



Empowering Parents

**How Choice Education
Informs Hartford Parents on
Options for their Children**

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May 18, 2012

Acknowledgments

Achieve Hartford! wishes to thank the following corporate partners for their generous financial support of the Choice Education Program:

1. **The Hartford Financial Services Group;**
2. **Comcast;** and
3. **Fairview Capital Partners.**

In addition, Achieve Hartford! would like to recognize the many partners who make this work possible, including:

- the Hartford Public Schools;
- the City of Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation – and all the pre-school centers they support;
- Community Renewal Team (CRT) – and all the pre-school centers they support;
- the State's Department of Children and Families;
- Compass Youth Collaborative and the Village for Families and Children; and
- the Hartford families themselves.

We look forward to continued collaboration with our partners as we work to ensure that all families participating in school choice have the information and assistance they need to make informed decisions on behalf of their children.



Achieve Hartford! is an independent nonprofit organization of business and community leaders focused on student achievement and supporting effective and sustained reform in the Hartford Public Schools.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Achieve Hartford! recently completed the second year of formal operation of the Choice Education Program, administered on behalf of Hartford parents and school children from October 2011-January 2012. Established in 2010, Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program works to address two realities:

1. Success of *any* school choice program is dependent upon families having the information needed to make *informed* choices.
2. The *SmartChoices* website – while a great tool for families to learn about and compare school options – on its own does not provide families with the assistance they need to successfully navigate the multiple school choice processes in Hartford.

The mission of Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program is to inform Hartford parents about the school options available to their children, while increasing their confidence to become more engaged in their children's education. The expected outcome is that parents make informed decisions about where to send their children to school, and gain comfort in interacting with the overall education system.

The second year results indicate that the program is moving in the right direction with:

- **1,581 Hartford families assisted directly and indirectly with the completion of Hartford Public School choice applications;**
- **322 Hartford families assisted directly with the completion of regional school choice applications; and**
- **A measurable increase in both the knowledge and confidence of the parents we served, as measured by our parent survey.**

Overall results of Year 2 are extremely positive, and we anticipate the continued impact of this program on not only Hartford families and students, but also on the great work of our partners who provide services in the community every day, and on whom we rely so greatly to carry out this work.

What follows in this report is a detailed evaluation of the 2012 Choice Education Program, presented in four sections:

- **an overview of how our program operates;**
- **data on our outreach efforts this year over last year;**
- **the recipe for success in our work; and**
- **the identification of three key opportunities going forward.**

Achieve Hartford! is proud to do this cutting edge work in support of school choice in Hartford, and looks forward to expanding our efforts in Year Three of the Choice Education Program.

PART 1:

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVE HARTFORD!'S CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Since 2008, the Hartford Public Schools have offered school choice to all students and families, making the 2012 process the fifth year of choice in Hartford. Key to the success of similar choice efforts throughout the country is **good information** in the hands of parents, and **individual assistance for families 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, and discussed in the pages that follow.

Program Mission and Goals

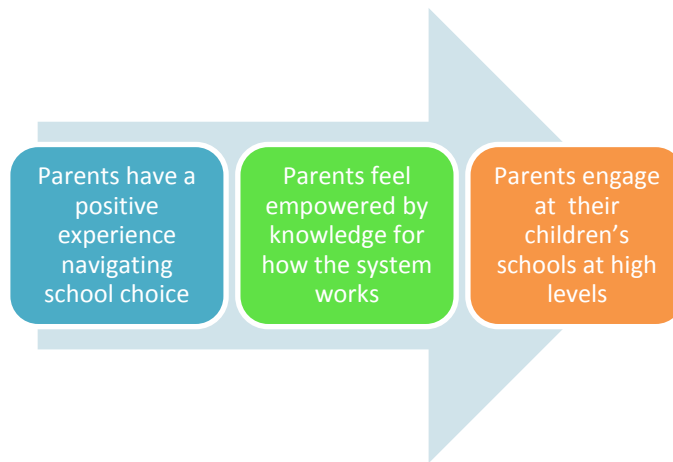
The mission of Achieve Hartford!'s Choice Education Program is to **inform** Hartford parents about the school options available to their children, while increasing their **confidence** to become more engaged in their children's education.

The goals of this program are three-fold:

- **educate families** on the choice process;
- **increase the number** of HPS choice applications submitted on time; and
- **build the capacity** of both parents and Pre-K/city/agency staff to fully engage in the school choice process in Hartford.

In addition to these goals, it is our hope that through this program, parents have such a positive experience with the school choice process that they become highly engaged in their children's school experiences later on.

The following graphic represents the ultimate impact we would like to see from this program, though we have yet to derive metrics to measure this impact.



Program Description – What We Do

A Collaborative Partnership Model

In order to conduct outreach to parents for whom choosing a school is mandatory, Achieve Hartford! once again partnered with three entities: (1) the City of Hartford’s Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation (the City), (2) the Hartford Public Schools (HPS), and (3) the CT Department of Children and Families (DCF).

As the primary provider of school readiness services, the City once again provided us with direct access to all pre-school providers they support in order for us to train staff and build relationships on the ground, including Community Renewal Team (CRT) pre-k centers. As partners, the 29 pre-school providers we worked with promoted the choice process, provided educational materials to parents, scheduled one-on-one meetings between Achieve Hartford! Parent Choice Advisors (PCAs) and Pre-K parents, and assisted hundreds of parents to navigate the choice process on their own. In addition, the City helped us create the four-page [2012 Choice Guide for Hartford Parents](#) (See **Appendix A**), with both English and Spanish versions. These allow parents to quickly review the most critical information that is presented in much greater detail in the 54-page Hartford Public Schools Choice Parent Brochure.

With 29 elementary schools – with diverse grade configurations – HPS was a key partner in driving information on our program down to school principals and school staff, and the HPS Choice Office provided us with up-to-the-minute data on how schools were faring in their efforts to complete choice applications. This information was critical to us being able to focus our outreach efforts at those schools that were furthest behind in the process.

Achieve Hartford! also worked with staff from the CT Department of Children and Families to ensure that children in the foster care system throughout the state had access to information they needed to navigate the choice application process in Hartford.

Services Offered

The Choice Education program offers a menu of services to partners who, based on their own internal capacity, decide what type of assistance they would like to receive. Services include:

- A. Educational materials in the form of the 2012 Choice Guide for Hartford Parents and the [SmartChoices](#) website**
- B. Training for pre-school provider staff**
- C. Group information sessions for parent and students**
- D. Phone banking with school staff to reach parents**
- E. Individual (one-on-one) assistance to parents at both schools and pre-schools**

PART 2:

YEAR 2 DATA: CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The goals of Achieve Hartford's Choice Education Program, as mentioned above, include the following:

- **Educating families** on the HPS choice process;
- **Increasing the number** of choice applications received; and
- **Building the capacity** of both parents and Pre-K/HPS/agency staff to fully engage in the choice process.

To measure how well these goals were accomplished, we tracked the following metrics:

1. **Number of parents** provided individual assistance *directly*¹;
2. **Number of parents** provided individual assistance *indirectly*²;
3. **Number of choice applications** submitted on time as a result of our work;
4. **Percentage gain** in parents' knowledge and comfort level based on parent surveys; and
5. **Number of staff trained** throughout the city on school choice.

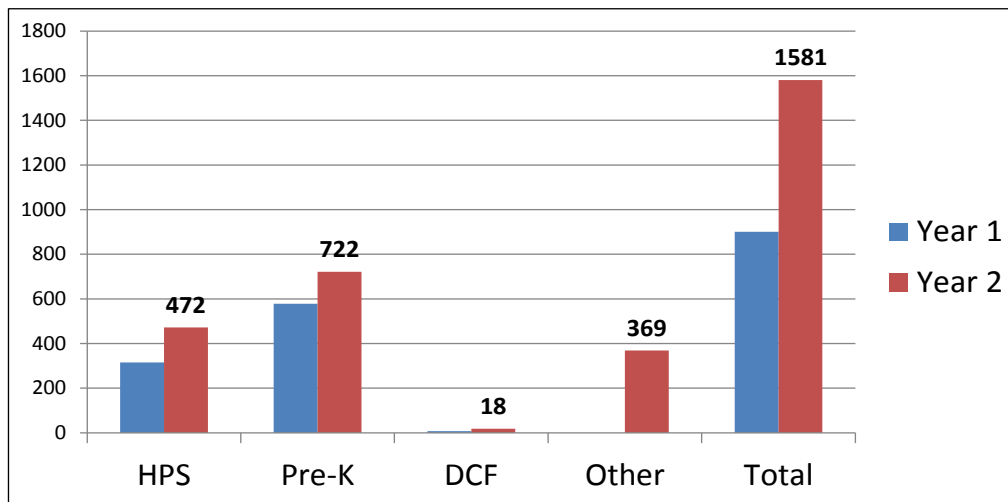
¹ "Direct Assistance" refers to one-on-one interventions provided by an Achieve Hartford! Parent Choice Adviser to an individual parent or family, 98 percent of the time resulting in a completed HPS application.

² "Indirect" refers to assistance provided by Pre-K or HPS staff we trained, resulting 100 percent of the time in a completed HPS application, as reported by each Pre-K center and school.

Program Performance

Application-related Indicators

In Year Two of the program, Achieve Hartford! staff assisted a total of 1,581 families, representing an increase of 680 (or 75 percent) over last year’s total of families served. A total of 952 HPS choice applications were completed via direct assistance from Achieve Hartford! Parent Choice Advisers and 629 completed through indirect assistance, with a one to one ratio of families served to applications completed. It is important to note that this year featured a new category of outreach – categorized as “other” in the graph below. This graph compares year two outreach results over year one, with outreach broken out into four categories. A complete breakdown of families touched at each school and Pre-K center with whom we worked is available in **Appendix B** of this report.



In addition to the 1581 HPS choice applications submitted through the efforts of this program, our records indicate that our direct assistance also yielded a total of 322 regional school choice applications submitted on time as well.

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of families assisted this year, we were able to maintain very high satisfaction ratings as indicated by our post application survey, where 96% of families surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance provided by Achieve Hartford! Parent Choice Advisers (500 respondents).

Hartford Public Schools

Of the 29 elementary and middle schools in the Hartford Public School system, eight schools partnered with us to assist transitional families, both directly and indirectly. Assisting 94 percent of the “outgoing” families at those schools, a total of **472** families were served either directly or indirectly.

Pre-School Providers

Achieve Hartford! worked with 20 early learning & child development centers, as well as nine Community Renewal Team (CRT) pre-k centers to provide both direct and indirect assistance. As a result of our collaborative efforts, **722** Pre-K families were assisted either directly or indirectly, representing 91 percent of “outgoing” families at those centers.

Department of Children and Families

This year, we worked closely with the CT Department of Children and Families to ensure that no child in the system who needed to attend a Hartford Public School next year missed the opportunity to participate in school choice. The Department of Children and Families charged one employee with the responsibility of identifying students from throughout the state who – given their projected living situation next year – should have completed applications for school choice.

While we were able to increase applications in year two, from 8 to **18** applications completed on time, we expect that our partnership going forward will continue to yield more students.

Other

This outreach consisted mostly of our assistance at multiple Hartford Public Schools Application Info Sessions held at the Hartford Public Library on Saturdays, as well as seven one-on-one interventions conducted in our offices. This resulted in a total of **369** additional families touched.

Capacity-Building Indicators

Administering a bilingual parent survey to 500 parents we assisted directly, we were able to collect some qualitative data on the level of knowledge and confidence gained by parents we reached. Survey results indicate the following:

- On average, parents reported a 95 percent gain in both their level of knowledge and confidence in navigating school choice from before to after the Parent Choice Adviser’s intervention.

A sample of the survey used with parents is available in **Appendix C** of this report.

Though no survey was administered to the pre-school and agency staff members we trained, a total of **36** staff were trained on how to assist parents in navigating the school choice process in Hartford.

Part 3:

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

As a result of the work done, it has become clear to us that certain critical factors drive the success of the Choice Education program. Without our partners, we could not connect with as many families – and without good tools we could not be so effective in explaining the various school choice processes and options that exist in Hartford. Most importantly, however, highly effective Parent Choice Advisors are instrumental to the success of the program.

Effective Parent Choice Advisors (PCAs)

Because the work of this program involves personal interaction, the quality of each contact made between a PCA and a parent is paramount. As such, we focus heavily on recruiting and screening the right parents to become PCAs. Ultimately, our PCA team must have these five characteristics:

- **have children or grandchildren in the Hartford schools,**
- **represent diverse ethnic and geographic backgrounds,**
- **know Hartford’s neighborhoods,**
- **have a personal passion for empowering parents, and**
- **be able to engage warmly with families (great customer service skills).**

After the right parents are identified and hired as PCAs, they must go through training on up-to-date school information, practice navigating both the HPS and regional school choice office choice applications, and also practice providing one-on-one assistance. PCAs are trained on how to walk parents through an entire thought process prior to actually completing an application, as *most* parents have not had a chance to review school information prior to sitting down with a PCA or school/pre-school staff.

Best Engagement Models

Having done this work for two years, we have developed and refined diverse models of engagement with our community partners. Overwhelmingly, two specific models stand out:

The “Take Ownership” Model with Pre-School Providers

Looking at the various ways we engaged each pre-school provider this year, it is clear that one model of engagement produces the best results in terms of numbers of parents reached. In the “Take Ownership” model, each center director and their respective staff develop their own unique outreach strategy to bring parents in and assist them with their application. We assist the centers with training and materials, but rely on them to provide direct assistance to their families. For those that find they have the capacity on staff to conduct this level of outreach to parents, results have been very strong.

The “Close Partnership” Model with Hartford Public Schools

This model consists of a partnering closely with the school principal, family resource aide, or school community partner – such as Compass Youth Collaborative or the Village for Family and Children. Under this model, the school creates the outreach strategy and identifies the type of assistance they receive from Achieve Hartford! PCAs – ranging from phone banking to information sessions to direct application assistance with parents. The key here is working very closely together across agencies and organizations, with parents’ needs foremost in mind.

PART 4:

OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD

In the upcoming 2012-13 school choice process, Achieve Hartford! recognizes three distinct opportunities for the Choice Education Program to have increased impact:

- 1. Work with an increased number of elementary and middle schools to help ensure that each school in Hartford reaches their goal of 100 percent of families completing choice applications on time;**
- 2. Identifying and serving the roughly 200 families in Hartford with Pre-K children in less formal daycare options; and**
- 3. Working with the HPS Choice Office to make school choice in Hartford much more than an application completion process over three months, but really more of a year-round engagement.**

Targeting those families whose Pre-K children stay at home, in the home of relatives, or attend neighborhood daycare professionals represents an exciting opportunity. To reach these families, however, additional community, healthcare and faith based partners need to be engaged in this work. These partnerships will not only be helpful in the distribution of information on school choice, but can potentially provide new ways of informing families on education-related issues throughout the year.

Working with the Hartford Public Schools to make school choice more of a year-round topic of conversation in the community is also an exciting opportunity. The assistance currently provided by PCAs to families is valuable less in its assistance to fill out applications, and more so in its prompting families to reflect on what they want out of the education provided to their children. This is where the Choice Education Program has long term impact on families, and what ultimately makes this program unique throughout the country.

PART 5:

APPENDICES

A. Components of the four-page 2012 Choice Education Brochure (with School Listings by Zone, Map, Scheduled Parent Sessions, and Contact Information).

Make a Great Choice!
The 2012 CHOICE GUIDE for Hartford Parents

A DIGITAL GUIDE TO Public School Choice IN THE GREATER HARTFORD REGION
SmartChoices

School Buildings in Hartford for Fall 2012

HPS Application Help Sessions in Hartford

- **OCTOBER 29:** 9:00 am – 12:00 Rawson Elementary School, 250 Holcomb Street
- **NOVEMBER 12:** 9:00 am – 12:00 America's Choice at SAND, 1750 Main Street
- **DECEMBER 3:** 9:00 am – 12:00 Noah Webster Micro Society Magnet School, 1755 Park Street
- **DECEMBER 17:** 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Hartford Public Library, 500 Main Street
- **JANUARY 11, 2012:** 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. Hartford Public Library, 500 Main Street
- **JANUARY 14:** 9:00 am – 12:00 Early Reading Lab at Betances, 42 Charter Oak Ave.

RSCO (Magnet) Choice Fairs in Hartford

- October 15: 9:00 am – 12:00 A. J. Price Technical High School, 401 Flatbush Ave.
- November 5: 9:00 am – 12:00 The Learning Center/ Commons Building, 43 Vernon Street
- December 18: 9:00 am – 12:00 STEM Magnet School at Anne Fisher, 260 Plainfield Street

Application Dates for Hartford Public Schools

Oct. 15 to Jan. 31 – Transitional/Grades
 Feb. 13 to Apr. 05 – Non-Transitional/Grades

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 siblings' student ID #s, contact the family resource aides at their schools.

RSCO (Magnet Schools): Oct. 14 to Jan. 20 (if/when)

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

Office for Family Liaison

Achieve Hartford!

B. Choice Application Data by Preschool Provider and Hartford Public School

Outreach Source	# Applications Submitted DIRECTLY	# Applications Submitted INDIRECTLY	Total HPS Applications Complete	% Families Completing Applications
Pre-School Providers				
Early Learning Center & Child Development Centers				
Salvation Army- Right Place	37	10	47	96%
YWCA Growing Tree	0	10	10	71%
Ashar Child Development Center	11	0	11	100%
Trinity College Community Child Center	0	12	12	100%
Elkey's Learning Experience	0	4	4	100%
Little Angels Learning Center	8	0	8	47%
YMC Wilson Gray Early Learning Center	11	8	19	100%
Womens League Child Development Center	23	14	37	68%
Burns Early Learning Center	5	1	6	100%
Capitol Child Development Center	0	6	6	100%
Hartford Neighborhood Center	0	6	6	100%
Salvation Army-North Corps	9	1	10	100%
Waverly Early Learning Center	6	0	6	75%
PequeninChildren's Multicultural-Readiness Academy	22	0	22	92%
Metzner Early Learning Center	12	3	15	100%
El Paraiso Infantil	24	8	32	100%
Hyland Early Learning Center	5	0	5	63%
Southside Jumpstart to Kindergarten	9	0	9	100%
Beacon Early Learning Center	0	10	10	100%
The Village for Families & Children Travelers ELC	0	11	11	100%
Total ELC/CDC	182	104	286	87%
CRT Pre-K Centers	115	321	436	93%
	297	425	722	91%
Hartford Public Schools				
Americas Choice@ SANDS	33	9	42	89%
Betances School	11	29	40	87%
Burr	50	26	76	100%
Latino Studies @ Burns	16	59	75	100%
McDonough	95	17	112	87%
Sanchez	27	29	56	95%
West Middle	50	3	53	100%
Hooker	3	15	18	100%
	285	187	472	94%
CT Department of Children and Families				
DCF	1	17	18	>50%
Other				
HPS Info Session	362	0	362	n/a
Single Interventions (at the office)	7	0	7	n/a
	369	0	369	n/a
GRAND TOTAL	952	629	1581	

C. Sample Parent Survey Form (Administered in English and Spanish)



Achieve Hartford! CHOICE Evaluation for Parents

1. Identify your level of knowledge on choice before and after the training, on 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 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 Attend ___ Racial Balance

Other _____



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