



Choice Watch: Diversity and Access in Connecticut’s School Choice Programs Executive Summary

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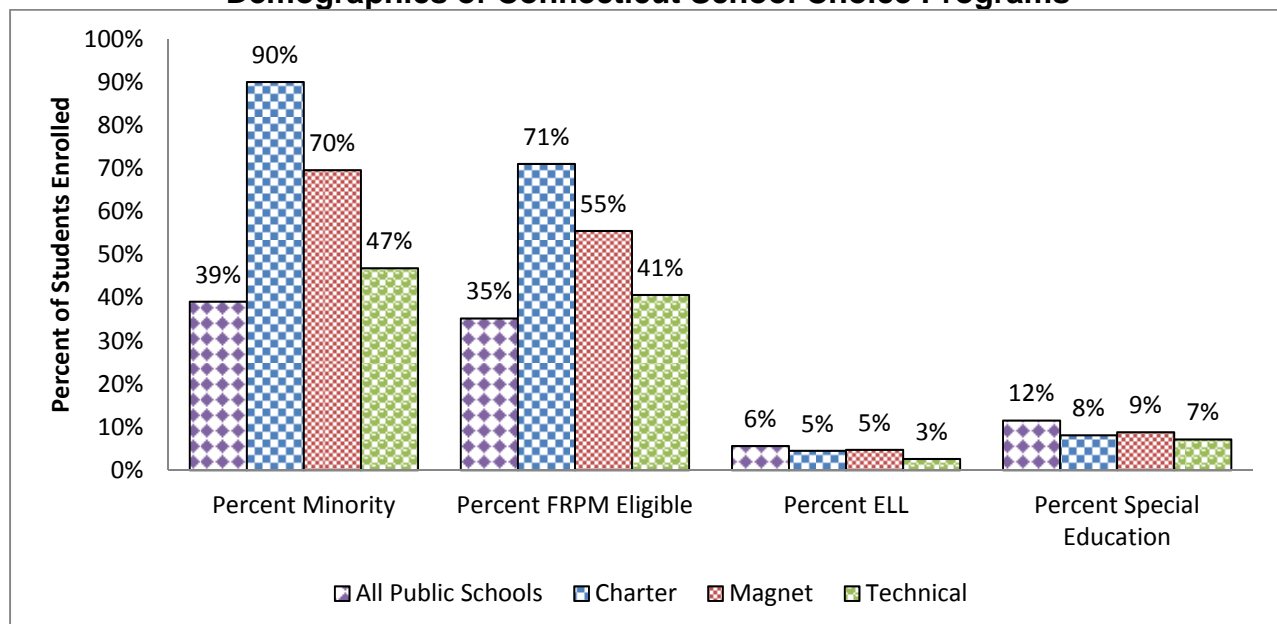
Connecticut’s constitution requires that every child be provided equal educational opportunity, including the opportunity to attend school in an integrated learning environment. This report examines the demographic composition of Connecticut’s public “school choice” programs – programs that permit parents to enroll their children in schools outside their local school district – to see whether they advance or hinder educational opportunity. In the 2011-2012 school year, nearly 50,000 Connecticut students enrolled in a school choice program, and the state spent millions of dollars on these programs above and beyond its traditional funding for local public schools. This report focuses on interdistrict magnet, charter, and technical schools, because these schools have higher enrollment than other choice programs and data were readily available. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic composition of Connecticut’s school choice programs?
2. Do public school choice programs in Connecticut provide students with a racially and ethnically integrated learning environment?
3. Do public school choice programs in Connecticut provide students with a socioeconomically integrated learning environment?
4. Are emerging bilingual students for whom English is not a first language proportionally represented in school choice programs?
5. Are students with disabilities proportionally represented in school choice programs?

We find the following:

1. Magnet, charter, and technical schools are more likely than traditional public schools to enroll minority and low income students; however, they are slightly less likely to enroll identified special education and English Language Learner (ELL) students.

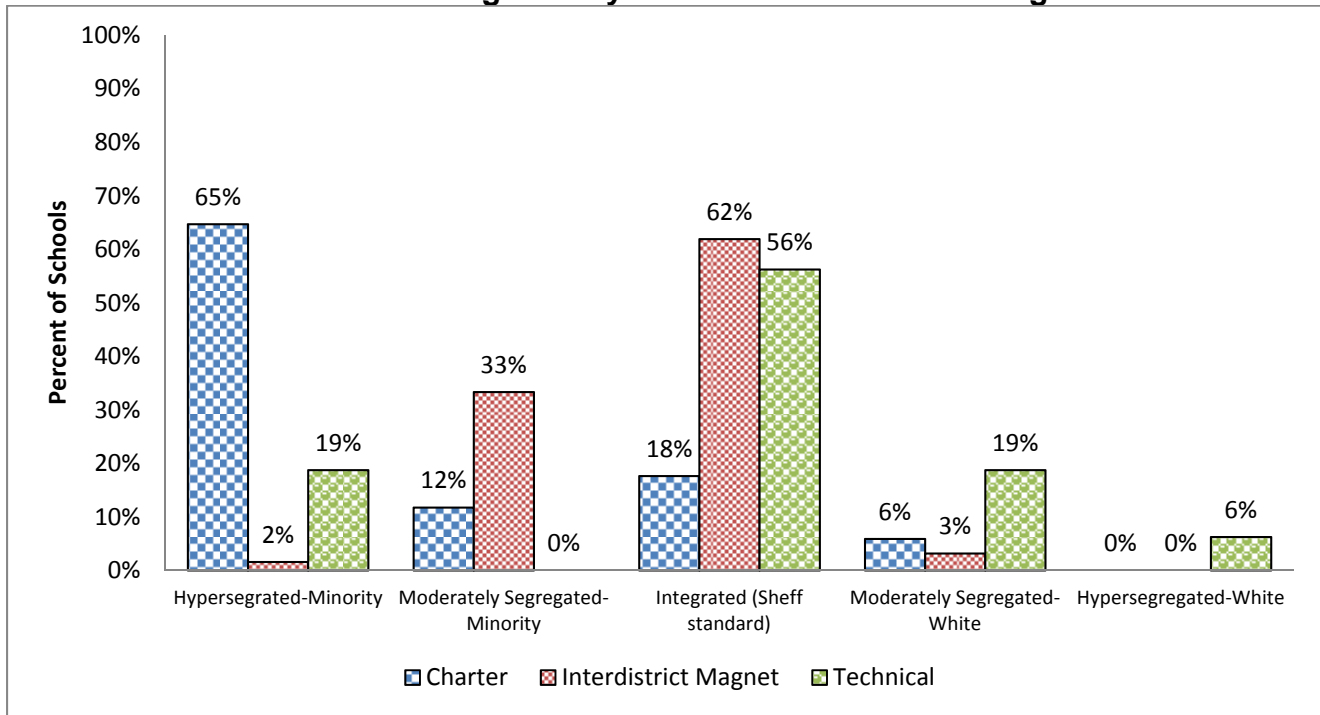
Demographics of Connecticut School Choice Programs



Source: CT Voices for Children’s Analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education Data, 2012

2. A majority of magnet schools and technical schools are integrated by race/ethnicity (between 25% and 75% minority students); however, a majority of charter schools are hypersegregated by race/ethnicity (more than 90% minority students). While magnet schools have legally defined, quantifiable integration standards, charter and technical schools do not.

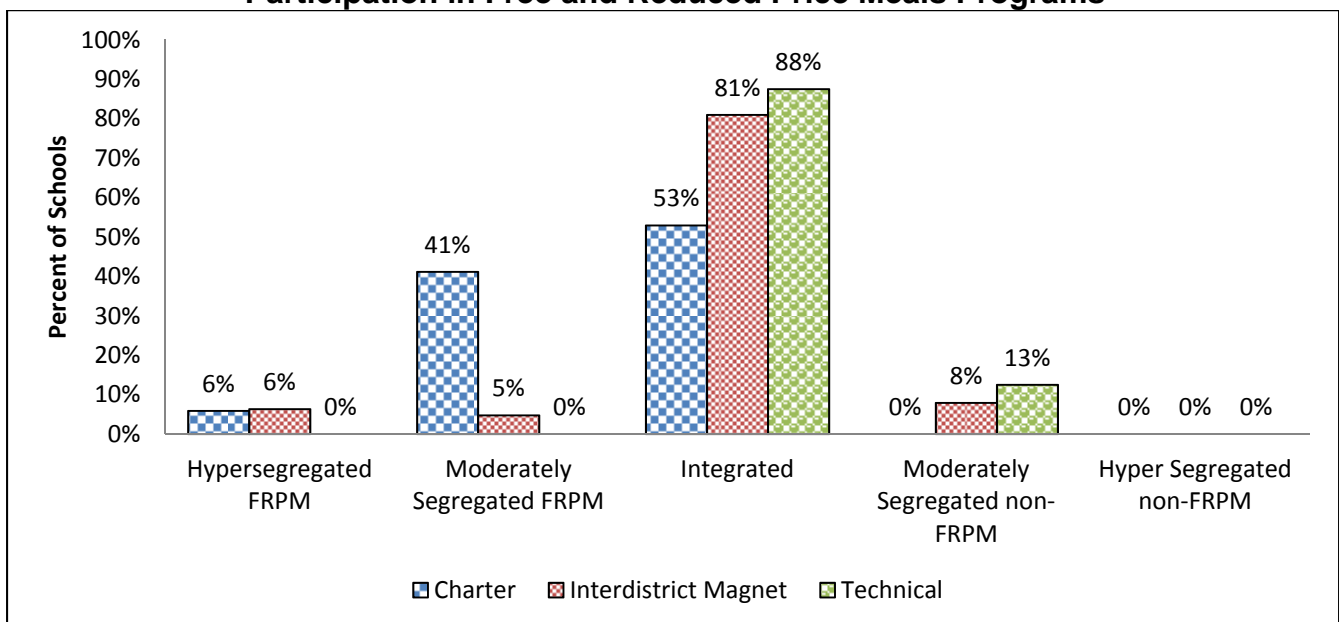
School Choice Programs by Level of Racial/Ethnic Integration



Source: CT Voices for Children’s Analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education Data, 2012

3. A majority of all three choice programs are integrated by socioeconomic status (as measured by having between 25% and 75% of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meal programs).

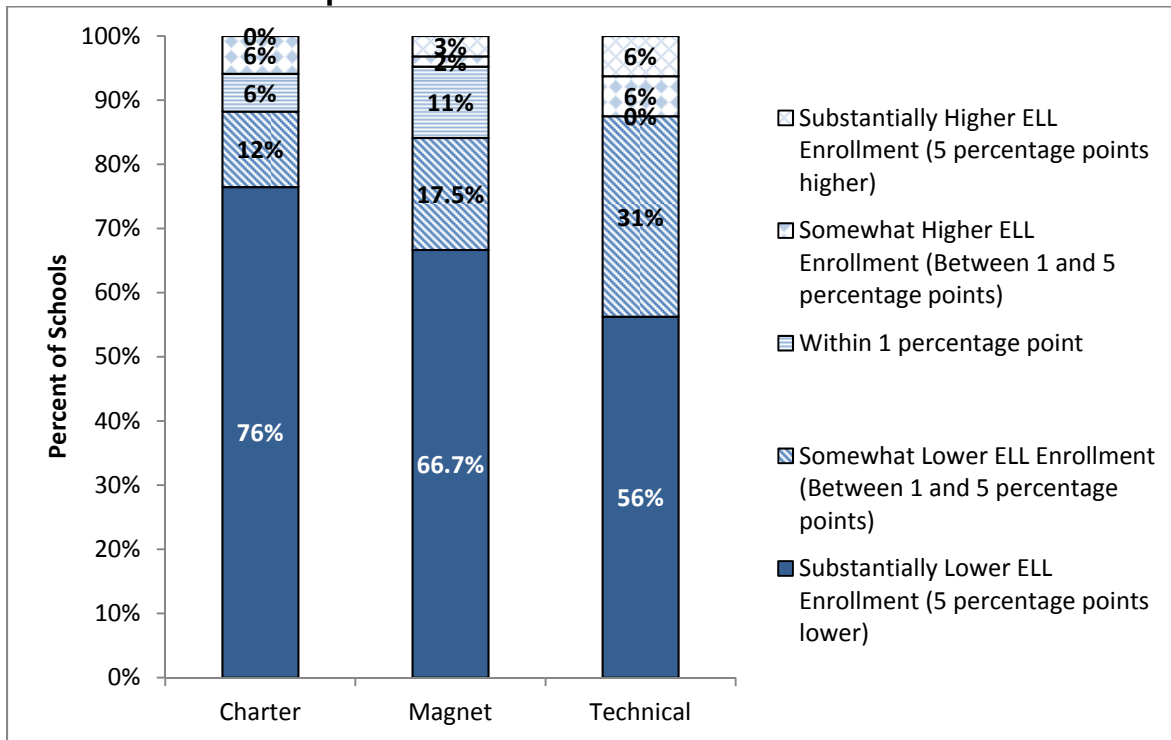
School Choice Programs by Level of Socioeconomic Integration: Participation in Free and Reduced Price Meals Programs



Source: CT Voices for Children’s Analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education Data, 2012

4. A majority of schools in all three choice program categories under-enroll emerging bilingual students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) by a substantial margin, when compared to the towns in which they are located.

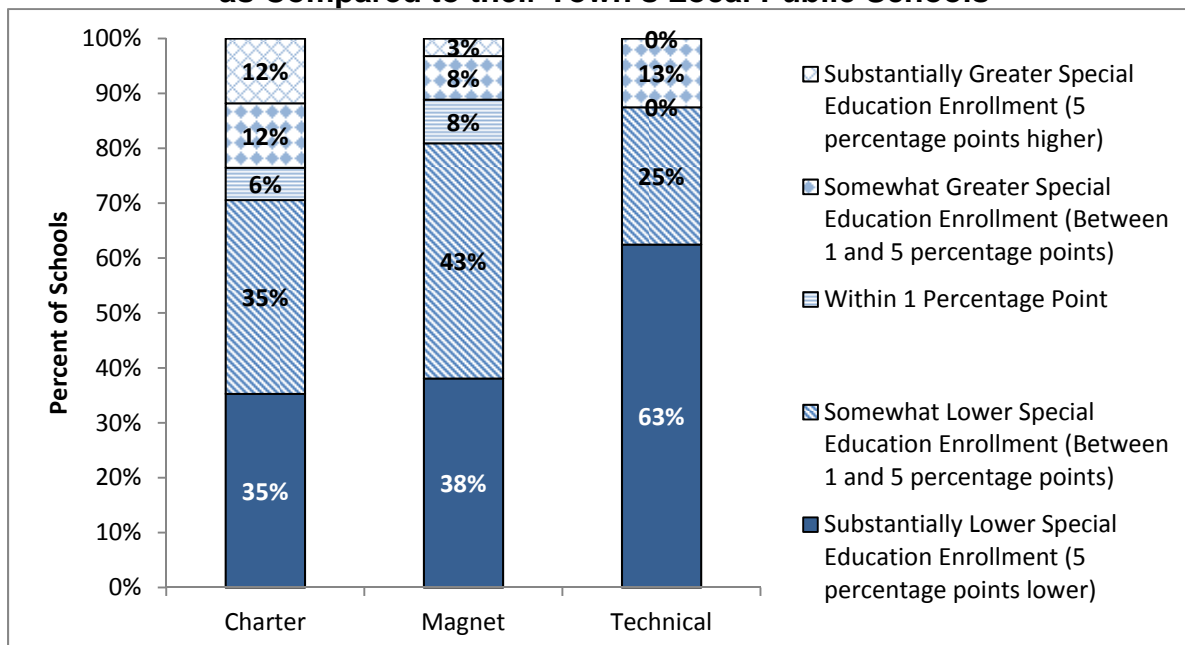
Over- and Underrepresentation of ELL Students in Choice Programs as Compared to their Town's Local Public Schools



Source: CT Voices for Children's Analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education Data, 2012

5. More than a third of charter and magnet schools and a majority of technical schools underenroll students identified as requiring special education by a substantial margin, when compared to the towns in which they are located.

Over- and Underrepresentation of Students with Disabilities in Choice Programs as Compared to their Town's Local Public Schools



Source: CT Voices for Children's Analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education Data, 2012

Recommendations

- The State should factor in the demographic differences between choice programs and local public schools when drawing comparisons between them.
- The State should establish quantifiable desegregation standards for *all* choice programs, as these standards appear to be effective in integrating magnet schools;
- The State should investigate barriers to enrolling ELL and special education students in school choice programs, and take action to eliminate any that are identified.