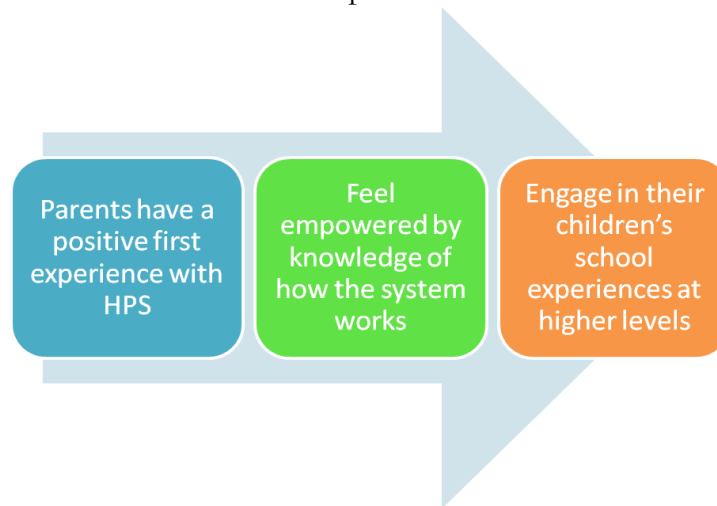
Program Mission and Goals

The mission of Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program is to empower Hartford parents to become more engaged in the education of their children.

The goals of the program include:

- **Educate** families on the HPS choice process by simplifying information on schools, grades, transportation, etc. and using parent-friendly language and interactions.
- **Increase the number of choice applications** received by the Hartford Public Schools; and
- **Build the capacity of:**
 - **Parents** in Hartford to be able to find out information on schools and the school system, and navigate the school choice process with confidence;
 - **Pre-school Provider staff** to be able to engage Hartford parents on choice with the right information and tools;
 - **Parent Choice Advisors** to become experts on choice, use technology effectively, and empower parents; and
 - **Corporate Volunteers** to become involved in the Hartford community.

In addition to these goals, it is our hope that through this program, parents – especially the parents of Pre-K students not yet enrolled in a Hartford Public School – will have such a positive experience with the HPS school choice process that they will be more likely to become engaged in their children's school experiences later on.



Program Description – What We Do

Collaborative Partnership Model

In order to conduct outreach to parents for whom choosing a school is mandatory, Achieve Hartford! partnered with the City of Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation (the City) and the Hartford Public Schools (HPS).

As the primary funder of school readiness services and convener of other early childhood initiatives, the City provides us with direct access to center staff at multiple levels, and advises us on the creation of materials specifically for Pre-K parents. These centers play a crucial role in the success of the program. At the “front line” for serving parents, the center’s role is to promote the HPS choice process to their parents, put educational materials in their hands before they must make a school choice, and to schedule times for Achieve Hartford! to deliver both group information sessions and individual assistance (these services are described in detail below).

With approximately 30 elementary schools having diverse grade configurations, HPS provides us with key information on schools and on the choice application that year, and also provides us with timely updates of the proportion of choice applications completed at each school. This information allows us to target our efforts at the schools that need our assistance the most.

In addition to our two major partners, Achieve Hartford! also partners with Hartford’s Department of Children and Families (DCF) to reach foster parents and students not placed in foster care yet.

Services Offered

Depending on the number of transitional parents at each pre-school provider or school and the capacity of that center or school staff to assist parents on their own, Achieve Hartford! provides some combination of the following services (detailed explanations follow):

- A. Educational Materials: Choice Guide for Hartford Parents of Children Entering Kindergarten Next September (*Choice Guide*)**
- B. Training for Pre-school Provider Staff**
- C. Parent Information Sessions in group format**
- D. Phone Banking with School Family Resource Aides**
- E. Individual Assistance to Parents**

A. While Achieve Hartford! relies on the 54-page *HPS School Year Choice Parent Brochure*, 46-page *HPS Course of Study Catalog*, and the *SmartChoices* website in providing accurate school information to parents, we also created a 4-page *Choice Guide* that provided parents new to HPS with uncomplicated, distilled information on how to navigate the school choice process. This publication can be found in **Appendix A**.

B. Achieve Hartford! trained the directors and staff of Community-based pre-school providers on the HPS school choice process. The intent behind this training was for center staff to become comfortable with information in the *Choice Guide* and relay this information to the parents of children entering kindergarten next year.

C. At most of the Community-based pre-school providers, Achieve Hartford! provided Information Sessions directly to parents to familiarize them with the choice process using the *Choice Guide*, and provide advice on how to prepare. This included directing them to the *SmartChoices* website to research information about schools and encouraging them to visit schools before they select them for their children. Information was delivered using friendly language and manner, to maximize parents' comfort levels, and the sessions were translated upon request. For many centers, these info sessions were all they needed to prepare parents to fill out applications on their own. For some centers, however, these info sessions were augmented by the individual assistance to parents provided by Achieve Hartford! parent choice advisors (PCAs).

D. For some HPS schools, Achieve Hartford! staff and PCAs provided phone banking assistance to school Family Resource Aides, who wanted to invite parents in for individual assistances with Achieve Hartford! PCAs. This required PCAs to come into the school, receive phone lists of parental contact information, and reach out to these parents to schedule appointments a few days later at the school.

E. For the individual assistance provided to parents, Achieve Hartford! PCAs brought both technology and knowledge out to places so that it would be easily accessible to parents. These locations included community-based pre-school providers, various elementary/middle schools, and community centers. PCAs walked parents through the www.SmartChoicesHartford.org website and provided information on schools in their own words, conferring with and helping parents to make informed school choices on their applications. PCAs also assisted parents with filling out the Hartford Public Schools Choice Application online.

PART 2:

EVALUATION OF THE CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The goals of Achieve Hartford!’s Choice Education Program related not just to building the capacity of parents to be served, but also to increase the capacity of parents, pre-school provider staff and volunteers trained to provide this information. As such, we used a robust set of metrics to examine our program’s outcomes.

Program outcomes are divided into the following two categories and measured using the following metrics:

- Program Performance is measured by:
 - # Pre-school Provider staff trained
 - # parents attending information sessions
 - # of parents provided individual assistance *directly*
 - # of parents provided individual assistance *indirectly* (assistance delivered by pre-school provider staff, or parent completed application solo following the info session)
 - # of PCAs trained and hours worked in the field
 - # of corporate volunteers fully engaged
 - # total site visits conducted
 - # of total choice applications submitted as a result of our work
 - Rate of parent satisfaction with our program
- Program Impact is measured by:
 - Increase in the number of “on-time” choice applications submitted to HPS
 - Parent survey on the gains in knowledge and comfort level
 - PCA survey on the impact of the Choice Education Program on their lives

Program Performance

Overall Takeaways

The table below demonstrates the overall performance of our program in its baseline year, in which more than 900 parents were touched, representing nearly 60% of transitional students attending the schools and community-based pre-school providers we targeted. Though we did not quite meet our goal of 1,000 families assisted in our baseline year, we are nevertheless excited about what’s been accomplished. We are also very happy to report that based on our survey of more than 400 parents, 94% were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they received from Achieve Hartford!

Overall Performance	Outreach	Outcomes						
	# Site Visits:	# Staff Trained	# Parents Attending Info Sessions	# Parents Directly Assisted	# Parents Indirectly Assisted	total # of parents touched	# Transitional Students that could have been touched	% of transitional students reached at target schools/centers
HOYC School Readiness Centers	60	102	215	168	410	901	935	58%
Hartford Public Schools (8 schools)	22	0	0	142	173		612	
Department of Children & Families	2	40	0	8	0		0	
	84	142	215	318	583	901	1547	58%

Community-based pre-school providers

Of the 44 total community-based pre-school providers funded by the City and active in 2011, the Achieve Hartford! Choice Education Program provided outreach to 22. While seven of the 44 centers serve toddlers who are not yet ready for kindergarten, there were two early learning centers that did not request services from us, 9 CRT programs that did not request services, and four privately-run community-based pre-school providers that we simply did not reach out to.

The table below lays out both the level of outreach conducted and the outcomes realized at each pre-school provider targeted. Because CRT centers maintain distinct management from all other centers, information on those centers is presented separately below.

		Outreach			Outcomes				
	Community-based Pre-school Provider	# Site Visits:	# Staff Trained	# Parents at Information Sessions	# Parents Direct Assistance	# Parents Indirect Assistance	Total # parents impacted	Total # transitional students	% transitional students reached
1	CREC Early Learning Center at Asylum Hill	3	1	10	10	3	13	15	87%
2	Salvation Army - The Right Place	2	10	20	1	26	27	62	44%
3	Salvation Army - North	0	3	0	0	10	10	13	77%
4	YWCA- The Growing Tree	2	1	3	3	2	5	5	100%
5	Ashar Child Development Center	3	1	8	8	0	8	8	100%
6	Fox Early Learning Center (OFYC)	4	2	9	9	1	10	10	100%
7	Trinity College Community Child Center	1	2	0	0	8	8	8	100%
8	Wilson Gray YMCA ELC (OFYC)	3	2	10	10	3	13	15	87%
9	Women's League Child Dev. Center	4	2	31	31	39	70	73	96%
10	Burns Early Learning Center (OFYC)	4	4	10	10	0	10	10	100%
11	Capitol Child Development Center	2	3	5	0	7	7	7	100%
12	Hartford Neighborhood Center	1	3	0	0	15	15	17	88%
13	Waverly Early Learning Center (OFYC)	1	4	0	0	13	13	15	87%
14	Pequenin Children's Readiness Center	4	3	29	27	0	27	28	96%
15	Metzner Early Learning Center (OFYC)	3	4	5	5	2	7	10	70%
16	El Paraiso Infantil (Catholic Charities)	4	2	19	19	7	26	26	100%
17	Hyland Early Learning Center (OFYC)	4	3	7	7	3	10	10	100%
18	Southside Jumpstart to K. (Catholic Charities)	3	2	0	1	6	7	10	70%
19	Beacon ELC (Catholic Charities)	2	3	0	0	9	9	9	100%
20	Village for Families & Children / Travelers ELC	4	4	9	9	1	10	13	77%
21	Little Angels	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	0%
22	Elkys Learning Experience	0	1	0	0	2	2	2	100%
	Total	54	60	175	150	157	307	385	80%
1	CRT Locust Street	3	2	30	18	n/a	18	n/a	n/a
2	CRT Douglas Street	2	15	10	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Other CRT Centers	1	25	0	0	253	253	550	46%
	Total	6	42	40	18	253	271	550	49%
	Total of all Pre-school Providers	60	102	215	168	410	578	935	62%

* 550 includes some non-residents of Hartford

We are very pleased at having assisted a total of 578 Pre-K parents through both direct and indirect assistance. Equally pleasing was having reached an estimated 80% of all transitional students within non-CRT community-based pre-school providers. An opportunity for improvement would be having processes or approaches that ensure a higher return at those centers that require multiple site visits to provide the necessary direct assistance to parents. For example, at centers such as Fox, Burns, Hyland and Village Travelers, a total of 10 or so transitional parents required 4 site visits. From the data, we also must understand better which centers have the capacity to assist parents themselves and which do not, to continue leveraging our trainings and information sessions to assist parents indirectly.

Hartford Public Schools

Of the 34 elementary and middle schools in Hartford with students transitioning out, we worked particularly with eight schools that asked for our assistance in reaching out to their families. Those schools and their outcomes are listed in the table below:

HPS Schools	Outreach	Outcomes						
	# Site Visits:	# Parents Direct Assistance	# Parents Indirect Assistance	Total # impacted by Program	# Transitional Students	% Transitional Students Reached	# applications submitted on time	% applications completed
Betances Early Reading Lab School	4	36	54	90	91	99%	90	99%
Burr Elementary School	3	12	n/a	12	76	16%	25	33%
Hooker Environmental Studies Magnet School	2	6	n/a	6	25	24%	10	40%
Latino Studies Academy at Burns School	2	19	n/a	19	94	20%	35	37%
Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet School	2	9	n/a	9	56	16%	35	63%
Rawson Middle Grades Academy	2	2	n/a	2	78	3%	55	71%
Sanchez Elementary School	3	17	97	114	126	90%	120	95%
West Middle Elementary School	4	41	22	63	66	95%	65	98%
	22	142	173	315	612	51%	435	71%

Through our collaboration with these 8 schools, we were able to reach directly and indirectly a total of 315 parents, representing over 50% of the total transitional parents at these schools. With additional data on the number of total applications submitted on time at these schools, we are also very pleased to see that the schools ending up with very high percentages of applications completed – Betances, Sanchez and West Middle – were those schools that created strong partnerships with us to reach parents. That partnership is fleshed out in more detail in the *Best Practices* section below.

Department of Children and Families

As part of a first year partnership with DCF, the program was able to conduct two information sessions to over 40 DCF staff. That being said, reaching foster parents and children not yet placed in foster care proved quite difficult. Only three DCF social workers and three foster parents requested individual assistance, for a total of 8 choice applications submitted to HPS. We know that from within DCF, the foster children already attending HPS in transition grades (as well as those entering Hartford from another district) represent a much larger population that we were able to reach this year. It is our hope to concentrate

more energy on reaching this very important population next year and to expand the depth of our partnership with DCF.

Parent Choice Advisors

Achieve Hartford! contracted and trained a total of 9 Parent Choice Advisors to provide individual assistance to parents on choice. Each PCA was able to put in an average of 30 hours in the field over a two month time period.

Corporate Volunteers

In addition to the financial support received from Fairview Capital Partners, LLC, the AH! Choice Education Program also benefited from the help of 3 Fairview Capital employees volunteering their time as choice advisors. These volunteers received the same training given to PCAs and were able to provide individual assistance to Hartford parents, just as any PCA could provide. Each volunteer was able to invest approximately 10 hours of their time to this work, and to have a real impact on the lives of Hartford families. This corporate support represents another potential technique for building outreach capacity – and we hope to expand it next year.

Program Impact

Impact on the Number of “on-time” HPS choice applications Submitted

On June 21st, 2011, HPS release a preliminary report on school choice data. This presentation compared, among other things, the total number of on-time choice applications submitted to the HPS Choice Office – online and on paper. The total number of on-time applications submitted in 2010 was 3,463, compared with 3,740 submitted this past year in 2011. This represents an increase of 277 applications, or 7%, over last year. While it is very difficult to correlate the efforts of the Choice Education Program directly to this increase, we are nevertheless pleased to see an increase in this number.

Impact on Parents Served

To the parents that received individual assistance from PCAs, we administered a parent survey (see **Appendix B**) immediately following the submission of their son’s or daughter’s choice application. The purpose of this survey was to quantify the level of gain made by parents in both knowledge and confidence before and after our PCA’s intervention.

The major takeaway from the survey was:

- Parents’ knowledge and confidence in navigating school choice showed a 100% and 95% increase, respectively, from before the PCA intervention to after.

While only so much weight can be placed on a self-assessment, we are nevertheless happy to see such high levels of learning taking place through our program’s intervention, and look forward to improving upon these ratings still.

Parent Choice Advisors

We also administered a survey to the 9 PCA's we trained that was qualitative in nature and asked for anecdotal evidence of the impact that the Choice Education Program had on their own lives.

In this survey, we gained another perspective on the success and challenges of our program. Takeaways of the PCA survey include the following:

- 100% of PCAs want to do the job again next choice season
- 100% of PCAs feel that the program had an impact on their lives
- In terms of building PCA capacity, the following outcomes resulted from the program:
 - Three PCAs have decided to pursue higher education (GED, CDA certification, and an Associate's Degree in Social Services);
 - Three PCAs found part time or full time jobs working with parents and children as a direct result of this program; and
 - Five PCAs have begun attending their school's PTO meetings to get more involved in their children's schools.

PART 3:

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS & BEST PRACTICES

As a result of the work done in the baseline year of Achieve Hartford!’s Choice Education Program, it has become clear to us that two critical factors have helped yield success in this work with families: highly effective parent choice advisors and a strong commitment to serving choice families at the center or school we are working with. In looking at the various models of engaging with each center and school, clearly some best practices have emerged and are described in detail below.

The Key Success Factor in our Program: Effective Parent Choice Advisors

Because the work of this program involves personal interaction, the quality of each interaction between a staff person and a parent will determine the success of the program. In order to ensure quality interactions, we believe that effective Parent Choice Advisors are the key. But what factors indicate whether someone will be effective working with parents on choice? We believe that, along with training, certain characteristics of our PCAs made them effective.

PCA Characteristics

The following characteristics – listed in order of importance – were critical to PCAs being so effective in their work with parents:

1. Status as a parent or grandparent of children attending the Hartford Public Schools, allowing them to bring personal experience to the table;
2. Diversity in nationality and race (four were Hispanic, four African-American and one from the Caribbean); and lastly,
3. Geographic diversity, with five PCAs from the North End of Hartford, four from the South End of Hartford, and all four zones of the City were represented. This was important, not because the experience of parents in each zone is so different, but because for parents choosing schools, distance from their home is the #1 factor in selecting a school for their child (based on the results of our parent survey in **Appendix B**). Thus, knowing exactly where schools were located and being able to explain that information in the context of nuanced rules regarding transportation was critical.

Training

The goal of PCA training was to learn the most accurate information on HPS schools and the HPS school choice process to then transmit that information to families. For that reason, our training included the following information:

- HPS school locations for the 2011-2012 school year and previous years;

- HPS transportation rules and district zone dividers;
- School grade levels for the 2011-2012 school year and previous years;
- Application deadline and the timeline for receiving information back from HPS;
- The ideal steps parents should take to gather enough information on schools before making a selection; as well as
- Key information on magnet schools and the Magnet/Open Choice application process, knowing that parents would want some information on these schools as well.

Training also included a detailed walk through of the *SmartChoices* website, role playing, and observation time for them to learn subtle ways to make parents feel more comfortable in the process.

Critical to the success of our training model was having on staff an experienced community organizer who was also a Hartford parent, knowledgeable of both how the Hartford Public School system operated and how parents experience the choice process. This staff person brought a level of credibility with her into the community, helping parents gain trust in the program.

Best Practice Model of Engaging with Centers and Schools

Community-based pre-school providers: The “Double Training” Model

The “Double Training” model – where both the center staff and parents receive training from us – yielded the best outcomes when serving of serving community-based pre-school providers.

The staff training provides the center director and teaching staff with up-to-date information on schools including recent changes in grade levels or locations and a clear presentation of key information on the HPS choice application process. The parent info session provides them with the same information, similarly using the *Choice Guide* as the basis of the session. During these sessions, parents are motivated to gather information on various school options by talking with their friends in the community, by visiting the *SmartChoices* website, and by visiting schools, long before sitting down in front of a computer to select schools. Having knowledge – and time – before the decision must be made allows parents to evaluate their options and come ready to speed through the choice application.

CENTER USING THIS MODEL	CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE CENTERS	OUTCOMES FROM USING THIS MODEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashar CDC • YMCA/Wilson Gray • Capitol CDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director emphasizing the importance of choice to staff • All teaching staff attend training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff well-versed on choice and can be experts for their parents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon ELC • CRT Douglas • CRT Locust • Burns ELC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members have a sense of urgency to ensure all transitional parents fill out an application • Ample time given to parents between when they attend the info sessions and when they receive individual assistance, allowing them to select schools <i>prior</i> to receiving individualized assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents well versed on choice make informed decisions • 100% of transitional students submit applications on time, or close to it • Increased levels of parent engagement at the center
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Hartford Public Schools: The “FRA-led” Model

The FRA-led Model consists of a partnership created between an individual school’s Family Resource Aide (FRA) and Achieve Hartford!, whereby the FRA takes ownership for ensuring that all transitional students receive assistance at some level and conducts extensive outreach to transitional parents to schedule times for parents to come in, according to when our PCAs can be present to provide individual assistance.

SCHOOLS USING THIS MODEL	CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE SCHOOLS	OUTCOMES FROM USING THIS MODEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betances • Sanchez 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRA takes full responsibility for outreach to parents and communicates the benefits of PCA individual assistance • FRA maintains a sense of urgency and personal responsibility for ensuring all transitional parents get their needs met • FRA encourages parents to conduct their own research on schools prior to the individualized assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRA builds his or her capacity to do outreach to parents • Parents very motivated throughout the process • 100% of transitional students submit applications on time, or close to it • Increased levels of parent engagement at the school

Hartford Public Schools: PCA Phone Banking Model

In this model, Achieve Hartford! PCAs partner with the school to assist them in reaching out to parents. They sit alongside the FRA at a given school and call parents to schedule a time for the parent to come in to the school for individualized assistance provided by the PCA at a later date.

SCHOOLS USING THIS MODEL	CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE SCHOOLS	OUTCOMES FROM USING THIS MODEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Betances• West Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Despite being extremely busy, FRA or Principal maintains a sense of urgency and personal responsibility for ensuring all transitional parents get their needs met	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100% of transitional students submit applications on time, or close to it• Increased levels of parent engagement at the school

PART 4:

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES TO CARRYING OUT THIS WORK

From having worked with community-based pre-school providers and Hartford schools for two years now – first informally and then as part of our formal program – we have recognized a number of systemic challenges we face in doing this work. In order for the Achieve Hartford!’s Choice Education Program to be successful each and every year, these challenges must be addressed via current or new strategies. It is our hope that by highlighting these challenges here, that each partner in this program can also work to address them in their own ways.

Community-based Pre-school Providers

Reaching Parents:

Community-based pre-school providers overseen by the City are required to assist parents transitioning out of Pre-K into Kindergarten. While we have been very impressed with the sense of ownership that many centers have demonstrated in serving transitional students and families, the level of focus on choice support varied widely from center to center.

Data Sharing

Currently, there is no way for centers to track on an ongoing basis the results of all their outreach to parents on choice. To our knowledge, data on which Pre-K students have completed applications has never been culled by HPS and shared back to the City, most likely because of the effort needed to compare center registration lists to application data.

Marketing

In some instances, it was necessary for PCAs to invest more time serving a center with 10 transitional parents than a center with 40. The biggest reason for this is the varied levels of marketing and outreach capacity among staff at various centers. Some staff members are able to get all of their transitional parents to come out on one day to receive individual assistance from PCAs; other staff members were unable to get more than 1 or 2 parents to come to the center at once.

Hartford Public Schools

School-level Outreach

The District, through its Choice office, conducted substantial outreach and communication initiatives this year. Expanded efforts this year included newspaper, radio and television ads, phone calls home via Connect Ed, flyers mailed home and sent via backpacks, various school choice fairs and information help sessions, and banners posted at every school. This also included a new city-wide marketing campaign that focused on choosing Hartford schools. Even with such outreach, we still encountered parents at schools we worked with who indicated first hearing about the choice requirements and deadlines with our contact.

For many reasons, reaching all affected parents in Hartford regarding choice is very difficult. The investments and initiatives by the Choice office need to continue. However, we would suggest that additional targeted efforts at the school level take place to reach even more parents. The focus on choice and impacted families varied among schools we observed, particularly as it related to transitional families that are leaving a school. Targeted programs should be highly encouraged at the school level – with perhaps appropriate directives and incentives to Principals from the District office – to ensure sufficient school level choice-related support is provided and that the choice-related needs of transitional families at each school are met. Given the importance of choice to the reform efforts and its inherent complexities, every effort to reach impacted families is necessary so that 100% parents submit an application on time.

School Staffing Structure

Because not all Hartford schools maintain a full time Family Resource Aide (or Family Support Services Provider) on staff, we expect that many schools simply do not have the capacity to serve the choice-related needs of outgoing students and their families. These schools must be identified and pushed to find ways to compensate. For those school that do have a Family Resource Aide on staff, allowing that staff time to effectively reach out to parents – which includes consistent updating of parent information in PowerSchool – is critical.

Paper Application

The re-introduction of the paper application presented a huge set of challenges at the systemic level, where parents receive conflicting messages about how to best to fill out the application. For schools, it is much easier for them to simply send paper applications home or make them available for parents to pick up, putting the onus solely on parents to fill out the application on time. In our experience with schools using the paper application, however, parents filled out the application with little to no guidance and with tremendous difficulty, submitting applications with only one school selected, with no school selected (just a zone), with magnet schools selected, etc. This required time consuming corrections that were taxing to staff at the school and district level. All of this compares to the online application's error rate of less than 0.4%.

The Department of Children and Families

Managing Priorities:

Given all the other priorities DCF social workers are faced with, it is likely that minimal capacity exists in the schedule of most social workers to take on additional school choice support. However, to assist in those efforts Achieve Hartford! can provide most of the support services needed to the DCF staff to facilitate the choice application process. Also, Achieve Hartford! can easily provide additional trainings to each team of social workers, and PCAs can be used for phone banking and other outreach if requested.

Data

There was a lack of concise data on the current number of HPS transitional students within the DCF system, or the number of students in DCF that will be enrolling in HPS for the first time next year. This data would make it much easier for social workers to set goals for themselves to reach out to certain children in their case load to receive services related to choice.

PART 5:

INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS TO NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAM

Program Structure

PCAs	We recognize the need to train PCA's more heavily on the troubleshooting of technology. Too much time was spent fixing simple technology problems, causing delays to parents needing fast and convenient assistance.
Scheduling with Centers	Because snow days were such an obstacle to fulfilling promises to parents of what days they could receive individual assistance with choice, we must do a better job of scheduling back up days and giving parents those days far in advance.
More Centers	There is no reason why we should not be reaching out to the 4 private pre-school centers funded by the Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation, or to the two community-based pre-school providers we did not reach: Elkeys and Little Angels. Additionally, while we are proud of having assisted so many CRT parents indirectly, we recognize that potentially hundreds more did not have their choice-related needs served. We must make sure to reach these parents next year.
Earlier Intervention	<p>Overall, both centers and schools could benefit from earlier intervention. We have learned that it is key to provide parents with information and guidance long before they sit in front of a computer to fill out an application. We do not have to wait for the choice application process to officially launch in order to begin providing Information Sessions to parents. Additionally, with more planning, we can provide more robust information sessions to parents, with computers on hand to allow them to navigate <i>SmartChoices</i> on the spot.</p> <p>With principals often being so busy, contacting them earlier would go a long, long way to ensuring that schools utilize the Choice Education Program to help them reach more parents.</p>
Program Expansion	With so many parents requesting assistance in learning about and filling out the Magnet / Open Choice application, we must decide whether or not to expand the program dates to include outreach to parents related to the Regional School Choice Application.
Inter-Agency Collaboration	Because the success of this program is so heavily dependent on our partnership with city agencies, we must continually find ways to increase the depth of each partnership and specifically address the systemic challenges outlined above.
Other	<p>Next year, we can also build the capacity of parents who would like to learn about program evaluation, and have them conduct the evaluation of the AH! Choice Education Program.</p> <p>Additionally, we must do everything in our power to ensure our PCAs are equipped with the best technology, to avoid many of the problems we experience in the field this year related to faulty hardware.</p>

Utilizing Best Practice Models

To ensure a high return on efforts made to serve each pre-school provider, we must insist on following our best practice model laid out in Part 3 above. The table below outlines which services we should provide to each pre-school provider, depending on the center's size and the capacity of their staff.

Staff capacity (base on time available and skill set needed)	Center size	Services Provided			
		Phone banking	Staff training	info session	Individual Assistance
Capacity to do 1 on 1s	small (<10)		x		
Capacity to do 1 on 1s	medium (10-20)		x	x	
Capacity to do 1 on 1s	large (20+)		x	x	x
No capacity	small (<10)	x			x
No capacity	medium (10-20)	x			x
No capacity	large (20+)	n/a			

Using this table to determine how we allocate our resources to community-based pre-school providers should be very helpful next year.

PART 6:

CONCLUSION

Achieve Hartford! has spent a great deal of time and effort to create a program that provides real help to parents who need knowledge, confidence or both when it comes to school choice. We have been the fortunate recipients of terrific work by our partners, enabling all of us collectively to impact over 900 Hartford families this past year. This baseline year has laid a strong foundation for great work to be carried out in the community for years to come, and has provided some great best practices that we can all learn from.

We look forward to greatly improving upon this program next year as it relates to the level of partnership, the involvement of parents, the strategic use of resources, the sharing of data, the implementation of best practice models, and the overall expansion of the program to reach more parents – including parents participating in the Regional School Choice Office magnet application process, beginning in November. Continuous improvement – and better and more clear information, are key. Given the number of zones, schools within the city, and state options throughout the metro area, it is easy for parents to be confused. This is why “Choice Education” for families is so crucial.

It is our hope that through this program over the next few years, we can meaningfully limit the number of applications submitted after the deadline and ensure that all transitioning students select schools that fit their needs and interests. We look forward to engaging the community on how this program can better serve their needs, and to continually reporting on the outcomes of our efforts.

APPENDIX

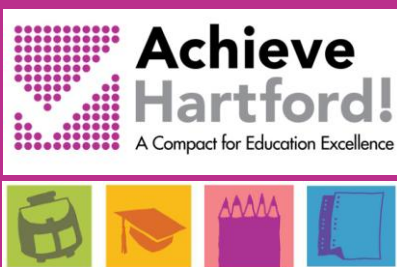
- A. 2011 Choice Guide for Hartford Parents of Children Entering Kindergarten Next September (English & Spanish)**
- B. Parent Survey Questions**

2011 CHOICE GUIDE *for* Hartford Parents of Children Entering Kindergarten Next September

(Information on Hartford Public Schools Only)



Make a Great Choice!

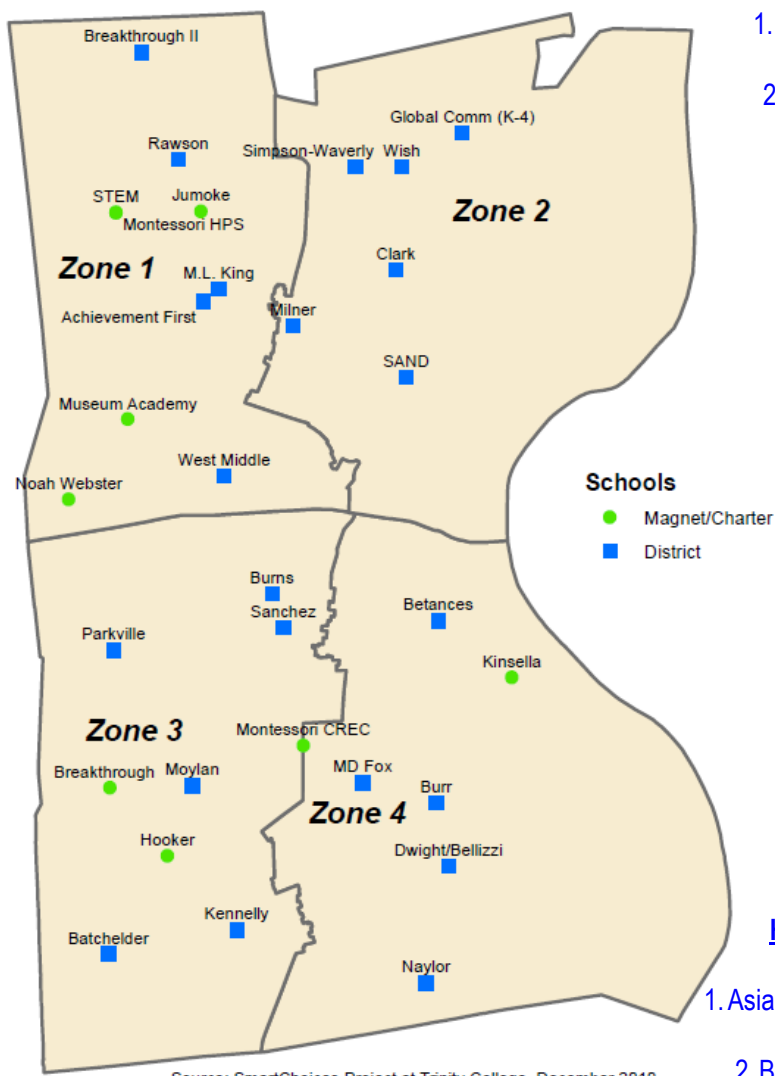


Zone 1

HPS Elementary Schools:

1. Achievement First
Hartford Academy (K-8)
(two schools)
2. Breakthrough 2 (PK3-5)
3. Martin Luther King (K-8)
4. Rawson (PK-8) (two schools)
5. West Middle (PK-8)

Public Elementary Schools in Hartford, 2011-12



Zone 3

HPS Elementary Schools:

1. Batchelder (PK-8)
2. Kennelly (PK-8)
3. Latino Studies at Burns (PK-8)
4. Moylan (PK-5)
5. Parkville (PK-5)
6. Sanchez (PK-5)

Zone 2

HPS Elementary Schools:

1. America's Choice at SAND (K-8)
2. Core Knowledge at Milner (PK-8)
3. Simpson-Waverly (K-8)
4. Wish (PK-8)
5. Global Communications (K-4,6-8)
6. Clark (PK-8)

Zone 4

HPS Elementary Schools:

1. Asian Studies at Dwight/Bellizzi (PK-8) (two buildings)
2. Betances Early Reading Lab School (PK-3)
3. Burr Elementary (PK-8)
4. M.D.Fox CommPACT School (K-7)
5. Naylor Elementary (PK-8)

Transportation Rules

Transportation **will be** provided to students attending a school **in** their zone, when:

- Grades K,1,2: family lives more than .5 miles from the school
- Grades 3,4,5: family lives more than 1 miles from the school
- Grades 6,7,8: family lives more than 1.5 miles from the school
- Grades 9,10,11,12: family lives more than 2 miles from the school

Transportation **will not** be provided for elementary students placed in schools **outside** their home zone, **except** for these schools:

- Achievement First located in Zone 1 will provide transportation to Zones 1 & 2
- Global Communications Academy in Zone 2 will provide transportation to all 4 Zones

7 Steps to Selecting a School for Your Child

Step 1:

Visit www.SmartChoicesHartford.org

to find your home **zone** and **compare schools** based on:

- ✓ distance from your home,
- ✓ racial balance, or
- ✓ academic performance.

The screenshot shows the SmartChoices website interface. At the top, it says "A DIGITAL GUIDE TO Public School Choice IN THE GREATER HARTFORD REGION" and "SmartChoices". Below this is a navigation bar with "HOME", "ABOUT THIS WEBSITE", and "CONTACT US". The main section is titled "SEARCH FOR SCHOOLS". It includes a search bar for the student's home address (221 Main St, Hartford, CT 06106), a dropdown for the student's grade (4th Grade), and checkboxes for "District schools" and "Interdistrict schools". A "SEARCH" button is present. Below the search bar, it says "29 schools found." To the right of the search bar is a map of Hartford, CT, showing various school zones. Below the search bar is a table of search results. The table has columns for "School & Management", "Address", "Dist. (straight line)", "Grades", "More Info", "Racial Balance", "Test Goal", and "Test Gain". The first two rows of results are visible, showing schools like "R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Arts" and "Sanchez School".

School & Management	Address (click to zoom)	Dist. (straight line) (click to zoom)	Grades	More Info	Racial Balance (click to zoom)	Test Goal (click to zoom)	Test Gain (click to zoom)
R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Arts (Hartford Public Schools)	65 Van Buren Ave Hartford, CT	0.6 miles	PreK4 to 8	RSCCO accepts late applications until May 1 See RSCCO transportation		32 % CT Avg	+7
Sanchez School (Hartford Public Schools)	176 Babcock St Hartford, CT HFS zone 3	0.7 miles	PreK4 to 6	Apply to HFS Choice before March 30 Preference for your Neighborhood		21 % CT Avg	+4

Step 2:

Decide **what factors** **are most important to you** when selecting a school for your child.

Racial Balance

Distance & Transportation

Test Scores

School Theme

Before/After School Programs

Sibling Attends

New Building

Interaction with Teachers

Step 3:

Visit the Magnet School (RSCO) **Choice Fair & HPS Info Sessions** to meet school staff in person.

Step 4:

Visit schools you are considering and talk to other parents about them.

Step 5:

Fill out an HPS Choice Application **before March 31!**

This application is **MANDATORY!**

Step 6:

Reply to Placement Letter you receive **before May 15th!**

Step 7:

Register your child at the school you were assigned before school begins.

RSCO (Magnet) Choice Fair

Wednesday, January 5, 5:30pm – 8:00pm
University of Hartford Magnet School
196 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford

HPS Application Help Sessions

Saturday, January 29, 9:00 am – 12:00

Capital Preparatory Magnet School
1304 Main Street, Hartford

Saturday, February 19, 9:00 am – 12:00

Noah Webster Micro Society Magnet School
5 Cone Street, Hartford

Application Dates

Hartford Public Schools: Jan. 10 to March 31

Important!

- If your child has a sibling attending a Hartford Public School, you must have that **sibling's Student Identification #** in order to complete an application!
- To get the sibling's student ID #, contact the **family resource aide** at their school.

RSCO (Magnet Schools): Nov. 20 to Feb. 4
(OPTIONAL)

For more information, call Lourdes
Fonseca (860) 634-9092



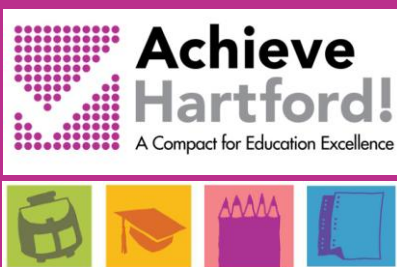
**Achieve
Hartford!**
A Compact for Education Excellence

2011 GUIA DE SELECCIÓN para padres de Hartford con niños entrando al Jardín de Infantes el próximo septiembre

(Información sobre las Escuelas Públicas de Hartford solamente)



Haz una Gran Selección!

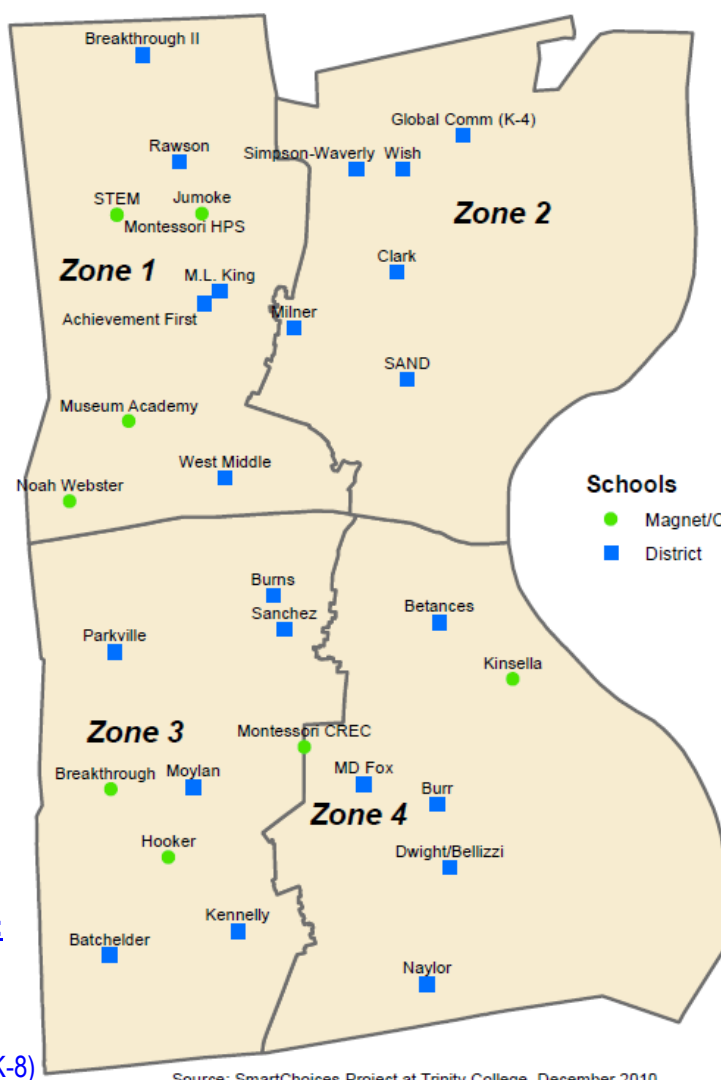


Zona 1

HPS Escuelas Elementales:

1. Achievement First Hartford Academy (K-4)
2. Breakthrough 2 (PK3-5)
3. Martin Luther King (K-8)
4. Rawson (PK-8) (two schools)
5. West Middle (PK-8)

Escuelas Públicas Elementales de Hartford, 2011-12



Zona 3

HPS Escuelas Elementales:

1. Batchelder (PK-8)
2. Kennelly (PK-8)
3. Latino Studies at Burns (PK-8)
4. Moylan (PK-5)
5. Parkville (PK-5)
6. Sanchez (PK-5)

Zona 2

HPS Escuelas Elementales:

1. America's CHOICE at SAND (K-8)
2. Core Knowledge at Milner (PK-8)
3. Simpson-Waverly (K-8)
4. Wish (PK-8)
5. Global Communications (K-4,6-8)
6. Clark (PK-8)

Zona 4

HPS Escuelas Elementales:

1. Asian Studies at Dwight/Bellizzi (PK-2) (3-8) (dos edificios)
2. Betances Early Reading Lab School (PK-3)
3. Burr Elementary (PK-8)
4. M.D.Fox CommPACT School (K-7)
5. Naylor Elementary (PK-8)

Reglas de Transportación

Transportación será proveída a estudiantes que asistan a escuelas en su zona de vivienda cuando:

- Grados K,1,2: la familia reside más de .5 milla de la escuela
- Grados 3,4,5: la familia reside más de 1 milla de la escuela
- Grados 6,7,8: la familia reside más de 1.5 millas de la escuela
- Grados 9,10,11,12: la familia reside más de 2 millas de la escuela

Transportación no será proveída a estudiantes fuera de su zona de vivienda, con la excepción de:

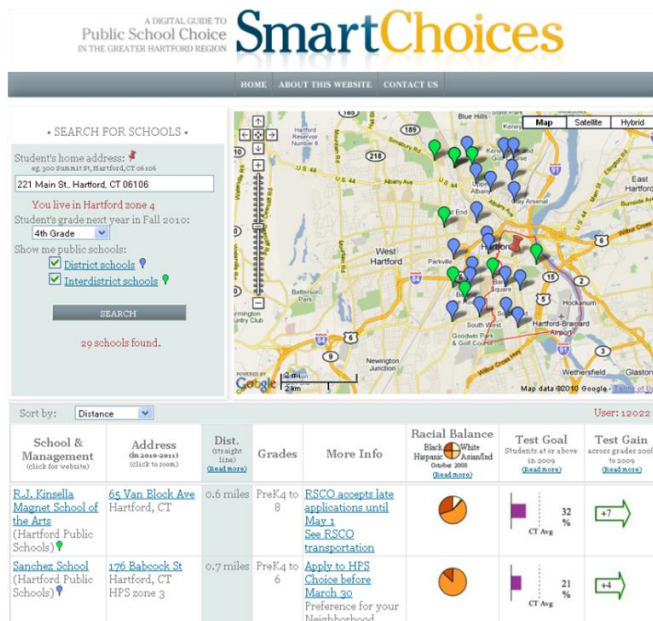
- Achievement First en zona 1 provee transportación para zonas 1 y 2.
- Global Communications Academy en zona 2 provee transportación para todas las zonas.

7 Pasos para Seleccionar Escuela para Su Hijo

Paso 1:

Visite www.SmartChoicesHartford.org para saber la zona donde Usted reside y comparar las escuelas basandose en:

- ✓ distancia desde su casa,
- ✓ balance racial, o
- ✓ rendimiento académico.



Paso 2:

Decida cuáles **factores** son **más importantes** para **Usted** al seleccionar la escuela de su hijo.

Balance Racial

Distancia y Transportación

Puntuaciones de Exámenes del estado

Tema de la Escuela

Programas Antes y Después de Escuelas

Hermanos/as en la Escuela

Nuevo Edificio

Relación con los Maestros

Paso 3:

Visita las ferias de las Escuelas Magnet (RSCO) & Escuelas Públicas de Hartford (HPS) para conocer personal de las escuelas.

Paso 4:

Visita las escuelas que estás considerando para tu niño y habla con otros padres acerca de ellas.

Paso 5:

Llena tu aplicación para seleccionar escuelas para HPS **antes del 31 de Marzo!**

Esta aplicación es **OBLIGATORIA!**

Paso 6:

Contesta la Carta de Colocación cuando la recibas y envíala a HPS **antes del 15 de Mayo!**

Paso 7:

Registra tu niño en la escuela asignada antes de que la escuela comience.

Feria de Selección

Miércoles, 5 de enero, 5:30pm – 8:00pm
University of Hartford Magnet School
196 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford

Secciones Informativas de HPS

Sábado, 29 de enero, 9:00 am – 12:00
Capital Preparatory Magnet School
1304 Main Street, Hartford

Sábado, 19 de febrero, 9:00 am – 12:00
Noah Webster Micro Society Magnet School
5 Cone Street, Hartford

Fecha para Aplicar

Escuelas Públicas de Hartford: **Enero 10 a Marzo 31**

IMPORTANTE!

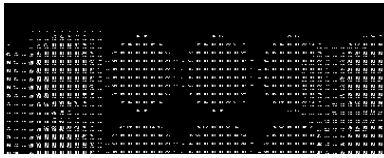
- Si su niño tiene hermanos/as asistiendo alguna Escuela Pública de Hartford, usted necesita el Número de Identificación Escolar # **para poder completar la aplicación!**
- Pregunte a la FRA de su escuela para conseguir ese número.

RSCO (Escuelas Magnet): **Noviembre 20 a Febrero 4** (OPCIONAL)

Para más información, llama Lourdes Fonseca (860) 634-9092



**Achieve
Hartford!**
A Compact for Education Excellence



Achieve Hartford! CHOICE Evaluation for Parents

1. Identify your level of knowledge on choice before and after the training, on a scale of 1-5, 1 being no knowledge, 3 being some knowledge, and 5 being very knowledgeable.

Before

1 2 3 4 5

After

1 2 3 4 5

2. How satisfied are you with the assistance you received today navigating school choice?
From very unsatisfied to very satisfied.

Very Unsatisfied Unsatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very Satisfied

3. Identify your level of comfort in filling out the online choice application before and after the training, on a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all comfortable, 3 being somewhat comfortable, and 5 being very comfortable.

Before

1 2 3 4 5

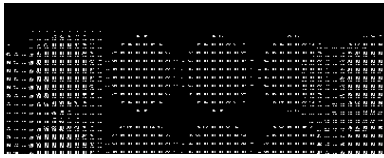
After

1 2 3 4 5

4. Please tell us what 3 factors were most important to you in choosing your school, using the list here or any other factors that come to mind.

___ Distance and Transportation ___ Test Scores ___ School Theme
___ Before/After School Programs ___ Sibling Attends ___ Racial Balance

Other _____



Achieve Hartford! Evaluación de CHOICE para Padres

1. Identifica tu nivel de conocimiento en CHOICE antes y después de este entrenamiento, en escala del 1-5, 1 siendo no conocimiento, 3 siendo algún conocimiento, y 5 siendo mucho conocimiento.

Antes

1 2 3 4 5

Después

1 2 3 4 5

2. Cuan satisfecho se siente usted con la ayuda recibida durante este proceso de CHOICE?

Bien Insatisfecho Insatisfecho Neutral Satisfecho Bien Satisfecho

3. Identifica tu nivel de conformidad llenando la aplicación de CHOICE electrónicamente antes y después de esta ayuda, en escala del 1-5, 1 siendo definitivamente no cómodo, 3 siendo más o menos cómodo, y 5 siendo totalmente cómodo.

Antes

1 2 3 4 5

Después

1 2 3 4 5

5. Por favor díganos que 3 factores fueron más importantes para usted al momento de escoger una escuela para su niño/niña.

___ Distancia y Transportación ___ Puntuación de Exámenes Estatales
___ Tema de la Escuela ___ Programas de Antes y Después de Clases
___ Hermanos/Hermanas en la Escuela ___ Balance Racial

Otros _____