

Choice Newsletter

September 2004

Volume 3, Issue 1



Capitol Region Education Council

A Service for the CREC Choice Program

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CREC Transportation

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Capitol Region Choice Program

34 Sequassen St. Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 524-4010 Fax (860) 524-4005



I. From the Director's Desk

We'd like to extend a warm welcome and best wishes to all of our new families and students who joined the Choice family and those who are continuing in the Choice Program. Thanks to all those who attended one of the six sessions we held in August for returning families. One of the main purposes of these meetings was to personally thank the families who supported their child(ren) throughout the year by attending conferences with teachers, made the extra effort to take their child(ren) to school when they missed the bus, and communicated on a regular basis with school staff.

Currently we have 4 people in the Choice office trying to support over 1,000 students, hundred of families, and over 120 schools. We shared with the families that we are unable to be proactive in meeting your needs and connecting you with events and resources in Hartford because we are inundated with issues dealing with high absenteeism which hurts students academically, difficulty reaching parents by phone, and many behavioral issues with our children on the bus and in school.

We wanted families to know that we are "Raising the Floor in 2004". During these meetings we distributed a copy of our Parent Expectations, Student Expectations, and Choice Expectations to each family. This information was also given to every new family with whom we met. Parents were asked to read and sign a copy which is being kept on file in the choice office. (Please see a copy on pages

2 & 3) In order for this program to be successful, as the State Department of Education strives to meet the State's mandate to increase enrollment by 200 students each year up to 1600 students, we need every family to be an active partner in the education of their child(ren). This year the program is serving over 1000 students in 128 schools and 28 towns. We are still in the process of placing additional students from the waiting list as superintendents continue to make seats available to Choice.

The Choice Program wishes all students a successful 2004-2005 school year!

We are getting close to the holidays and I want to take this time to wish you and your family a very safe and



Happy Holiday Season

II. Choice Administration



Our records show that many phone numbers are either temporary disconnected or out of service. Parents who have not updated their child's emergency contact information with the Choice office should do so immediately by calling (860) 524-4010. It is extremely important for the Choice office and CREC's Transportation Program to have accurate information especially in cases of emergency.

Accurate information on Choice students is crucial. Every school year the routes and bus stops are updated and in order to assign your child a suitable bus schedule, we need you to call the Choice office and report your change of address, home and work phone numbers, and emergency contact phone numbers as they become effective.

Please call the Choice office at (860) 524-4010 to update your child's information.

The Mary Carroll Incentive Award Fund

All Graduating Choice seniors are eligible for the college incentive award.

<i>Lynn Lewis</i>	<i>Simsbury High</i>
<i>Angela Minto</i>	<i>Plainville High</i>
<i>Kelvin Valencia</i>	<i>Canton High</i>
<i>Tiffany Wright</i>	<i>Granby High</i>

Choice will be planning several events in the future to benefit The Mary Carroll Incentive Award.

- Gospel Concert
- R&B Concert
- Bake Sale

We encourage your support at these events so that all of our graduates planning to attend college can benefit. We will share more information in the coming months.

Choice Connections

It is the agency's desire to bring the Project Concern/Choice Program graduates back to share experiences and make connections with other graduates. Also, to develop a network of graduates to give back to the children currently in the program.

We need your help!

If you are a graduate or know someone who graduated from Project Concern or Choice, please email me at noram@crec.org or call me at (860) 524-4014 with any information you might have.

Choice would also like to recognize the accomplishments of our Project Concern and Choice alumni. Please forward all news worthy information, photos, or articles to the Choice office.

By Bunny Hoest and John Reiner



IV. Transportation



The horrors of the first few weeks of school transportation are over. Anything that could have gone wrong did go wrong. Driver background checks were delayed by months so qualified drivers could not be put behind the wheel. Wrong and untimely information was used in the routing process. Many changes had to be made during the first few weeks to correct timing differences, correct safety issues and accommodate as many parental needs as possible.

Parents and students demonstrated a great deal

of cooperation and patience during this transition.

The transportation program has “stabilized” now. We are now focused on refining smaller problems and issues. We have added six buses to the CREC transportation program since September. We have split some routes in an effort to reduce the number of students on the bus and the time the bus must transport the students. We are



continuing this process with the hope of splitting another five routes in the next few weeks. Many parents came to CREC to help review the routes and improve them. Any parent who thinks they have ideas to improve a route are encouraged to call us or perhaps visit us to go over the route.



Video Cameras on Buses

CREC has purchased twenty-five video cameras. They are being installed on the buses now and will be in full operation in the next two weeks. Discipline is an important issue on the buses. The fact that we are transporting students to various school districts creates a long ride for many of them. We try to reduce this time as much as possible but the fact remains that the ride will be relative long. A long ride contributes to disciplinary issues. Parents are reminded to work with their children to encourage good behavior on the buses. The school has primary responsibility for discipline. The bus driver and monitor are encouraged to report all issues. Students are encouraged to report

problems to the school administration. Cameras will make a significant contribution to this issue. Swift action is routinely taken to eliminate the problem student from the bus. The other students need to feel safe on a bus.

Children in Kindergarten through third grade must have an adult receive them at the bus stop. We are experiencing a serious problem with “no-show” parents at these stops. The bus must finish the route and return to the stop to see if the parent (or other adult) has arrived. Some students must be brought to the Choice office while a parent is tracked down to retrieve the child. The police have had to be called in a few instances to take the child.

CREC has implemented a procedure whereby the family will be notified in writing when a child has been forgotten. Multiple violations will require a meeting with the Choice Program and Transportation Department. Continued violations will cause a suspension or cancellation of transportation service for that child.

CREC has many plans to continue improving the transportation program. Your support and cooperation will help us achieve the goals of safe and timely transportation.

Twenty Five Video Cameras on the buses and in full operation



Student Services

1. We will be visiting schools and communicating with guidance counselors. During our mid year review we will identify those families with whom we need to have further discussion about ensuring that they support students to be successful.

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

During the Information Session with the Choice representative I was made fully aware of the challenges and responsibilities associated with my child participating in the Choice Program.

Based on the information received I understand that....

- My child is now a student in the district where he/she has been placed and will be held to the same standards as students who live within that district.
- The Choice Program staff is responsible for monitoring my child's progress and will intervene in situations as necessary.
- I am responsible for my child's behavior on the bus and in school.
- If my child misses the bus, it is my responsibility to make sure he/she gets to school.
- If the school calls because my child is sick, I must pick him/her up from school.
- If my child is suspended from the bus, it is my responsibility to get my child to school those days.
- If my child receives an out-of-school suspension, he/she is still responsible for homework assignments due those days.
- If my child misbehaves excessively on the bus and is dropped off at the Choice office, I must pick my child up at the Choice office by 5 p.m. or Police will be called.
- Excessive bus misconduct and pick-ups at the Choice office can lead to suspension from the bus.
- I must have a working contact number available at all times.
- If my address and/or phone number changes, I must notify the Choice Program and the school immediately.
- In order to ensure my child's success in the Choice Program I must...
 - ~ communicate on a regular basis with my child's teacher(s).
 - ~ provide an area at home where my child can study without distractions.
 - ~ return all calls from the school and the Choice office.
 - ~ work with the school and the Choice office to make decisions that are in my child's best interest.



Student Services (Cont.)

CHOICE RESPONSIBILITIES

- To review and support students' academic performance.
- To support students' social/emotional transition.
- To attend PPT and mediation meetings.
- To intervene in school situations as requested by teachers, principals, and guidance counselors.
- To maintain and connect families to resources that will assist students and their families within the Hartford area.
- To provide information/workshops;
 - ~ to help parents partner in their child's education.
 - ~ to help students succeed socially, and academically in their new community and school.
- To build relationships within the suburban school district.
- To encourage diversity training and openness to the diverse experiences, talents, and interests of Choice students.
- To encourage parent involvement, networking, and connecting with students, educators, and parents in the suburban schools.

2. Student Services are looking for volunteers for a Choice Student Forum to be held in January 2004. If you are in middle school grades, 6-12, we need you to call if you are interested in participating in a Choice Student Symposium. This is your opportunity to share with others your experience, success, and challenges in the Choice Program. We look forward to hearing from you.

Parent Network Committee Meeting

October 21, 2004
5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Conference Room
34 Sequassen Street,
Hartford, CT 06106

The role of a Parent Representative is to represent and be the voice of parents in a designated district(s), to facilitate the distribution of information from the Choice office to families within their district(s), and to coordinate volunteer efforts for Choice events.

HELPFUL HOMEWORK RESOURCES

Big Y Homework Hotline
(800) 866-Big Y (2449)
Mon. –Thurs. 4pm – 7pm

Homework Relief center
www.homeworkreliefcenter.com
(nominal fee)

Family Resources
www.familveducation.com

The Parent Institute
www.parent-institute.com



V. Up Coming Activities



Choice Program Administrator's Conversation

Wednesday, October 27, 2004

from 3 to 5 PM

Conference Rooms 1 & 2

CREC Central
111 Charter Oak Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106



Grants For Youth Service Day

Want to participate in next April's National Youth Service Day, the largest service event in the world? This could make it easier. State Farm Insurance is offering 100 grants of \$1000 each to students aged 5-25, teachers and school-based service-learning coordinators to support youth service projects planned for April. Applications must be received by Oct. 18.

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES



Visit www.ysa.org/nysd for details, application forms and other grant opportunities.

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Connecticut Transit Fare Cards Distribution

Fifteen (15) magnetic fare cards will be issued on Monday, November 15th, 2004 to eligible students. You must come to the Coltsville Building at 34 Sequassen St., Hartford to sign for and receive your cards.

- Fare cards will be issued to students and/or their parents only.
- For purposes of audit, **canceled fare cards must be returned** to the Choice Program office.
- After the initial distribution, **you will receive one new card for each card returned.** Lost or stolen cards will not be replaced.
- Additional cards for authorized activities must be approved by the Choice Program Director, Nessa Oram. All used or partially used fare cards should be returned then.
- Students will no longer need to use a student's I.D. Transit Card with the new 10 Ride Youth bus ticket Ages 5-18, however proof of age may be requested.

Save The DATE !

November 15th, 2004

9 am to 5 pm

en St. 2nd Fl. Room 253



Event Highlights

Girlfighting: Preventing Girls' Aggression & Violence

Date: October 15, 2004
 Time: 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
 Location: Institute of Technology and Business Development Conference Center
 185 Main Street, New Britain, CT 06051
 For more information and registration, visit <http://www.preventionworksct.org/gpptrxevents.html#anchor>

Sponsored by: The Governor's Prevention Partnership and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Services

OPMAD

Invites you and your family to be our guest for an evening of laughter and learning from author and entertainer John Reardon

Date: Wed. November 10, 2004
 Time: 7:00 p.m.
 Location: Batchelder School Auditorium
 185 Main Street, New Britain, CT 06051
 For more information and reservation form call (860) 548-0301

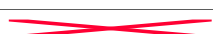
Admission and Childcare is Free
 Transportation, available from Kennelly, Noah Webster, and Annie Fisher School to Batchelder

Organized by: Parents Make A Difference, Inc.



**Don't forget to
 VOTE
 November 2, 2004**

**We encourage you to bring
 your children with you**



CALLING YOUNG ARTISTS!!!

Drug Prevention Poster Contest

For RED RIBBON WEEK

Oct. 23-31, 2004

Create Your Own Poster about: chemicals, alcohol, tobacco or any other substance

**Register at ONE of the following locations*

**Poster Workshops will be held at these locations on the listed date*

**1. October 16, 2004/Saturday 1pm- 3pm KDA (Anderson) Center
 2561 Main St, Hartford (860) 722-6525**

2. October 9, 2004/Saturday 1pm - 3pm Pope Park Center

30 Pope Park Highway (860) 722-6481

AGES: 8 – 15 years old

PRIZES! PRIZES! PRIZES!

First Come, First Serve

For more information contact Martha Jackson 547-1426 x7552,

or Diann Cook at 242-5247.

COME READY TO DRAW!!!

Sponsored by the Hartford Department of Health & Human Services - Youth Services Department, and the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention



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Choice Program

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.crec.org/Choice

Purpose of the Choice Program

The Capitol Region Choice Program is part of a statewide program established by the Connecticut State Legislature through Public Act 97-290 to: 1) Improve academic achievement, 2) reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation or preserve racial and ethnic balance; and 3) provide a choice of educational programs for students. The program is managed by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). The Choice Program offers the opportunity for public urban school students to attend public suburban schools and students from public suburban schools to attend designated urban schools. While the decision to participate is up to the Parent, placement is determined by lottery and the number of spaces made available by the receiving districts. The decision to send a child to school in another district is complex. While some students easily adapt to their new educational environment others find the transition more difficult. It is up to the parent to think through the benefits and drawbacks of participation as it relates to each individual child. Recognizing the social and emotional impact of participation in the program on students, parents and schools, the Choice Program has developed School/Family Liaison Services to support participants in making the necessary adjustments. The services offered include: scheduled school visits, monthly rap sessions, parent group discussions, student activity committee, parent activity committee, parent activity committee and other planned programs.

Siblings attending public school have priority in placement, and where, possible siblings are placed in the same district.

The **law** states that students enrolled in non-public schools are not eligible to apply for the Choice Program. There are no tuition costs to parents for the Choice Program.

There are no tuition **costs** to parents for the Choice Program.

Transportation for the Choice Program is paid for by the State of Connecticut and administered by CREC. The receiving schools are responsible for student conduct on the Choice buses using the same discipline criteria as used for resident students. Limited transportation is provided for high school and middle school students participating in supervised after school activities.

The district where the student is attending school is responsible for the student's educational program. Parents should make every effort to establish a close relationship with the school and their child's teacher.

Please Note: While every attempt has been made to provide correct information in this brochure, the Connecticut state legislation at each session and therefore all information is subject to change.

HOW TO APPLY: The Choice Program intake for new families for 2005-2006 school year will take place on the following dates. Please join us on one of these dates to get the facts and to complete your application at 34 Sequassen St., Hartford, CT, 2nd Floor Conference Room. **Save the Dates:**

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. January 19th, 2005 | from 4 to 5 p.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. |
| 2. February 12th, 2005 | from 10 to 11 a.m. and 11 to 12 p.m. |
| 3. March 1st, 2005 | from 4 to 5 p.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. |



Capitol Region Education Council

Choice Program
34 Sequassen St.
Hartford, CT 06106

