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Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes

Loida Reyes

University of Connecticut - Storrs, loida48@aol.com

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and School Attributes

Loida Reyes, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut, 2015

Abstract

The Supreme Court declared unconstitutional state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954. Despite this major achievement, more than 60 years ago, residents in Hartford, Connecticut continue their fight to eliminate educational inequalities. In *Sheff vs. O'Neill* (1989) plaintiffs challenged the economic and racial segregation of public schools in Hartford and the lack of adequate resources in the city schools, which denied its students an equal education. Hartford public schools, where currently more than 90 percent of students are black or Latino, remain as segregated today, as they were when the *Sheff* lawsuit was filed in 1989. The central purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of school engagement as an important component of their educational experience and to address whether this indicator differed by race and ethnicity and school attributes. The subjects of this study were high school students participating in the Open Choice Program conducted through the Capital Region Education Council (CREC) who are bused from Hartford to surrounding suburban towns for an equitable and less segregated educational experience. To explore the integration experience of Open Choice Program participants from both perspectives, a mixed-methods approach was used: a survey questionnaire and focus groups of current participants attending suburban high schools, and in-depth interviews with school administrators from a subset of the high schools were completed.

Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics
and School Attributes

Loida Reyes

B.S.W., Saint Joseph College, **1992**

M.S.W., University of Connecticut, **1998**

A Dissertation

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University of Connecticut

2015

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Loida Reyes

2015

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics
and School Attributes

Presented by

Loida Reyes, B.S.W., M.S.W.

Major Advisor _____
Kay W. Davidson, D.S.W.

Associate Advisor _____
Brenda Kurz, Ph.D.

Associate Advisor _____
Joan Letendre, Ph.D.

Associate Advisor _____
Xae A. Reyes, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut

2015

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Americans have the right to a free and equal public education. No child in the United States, whether native or foreign born, can be denied access to a public school for elementary and secondary education (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). Although in theory every child is entitled to an equal education, careful study shows wide disparities in the quality of education from town to town. Public schools receive nearly half of their funding from local taxes, making large disparities in education spending between wealthy and impoverished communities' nearly inevitable (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The State of Connecticut has such disparities between towns.

These disparities have caused social injustice and inequality for students of color, in many areas, including the fundamental right to education. The way in which schools are financed wealthier school districts will receive more funding than a socio-economically disadvantaged school district. Schools in low-income states and districts, like those in Hartford are especially hard hit, with inadequate instructional materials, little technology, unsafe buildings, and less-qualified teachers (Glickman, Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007). Some would argue that these disparities are the result of long-standing structural racism.

More than 60 years after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which mandated desegregation and equal educational opportunity for all children, research confirms that the ambitious goals of *Brown* have not been met (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Holmes & Clarke, 2005; Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Eaton, 2003). Therefore, the struggle for

equity has had to continue beyond *Brown*. In *Sheff vs. O'Neill* (1996) the Connecticut Supreme Court concluded that the Hartford school system and its surrounding suburbs were unconstitutionally segregated. The court held that the students were “racially, ethnically, and economically isolated, and that as a result, had not been provided an equal educational opportunity under the state constitution” (*Sheff vs. O'Neill*, 1999, p.1). The court clearly recognized that the State had not intentionally segregated racial and ethnic minorities, but that it had created local school district boundaries that had remained unchanged since 1909. Further, the court found a strong causal relationship between racial, ethnic, and economic isolation and lower academic achievement, and ruled that the state was responsible for developing appropriate remedies to meet its commitment to equal opportunity and high standards for all (Holmes & Clarke, 2005). The plaintiffs and the State of Connecticut settled upon voluntary measures such as interdistrict magnet schools and the Open Choice Program (formally Project Concern) as the primary remedies to provide Hartford children an opportunity to fully participate in an equal education and reduce racial and socioeconomic isolation.

Sheff (1996) has been on a long laborious journey since the lawsuit was filed in 1989. However, the stage had been set twenty years earlier. In 1966, Hartford requested the aid of Harvard University to conduct a study, assessing Hartford public schools. The findings of this study were later published in what is known today as the “Harvard Report.” It presented many suggestions, one being a state-funded metropolitan busing plan. As a result, Hartford corporate executives and educational leaders joined forces with political liberals, black and white, to initiate a city-suburban busing program. Named Project Concern, it was the first interdistrict school integration program in the United States, in which minority students were bused out to suburban schools. They recognized that if the city developed an all-minority school system,

children — white and minority — as well as Hartford’s industrial and commercial activities could be negatively impacted (Fuerst, 1987). Initially, the Hartford Board of Education resisted Project Concern for three reasons. The first was that Project Concern was accepting only higher achieving children for the suburbs, leaving the lower achieving ones to be educated in Hartford schools (known as the creaming process). The second reason was that Project Concern included no reverse busing of white children to Hartford schools. The third was that this one-way busing resulted in a loss of reimbursement from the state and in lesser enrollments, which necessitated reduction in teaching staff (Fuerst, 1987). The most discouraging evidence — that further necessitated the filing of the *Sheff* (1996) lawsuit — was the increasing number of students who could not even meet the basic remedial standard on the Mastery Test (Delaney, 2001).

After *Sheff* (1996), Project Concern was reorganized and renamed Project Choice; after further changes, it became the current Open Choice Program. The goals of Open Choice are to improve academic achievement; reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; and provide a choice of educational programs for children, with reduced isolation. Open Choice offers students the opportunity to attend public schools in nearby suburban towns. Unlike Project Concern, it provides reverse busing, so suburban students can attend public schools in Hartford at no cost to the students’ families. The process of selecting students has also changed to a lottery system that does not consider students’ achievement. The program has also grown; from 260 to more than 2,000 students enrolled in 2015 (Greater Hartford Regional School Choice Office, 2015). The state also provides financial incentives for suburban schools to join.

More than 40 years ago, Dr. King recognized that merely getting all students into the same building was not enough. He believed that desegregated schools would be better for minority students and would be important in helping Americans of all races to move beyond

stereotypes toward genuine equality and respect for integration (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). Research shows that when a school works seriously on integration, there are benefits not just in test scores, but also about chances for a better life (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Jordan & Nettles, 1999).

Significance of the Study

As the Open Choice busing program grows to include more students, an in-depth review is warranted to assess whether Choice students are being fully integrated. The support specialists hired by CREC serve as bridges to get the children into the suburban school of choice, aiding the effort to desegregate. A support specialist is usually communicating with guidance counselors or school administrators. For the most part, school social workers are not consistently involved, despite their knowledge of the interface between schools, families and students. Once the children enter, individual school districts have to ensure that students are integrated properly and able to participate fully in this educational experience. An ecological perspective is critical to understanding the exchange between person and environment, in this case between the Choice student and the suburban school. The school social worker or other trained social worker needs to be in the forefront of the integration experience using knowledge of this perspective.

According to Monkman (2009) the purpose of school social work activity is to improve the match between the coping behaviors of the individual student and the quality of the impinging environment so that the stress in these transactions is not destructive to the student or the school environment. This study is expected to illuminate the need to involve the school social worker or other trained social worker in the integration process.

The Open Choice experience includes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement; as well as the student's full participation in student life and feelings of comfort and belonging in the suburban school. There is growing interest in the construct of engagement because it is presumed to be malleable and responsive to variations in the environment and linked to academic outcomes and high school completion (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Wong and Rowley (2001) propose that researchers move beyond the study of grades and test scores as academic outcomes because these constructs reflect a narrow view of students' educational experiences.

School social workers can assist marginalized students to fully participate, as they are in a strategic position to promote social functioning and ameliorate environmental conditions that impede the learning process (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 1996). Social workers are not typically involved in the integration process in every school, although knowledgeable about the match between institutions, such as schools, and the needs of the students (Monkman, 2009). They understand environmental obstacles of new learning environment with new rules and can assist students in successful adaptation to the new environment. The interpersonal climate is crucial to the educational experience, and integration is expected to reduce racial inequality in education-related outcomes, such as engagement in school (Holland, 2012; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Given that the school social worker's role is prescribed, schools participating in the Open Choice program may need to involve another trained social worker hired by the school to play this important role, perhaps that of the District Open Choice Liaison.

There are currently over 2,000 students and 28 different school districts participating in the Open Choice program (Greater Hartford Regional School Choice Office, 2015). According to the *Sheff* (1996) one-year extension agreement, this number will need to increase so that 47

percent of Hartford minority students will be in integrated schools, by the 2015-16 school year; this would mean an increase of 325 more students attending suburban school districts through the Open Choice program (De la Torre, 2015). Given the fact that the State of Connecticut has made a commitment to increasing the use of voluntary busing as a way of desegregating Hartford students suggests that there is value in closely examining less well understood aspects of the Choice students' educational experiences.

Key Terms

Behavioral Engagement. Behavioral engagement refers to the students' effort, persistence, participation, and compliance with school based activities (Finn, 1993). It includes both academic and nonacademic school behavior and has significant impact on academic achievement (Scheidler, 2012). Indicators of behavioral engagement also include behaviors that do not disrupt the learning environment (Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997).

Cognitive Engagement. Cognitive engagement consists of self-regulation and use of learning strategies, as well as how committed a student is to the learning process (Chapman, 2003; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Emotional Engagement. According to Sbrocco (2009), emotional engagement encompasses student actions and feelings of their classroom experience and their school. Feelings related to school safety and connectedness with peers and staff demonstrates emotional engagement, while boredom, sadness, and anxiety are some of the indicators of emotional disengagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

CREC Support Specialist. A support specialist is hired by Capital Region Educational Council (CREC) to serve as the liaison between suburban school districts and families. These specialists are centrally located in the Open Choice office in Hartford, and have experience working in human services; some have earned their Masters in Social Work. Each specialist is assigned up to seven school districts for which they provide support to the Open Choice students and families. They are racially diverse and some are bilingual.

District Open Choice Liaison. A district Open Choice Liaison is hired by a school district to serve as the district-wide support staff person for the Open Choice students and their families. With varied professional experience including education, human services or other field of study, they work directly with Open Choice students to ensure they receive academic support and timely access to services that CREC makes available to all students in the program. They also leverage the relationship between the school and the families.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Voluntary desegregation across city-suburban lines is not a new phenomenon. A handful of studies have examined this effort to desegregate America's most segregated schools (Eaton, 2001; Wells & Crain, 1997). Both Eaton (2001) and Wells and Crain (1997) focused on alumni of voluntary city-suburb busing programs in Boston and St. Louis and their long-term benefits. Interviews produced mixed findings; the program had benefits, as well as negative effects, but most would repeat the program if given the opportunity (Eaton, 2001). Wells and Crain (1997) found that students bused from city to suburbs excelled when compared to the urban students attending racially mixed magnet schools and that suburban students also benefitted from increased racial tolerance.

In a historical study of why suburban schools did (or did not) participate in Project Concern during 1966-1998, Beckett (2004) found the most influential factors in participation were financial factors and leadership. Gutmann's (2003) study examined the role of adults who supported participants, using data from oral history interviews with alumni. They found strong support from Project Concern staff, school personnel, and family. Two longitudinal studies on program participants attending elementary school found academic gains, higher career aspirations, and positive student attitudes (Iwanicki & Gable, 1981, 1985).

Holmes and Clarke (2005) conducted a study analyzing transcripts from three focus groups of parents, educators, and students participating in the Open Choice Program in October of 2001. (These focus groups were facilitated by staff members of the Connecticut State Department of Education as part of a needs assessment to design diversity training for educators

who were participating in Open Choice at the time.) Holmes and Clark (2005) also reviewed data they collected from interviews with state officials and from notes of two Area Cooperative Educational Service (ACES) meetings they attended in 2003 and 2004, as well as notes from a 2003 high school forum held by ACES. ACES manages Open Choice for the southern region of the state and is comparable to CREC for Hartford. Their study included positive student reports, for instance, that attending quality schools was the best part of their experience and they were more hopeful about their educational future goals. However, students also reported encountering ignorance, bias-related tension, and being responsible for raising diversity awareness. The researchers also found race to be a reoccurring theme in parent focus groups. Parents shared their understanding of the need for their children to learn the skills to navigate between their two worlds and the concern that the host setting would lack diversity in curriculum and in staff skill sets to effectively teach their children from a multicultural perspective. They also feared that staff would have lower expectations for their children. Despite concerns, parents supported the program, anticipating positive educational and personal outcomes for their children. Holmes and Clarke also found that administrators were genuinely concerned about the Open Choice students both academically and socially. Problematic themes that emerged from the administrators' perspective were busing and the need for Open Choice students to assimilate into the culture of the host school. Administrators were also found to be avoiding the issue of race. However, increased awareness, and understanding were indicated by more positive meeting discussions in 2003, as compared to those analyzed from a 2001 meeting (Holmes & Clarke, 2005).

The present study's unique purpose is to gain a better understanding of a nonacademic aspect of the educational experience – *school engagement*. It considers whether individual characteristics and school attributes make a difference to a Choice student's level of engagement.

An ecological framework will be used, as engagement is malleable, responding to changes in the environment (Connell, 1990; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007). Engagement here is delineated as a three-dimensional construct, as discussed below.

School Engagement

Educational research has identified school engagement as a primary predictor of high achievement in school. Engagement is multidimensional and is typically described as having two to three components. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) and Jimerson, Campos, and Greif (2003), propose that the concept of engagement should include behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components, as these dimensions are all interrelated, thereby providing a richer characterization of individual students. The three components often overlap, have been defined in various ways, and resemble other motivational and cognitive constructs.

Behavioral engagement is most commonly described as positive student actions that can easily be seen inside the classroom – for example, students actively involved in learning and participating in classroom activities, assignments, and projects. This type of engagement focuses on the degree to which students take an active role in school-related activities, both inside and outside the classroom, studying and participating in school-related activities like sports or clubs, while avoiding disruptive conduct like skipping class and getting into trouble (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Munns & Woodward, 2006; National Center for School Engagement, 2006).

Emotional engagement is described as students' emotional reactions in the classroom, including specific interests, boredom, happiness, sadness, feelings about the school and the

teacher, identification of belonging, and an appreciation of success in school (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1989; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1995; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Cognitive engagement is defined as student motivation, being strategic, and demonstrating effort. This includes psychological investment in learning, a desire to go beyond requirements, and a preference for challenge and hard work (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong purport (2008) that every school, irrespective of school level, geographic location, or demographic characteristics of students has both disengaged and engaged students. Data from the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement, based on responses from 81,499 students in grades 9-12 from 110 schools in 26 states, illustrate the applicability of the engagement construct to all students (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Students reported being less engaged across high school years if they were: male; from an ethnic group other than White or Asian; were at lower socioeconomic levels; or if they were in special education rather than vocational, general education, or advanced classes. While many students reported being engaged in school, more than one-fourth were not.

Further evidence of the connections between social environment, school engagement, and academic achievement comes from a recent longitudinal study of middle school students (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). School social environment (autonomy, teacher support, performance goals, mastery goals, and discussion) in 7th grade predicted affective (school identification), behavioral (school participation), and cognitive (self-regulation strategies) engagement in 8th grade, and engagement in turn was significantly related to 8th grade GPA. This research provides support for

the link between engagement and academic achievement, and engagement is found to respond to variation in environment (Connell, 1990; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007).

Li and Lerner (2013) also found that school engagement plays an important role in preventing academic failure, promoting higher academic proficiency, and influencing a range of adolescent outcomes. Li and Lerner (2013) explored how the multidimensional parts (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) of the construct of school engagement interrelate. They performed a longitudinal study involving 1,029 adolescents in high school over a three-year period. They utilized the multidimensional construct as the way to define engagement, as it provides a greater opportunity to understand the complexity of adolescents' experiences in school. They noted that few studies have included all three types of engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Li & Lerner, 2013). They found that earlier emotional engagement predicted later behavioral and cognitive engagement, and that earlier behavioral engagement was predictive of later emotional and cognitive engagement (Li & Lerner, 2013, p.28). Their findings gave some support to the hypothesis that positive emotions and motivational thoughts intensify participation and those positive feelings broaden cognitive capacity. Their study further demonstrated that school engagement is a multidimensional construct, that it has its own internal dynamics, and that positive emotions and motivational thoughts of students can improve academic outcomes, but that they are not sufficient on their own, as participation is important as well (Li & Lerner, 2013). They suggest that the creation of nurturing school environments where students are emotionally connected to school activities and personnel would maximize the school experience for all youth. Teacher behaviors, a school's climate, and the elimination of racist beliefs can positively impact students' academic engagement (Finn, 1993; Marks, 2000, Ogbu, 2003). By

examining practices through the lens of engagement, teachers and schools may be able to narrow the achievement gap between white students and students of color..

Individual Characteristics

Role of Race-Ethnicity and Gender. The concept of student engagement (Finn, 1989; Newmann, 1992) offers a way to link the observed gap in achievement between social groups with the larger social forces that affect students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there is conflicting evidence on the level of engagement of minority and disadvantaged students relative to white/privileged students. Research has identified individual characteristics of students and their family background, including race-ethnicity, which may explain differences in engagement in school (Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001).

Oppositional culture theory argues that many African American students perform worse in school than their white counterparts because they are less likely to believe that school is important to their futures, and therefore invest less effort in school (Ogbu, 2003). Researchers have suggested that racial barriers and lack of access cause African American students to perceive school and related academic aspirations as unimportant or unattainable, leading to their academic disengagement (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2003). Thus, several scholars suggest that increasing engagement among disadvantaged minority students is a promising way to decrease educational disparities (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Finn & Rock, 1997).

Research on school engagement has produced mixed evidence on racial or ethnic differences (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005). In Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001), African American students reported lower levels of school

attachment, but were more likely to pay attention and complete homework. Similarly, Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) found that black students rated themselves as having a greater degree of engagement and more positive affect in the classroom than did white students. In contrast, Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey's (1998) analysis of students in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) found that African American students reported spending less time on homework than European American students. Voelkl (1997) found that African American students had higher levels of school identification (sense of belonging and valuing school) than European American students. These varied results emphasize the need for a more thorough examination of the school environment and how school engagement may differ as a function of race or ethnicity.

More recent research by Deckers and Zinga (2012) further supports the idea that diversity may explain differences in engagement and school success. Their study involved youth attending secondary schools in Ontario, Canada who may have migrated from a different country. They found that youth who identified fear-based reasons for going to a new school in a new community (country) reported being less involved within their school than those who identified as leaving to pursue employment and educational opportunities. This same population of youth also viewed this relocation as temporary place to gain skills, which also then led them to be less engaged in the school and the community. They further state that teachers should focus on the diverse and unique needs of newcomer youth, rather than all new students as a homogenous group. That view could only point out larger trends and patterns, and not the rich data that can come from teasing out the diversity within the group and exploring the differences between the groups in terms of their ability to engage and be successful in their new school environment. Through student focus groups and student questionnaires, they noted that many youth raised the

importance of parental influence. Hence, they recommended specific training for teachers on how to engage parents and incorporate meaningful cultural activities to the classroom lessons or school activities. These authors suggest that their findings further support the importance of meaningful cultural activities in increasing newcomer youths' levels of engagement in the school and the wider community. Although, their study centered on students that may have migrated to a new country, some may argue that the sojourners experience is similar.

Open Choice students do not live in the community in which they are being schooled; consequently they are viewed as newcomers. Most parents choose to have their child participate in Open Choice to escape volatile school environments or failing schools. This study explored whether participants of Open Choice integrate into these new communities and what attributes may affect their integration.

Gender is also associated with school engagement, with girls reporting high levels of school engagement (Meece, Glienke, & Burg, 2006; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005; Wang and Eccles, 2012), high levels of subjective valuing of learning (Eccles et al., 1993), higher levels of extracurricular participation, and fewer school behavior problems (Martin, 2004). Boys, however, feel more negative about school and are less likely to report school attachment in middle school (Voelkl, 1997; Wang, 2009). These patterns reflect consistent gender differences in the three components of school engagement.

School Attributes

According to Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001), the educational experiences of young people are firmly embedded within the schools they attended. They posit that schools offer an educational and a social milieu, which involve interaction with peers, teachers, and other school staff and the expectations and values of all of them. A key part of emotional engagement is a

student's connection or feelings of belonging to their school. This study explored attributes of the school environment and their connection to engagement. These attributes include: the racial-composition of the student body and the teaching staff, district staff participation in multicultural trainings, the participating District Reference Group (DRG) classification, and whether or not the school offered a late bus that would bring the student home after participating in school activities.

Racial-ethnic composition of student body and professional staff. Since *Brown* (1954), educational research has documented the influence of schools' racial-ethnic composition on the academic and social lives of students. While this body of work is large and contains some inconsistencies, generally studies have found that interracial contact in school promotes more positive racial attitudes (Ellison & Powers, 1994) improves the academic achievement of minority students (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Roscigno, 1998) and promotes the ability of minorities to function with whites in social, academic, and work environments across the life course (Braddock, 1985). However, attending a more racially and ethnically heterogeneous school may also pose challenges, making it more difficult for minority students to feel a part of the school community and discouraging their engagement (Johnson, et al., 2001). African-American and Hispanic-American students often report feeling more disconnected from school, fellow students, and school staff than do white students (Romo & Falbo, 1996; McNeely, 2004).

Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) suggest that the schools' racial-ethnic composition can influence engagement in both direct and indirect ways. Being surrounded by students of one's own group may stop disengagement indirectly through school attachment. Students who do not feel at ease or socially integrated with other students may withdraw. A more direct effect of student composition on engagement occurs when the student feels different from peers and

avoids interactions with others by not attending class. A more positive direct effect is that minority students have a higher probability of finding same-race models for engagement, due to increased minority populations of highly motivated or high achieving students (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001).

There is limited research on the impact of school racial-ethnic composition on academic engagement. Lee and Smith (1995) found no effect of attending a school with a high concentration of minority students on the engagement of 10th grade students, but because they controlled a measure of 8th grade engagement, it is not possible to ascertain whether there were baseline differences in engagement across schools with different racial compositions. On the other hand, Finn and Voelkl (1993) found that students of attending schools with a high percentage of minority students had lower levels of engagement. Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) and Cheng and Klugman (2010) found that minority students feel more attached to schools when there are higher proportions of students of their own race-ethnicity.

According to Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) the composition of the teaching staff may also shape students' engagement behaviors and feelings of attachment. Having teachers who look like them may help the students' sense of belonging. Boser (2011) further posits that teachers of color serve as role models for students, giving them a clear and concrete sense of what diversity in education—and in our society—looks like. He also contends that a recent review of empirical studies indicates that students of color do better on a variety of academic outcomes if they are taught by teachers of color. However, there continues to be a considerable gap between the racial make-up of the teaching staff and that of the students of public schools in the U.S. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010; National Education Association, 2004). America's teaching force remains remarkably homogenous; a full 83 percent of educators

are white (Boser, 2011). There is a persistent gap in academic performance between minority students and non-minority students (Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Researchers have theorized that the lack of minority teachers and the lack of minority achievement are linked and propose that a way to close the achievement gap is to increase the number of minority teachers. This study explored whether the racial-ethnic composition of the teaching staff makes a difference in student engagement.

Staff participation in multicultural training. Providing teachers with the requisite skills to teach effectively, regardless of race, class, and culture, is now widely recognized as essential (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Clear and consistent evidence has emerged that when teachers lack such skills, students are less likely to achieve and classrooms are more likely to be disruptive and disorderly (Irvine, 2003; Lipman, 1995; Sleeter, 2000). Boykin and Noguera (2011) posit that the reason for these problems is that students learn through relationships. When educators experience difficulty creating respectful, caring, and mutually beneficial relationships with the students they teach, it is hard to create an atmosphere supportive of teaching and learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Race, class, and cultural differences between students and teachers do not cause the achievement gap, but may complicate the efforts to diminish or eliminate disparities in student educational outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Educators and school districts now recognize the importance of what is widely referred to as “cultural competence.” There have been two prevailing views on race and class differences and teaching; the assimilation of students from culturally different backgrounds (Cremin, 1988; Fass, 1989; Katznelson & Weir, 1985) and the “color-blind” approach (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Mun Wong, 1997; Sleeter, 2000). *Assimilation* is the expectation of schools to teach the values, norms, and language of the dominant culture to

immigrant, poor, and minority students (Jiobu, 1988) as essential in preparing disadvantaged and culturally diverse students for citizenship and integration into mainstream society.

“Americanization” was regarded as the price certain students had to pay for mobility (Fass, 1989). The “color-blind” approach called for teachers to ignore differences related to race, class, and culture and to treat all children equally regardless of their backgrounds. By ignoring differences, teachers could supposedly minimize the possibility that prejudice and bias would influence their perceptions of students and interfere with their ability to teach (Fine, et al., 1997; Sleeter, 2000).

In the early '80s, a new approach to preparing teachers to teach in ethnically and socioeconomically diverse classrooms—multicultural education— began gaining credibility. This approach exposed teachers to curricula that concentrated on the history of race and class oppression in the United States and that compelled them to recognize and unlearn any biases (Lee, 1995). CREC has been a proponent of multicultural education and has offered cultural competence awareness trainings and activities to participating districts to prepare them for the integration of Hartford children into their schools. These trainings and or activities consist of:

- guided bus tours of the City of Hartford – offering participants the opportunity to see the neighborhoods the children live in first hand;
- the professional book club – offering participants the opportunity to engage in a facilitated dialogue about the importance of cultural competence in the school milieu after reading a preselected book;
- the Summer Institute – which prepares districts for the Choice student arrival into the district with a minimum participation of two staff from each district;

- the Unity Project – which is comprised of ten student leaders (minimum of three Open Choice students) and a faculty advisor from each district.

District Reference Groups (DRG) classification. Since 1989, the Connecticut Department of Education introduced Educational Reference Groups (ERG) that divided school districts into seven groups according to the 1980 census measures of socioeconomic status and need. In 1996, ERG's expanded to nine groups, utilizing census data based on families with children in public schools and using recent state data on poverty and enrollment. The 2006 DRG's maintained the changes introduced in 1996 and calculated poverty and non-English home language from the records of students attending public schools in 2004. These nine groups are determined according to three indicators of socio-economic status (median family income, parental education, and parental occupation), three indicators of need (percentage of children living in families with a single parent, the percentage of children eligible to receive free or reduced-priced meals, and percentage of children whose families speak a language other than English at home) and enrollment (the number of students attending schools in that district).

DRG's are a classification system under which school districts are grouped together to allow legitimate educational outcome comparisons. DRG's are based on families residing in a district, not school attendance areas or neighborhoods. Therefore, the DRG's do not count students from other communities who enroll through the Open Choice program or through magnet programs. For the purposes of this study the DRG score will serve as a variable to investigate if attending a school in a more affluent district affects academic engagement.

Busing. Forms of forced and voluntary desegregation were implemented, with busing seen as a crucial remedy to the segregated schooling system. The Supreme Court required that

busing be limited by time and distance, allowing the specifics to be determined by different rulings in court cases (*Brown*, 1954). Transportation ended up ranging (depending on the city) from 45 minutes on the bus each way up to two and a half hours on the bus per day (Rossell, 1990). Open Choice students bear the burden of having to go long distances for an equal educational experience. Despite concerns over the effects of school distance, the availability of late buses may allow students to partake in a more complete educational experience by participating in clubs and school activities. Research on the effects of student investments in school-sponsored activities on a variety of educational outcomes suggests that participation in academically related extracurricular activities is linked to higher academic performance and attainment (Braddock et al., 1991; Holland & Andres, 1987, Jordan & Nettles, 1999). How youth spend time outside of school may have important implications for school engagement, because extracurricular or sports activities have the potential to foster school bonding and build skills that are beneficial for school-related competencies (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

Cross-Cultural Adaptation. This study utilized Kim's (2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptation. Kim (2001) contends that all strangers in an unfamiliar environment (sojourners) embark on the universal mission of establishing and maintaining a relatively stable and reciprocal relationship with the host environment (p. 31). She further purports that sojourners struggle to meet the demands of an unfamiliar culture, and strange people, tasks, and situations.

Kim (2001) sets the following three boundaries on the theory to define the situations in which cross cultural adaptation occurs: 1) the sojourners have had primary socialization in one

culture and have moved into a different and unfamiliar culture or subculture; 2) the sojourner is at least minimally dependent on the host environment for meeting their personal and social needs; and 3) the sojourners are at least minimally engaged with firsthand communication experiences with that environment.

Within these boundaries Kim (2001) claims the sojourner goes through a continuous cycle of stress and adaptation which results in growth over time. This plays out as cyclic and a continual “draw back” and “leap forward” motion; such that when a sojourner experiences stress he or she withdraws, or disengages. This withdrawal then activates an adjustment sequence through which the sojourner manages the stress and reorganizes, subsequently propelling the sojourner to “leap forward” with new insight and engagement. Over time, sojourners develop more successful interaction patterns and experience less stress. The draw back and leap forward motion becomes less severe leading to an eventual “calming” effect (Kim 2001, p.59). At the core of this theory is the sojourners’ adaptation to their environment. This helps with understanding based students’ adaptation to the new host school environment.

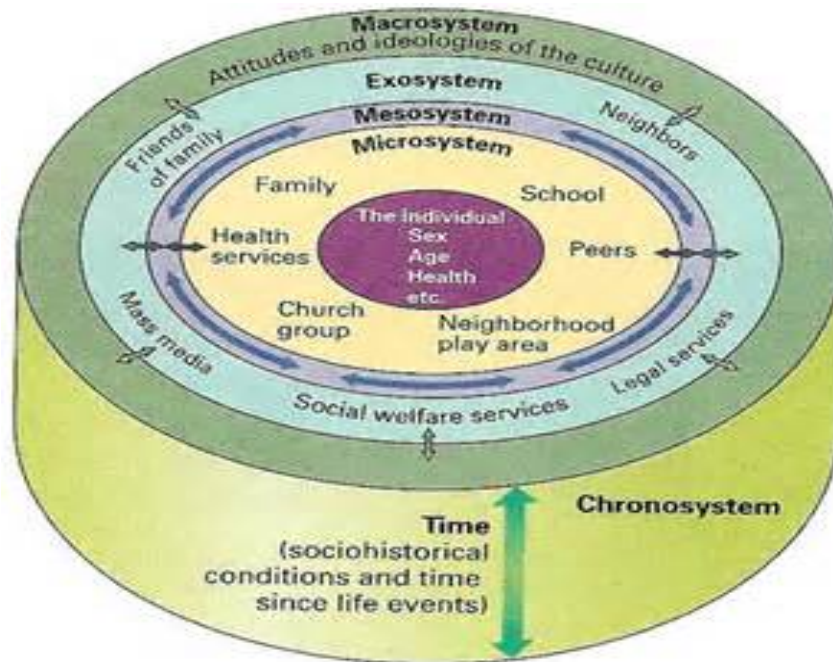
Ecological Theory. An additional theoretical underpinning of this research is Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (1979), which focuses on the individual child. Bronfenbrenner proposed that the developing child is surrounded by layers of relationships like a set of nested Russian dolls (1979, p. 3). The inner circle, or microsystem, describes each setting in which the child has direct, face-to-face relationships with significant people such as parents, friends, and teachers. This is where students live their daily lives and where they develop. Ordinarily, there are cross-relationships as parent’s talk to teachers, for example, and these connections are called the mesosystem (p. 25). Beyond this is an outer circle, the exosystem, made up of people who are indirectly involved in the child’s development, such as the parents’

employers, family health care workers, or central school administrators (p. 25). Bronfenbrenner also described a macrosystem (the prevailing cultural and economic conditions of the society) and a chronosystem (reminding the reader that this system of nested relationships is situated in time and shifts accordingly; see Figure #1). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also contends that the goodness-of-fit between the person and the environment influences whether outcomes are successful or strained. His theory is appropriate for this study because it is expansive, yet focused on the complex layers of school, family and community relationships, as well as on the individual student development. Central to the individual student's development is in the ability to achieve a goodness of fit to their environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) contends that healthy development is dependent on the match between the needs of the developing individual and the environment in which the person is located, in this case the school environment.

This conceptual framework leads to the expectation that school social workers or other trained social workers should participate in transition planning and in the support of the Open Choice student, since the CREC support specialist only serves as a conduit to getting the student to the suburban school and is not able to offer daily support. Social workers can be instrumental in the school (microsystem) and outside of school (mesosystem), supporting the CREC support specialist in facilitating the relationship between home and school and in assisting the Open Choice student in maintaining and sustaining a goodness of fit to this host environment on a daily basis.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions and Hypotheses:

This study examined the following questions and hypotheses:

Question 1: What effect does the students' race-ethnicity have on engagement (three dimensions and overall)?

H₁: Choice students of color will report lower levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

Question 2: Do the schools' attributes influence students' engagement?

H_{2.1}: Choice students of color who attend a school with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.2}: Choice students of color who attend a school with higher percentage of racial-ethnic student body will report higher levels of attachment and engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.3}: Choice students of color who attend schools with higher staff participation in multicultural trainings will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.4}: Choice students who attend schools in more affluent District Resource Group (DRG) districts will report lower levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.5}: Choice students who attend schools with a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.6}: Choice students who attend schools with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff and student-body, a higher percentage of staff participation in multicultural trainings, which are in less affluent DRG districts, and have a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

For the qualitative segment of this study, the overarching research questions were:

Question 1: From the administrators' perspective, what do schools do to promote engagement and integration of Choice students?

Question 2: From the administrators' perspective, how do the Choice students adapt to their school?

Question 3: To what extent do Choice students and administrators agree about the Choice student's integration experience?

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a mixed-method approach with a sequential design. Padgett (2008) purports that in a sequential design, the study's segments are prioritized and integrated depending on its priorities. She further states that the most common (qual→QUAN and QUAN→qual) typically involve using a focus group or interviews to prepare for the "main event" or to better understand it after the fact (Padgett, 2008, p.224). In this study, the qualitative segment followed the quantitative segment. In the quantitative segment of the study, current high school Open Choice students were surveyed to determine their level of school engagement. Then schools that participated in the survey were asked to participate in administrator interviews and student focus groups, to gain a more comprehensive view of the social phenomena of engagement and integration, from both the school administrator's perspective (or designee) and the students'. Initially schools were going to be selected to participate in the qualitative segment after determining which ones had Open Choice students with higher levels of engagement as indicated in the survey results (quantitative segment); however, recruitment was challenging and so it was decided that any school could participate in the qualitative portion with the goal being to include schools from each of the DRG districts. The

study design continued to be sequential; however, (QUAN→QUAL) this time they were equally weighted, which Padgett (2008) describes as when both the qualitative and quantitative segments receive sufficient allocations or resources to meet their respective sampling and data quality needs (p.225).

Study Sample

Quantitative. The study participants were selected by utilizing a purposive non-probability sampling technique (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Purposive sampling is used in an attempt to knowingly select candidates based on their ability to provide the information being sought in the study (Padgett, 2008). This study sought to explore Open Choice students' school engagement and therefore the participants of this program were recruited, as they would be able to provide the information being sought in this study. The sampling frame was obtained from Capital Region Education Council (CREC), which manages the Open Choice program for Hartford, CT and maintains data on all current participants attending school through Open Choice. The researcher narrowed the sampling frame to older students, as they were believed to be the most capable of participating in this particular kind of research; hence, it was limited to those students attending high school. The list was sorted by participating districts, then by high school and by grade: 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th graders for a total of 350 students. After receiving permission from the superintendent of the district, those students who were willing to participate and provided their parent with notification of the study were included in the study. Parents who did not want their child to participate were asked to sign the parent notification form (see Appendix A & B). Students who were 18 years of age or older signed their own consent (see Appendix C). A power analysis using Cohen's table for effect size revealed a sample size of at least 85 respondents was necessary for a .05 level of significance and medium effect size. Efforts

were made to achieve the highest response rate possible by inviting 22 of the 27 high schools participating in Open Choice to join the study; five of the schools were not recruited due to low enrollment (less than 10 Open Choice students enrolled). The researcher sent emails to the 22 superintendents and then followed up with a phone call to each of them. Also, the researcher solicited the assistance of the Program Director of the Open Choice Program to assist in further recruitment efforts. Ultimately, after four months 11 schools agreed to participate, which yielded 149 students out of a possible 196 that were successfully recruited to participate in the survey. Of these 11 schools, there were four high schools from DRG B, three from DRG C and D, and one from DRG F.

Qualitative. In the qualitative segment of this study, this researcher conducted two phases of interviews with eight high schools that participated in the quantitative segment of the study and also agreed to participate in this phase of the study. Three high schools chose to participate only in the quantitative segment of the study. In phase one, in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with the high school principal and/or other administrative personnel at the school. Some schools elected to have just the principal interviewed, while others chose to have both the principal and vice principal and /or the support specialist interviewed as the designee. In the end, ten administrators and/ or designees participated in these interviews. In phase two, focus group interviews were also conducted in each of the same eight high schools to gain an understanding of the extent to which students shared the same perspective as the administrators about their integration experience. Depending on the school size, focus groups ranged from four to six members and were conducted in-person at the designated high schools. Ultimately, thirty-four students participated in the focus groups. They were asked if they wanted to participate in the focus group after completing the survey questionnaire. If they agreed to

participate, their names were randomly selected to give each student an opportunity to be selected as only 4-6 could participate from any given school.

For both segments of the study, participants were recruited through an initial email from the CREC Open Choice Director sent to all participating district superintendents informing them of the study. This was followed up with an invitational email sent by this researcher (see Appendix D). Then this researcher held an informational meeting at CREC with all the CREC Open Choice Support Specialists, at which time they were given a recruitment flyer (see Appendix E) that they could distribute to the students to request their participation once the researcher received the approval from the superintendent. Once a district superintendent or assistant superintendent gave approval, the researcher e-mailed the principal of the school a cover letter that outlined the purpose of the study, consent procedures, and the researcher's contact information for further questions (see Appendix F). Then the researcher followed up with a phone call to arrange the interview or time to administer the survey questionnaire to the Open Choice students. For some schools, the researcher held informational sessions with the students, upon the school's request to discuss the purpose of the study and to give the students a copy of the parental notification and the date that the survey and focus group would occur in their school.

Instruments

Quantitative. The quantitative segment of the study focused on identifying the effects of individual characteristics and/or school attributes on the Choice students' school engagement. A self-administered survey questionnaire was developed that addressed: demographics and self-assessment items (forty-three questions which related to engagement and its three dimensions, and 13 items about club or school activities). The self-assessment questions were adapted from

previous surveys on engagement and integration (Jordan & Nettles, 1999; National Center for School Engagement, 2006; Sbrocco, 2009; Scheidler, 2012). The engagement questions utilized a 4-point Likert scale and were averaged. A score of 4 represented complete engagement, while a score of a 1 represented complete disengagement (Sbrocco, 2009), except for those items that were reversed scored. The last 13 questions related to whether or not they participated in a school activity (see Appendix G).

Verification for Quantitative Segment

Validity/Reliability. The internal consistency/reliability for all of the subscales was calculated and found to be consistent with previous research. The survey instrument for this study was adapted from three instruments that were previously validated and used in studies on student engagement. Some questions were derived from the scale used by the National Center for School Engagement (2006). Scheidler (2012) and Sbrocco (2009), utilized three separate scales to measure the three dimensions of engagement; emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. The typical acceptable Cronbach's Alpha score in social science is .70. Each of the scales in their study, with the exception of behavioral engagement in Jacksonville, Florida, exceeded this and did so consistently. The Cronbach's Alpha scores ranged from .79 to .92. These numbers indicated that the items fit in these scales. Other questions were derived from Scheidler (2012) survey with Cronbach's Alpha scores for the engagement construct as follows: cognitive - .80, behavioral - .82; emotional - .68. A few questions were adapted from Sbrocco's (2009) survey: behavioral - .88 and emotional - .73. The Cronbach's Alpha scores for subscales for the survey utilized in this study were: cognitive - .80, behavioral - .84, and emotional - .80. Two questions originally categorized as cognitive (questions 11 and 12) were recategorized as follows. Question

11 had a better fit under emotional engagement (as the inter-item correlation score was the highest .103 although still under the suggested score of .300) and question 12 was recategorized as behavioral (inter-item score - .232; behavioral - .84 and cognitive - .80. According to the source survey, these questions could be categorized as either; cognitive, emotional or behavioral. The decision to recategorize one of the items as emotional engagement was based on psychometrics.

Qualitative. For the qualitative segment of the study, there were two phases as noted, an interview with administrators and/or their designee and a focus group with Open Choice participants. An interview guide was adapted from a previous study by Lasso and Soto (2009). The guide consisted of 12 descriptive questions; six of which are similar to the questions asked of the students in their survey to determine the extent to which administrators and students view integration similarly. An additional question was added through an amendment through the University of Connecticut (UCONN) Institutional Review Board (IRB) after the first interview, as the researcher realized that no question was asked about the involvement of the social worker in the integration process. The administrator received the guide ahead of time to provide an opportunity to prepare for their responses and data on the school and the students (see Appendix D).

For focus groups with Open Choice participants, an interview guide was also adapted from a previous interview guide created by Lasso and Soto (2009), which explored how Hispanic immigrants were adjusting to their new schools in Midwestern communities. The guide consisted of eight descriptive focus questions; five of which were similar to the questions to the administrators or their designee to determine if administrators and students viewed their integration in the same way (see Appendix J). As with the administrator's interview guide, a

question was added to the student focus group questions (approved by the UCONN IRB), as the researcher realize that there was not a question that elicited what other staff, besides the teacher (i.e. school social worker) do to assist students in their integration process.

Data Collection

Quantitative. In the quantitative segment of the study, 146 Open Choice students participated in the survey. The surveys were all administered by the researcher at the schools that agreed to participate in this segment of the study; there were 11 high schools in total. All the schools provided a designated space in either a conference room or private area to provide some level of confidentiality. At the time of the survey administration, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and acquired a written assent from all of the participants (see Appendix H). The researcher explained their rights and provided an opportunity for any questions. They were instructed not to put their names on the survey as this researcher wanted to ensure the anonymity of all participants. A visual review of the surveys was done on site as the students handed in their completed surveys to identify unanswered questions. If there were missing responses, the student was given an opportunity to fill in the response. Upon completion, the researcher entered participants into a raffle for five \$85 gift certificates. Immediately after the surveys were completed and returned, responses were coded with a three-digit number that could only be interpreted from a master list maintained by the researcher. Upon completing the data collection and selecting the raffle winners, the master list of participants was destroyed.

Qualitative. Ten administrators or their designee were interviewed in the first phase of the qualitative segment of the study. The interviews were conducted at the schools; there were eight separate schools that participated in this phase of the study. Most of the interviews consisted of only the principal or the support specialist while others consisted of both and other

key administrators. Interviews were private, there were no disruptions, and they were tape-recorded. All interviews were conducted in English.

Informed consent was obtained from each of the interview participants before data collection began. Participants were given a consent form that was read aloud to them by the researcher. The consent form included the purpose and the nature of the study, the rights of each participant, permission to tape the interview, and all the procedures that were utilized to protect confidentiality. A signature was required to affirm consent (see Appendix K). The researcher also explained to the participants their right to withdraw from the study at any time and provided an opportunity to ask any questions. Interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes to complete. All interviews were recorded using a digital device and the researcher wrote out responses in case the device malfunctioned in any way. Also the researcher took brief notes regarding facets of the interview that were not captured in the audiotape (e.g. the setting, school atmosphere, etc.). Data collection for this phase ceased when all those who agreed to participate were interviewed.

In the second phase of the qualitative segment of the study, thirty-four students participated in the focus groups. All the focus groups were conducted in small conference rooms in each of the eight participating high schools. One focus group consisted of six members due to the large size of enrollment of Open Choice students in that particular school and the other seven schools had four Open Choice students per focus group. Some of the focus groups were private, while in others the Support Specialist chose to sit in the room where the focus group was being conducted. The researcher administered all the focus groups. Parental notification and assent were obtained from each participant before data collection began (Appendix L). All participants who were younger than 18 years of age were given a parental notification form prior to the day

of the focus group to give to their parents for signature. Due to the poor response rate of getting signed consent forms back, an amendment was made to the parental consent, through the UCONN IRB, to only require signature if the parent chose not to have their child participate in the study. The interviews were audio recorded. All the participants were given a free movie pass, worth \$6, for their time. Focus groups lasted between 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Focus group participants were entered into a raffle for five \$85 gift cards for West Farms Mall, along with all the students that participated in the survey. At the completion of the data collection phase, the raffle yielded five winners whose names were randomly selected and derived from the assent forms. The assent forms were then destroyed. The gift certificates were hand delivered and given to the Program Manager of the CREC Open Choice Program for distribution to the Support Specialist who was assigned to the chosen participants' schools. The CREC Support Specialists agreed to distribute the gift cards to the winners.

Data Analysis for Quantitative Segment

Data Management. The researcher entered all the survey responses directly into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). After entering an entire participant group for each school, the researcher checked the accuracy of the data entry. In the event of missing data, the researcher checked the survey response to determine if in fact the information was missing or was a data entry issue. There were two missing values that were found to be a data entry error and corrected.

The variables behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement were derived by adding the responses to the respective question set and computing the average for each. An overall engagement score was derived as well. These steps were performed prior to conducting the statistical analysis. Also some data were reversed scored, 15 out of the 43

questions in the self-assessment section of the survey that related to student engagement were reversed.

Frequency distributions. Frequency distributions and basic descriptive statistics were also used to check for data entry errors.

Normality and Multicollinearity. An assessment of normality was conducted for the continuous variables (*emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, overall engagement, and student age*) through Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic. Tests showed there was normality. Multicollinearity was assessed between the three components of engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) with collinearity diagnostics. The results yielded no multicollinearity issues using the VIF scores and Tolerance scores. Therefore the three components of engagement were treated separately.

Hypothesis Testing. H₁: Choice students of color will report lower level of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

Hypothesis one could not be tested, as there were only students of color in the sample. Of the 146 student participants, 91 self-identified as black, 43 self-identified as Hispanic, 8 self-identified as multiracial, 4 self-identified as other, and none self-identified as white.

H₂₋₁: Choice students of color who attend a school with higher percentages of racial-ethnic teaching staff will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test this hypothesis, a correlation (one tailed) was used to analyze the degree of and significance of the relationship between the independent variable, racial-ethnic teaching staff, and the dependent variables, the three engagement variables and overall engagement, all continuous variables.

H₂₋₂: Choice students of color who attend a school with higher percentages of racial-ethnic student body will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test this hypothesis a correlation (one tailed) was used to analyze the degree of and significance of the relationship between the independent variable, racial-ethnic teaching staff, and the dependent variables, the three engagement variables and overall engagement, all continuous variables.

H₂₋₃: Choice students of color who attend suburban schools with higher percentages of staff participating in multicultural trainings will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

This hypothesis could not be tested as most of the schools reported not having any specific multicultural training for a number of years for their professional staff. Most reported having anti-bullying training or having some staff voluntarily participate in the Book Club activity sponsored through CREC.

H₂₋₄: Choice students who attend schools in more affluent DRG districts will report lower levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was used to compare engagement levels by DRG.

H₂₋₅: Choice students who attend schools with a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement.

To test this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was performed to compare the mean scores of two different groups, students that had a late bus and students that did not. Late was defined as after 5:00 p.m. as it was thought that such a bus might allow choice students to participate in more after school activities.

H₂₋₆: Choice students who attend schools with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff and student body, a higher percentage of staff participating in multicultural trainings, with a less affluent DRG district, and have a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test this hypothesis, a multiple regression model was used to explore the relationship between one continuous variable (engagement – behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and overall) and a number of independent variables (percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff and student body, DRG, and a late bus). Due to the lack of data, the variable *percentage of staff participating in multicultural training* was dropped from the model. Also, to make the model more robust, the covariate student's age was added to the model.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Segment

Approach to data collection. The analytical approach for the qualitative data was case study, as it plays an important role in program evaluation (Padgett, 2008). All interviews were transcribed from the electronic audio files into a Word document and then carefully checked against the audio file and corrected for accuracy. While transcribing, the researcher began coding as the themes emerged from reviewing the data more than once. Saldana (2013) recommends that for first time studies, one should code on hard-copy printouts first, not via a computer monitor (p. 26). The researcher also reviewed the initial themes with two experienced qualitative researchers on my dissertation committee. This process resulted in the development of an initial list of themes that focused on the major topics in the study such as engagement, belonging, and so on. The researcher then loaded all the transcripts into QSR NVivo, Version 10, and 1999-2014 qualitative data software. Nodes were created, those initial themes that emerged in the review of the printed transcripts. Some corrections were made after feedback

from the committee members and after analysis utilizing the software. Memos were also added to deepen the context. Once all interviews and focus groups transcripts were entered into NVivo the recordings were destroyed.

Subjectivity of the study. Padgett (2008) recommends that the researcher continually analyze one's biases throughout the progress of a study, as they are in essence the instrument of qualitative research. During this study, the researcher was attentive in considering interests, biases, and motivations. The researcher's interest in the Open Choice program began with her academic course work related to multicultural education. The course work encouraged the researcher to think back about her educational experience in the inner city. This then provided the researcher with the curiosity of wanting to know what it was like for the students that were bused out to better schools in the suburbs, as this researcher remained in the inner city. It is possible that these early experiences biased the viewpoint of the researcher. As this researcher had a personal perspective, it was important to be aware of this and not allow this to affect her view of the research being undertaken.

Related to this bias was the fact that this researcher participated in a reciprocal relation with the CREC Open Choice program in order to gain access to the data. It is possible that some schools chose not to participate due to feeling that this researcher was aligned with the CREC Open Choice program and would somehow compromise their relationship by allowing access to the student's voice. Hence, the researcher was very explicit that the results would remain confidential, even to the CREC Open Choice program, with respect to the specific school results. Also this researcher processed qualitative results with committee members to ensure that it was a nonbiased report of the facts.

Ethical Considerations

Review and approval was sought through the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) and CREC. Access to the students initially required CREC's permission, which was granted. However, CREC requested that the researcher provide research recruitment information for them to disseminate at a meeting with all the superintendents to assist in the recruitment. CREC then requested that this researcher contact each superintendent directly through email and by phone to request approval from each respective district. Recruitment occurred over the course of seven months and involved numerous steps. Initial contact was made through email to all of the superintendents and their secretary of the 22 school districts that were invited to participate in the study. In the email, was an invitation of participation along with two attachments; the recruitment flyer and the consent forms. A week after sending this invitation to participate, follow-up phone calls were made to each superintendent and assistant superintendent to confirm receipt of the invitation and to answer any questions about the proposed study.

The process of obtaining approval from the superintendents differed by district. Some superintendents required a face-to-face meeting to discuss the research proposal and ask questions about the proposed study. Others granted approval after a phone conversation and instructed the researcher to contact the high school principal directly to begin the research. All superintendents agreed to participate only if anonymity was preserved. This researcher discussed the confidentiality agreement already outlined in the IRB application, which stated that no school would be identified by name in the dissertation, as they would only be listed by District Reference Group.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics. In total, one hundred and forty six ($n = 146$) Open Choice students participated in the study. Of these, 91 self-identified as black, 43 self-identified as Hispanic, 8 self-identified as multiracial, none self-identified as white, and 4 self-identified as other. Due to the small number of participants that self-identified as multiracial and other, these groups were combined when the data analyses were conducted.

Students' age ranged from 14-19, the median age was 15.0. Students' grade ranged from 9th to 12th, the median grade was 10th grade. In the sample, there were 70 students from DRG B (with four high schools participating), 32 students from DRG C (with three high schools participating), 35 students from DRG D (with three high schools participating), and 9 students from DRG F (with one high school participating). At the time of the study, 47 students (32.2%) were new to the district and 99 students (67.8%) attended school in the same district in the previous year. Table 1 presents the overall demographic characteristics of students sampled for the study.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

	<u>Grade of Student</u>								<u>Total</u>	
	9		10		11		12			
(n)	(52)		(40)		(31)		(23)		146	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	(n)	
Ethnicity										
Black	53.8%	(28)	62.5%	(25)	67.7%	(21)	74.0%	(17)		146
Hispanic	32.7%	(17)	37.5%	(15)	19.4%	(6)	21.7%	(5)		146
Other	13.5%	(7)	0	(0)	12.9%	(4)	4.3%	(1)		146
Age										
14 years	42.3%	(22)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	15%	(22)
15 years	48.0%	(25)	52.0%	(21)	3.0%	(1)		(0)	32%	(47)
16 years	9.7%	(5)	45.0%	(18)	45.0%	(14)	9.0%	(2)	26%	(39)
17 years		(0)	3.0%	(1)	49.0%	(15)	39.0%	(9)	18%	(25)
18 years		(0)		(0)	3.0%	(1)	43.0%	(10)	8%	(11)
19 years		(0)		(0)		(0)	9.0%	(2)	1%	(2)
DRG										
Group B	40%	(21)	37.0%	(15)	61.3%	(19)	65.0%	(15)	48.0%	(70)
Group C	25%	(13)	30.0%	(12)	16.2%	(5)	9.0%	(2)	22.0%	(32)
Group D	23%	(12)	27.0%	(11)	19.3%	(6)	26.0%	(6)	24.0%	(35)
Group F	11%	(6)	5.0%	(2)	3.2%	(1)		(0)	6.0%	(9)
District										
Out of District	44%	(23)	40.0%	(16)	19.0%	(6)	8.7%	(2)	32.2%	(47)
Same District	56%	(29)	60.0%	(24)	81.0%	(25)	91.3%	(21)	67.8%	(99)

Hypotheses Testing

Findings related to question one. What effect does the students' race-ethnicity have on engagement (three dimensions and overall)? H_1 : Choice students of color will report lower levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

This hypothesis could not be tested as noted earlier.

Findings related to question two. Do the schools' attributes influence student's engagement? H₂₋₁: Choice students of color who attend a school with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

There was no statistically significant relationship between emotional engagement, cognitive engagement and percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff. However, behavioral engagement was positively associated, ($r = .17, n = 146, p < .05$), with percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff. Overall engagement was positively associated, ($r = .15, n = 146, p < .05$), with percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff as well. Since the overall score for engagement is significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. See Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations between emotional, cognitive, behavioral and overall engagement and percentage minority professional staff.

		Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral	Overall Engagement
% Minority Professional Staff	Pearson Correlation	.055	.135	.170*	.151*
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.255	.052	.020	.034
	N	146	146	146	146

Note. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

H₂₋₂: Choice students of color who attend a school with higher percentage of racial-ethnic student-body will report higher levels of attachment and engagement (three dimensions and overall).

There was no statistically significant relationship between cognitive engagement and percentage of racial-ethnic student body. However, behavioral engagement was positively associated, ($r = .22, n = 146, p < .05$), with percentage of racial-ethnic student body. Emotional engagement was also positively associated, ($r = .14, n = 146, p < .05$), with percentage of racial-ethnic student body. Also overall engagement was positively associated, ($r = .18, n = 146, p > .05$), with percentage of racial-ethnic student body. Since the overall score for engagement is significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. See Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations between emotional, cognitive, behavioral and overall engagement and percentage minority student body.

		Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral	Overall Engagement
% Minority Student Body	Pearson Correlation	.139*	.057	.215**	.176*
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.047	.249	.005	.017
	N	146	146	146	146

Note. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

H_{2.3}: Choice students of color who attend schools with higher staff participation in multicultural trainings will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

Hypothesis three could not be tested as noted earlier.

H_{2.4}: Choice students who attend schools in more affluent DRG districts will report lower levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test hypothesis four, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of District Resource Group on the three dimensions of engagement and overall engagement. Participants were divided into four groups according to the DRG district where they attended school: Group B, Group C, Group D, and Group F. There was no statistical significance by groups for emotional engagement or cognitive engagement. However, there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level for behavioral engagement: $F(3, 142) = 3.1, p < .05$. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between groups was quite small. The effect size, calculated eta square, was .06. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group D ($M = 3.10, SD = .406$) was significantly different from Group C ($M = 2.81, SD = .366$). See Table 4 and 5.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance of Behavioral Engagement by DRG

Behavioral Engagement					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.565	3	.522	3.165	.026
Within Groups	23.397	142	.165		
Total	24.962	145			

Note. ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests were used in this analysis. *. The mean difference is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 5. Tukey's HSD for Behavioral Engagement by DRG

(I) DRG Accounts for all groups	(J) DRG Accounts for all groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Group B	Group C	.21736	.08662	.063
	Group D	-.07302	.08403	.821
	Group F	.00247	.14374	1.000
Group C	Group D	-.29038*	.09928	.021
	Group F	-.21489	.15316	.500
Group D	Group F	.07549	.15171	.960

Note. ANOVA and Post Hoc Tests were used in this analysis. *. The mean difference is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

H_{2.5}: Choice students attend schools with a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

There was no statistical significance in mean scores for emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement and overall engagement. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small.

H_{2.6}: Choice students who attend schools with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff and student-body, a higher percentage of staff participation in multicultural trainings, which are in a less affluent DRG district, and have a late bus that can take them home will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

H_{2.6} (Revised): Choice students who attend schools with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff and student-body, in a less affluent DRG district, and have a late bus that

can take them home given the students age will report higher levels of engagement (three dimensions and overall).

To test hypothesis six, a standard multiple regression was conducted to explore the relationship between students' levels of engagement (dependent variable), the independent variables, and the covariate listed above in the hypothesis. The revised hypothesis was created as one of the variables, percentage of staff participation in multicultural trainings, could not be included in the model due to lack of data and student's age was added as a covariate. As noted, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. All of the independent variables and the covariate were entered at one time. For cognitive engagement, the total variance explained by the model was 5%, $F(5, 128) = 0.25, p < .33$. The model was not statistically significant. For emotional engagement, the total variance explained by the model was 5%, $F(5, 128) = 0.38, p < .29$. The model was not statistically significant. However, for behavioral engagement, the total variance explained by the model was 12%, $F(5, 128) = 0.39, p < .01$. The model was statistically significant. Conversely, while this model (behavioral engagement) as a whole was statistically significant, the only variable that was significant was student age ($p < .01$). See Table 6. For overall engagement the total variance explained by the model was 10%, $F(5, 128) = .80, p < .02$. The model was statistically significant; student age emerged as significant ($p < .01$). See Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Regression coefficients for hypothesis six for behavioral engagement.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	3.939	.502		7.841	.000
MinorityStudentBody	.007	.007	.116	1.007	.316
MinorityProfStaff	.044	.030	.200	1.438	.153
DRG Accounts for all groups	.038	.051	.107	.741	.460
Student Age	-.085	.029	-.246	-2.931	.004*
LateBus	-.086	.070	-.103	-1.223	.223

Note: A regression analysis was used for this data. *The mean difference is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 7. Regression coefficients for hypothesis six for overall engagement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	
(Constant)	3.686	.408		9.035	.000
MinorityStudentBody	.006	.006	.130	1.109	.269
MinorityProfStaff	.029	.025	.166	1.179	.241
DRG Accounts for all groups	.011	.041	.037	.256	.798
Student Age	-.062	.023	-.224	-2.628	.010*
LateBus	-.035	.057	-.053	-.618	.538

Note: A regression analysis was used for this data. *The mean difference is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Summary for Quantitative Results

The null hypothesis was rejected for three of the five hypotheses that could be tested. The hypotheses that were supported linked behavioral engagement and overall engagement with higher percentages of racial-ethnic staff and student body. These findings are of major importance as Open Choice participants are mostly students of color, while the schools that they attend are majority white schools. Themes from the qualitative interviews provided additional insight into the Open Choice students' integration experience and whether their responses were congruent with the school administrators that are charged with receiving them. These results are presented below.

Qualitative Results

Having established the focus of this research study, this chapter presents the findings from the interviews and focus groups. A qualitative approach was utilized because this type of inductive research provided the best opportunity for enhanced understanding and detail about the experiences of Open Choice students, from two distinct perspectives. Key administrators and the students themselves sought to share meaning about the experience of having to integrate into new school communities in the suburbs where they go to seek a better educational opportunity.

Administrator interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of what the schools are doing to promote the integration of Open Choice students. This allowed for a comparison with the interviews of Open Choice student themselves to determine whether or not they perceived the integration experience in the same way. The administrator interviews allowed for the administrator's perspective to be shared and better understood. There were ten ($n = 10$) administrators and/or designees who participated in the study; of those six were principals, two were vice principals, and two were District Open Choice Liaisons hired by the school district to offer support to Open Choice students and their families. Ultimately there were participants from all four District Reference Groups invited to participate in the study. Of these eight schools that participated, there were three high schools from DRG B, two from DRG C and D, and one from DRG F. An invitation was emailed to all superintendents participating in Open Choice by the Director of the Open Choice program and then followed up with an email by this researcher. Participants were selected upon the superintendent of the district expressing interest in the study. While there were 22 high schools invited to participate in the study, only eight agreed to participate in this segment of the study. All of the administrators were Caucasian and of the two District Open Choice Liaisons, one was Caucasian and the other was Black. There were 13

open-ended questions asked during the interview to elicit a discussion and gain insight into their perspective.

Focus groups were also conducted to gain an understanding of student responses to their integration experience as Open Choice students. This allowed for a comparison to that of the school administrator to ascertain if they both viewed the integration experience in the same way. The focus groups allowed for the student voice and experience to be shared and better understood. As discussed in earlier chapters, a purposive sampling was used in this study to recruit students. All participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Thirty-five ($n = 35$) Open Choice students participated in the focus groups during the months of May to December 2014. The sample consisted of 20 females and 15 males. All of the participants were between the ages of 14-19 and identified as Black, Hispanic or other. All were Hartford area students who were enrolled in a high school through the Open Choice program, which enabled them to attend a suburban school. There were 4-6 participants in each of the eight focus groups held at eight different high schools in Connecticut that participate in the Open Choice program. Participants were selected after expressing interest and willingness to discuss their perspective about their integration experience as bused students. The focus groups took place in each school in a space deemed as confidential by the school administrator. All the focus groups were conducted in English. There were eight open-ended questions that were asked to promote the discussion.

This chapter explores the themes that were developed from the interviews with the administrators and the focus group sessions with the students. The themes capture the salient aspects identified as being important to better understanding the experience of Open Choice participants from two voices, that of the administrators who receive them and that of the students

themselves. All identifying information about the participants and the schools has been removed from the transcripts. No names or identifying information were revealed when discussing study results. The three overarching research questions for the qualitative segment will provide the structure to the findings. They were as follows:

1. From the administrators' and students' perspective, how do Open Choice students adapt to their school?
2. From the administrators' and students' perspective, what do schools do to promote engagement and integration of choice students?
3. To what extent do Open Choice students and administrators agree about the Open Choice student's integration experience?

There were five themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups, as well as several sub-themes. The five primary themes were cultural adaptation, school and staff connections, involvement in school activities, cultural reciprocity, and structural factors. The sub-themes included differences in integration experience by gender and time in the Open Choice program.

Research Question One

From the administrators' and students' perspective, how do Open Choice students adapt to their school? In order to answer the research question, Kim's (2001) Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaption was utilized as it provides the conceptual underpinning for this research. Responses from both the administrator and the Open Choice student were detailed to illustrate the process of adaptation to this new school environment.

Cultural adaptation. The theme of cultural adaptation was the first to emerge. Kim's (2001) Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation speaks to the struggle that sojourners, strangers to an unfamiliar environment, struggle to meet the demands of an unfamiliar culture and situation.

Kim (2001) further describes a “draw back” and “leap forward” motion that is characteristic of a sojourner’s experience. The “draw back” occurs when a sojourner experiences stress and causes withdrawal. Open Choice students described having similar experiences to that of a sojourner that is struggling to adapt to a new environment:

“I feel like at first the students were questioning as to why we were in their school, but now I feel more welcomed not that they were not welcoming since beginning; but it was new for both of us”(female respondent).

“Probably how everyone grew up together as this is a small town. But I am just starting to come here since last year, so it is much more difficult as I don’t really know many people that is really a big deal” (male respondent).

Many administrators had mutual understanding of the difficulty some Open Choice students have in adapting to their new school environment.

“...at lunch time in the beginning of the year we will tend to see students from the same town sit together ...if we see someone sitting alone we pull an upper classman and ask them to join the student and get others to sit with them. I can assure you that no one sits by themselves as we are on top of it”.

Kim (2001) further purports that this withdrawal (draw back) then activates an adjustment sequence through which the sojourner manages the stress and subsequently propels or “leaps forward” with new insight. Open Choice students also discussed this phenomenon of gaining new insight and developing more successful interactions and experiencing less stress:

“I have enjoyed my experience in being an Open Choice student. It has helped me a lot to mature as a person and to look at everything from a different perspective. At first I came to this school only thinking one way and coming to this school has helped me to look at life very differently and I have gotten to know different people”(male respondent).

“Stepping out of your comfort zone and trying to get to know people. I have definitely tried to do that more this year and as a result I have met a lot of nice people. It is kind of hard when you don’t know many people when you come here, because you feel like they

are going to judge you because you don't really know them, but they don't know you either. And then you learn that they are really nice people and that you may have something in common. You just have to look past skin color and have an open mind" (female respondent).

A variation that emerged from this cultural adaptation experience was that the experience was different according to gender. Some girls seemed to have a more difficult time adjusting to the new environment, than boys. They were much more relational in the process wanting to develop friendships rather than casual peer relationships. According to Letendre (2006), girls' sense of themselves is deeply intertwined with connection to others, while boys maintain autonomy in relationships. The Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) of female development, originally developed by Jean Baker Miller (1991) also supports this phenomenon as it recognizes relationships as the central organizing feature in girls' development. In contrast, boys experience far greater freedom and recognition for the development of autonomy with a minimal focus on nurturing relationships (Perry, Perry and Weiss, 1989). There were a variety of examples from girls who participated in the study that described the need for them to connect at different levels, whereas boys were more elusive about the need:

"...in Middle School there was an activity where we could pick a friend from the town to go bowling with us, this was a CREC event, to help us connect to another person that live here. They got to be a better friend and I also got to meet other people that came along with the other Open Choice students. This event was a simple and fun way to help you connect. They don't do this at the high school level, but they should" (female respondent).

"...I am a guy and I just try to blend in" (male respondent).

Administrators and students, were congruent in their thinking that this struggle to adapt is most apparent when they first arrive to the district and is much more difficult if the student arrives new to the district during the high school years. Administrators openly discussed the

need to readjust their strategies to assist students in this integration as they continue to accept students in the higher grades as oppose to accepting them earlier on in their academic career.

“...a few years ago we accepted students into the district into ninth grade, for the first time. So these were not students that had grown up through the years, but were brand new. This proved to be quite problematic. It was a much greater struggle for both the students that were currently attending high school here and for the students coming new to us from Hartford. We ultimately overcame the struggle, but it took a lot of work with students, staff and the community...”

“... I think the tendency is most cases if they happen to be in class or lunch with Open Choice students then they may naturally gravitate to one another. It is more that they are a peer group with common values and experiences so it is about comfort or having commonalities. If we have five students that are Open Choice and hang out with each other it may happen, this is different by peer groups. There are a couple of girls who are so assimilated that they eat lunch with town or Choice students it is about being friendly with you and not about zip codes. A student starting out in later grades in the district have a harder time and they are more reluctant to interact with town resident students, initially. The students who start out younger, 2nd and 3rd grade level they pick up on the culture more readily so it is easier to integrate”.

The Open Choice students shared very similar insights:

“...I feel the newer Open Choice students tend to sit together at lunch because they may feel uncomfortable due to the fact that they have not been going to these schools from the beginning, so it takes a minute to get to know people. But the students that have been here longer need to help them get to know new people because we know just how hard it is to make friends when you are not from here. We have to help them” (female respondent).

The next section provides awareness about what these host schools do to assist the Open Choice student in maneuvering through the journey of integration. Students and administrators alike share their perspective on what is working well and what may be some barriers that get in the way of the full integration of Open Choice students to these suburban school environments.

Research Question Two

From the administrators' and students' perspective, what do schools do to promote engagement? The researcher asked questions about activities that occur that in their opinion promote integration, asked who supports them, and what gets in the way of full integration. From the responses several themes emerged here: importance of staff and school connections, involvement in school related activities, impact of cultural awareness and diversity on engagement, and barriers to integration.

School and staff connections. Student's connection to the school and the staff was a salient theme that emerged from the focus group discussions. Past research has supported the notion that the educational experience of young people is firmly embedded within the schools they attend (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Students were asked what gets in the way of them feeling like they are a part of the school. Many stated the obvious concern of the lack of transportation. Additional concerns related to belonging included....

“Transportation gets in the way it is impossible to do things here in town as you don't have a ride when you need it. Like today for example it is senior prank day and you look out the window and see the fun they are having and I can't stop but think about when I am a senior and how I won't be able to join in the fun. Miss they had to get here really early to set up the prank (hallways full of balloons and toilet tissue). It just makes me sad” (female respondent).

“Probably how everyone grew up together as this is a small town. But I am just starting to come here, so it is difficult as I don't really know many people, so this is a real big deal” (male respondent).

When asked what staff supports them in this process of integration, overwhelmingly the students indicated that their teacher was the most supportive. Skinner et al. (2008) for instance, found student reports of teacher support to be predictive of increases in emotional engagement

and declines in emotional dissatisfaction across the years. Although, this was not tested in the quantitative segment of this study, it is worthy of attention as again it is a factor that is within the control of the school environment and has shown an increase in engagement for other student populations. Open Choice students share their insight about teacher and staff support:

“Well my teachers will check in with me based on how I look, like if I am sad they notice and they ask me why and they take time to talk to me and they also check on me about my school work to make sure that I am doing okay in my classes, not just in their class. They also provide me with extra help whenever I need it. So I believe they care a lot” (female respondent).

“Some teachers may pull me aside when I am off track and they always let me know when I have improved on something, which feels good. They actually care enough to tell you the positive” (male respondent).

Many students also noted the value of having a District Open Choice Liaison to assist them and support them on a regular basis during the school day.

“The staff member that helps the most is our Open Choice District Open Choice Liaison because he/she knows that it is hard for us to get back to Hartford. He/she will arrange transportation even at the last minute if it means we will participate in activities or need extra help. He/she even arranges for a special bus for activities so we can feel more a part of the school” (male respondent).

“...the Principal and District Open Choice Liaison as they make it a point to ask me personally how am doing not just in my classes, but as a person” (female respondent).

Administrators emphasized the importance of having the assistance from the CREC Support Specialist to serve as conduits to the student’s family and communicate important events made available to Open Choice students. Those schools that were fortunate enough to have hired District Open Choice Liaisons, as only four schools did in this sample, appreciated the extra support they were able to afford the students and their families that were involved with Open Choice.

Involvement in School Activities. Involvement in school related activities was a theme that resonated with both groups, administrators and students, as a major way of integrating into the school environment. Many differentiated between those activities that were a natural part of a typical school environment and those orchestrated specially for Open Choice students to encourage interaction with local students. Several students discussed different opportunities that were made available to make them feel connected.

“...I participated in the Youth Summit (sponsored by CREC) with 9th and 10th graders and this allowed me to interact with different students, it was really great” (female respondent).

“The pep rally and we all made shirts and I got to talk to kids from my grade and they all complimented me about the shirt my group made. We collaborated with town kids in coming up with the tee shirt logo and design. This was fun and it got me to meet other students and we took pictures together and talked with each other about the whole idea of how we made our shirts. It was a great memory” (female respondent).

“Sports make me feel like I am a part of the school because you come together with other students due to something you both like and so it really helps” (male respondent).

Administrators spoke openly about the fact that they relied on the natural activities available to every student as opposed to creating activities specifically for the Open Choice students. To that point, many of the schools had no specific activities to specifically promote engagement and integration of the Open Choice student to the school or the community at large. But they were eager to hear about what the students’ perspective was with respect to this being an area of need or not.

“...I don’t think there have been and this is one of the areas that we are falling short in”.

“I think that athletics is a central part of a small school and I do believe we work hard especially in the winter to promote opportunities to work on their schedules, game schedules and bus schedules to encourage participation and it was successful this year. I think this is important as kids get to form relationships and become integrated. It goes beyond the school day. They walk over to the McDonalds together and then they come back and take the four o’clock bus and this is a real good thing. Athletics forges the opportunity to build that rapport”.

Some utilized the CREC sponsored program of the Unity Club, which is comprised of Open Choice students and local students and promotes opportunities for joint activities and better interaction.

...absolutely we have the Unity Club, sponsored by CREC and we also have an advisory board that some Open Choice students are a part of.

They were also asked about activities they did specifically for Open Choice families in an attempt to welcome them or involve them in the school community. Most administrators reported doing welcoming events for the entire school community, but not specific to Open Choice; however, there were two schools that held meet and greet events in Hartford at either CREC or a local college to allow parents an opportunity to meet with staff, both administrators and teachers.

“...one activity we have done at a local college in Hartford is the meet and greet so that families can come and meet the superintendent, our District Open Choice Liaison and some of the administrators from the schools...this was good for the lower grades, but no high school families attended the event. But this is a great starting point to have these events”.

Some administrators discussed the attempt they have made to recruit host families in the town to allow for Open Choice students to more readily participate in school activities. Host families are families that reside in the town that allow the Open Choice student to stay at their home during after school hours to allow for the Open Choice student to participate more fully in

school activities. This has been really difficult for them, but they continue to try to recruit. The other activity or act is that they have solicited monies to pay for extra meals so that they are able to provide a healthier alternative for Open Choice students when they are waiting for the late bus.

Cultural reciprocity. The final theme was the indication of cultural reciprocity, which is the exchange of knowledge about one another's culture. Many students across districts were very willing to be open to learning from this new experience and were looking for an opportunity for the same to occur from staff and town resident students to learn about their culture. This learning could occur by town residents and staff experiencing the urban culture by visiting Hartford and learning about how the other side live. The other way to learn is through multicultural training. The majority of the administrators acknowledged that competing school priorities had interfered with multicultural training for their professional staff for several years. Trainings offered were not specific to cultural diversity, but more about anti-bullying. In the following excerpt the students shared positive and negative experiences related to cultural reciprocity:

"I feel that the staff, if they are older, feel the same way as some of the students as they don't have to change their way of thinking as we are only a very small minority of the student population, so they are not forced to change just have to accommodate us. We are only a few kids from Hartford, now if we were stronger in number they would have no choice but to learn" (female respondent).

"People in the school should know that there are Open Choice students in the school and this will allow them to ask us questions about who we are and where we come from. I think the only way they know is because they watch a lot of movies about cities and how corrupt it is, but they don't have an opportunity to ask us these questions in a guided way. They are just left with these impressions and unresolved answers so they go by what they see in the media. The adults should help us talk about it" (female respondent).

“This school experience has been great. I have learned so much I now play Lacrosse, which I would not have been able to play in Hartford. So that is one thing that I have been exposed to different things. Also all the friends that I have made here treat me well and I am always welcomed over their house. I have been exposed to business programs and other programs that will help me with my future” (male respondent).

All the administrators shared examples about how much Open Choice students have added value to their respective schools. Many students across districts were very willing to be open to learning from this new experience, despite it being difficult. They also shared wanting to share more about their culture. Professional staff should be just as open to experiencing the culture of the Open Choice students. However, teachers need the same support as the students with respect to having safe spaces to learn about multiculturalism. This cross training is critical for engagement to occur.

“...Some teachers stop me in the hallway to chat and share their frustration and to get assistance on a particular student issue from a cultural perspective. They want to learn” (District Open Choice Liaison).

“...we are just the Black and the Hispanic kids that come from Hartford and it is sometimes seen as a negative and so we feel singled out, but I think it is because they don't talk about it so we can assist them in dispelling the stereotypes ...I have been to schools where this is an open topic” (female respondent).

This finding was consistent with a statistically significant finding in the quantitative segment of this study as there was a relationship between behavioral and overall engagement and minority professional staff. Given the fact that there is little representation of minority staff training non-minority staff is critical in engaging these students of color.

Structural factors. There was overwhelming strong consensus among administrators and students that transportation was a barrier to full integration into the culture of the school. Although quantitative findings did not find a statistical significance in mean scores for the three

levels of engagement and overall with respect to schools having a late bus, qualitative findings determined that it was a critical factor that did not permit full participation.

“The only barrier or rather an inconvenience is the after school busing. We do have a late bus some days of the week that leaves at 5 p.m. and can allow for some participation. But for full participation in all school activities or sports it is not possible” (administrator).

“Sometimes if we are doing an activity or sports afterschool and our parents are working we can't get a ride and this gets in the way. There are no late buses that can get us home after the activity so you cannot participate. There is one late bus, but it comes earlier in the afternoon” (female respondent).

Some administrators and students noted the lack of diversity within the student body and the staff as a structural barrier as well:

“...The second barrier is that there is a lack of diversity in the school. This inhibits a real strong blending of people. There is not a lot of social diversity, cultural diversity, religious diversity, and or racial diversity in the school, so as a result they are recognized as the Open Choice students as they are of color, as opposed to a town resident” (Administrator).

“Something that does get in the way is the black teacher to white teacher ratio as you cannot find not even one black adult to look up to and you feel like you are the only black people in this building. This is not a comfortable feeling” (female respondent).

Research Question Three

To what extent do Open Choice students and administrators agree about the Open Choice student's integration experience? Administrators and student participants had some similar but also some different perspectives with regards to the integration process. In an attempt to address this research question in the most comprehensive way the researcher arranged the questions asked to both groups in a thematic fashion rather than as individual questions:

Welcoming experience. Both groups were asked to describe how the town resident students respond to having Open Choice students into their school. Focus group participants gave a range of responses, but mostly all described positive reactions and feeling like they were accepted and treated well. There was some differences noted for the students that were new to the district as they had a more difficult time in acclimating themselves to the new environment.

“I think it is actually normal they treat us like we are part of the school and we are not just like Hartford kids we are actually like town kids” (male respondent).

“I feel we are separated between Open Choice and them. But it may be different because I was not here from the beginning grades like they were so it is much harder” (female respondent).

Administrators shared similar reaction and felt that it was a rather “seamless” or a neutral experience. For some it was rather positive.

“Honestly I don’t see a difference between the student’s perception of one another whether they are a town student and or an Open Choice student. In the last four years since being here I have been really impressed with that”.

“It is rather seamless transition for both the town resident and the Open Choice student. For the most part the students are very accepting they don’t see any differences and treat every student as they did in elementary and middle school”.

Structural barriers. Administrators and students were asked to describe what gets in the way of them feeling like they are a part of the school. As discussed earlier in this chapter, both administrators and students reported similar responses in stating that the biggest issue was the lack of transportation. It was noted that many administrators were becoming very creative in how they were maximizing the bus pick up schedule to allow for students to be involved in sports and other activities. Moreover, students also openly discussed concerns over the lack of

diversity in the student body and professional staff. This finding was supported by quantitative results that also found a positive correlation between behavioral and overall engagement and percentages of racial-ethnic teaching staff and between behavioral, emotional, and overall engagement and percentages of racial-ethnic student body. This mirrored the sentiment so of some of the administrators that reported this as a concern and stated that it was an area of focus for the future.

Activities to improve interaction. This was one of the areas where there was a difference of opinion. While many of the administrators discussed the importance of the Open Choice student being a part of the activities that were naturally available through the school, many of the students yearned for supplementary activities to assist them in this area. Some discussed activities that were about school traditions not sporting events. While others noted that these type of activities were especially available at the elementary and middle school level, but not high school. Students discussed feeling like they were left to figure this out on their own.

“Provide transportation to activities in this town like the bonfires would be a great experience, but I have never been to one. Also like today you see how much fun students are having they have been here since really early this morning tagging the school with balloons and toilet paper everywhere to celebrate being a senior we can’t do that so it sucks” (female respondent).

“They do not do anything extra to help us feel welcome or to make more friends you are kind of on your own” (male respondent).

“I feel like they should recruit other students from this town to join the Unity Club and do more things like what this club does to assist you in making connections it should be a school activity not just a small group. It would be a great way of helping you make lasting connections it’s hard to do all by yourself because they probably just as scared to get to know you” (female respondent).

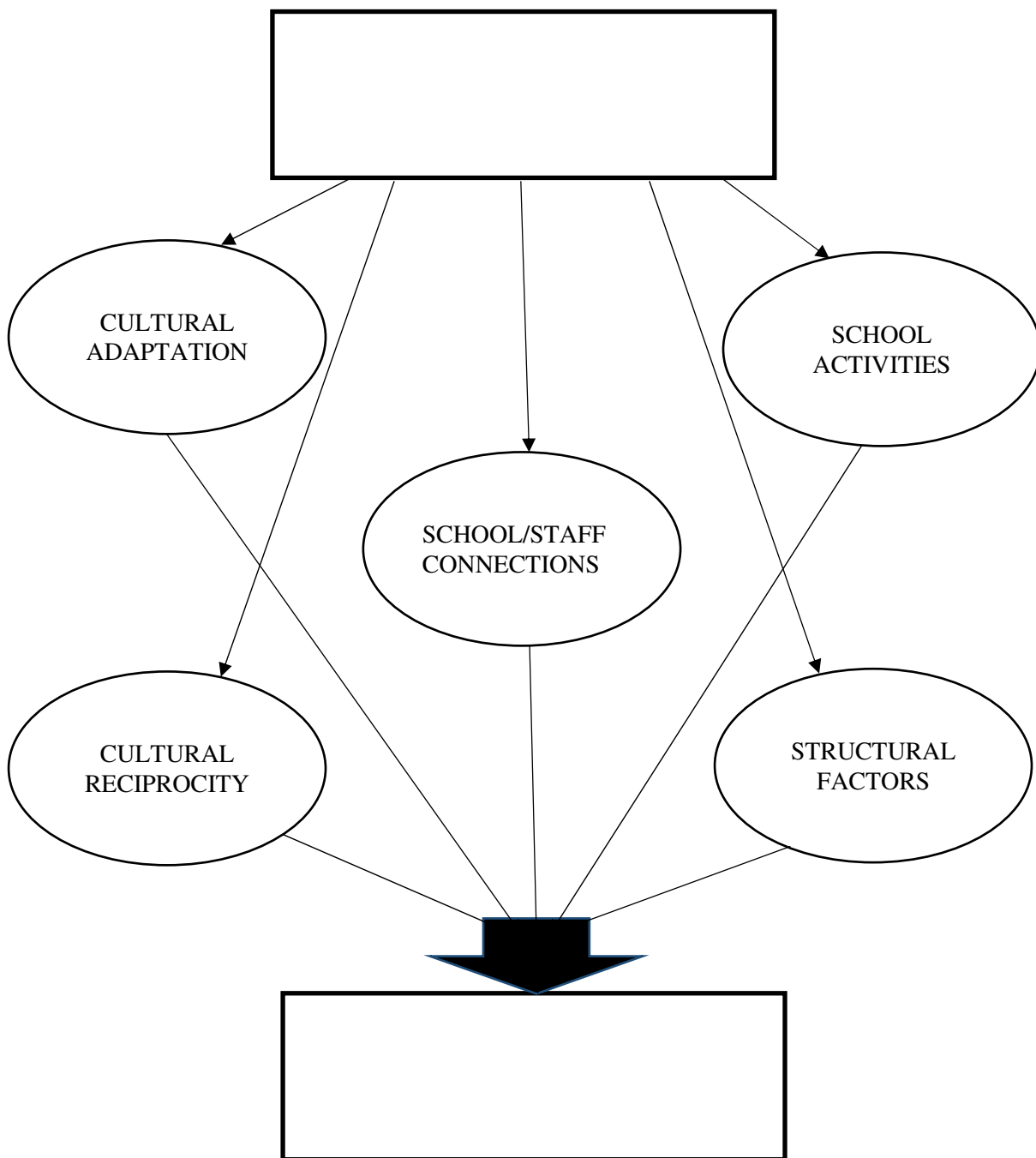
Peer and school connections. Administrators and students were also asked if they noticed the interaction of the Open Choice student in class, at lunch and after school. There

were some differences in their perspectives. While administrators noted that there was really no difference in the class; some students noted sometimes feeling awkward or isolated as they were the only student of color. With respect to the sitting arrangement in the cafeteria they shared similar views as the new students reported sitting only with Open Choice kids as they felt a certain level of comfort. Administrators reported in the same way and noted that this was more evolutionary and changed depending on their grade and interests. During the after schools hours they shared the same perspective as due to the need to travel back to Hartford students tended to hang out with each other as they waited for the bus.

Summary

This chapter presented both the quantitative and qualitative findings. This mixed method approach provided a more in-depth understanding of the experience of a sojourner”, in this case the Open Choice student, as they integrate into these unfamiliar and vastly different environments. The qualitative data were gathered from two critical players in the integration process of the bused student, the student themselves and the administrator in charge of receiving them into their district. The themes and subthemes developed gave further understanding into student and administrator’s perspective and experience in the cross-cultural adaptation to the schools outside of their community. Overall there was some level of congruence in terms of their perspectives on some key areas, but there were also some areas where they had varied perspectives and that are worthy of further attention. These similarities and differences in their perspectives will be discussed in the chapter that follows. Table 9 below describes the model of cross-cultural adaptation produced by the researcher to illustrate the model.

Figure 2
Concept Map of Findings



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to describe and examine the lived experiences of high school Open Choice students, focusing on their engagement in the suburban schools they attend. The suburban school administrators' perspectives were also captured in an attempt to ascertain if administrators and students viewed the students' experience in the same way. The conceptual basis for this study was Kim's (2001) cross-cultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, which provide a useful framework to understand the Choice students' level of engagement within their school community. Kim's theory is helpful in understanding a student's process of adaptation. According to Kim, the overall mission of a transfer student's adaptation is to establish and maintain a stable and reciprocal relationship with the host environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) focuses on individual children. I will utilize Bronfenbrenner's (1979) definition of development as a foundation for the initial discussion of the quantitative findings:

“Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated, and valid conception of ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content” (p. 27).

The goodness-of-fit between a person and the environment strongly influences whether outcomes are successful or not. These frameworks together allow for a deeper understanding of the integration experience; one delineates the factors that may prevent successful adaptation, while

the other illuminates the relationship of the complex layers of school, family, and community relationships and individual student development.

Significant findings from the quantitative data analysis will be discussed, along with the qualitative results, to examine the individual characteristics and school attributes that impacted the levels of engagement and integration of the Open Choice student to their suburban school placement. A review of study results will be explained using the theoretical lenses of both Kim (2001) and Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Individual Characteristics

Role of race-ethnicity, age, and gender. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory requires behavior and development to be examined as a joint function of the characteristics of the individual and the social environment. Characteristics of the individual include: age, gender, skin color, and physical appearance (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This study sought to examine whether or not individual student characteristics correlated with levels of engagement. The first characteristic under study was the race-ethnicity of the Open Choice student. The fact that all the students in the sample were all of color rendered this hypothesis untestable. Participants' gender was a variable of interest for the quantitative segment of the study, as research has previously shown gender differences correlated to levels of school engagement. Although gender was not listed as a question in the survey instrument, the impact of gender was revealed in the qualitative analysis.

In the qualitative segment, levels of engagement were found to correlate to gender. Girls' relationships with peers and staff were very important. Girls expressed a desire for more lasting relationships and struggled to achieve a goodness of fit when those types of relationships were

absent or hard to maintain. Some said that the fact that they were from a different community made it more difficult to form more meaningful relationships. They desired reciprocal relationships that would be life long and for some it affected their ability to engage. Many girls expressed a need for assistance in meeting people in their new schools; they found this to be challenging in unfamiliar communities with different people who were culturally very different. Boys, on the other hand, reported feeling that integration was easier, as they just talked about common things like sports or videos, etc. Significantly, boys had different expectations about the relationships they made in these host settings. They were not looking for life-long relationships. They did not appear to be affected by having rather superficial relationships with town residents; their friends were back home.

Age was inversely related to behavioral engagement and overall engagement. The older Open Choice students were, the less engaged they became. It should be noted that recently schools have been encouraged to admit older students into the program. This finding begs for a closer examination of what may contribute to their disengagement. Although, it is normative for older teens to disengage as they begin to prepare for graduation, it may also have to do with the fact that they are being enrolled later and lack supports from peers and others.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) contends that it is important to examine the social environment, which encompasses the physical, social, and cultural features of the immediate settings within which the student is immersed (e.g., family, school, and the neighborhood). In this study, the school is the social environment of interest. In the ecological model, the school is conceptualized as a context that directly impacts student behavior by contributing to the development of that student and thereby increasing the likelihood of academic success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Stewart, 2007). The results support the notion that students' interface with the school and the

community becomes embedded and is vitally important to their success; students' level of positive engagement is commensurate with their positive interface. Following are the results of analyses that involved school attributes.

School Attributes

Bronfenbrenner (1979) purports that the environment consists of four interrelated systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. The following analyses will consider the microsystem (a setting in which the child has direct, face to face relationships with significant people and where they develop) and mesosystem (where cross relationships between the small settings, like between home and school). The school attributes that this study considered were the percentages of racial-ethnic professional staff and student body, cultural competence of professional staff, the DRG in which the school resides, and whether or not there was a late bus to participate in afterschool activities.

Racial-ethnic composition of student body and professional staff. Analyses revealed that students' behavioral engagement – the students' effort, participation, and compliance with school activities (Finn, 1993) – and overall engagement were positively associated with a higher percentage of minority professional staff. This extends the research of Johnson et al., (2001) which contends that the composition of the teaching staff may also shape students' engagement behaviors and feelings of attachment. Boser (2011) also contends that teachers of color serve as role models and positively affect the overall educational outcomes for students of color. The significance of this finding can not be overestimated; one of the central tenets of the Open Choice program is to offer students from Hartford, predominantly students of color, the opportunity to excel academically. The fact that engagement is linked with academic

achievement is highly relevant (Connell, 1990; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007).

Moreover, high levels of behavioral engagement and emotional engagement – a student’s actions and feeling towards their school experience, (Sbrocco, 2009) – and overall engagement were all found to be positively associated with a more diverse student body. These findings were consistent with previous research, indicating the benefits of interracial contact in school. On the other hand, it may also pose challenges when there is a greater percentage of students from other racial-ethnic groups. Too little diversity within the student body also presents new challenges, which include students feeling alienated from the school community. This, in turn, would negatively impact student engagement (Johnson, et al., 2001; Romo & Falbo, 1996; McNeely, 2004). Students who do not feel at ease or socially integrated with other students tend to withdraw (Johnson, et al., 2001). This latter finding aligns with Kim’s (2001) Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, the conceptual framework for this study, in which she describes precisely this “drawback” when the sojourner experiences stress and then withdraws. Along the same lines, in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of human development, the school is conceptualized as a context that directly influences student behaviors by contributing to the development of competencies that increase the likelihood of academic success. According to Myers, Kim, and Mandela (2004) such factors as the overall percentage of minority enrollment are linked to minority youths’ academic success. Again, because of the link between engagement and academic achievement, this should be recognized as a keystone in our efforts to properly integrate our schools.

Another important finding was the relationship between the DRG districts (the towns where the suburban school is located) that the Open Choice students attended (Group B, Group

C, Group D, and Group F) and level of student engagement. There was a positive relationship between behavioral engagement for the four DRG groups; however, the actual difference between the groups was quite small. Though small, one needs to consider the neighborhood/town differences, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) contends that the macrosystem is where there are cross-relationships between the small settings (suburban schools) and the neighborhoods in which they are situated. The fact that Open Choice students live in urban settings, but attend schools in suburban settings, means that they face a big challenge coping with a new culture and their multifaceted interfaces. They have to learn and adapt to a new culture, while maintaining their own identity. It can be a tricky cultural juggling act. This would be a challenge for a person of any age, but especially so for an adolescent. If these students are properly mentored and supported, they can learn to cope, and their chances of success increase exponentially. Key is having adults to help them navigate fluidly between their environments. And the linchpin, or keystone, would be the social workers dedicated to helping with this interface. Learning to maneuver/navigate across cultures and attaining a goodness of fit is invaluable to the future success of Open Choice students, who are predominately students of color.

Previous research has found that school location (urban, suburban, and rural) has been associated with student achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Schools in urban, poor, and disorganized communities have more problems than schools in rural, suburban, affluent, and/or organized communities (Gottfredson, 2001). To this point, one student participant said: “First of all, I actually learn in this school because everybody else here wants to learn, too. If we act up in class, the students don’t think you are cool or add to it. And the teachers don’t tolerate it.”

Another important school attribute was the availability of transportation. There was no statistical significance in mean scores for emotional, cognitive, behavioral and overall engagement, and late bus availability. However, anecdotal reports indicate that transportation was a major stressor for both students and administrators. Limited transportation did not allow for Open Choice students to fully participate in their educational settings and student life. A number of studies have demonstrated an association between students' involvement with extra-curricular activities and their grades, defined as behavioral engagement in this study (Broh, 2002; Guest & Schneider, 2003). This is an area of continued focus. Crosnoe and Elder (2001) found that students who feel more attached or embedded in their school exert more effort, while those that participate in extra-curricular activities develop increased positive feelings towards school (p. 320).

Insofar as qualitative results, the concept mapping revealed five major sources of stress for the Open Choice student: teacher/staff support, activities that promote interaction, cultural reciprocity, barriers to integration, and peer and school connections. These findings are relevant because they reflect the Sojourners' lived experience of integrating into unfamiliar environments for the purpose of equal educational opportunity.

Many students reported that teacher and staff support were crucial to their feeling of belonging. Many of the students noted that teachers cared about their academic success and pushed them to achieve at a higher standard. Research on black and Hispanic education has proven the important role of teachers' perceptions in the success and failure of students. A teacher's low expectations, doubt of intellectual potential, and "dumbing down" the curriculum can have a powerful impact on student achievement (Howard 2010; Steele and Aronson, 2010).

During focus group discussions, students said that they were learning more both academically and socially, clearly benefitting from attending their current school.. They discussed feeling like they had a promising future because of the challenging course work they were being introduced to. They also raised the idea that they were being exposed to another way of living and different activities that they otherwise would not have been exposed to. Many students described their appreciation for the rigor of the teacher's instruction and for exposing them to new ideas that would prepare them for college or the future. Such was a typical response from one male student:

“The teachers ask us if we want to stay after, like if we are having problems with some of the work in class. They give us tips on what we can do to improve our grades so that we can have a better future.”

The significance of a teacher's genuine concern and care for helping the students was one quality that also emerged from the data. Many students stated that the fact that teachers were willing to help before, during, or after school was a sign that they cared. They also indicated that the teachers reminded them about their assignments and made them accountable and focused on their learning.

An equally important theme that emerged was the activities that promoted interaction, and therefore integration. There is ample research supporting the benefits of student extracurricular involvement (Broh, 2002; Brown & Evans, 2002, Marsh, 1992). However, Broh (2002) contends that, not all types of extracurricular activities and student participation in these activities are of equal value to students; benefits to students vary. This is important to note because, again, an Open Choice student confronts a host of challenges in an unfamiliar environment. Student responses regarding extracurricular participation ranged from feeling connected through their involvement in sports, to yearning for activities specific to sojourners,

which would offer them opportunities to meet new people. One student shared: “I wish they could arrange a bus for us to go to the bonfire that they do in town each year. I have never been to one.”

Cultural reciprocity emerged as a prominent theme in student focus group discussions. Many of the students accepted the challenge of coming into an unfamiliar community and being willing to assimilate. However, many voiced concerns that they did not feel the reciprocity from the school community, staff, and or peers. One student articulated her experience this way:

“My freshman year here, which was my first year, I felt like I was the victim of wrong assumptions and it was a little bit alienating. We are encouraged to integrate, but they don’t understand this is hard and don’t really help us with this. All we have is the District Open Choice Liaison, but that is not always enough; you need the teachers to do it too.”

Originally the study sought to assess the impact of staff participation in multicultural training on student engagement levels. Unfortunately, this could not be examined as none of the schools had scheduled multicultural training in a number of years. Many administrators expressed the fact that there were too many competing demands for training as the reason for not having had specific training in this area. Given the fact that the Open Choice students are predominately of color, providing teachers with requisite skills in the area of cultural competence is absolutely critical to the engagement of these students. Even the “best” teachers need multicultural training, as they need to be exposed to the topic of race and oppression in safe learning environments to recognize and unlearn any biases. Trainings are essential in order to be able to teach in a culturally responsive way, which Gay (2000) defines as integrating the experiences, perspectives, and histories of students from different cultural backgrounds into

teaching practice. Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing process, because culture is dynamic. A teacher who participates in multicultural training in 1990, 2000, or 2010 is going to need ongoing refreshers. This is especially important in these schools given that the student makeup is predominately white, so teachers are less exposed.

Students raised the lack of connection they experienced with staff and their peers with respect to race issues. They mentioned hearing racial jokes and ignorant statements, but regarded adults as being absent from the resolution. They preferred having the opportunity for an adult facilitated honest dialogue about race so that they could have the opportunity to dispel myths and allow them to answer any questions. This idea of cultural reciprocity was a sub-theme that emerged from both the focus group and the interviews. Related to this is the fact that Open Choice students voiced consternation about a lack of staff explanation about the Open Choice program to resident students. The sojourners felt that their presence in the school was not openly explained to their peers and they felt that it should consistently be brought up to allow for learning to occur on both sides. According to Singleton and Linton (2006) in order to exercise the passion, practice, and persistence necessary to address racial achievement gaps, all of the members of the school community need to be able to talk about race in a safe and honest way (p. 15). Again, a critical gap — and one that should be relatively easy to fill — is that of staff trained to facilitate proper integration of sojourners, but also their resident peers.

Along the same lines were the barriers to integration. As discussed earlier, transportation can be a huge impediment to students being able to fully engage in the school community. However, the issue of diversity is the other main barrier that was raised by both students and administrators and should be a point of focus. Transportation is an easier problem to analyze and potentially correct because it is concrete, whereas, diversity is a more difficult issue to tackle.

The data analyses in the quantitative segment of this study shed light on the critical importance that diversity has on student engagement. Equally important were students' voices as they spoke of feeling isolated and without role models of similar racial background and heritage. Students felt like they "stuck out" and some discussed the feeling of being watched or judged negatively as a natural occurrence they had grown to accept as ignorance. While some administrators acknowledge the lack of diversity, very few had specific activities that assisted in the integration of these students to their new environment, outside of those activities like sports and clubs that organically exist in all schools.

Some administrators also raised the issue of lack of diversity in teaching staff. One in particular had made a conscious decision to hire diverse staff for recent openings, as he felt strongly about having a staff that mirrors the culture and ethnicity of the students. This is an area that needs considerable attention as the statistical percentages of minority professional staff in the schools that participated in the study ($n = 11$) were very low, one school had no representation of professional staff of color, the highest was 6.9 %. Cultural differences between the student and teacher have been cited as barriers to effective teacher-student relationships and positive learning experiences (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004).

The final theme that emerged and appeared to have bearing on Open Choice students' engagement and integration was peer and school connections. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, the interface of the developing student (Sojourner) and the school community has direct impact on their success. As discussed earlier, there is ample evidence in the literature to support this notion. Given that Open Choice students are coming to unfamiliar communities and the program enrollment will continue to increase, this particular facet of the integration issue warrants further attention and action. Many student participants voiced a desire to have specific

programming at the high school level that would assist them in connecting with town residents.

Some school administrators shared some efforts in this regard; for instance students participated in community road races and were provided transportation to do so on the weekend.

Administrators and liaisons noted that supplementary activities to assist with integration were being done in the elementary and middle school. The fact that more students are now being admitted in high school requires a strategic shift to ensure that similar activities are offered at the high school level.

Summary

Access to high quality education is not available to all Connecticut students in the communities where they live. Some students are given the chance to attend schools outside of their urban communities as a way of providing them access to high-quality, “equal” education. Although much study has been devoted to the subject, this journey of integration is not fully understood. As capacity for enrollment to Open Choice continues to increase, so should research. This study aimed at more fully understanding this phenomenon to enhance the process. Implications, social work relevance, and future research recommendations will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the social work literature on educational equality. The drive to end segregated education in Connecticut has encouraged interventions such as the Open Choice program. This program is one of the two major ways (the other is magnet schools which are not part of this study) Connecticut has implemented integration and improved quality of education for urban public school children of color. This chapter begins with the study limitations and then with a presentation of the implications for both participating school districts and CREC, as the findings may have the potential to impact CREC's policies with respect to the Open Choice program. The chapter concludes with the relevance to social work and future research recommendations.

Study Limitations

There were a few major limitations in the study. The primary limitation was that the sampling method utilized (purposive sampling) limits the generalizability of the results beyond the study group. Transferability may be limited due to the small sample size and the sample being selected from one region of the state out of several possible regions. The participants were selected from the central region of the State of Connecticut; however, the Southern part of the state consisting of New Haven and Bridgeport also participate in voluntary busing programs. Despite this, Padgett (2008) contends that the capacity for a study to stimulate thought, improve practices and policies, and incite further research is a metric of success (p.183).

Also, while participant saturation levels were met, only a small fraction of high school students shared their perspective through the focus group discussions. Some of the focus group discussions were held with different staff in the room, which may have caused some students to

be more reticent about their experience. Also, the fact that many schools presented with little diversity in professional staff, and this researcher is Latina, may have created what Padgett (2008) refers to as the threat of respondent bias. Respondents may have withheld information or not been completely truthful due to embarrassment or discomfort.

Another limitation involved the survey instrument. The first concern had to do with the fact that the survey instrument was a composite of three different existing instruments. This researcher had to make adjustments and could not add too many questions, as it had to be short to allow the students to participate during the school day. Another oversight was that the student survey did not request the participant's gender, to be able to quantitatively analyze gender as a factor that impacted engagement. Lastly, the survey was not linked to the focus group participant responses, which made it impossible to gauge whether or not the levels of engagement from the students that chose to share their perspective on the integration process were supported by their responses in the small group discussions.

A further difficulty was the recruitment itself. Of the 22 districts recruited for the study, only 11 schools agreed to participate. A major recruitment barrier was the nature of the study itself. Although I assured anonymity, many schools did not wish to participate. The superintendents of the schools that ultimately did join had a genuine interest in study results. They were eager to get data to inform them how the Open Choice students are doing in their school, rather than rely entirely on anecdotes. This researcher agreed to go back and aggregate the data to give them individual school results.

School and District Implications

At the inception of the Open Choice Program (previously called Project Concern), fewer than 300 students participated in the busing program. Today, it has become one of Connecticut's

main strategies to reduce racial and economic isolation of children and youth residing in the major metropolitan areas of Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. There are now more than 28 school districts in the surrounding towns and over 2,000 students in the Open Choice program serving Hartford students. Many suburban schools have increased their number of seats to allow more Hartford students to attend their district schools.

Study findings indicate a need to increase the diversity of professional staff in the schools. Both behavioral engagement and overall engagement were found to be positively associated with a higher percentage of racial-ethnic teaching staff. Given the fact that educational research has identified engagement as a primary indicator of high achievement in school, this should be an area of focus. One school district administrator was able to hire qualified people of color to fill both administrative and teaching positions in his school as he felt the school staff should be representative of the students in the school. Many students noted that the lack racial-ethnic staff negatively affected them; they felt they lacked role models and teachers who understood their heritage and could help them along the way in this difficult journey of integration.

Many students also noted the high level of support they received in having a dedicated staff person to assist them in this journey. From my own observation, District Open Choice Liaisons served a vital supportive role for students, assisting them in myriad of ways with the integration process. Unfortunately, not all districts have an internal staff person to serve in this unique role; for those districts that did, the supportive relationship between student and this dedicated staff person seemed to make a noticeable difference in the students' engagement in their school community.

Also noteworthy was the lack of program development to specifically address the integration of new students in most school districts. In their interviews, administrators spoke about the need for Open Choice students to be a part of the “organic” activities, such as sports and clubs that are a natural part of any school, as way to achieve full engagement and integration into the school community. However, the students’ perspective was quite different. While some acknowledge that being part of sports and clubs made it easier to make friends and become a part of the school community, others said that it was a very difficult experience for them and they felt lonely in the process. Some students noted that, at the high school level, there were no supplementary activities to assist them in making these connections and that they were pretty much on their own. Bronfenbrenner (1979) contends that for a student to acquire a goodness of fit to the school, the entire student, including their development, must be considered. During adolescence, peer relationships are critical to healthy growth. For some of the Open Choice students, forming these relationships was even more difficult, as they were coming into the district during the high school years. Some had no relationships in the district other than the other students from Hartford. This emphatically underscores the need for specific set of program activities that assist the Open Choice students’ integration, to assist them in navigating this unfamiliar school culture.

Implications for CREC

There are several implications for CREC, which is the administrator of the Open Choice program for Hartford. An improved understanding of some of the Open Choice student experiences will increase its ability to assist the districts in programming activities that will promote full integration and engagement. CREC Open Choice is also well poised to influence positive academic outcomes by emphasizing the vital importance of multicultural training for

district staff and teachers. Although multicultural training has been shown to make a difference in student outcomes, it is overlooked or does not occur due to district budget constraints and allotted time for training. Such training should be identified as a priority. The existing investment in this program should compel such training, as it is a keystone to the program's overall success. Multicultural injects provided by CREC are one of the few opportunities that teachers have in order to acquire such skill set development. But these can only be supplementary to what school districts should provide.

This researcher will present the findings of this study to each participating district and CREC. Hopefully, this will raise awareness as well as support previous knowledge about the factors that promote full integration and engagement. Given that transportation was a major barrier, this study's findings can be used to support future funding or implementation of a new strategic plan to enhance the Open Choice students' integration experiences. Both students and administrators expressed their frustration about inflexible busing schedules that prevented students' participation in organized events and thus, their full integration with school culture. Students in this study genuinely wanted to be a full part of their school community and culture and did not want it to be just an academic placement. Students found this goal to be elusive, if not impossible, to realize.

Social Work Relevance

Quality integrated education is not a whim, or the desire of a few; it is the *right* of every citizen, established in our constitution and upheld by *Brown* and *Sheff* (among many others). As such, the fact that many poor, urban, and minority students do not have access to such an education is a social justice issue. Social workers are well suited to support the social emotional needs of the Open Choice student as they navigate across town lines to benefit from a quality

integrated educational experience. Social work involvement is critical in this social justice issue. The desegregation of the Hartford school system is important as it allows students of color, who otherwise would have to attend a segregated school with fewer resources, equal access to a quality educational experience. Social workers can advocate for policy changes that support the involvement of social workers in the integration process, that require mandatory cultural diversity training for all professional staff involved in the Open Choice Program, encourage the development of social work presence in the integration process, and support social work education to be more inclusive of the issue of desegregation and integration.

Policy responses. Only one of the schools that participated in the study had a school social worker as part of the integration team. Social workers are well positioned to assist in providing administrators and students with support in this adaptation process. Given their training, social workers are able to utilize their skills to assist with such a charged and equally delicate discussion within a school environment.

However, the reality is that the school social worker has a prescribed role within the school that limits their direct involvement in the integration process of these students into these host settings. This study found that CREC and the school had replaced the critical need of the involvement of the school social worker with CREC Support Specialists and District Open Choice Liaisons to offer support to Open Choice students and interface between school and home. These individuals all have social work experience and some have or are in the process of acquiring higher degrees in social work. For many of the students, these staff members serve as their only role models, since a strategic effort was made to ensure that these positions, Support Specialist and District Open Choice Liaisons positions were held by racially diverse, bilingual staff and/or staff that had experience in engaging diverse populations. Both Support Specialist

and District Open Choice Liaisons can offer the emotional support and provide the student with a safe haven when things in their transition may present as difficult.

During the course of the study, I observed Open Choice students frequently visiting the office of the support specialist and/or District Open Choice Liaison in-between classes and at lunch. The conversations ranged from personal check-ins to grade checks. But most remarkable was the engagement and comfort level of the student with these professionals. It should be noted that, more often than not, students of color who lived in the host community also sought out the support of the District Open Choice Liaison. At the heart and soul of the school community are these connections that solidify the engagement of the student. For Open Choice students, these “extra” supports are *not* extra; they are critical as they at times may lack the coping strategies to ride this integration bus alone.

A trained social worker is familiar with basic tenets of the profession that will assist in ensuring that the Open Choice students’ emotional well-being is supported as they try to achieve a goodness of fit to these host environments, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Policy changes need to include the inclusion of a social worker at every district participating in the Open Choice program. The CREC Support Specialists are the conduits for getting the student to these host communities and in interfacing with the family who reside in Hartford. A District Open Choice Liaison would be able to offer the day-to-day critical support to the student in their host community. These students need a trained social worker that understands the importance of personal guidance and support, as well as creating a community of acceptance – not just one of mere tolerance – so that true engagement and integration can occur.

The second policy implication involves the creation of host settings that allow for the full integration of the Open Choice student, understanding that many bring with them cultural/ethnic

differences. Administrators require support to create educational settings where race is discussed openly. For example, one of the findings alluded to Open Choice students wanting an opportunity to talk about race with resident students. Many described themselves as being the minority in these host settings and feeling like they stuck out because of the color of their skin. They further described an avoidance of the topic by teachers and staff. This conclusion is supported by the study findings of Holmes and Clarke (2005) where they found that, although administrators had demonstrated a deeper level of awareness about integrating staff, community, and Open Choice families, they avoided the topic of race. If voluntary busing is going to continue to be one of the major remedies for desegregating Hartford schools, policy makers can no longer allow such an avoidance of the topic of race. This is at the heart of how social injustice is maintained. The Open Choice students have braved the difficult journey of crossing these district lines, but are often met by school settings and communities that continue to operate in a colorblind fashion. Common sense and courageous conversations need to happen in these school communities.

While some of these host settings were very welcoming and many students reported feeling like they belonged, many did not. Given the fact that staffing in many of these suburban schools is relatively homogeneous and considering responses gleaned on student perspectives, multicultural training should be established, as a high priority need. Teachers are well positioned to have an impact on the engagement level of the Open Choice student; however, they need the support and a cultural tool kit to assist them in providing a teaching environment that reflects the student's culture and experiences.

There are high stakes not only for these students, but society as well. Connecticut has one of the highest achievement gaps in the nation and the schools in these urban districts

continue to be as segregated as they were when the voluntary busing program started in the late '60s. Open Choice students have access to an equal educational opportunity, but they have to be able to benefit fully as well.

Policy changes need to occur to ensure that these host communities understand the social implications of not allowing for full engagement/integration and cultural understanding to occur in these host settings. It is beyond just being able to graduate from high school; it is a much deeper experience that affects life-long outcomes for the student of color, which is a concept understood by those immersed in and knowledgeable about diversity and racial justice. Hence, ongoing training in this area should be a requirement for all professional staff participating in the Open Choice program.

This study found that administrators' hands were tied by too many requirements for too few days; they are compelled to make academically- based training on professional training days a priority, but have no time left for specific cultural diversity training. The state provides financial incentives for districts to join the program and should outline specific requirements, to include mandatory training and looking at all educational outcomes through a racial lens. Training should be specific for educators. CREC offers many opportunities, but they are not mandatory and are not specific to individual district needs. CREC can only augment what should already be made available to professional staff at the district level.

Social work education. The social work profession should be in the forefront of this social justice issue. As a profession, we cannot leave this in the hands of educators and policy makers alone. Social workers are trained to understand the need for engagement for individuals to maximize learning whether it is in a school or in therapy. Social workers also understand how

to partner with other disciplines to create an environment that is not only tolerant, but also inclusive of other worldviews.

Social work education needs to highlight these considerations when training social workers. The social work profession prides itself on its heritage of social justice and societal reform, but it has been rather silent in the fight for equal education for Hartford's poor and racially isolated children. The desegregation efforts entail more than just getting more seats in suburban towns. In order for students to achieve both academically and socially, a goodness of fit must be established in these host settings. Social workers are trained to understand such complexities.

Social work schools must expand curricula to include social work's role in the school desegregation effort. While social workers are present in school settings, their roles are often prescribed as work with the special education population, with little time left over to take on this critical role. The stakes are too high for children of color, as ample research has been conducted on their negative life outcomes, which include higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, and unemployment. Educators are not trained to understand the effects racism has on the social-emotional well being of individual students and on their ability to learn. Social workers are key in making these connections more explicit for educators in order for students of color to benefit from these higher quality-learning environments.

Recommendation for Future Research

Given that little has been written about the engagement and integration of the bused student (Open Choice participant) there are numerous possibilities for future research. This study was limited in its sampling frame of Open Choice students in the central region of Connecticut. Future research should expand to the other two cities, Bridgeport and New Haven,

which also participate in the voluntary desegregation busing programs. A comparative analysis could be done with high school students across the three cities in terms of their school engagement and integration.

In addition, more research is necessary to understand the perspective of the town resident students. This study did not consider their voice in the integration process of the bused student. For some of these students, Open Choice students present the only limited opportunity for interaction with people of color. Focus group participants acknowledged that they were unfamiliar to the town residents. Studies show that segregation can have a powerful negative impact on students regardless of their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bhargava, Frankenberg, & Le, 2008). This was one of the factors that impelled the Supreme Court to declare segregated schools unconstitutional in 1954.

Baron and Banaji (2006) found that prejudice reduction is especially important because racial prejudices and implicit biases are developed early in life and can become entrenched over time. Diverse school settings can be effective in reducing stereotypes and prejudices by promoting greater levels of contact among different groups and by fostering intergroup friendships (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Racial diversity and intergroup contact can play an important role in shaping biases in children's interactions with their peers, their formation of cross-cultural friendships, and in developing teamwork skills essential to successful functioning in a diverse society. Past research has shown that indirect programs have little impact on changing the actual behaviors of students, i.e., Black History Month celebrations to encourage cross-racial understanding, but little representation of students of color in the school (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007).

Continued research on voluntary busing is warranted especially for Connecticut, as it has chosen to utilize this method of desegregation. Given the court involvement and the state mandate to continue to provide all children with a choice of an equal, quality educational experience, this is an important area for research to build upon. Early research on desegregation from the 1970s and '80s suggests that desegregation has had positive effects on achievement outcomes (Crain & Mahard, 1983). More recent studies and literature point to the widening achievement gap that exists between students of color and white students (Ferguson & Mehta, 2002; Ogletree, 2007; US Department of Education, Connecticut Council for Education Reform, 2014).

Conclusion

The participants in this study struggled to attain equal access to a quality education. They made daily sacrifices by getting up hours earlier than their neighborhood friends to make the trip across city lines to attend suburban schools in neighboring towns. They courageously entered unfamiliar communities and learned how to navigate between two worlds. Most found hope and experienced a higher quality education from experienced teachers who genuinely cared. They had better resources; some even received a computer to keep. They were encouraged to go after their dreams, which included graduating and attending college.

However, along with hope, they also found an absence of people that resembled them. They described feeling uncomfortably conspicuous as a person of color in a sea of white students, who were probably just as uncomfortable. The Open Choice students realized that they needed help to attain goodness of fit and reached out to adults for help with this transition. They found comfort in the support of the District Open Choice Liaison and the CREC support specialist. Although students recognized teachers for caring about their academic success, they

voiced needing emotional support as well. They found that this drive across city lines was a difficult one, especially because they were not the driver and so had to rely on the adults to drive the process of integration.

Social workers have a lot to offer in this social justice movement. They are best equipped to manage the complexities and many levels of relationships that affect the student. Segregated schools have long-term negative effects. This voluntary busing experience is, for most, their ticket to equal access to college, rewarding employment, and other positive life outcomes. Therefore, social workers need to be present in actively working to support the attainment of positive educational outcomes acquired through the Open Choice student's successful integration into these host settings.

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Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

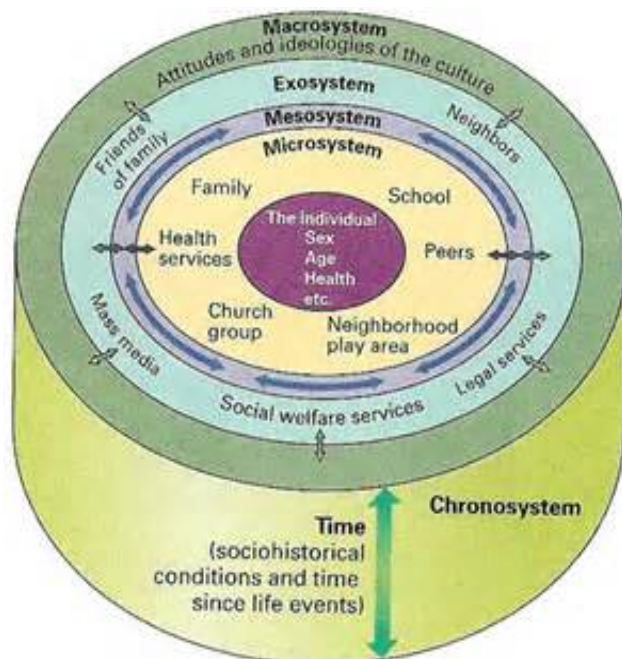
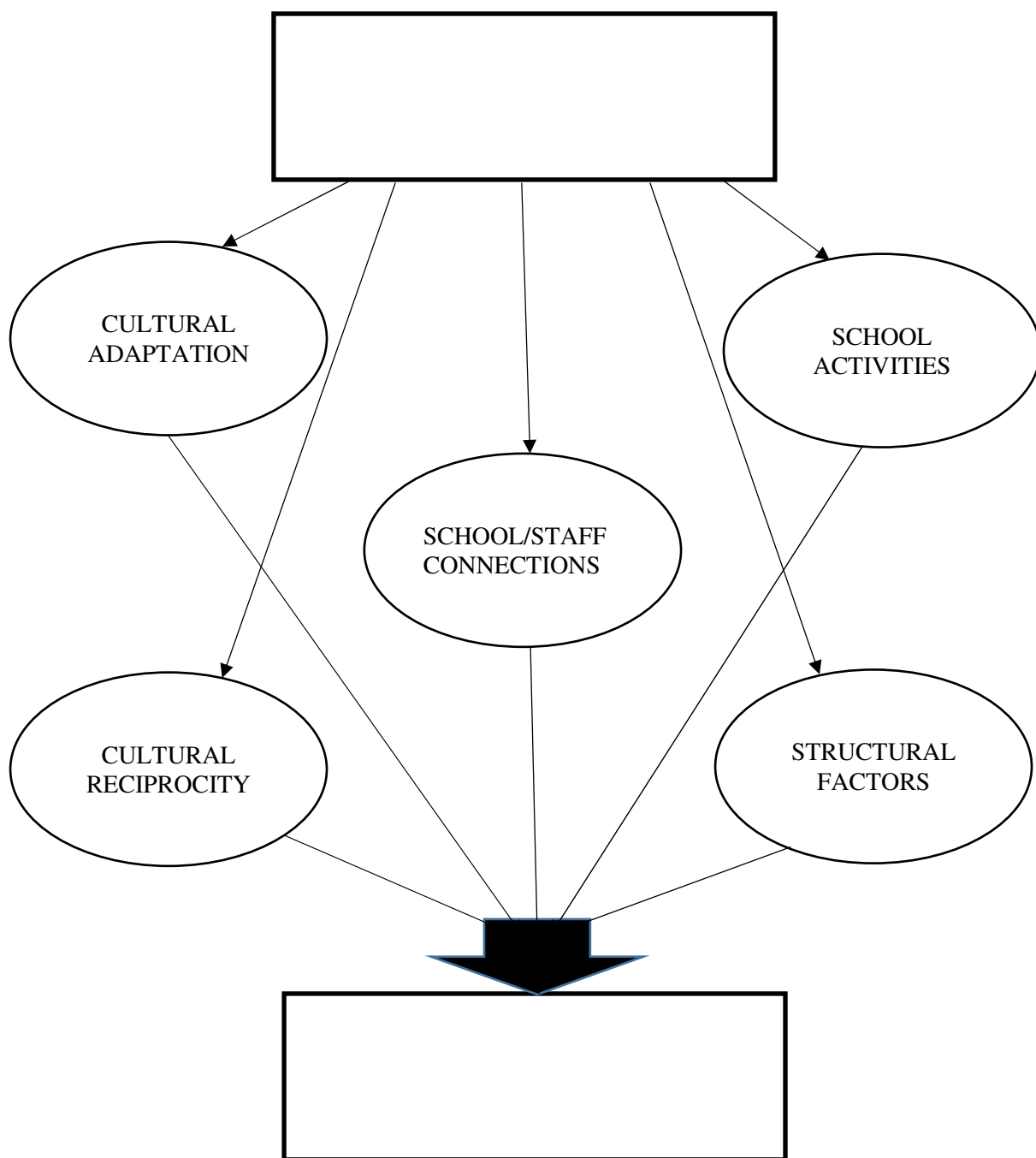


Figure 2: Concept Map of Findings



Appendix A: Parent Notification in English

Parental Notification Form Regarding Participation in a Research Study



Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, DSW

Student Researcher: Loida Reyes, MSW

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.

Sponsor: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Introduction/Why is this study being done?

Your child is invited to participate in a research study to look at how they act, learn, and feel while attending their school out of Hartford. Your child was picked because he or she attends a high school through the CREC Open Choice Program. This form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and what you need to do if you DO NOT want your child to participate. I encourage you to take some time to read this form and ask any questions you may have now or at any time. If you decide to allow your child to participate, no further action is required. Your child will automatically be enrolled in the study. However, if you decide that you DO NOT want your child to participate or if you decide later that you would rather not have your child's data be used in the study, please sign the attached form and return it to your child's support specialist by _____. This study will be conducted by Loida Reyes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut (UCONN).

The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of CREC Open Choice high school students' level of interest in school. And to find out whether this is different for students of different race and ethnicity and by the school they attend. Also the study will be looking at how well your child is accepted into their school outside of Hartford. The study will look at what your child's school is doing to make your child feel like they belong. This study is important because some research states that how your child feels about school affects how well they do in school.

What are the study procedures? What will my child be asked to do?

There are two parts to the research study. In the first part your child will be asked to fill out a survey asking them about how they like school and what they feel about their school. The survey will take 20 minutes of your child's time. This will happen during lunch, a free period, or after school. They will not be taken out of class in order to participate. In the second part of the research study your child may be asked to participate in a focus group. Only students from

selected schools, where the principal agrees to participate in a separate interview, will be asked to participate in this part of the study. They will be asked after they participate in the survey and given the date for the focus group. If they agree to participate in this part the group will take about 45 minutes and will happen at their school, after school hours. They will be provided transportation on the late bus.

The survey is made up of three parts. The first part will ask them general information about what grade they are in, their school grades last year and the name of their school. Then there will be 43 questions about how they feel, act and learn while at school. These questions will be answered by either agreeing or not agreeing with the question. The last section will be a list of 13 possible clubs or school activities (sports) and they will be asked to check off the ones that they attend. They will not write their name on the form and it will only be coded by number so student researcher, their school, or CREC will not know who answered the questions. A list of the codes with your child's name will be kept only until a raffle (see below) is completed and then it will be destroyed. Your child can skip any question and stop their participation at any time during the study.

The focus group will be made up of 6-8 students at the same school. There are eight questions that will be asked by student researcher and have to do with how your child feels about their school and whether or not they feel like they belong. Your child will not share their real name. The focus group conversation will be audio recorded so that student researcher can go back and write down the students answers to the questions for the research study. This audio cassette will be destroyed once the student researcher writes the information on paper.

If you DO NOT want your child to participate, what will he/she do instead?

Should you decide not to have your child participate they will not be part of the study and therefore will not need to meet with this researcher during their free period, lunch or after schools.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?

We believe there are no known risks to your child because of his/her participation in the research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study, survey and or focus group. Some feelings of uneasiness may occur, if they participate in the focus group and share stories of not belonging or being discriminated. Student researcher will talk about this issue at the beginning of the group and state that they can stop answering questions at any time and student researcher will ask if anyone feels uneasy at the end of the group discussion. Your child will be given contact information to their support specialist and or the school social worker if they need to talk more about this after their participation in the research study.

What are the benefits of the study?

Your child may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your child's participation in the study may help schools and CREC learn more about student's experience while participating in the Open Choice Program. This is important information to have as the Open Choice Program continues to grow. It may also help in understanding what the schools need in order to make your child's participation in Open Choice successful.

Will my child receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

There are no costs to you and your child for participating in this study. For participating in the survey your child will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win an \$85 gift certificate from Champs Sports Store at West Farms Mall. There will be five gift certificates raffled and your child will be contacted by their CREC support specialist if they win the raffle. If your child participates in the focus group they will receive a \$5 movie pass on the day of participation. Also, refreshments and a light snack will be provided during the time they are participating in either part of the research study.

How will my child's information be protected?

The study results will be shared with the school superintendent and principal, CREC director, and the UCONN School of Social Work. Your child's name will not be recorded in any of the data that is being shared. The results will be made on behalf of all the students that participate in the study not any specific student.

The researchers will keep all study records (including any codes to your child's data) locked in a secure location at the PhD office file cabinet and labeled with student researcher name. Research records will be labeled with a code. The code will be derived from your child's last initial followed by a number that reflects how many people have enrolled in the study. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be destroyed after the dissertation is completed. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. Data that will be shared with others will be coded as described above to help protect your child's identity. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and your child will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from your child but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. If your child chooses to participate in the focus group there are no guarantees that other students participating in the group will not share what is discussed. The researcher will talk to the students about not sharing any of the information before starting the group. This researcher is also a mandated reporter and will not be able to keep information about child abuse and neglect confidential.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your child's responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Can my child stop being in the study and what are my and my child's rights?

Your child does not have to be in this study if you do not want him/her to participate. If you give permission for your child to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw your child at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want your child to participate. This will not affect their grades.

For surveys and the focus group your child does not have to answer any question that he/she does not want to answer. This will be discussed and reviewed with your child during the research study. If your child displays disruptive behaviors or becomes upset when taking the survey or participating in the focus group they may be withdrawn.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Kay Davidson, at 860-570-9018 or the student researcher, Loida Reyes, at 860-944-6738. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

Parental Notification Form Regarding Participation in a Research Study



Return Slip

Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, DSW

Student Researcher: Loida Reyes, MSW

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.

Sponsor: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Notification of Refusal:

I have read this form and decided that I DO NOT give permission for my child to participate in the study described above. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this parental notification form. Please return this form to the child's support specialist.

Print Child's Name:

Parent/Guardian's Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Relationship (e.g. mother, father, guardian): _____

Forma de Notificación para Participación en un Estudio de Investigación



Investigador Principal: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Estudiante Investigador: Loida Reyes, MSW

Título del Estudio: El Compromiso Escolar de los Estudiantes de Hartford Open Choice: El Papel de Características Individuales y Atributos Escolares.

Patrocinador: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Introducción

Su niño es invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación para estudiar la manera en que actúan, aprender, y como se sentían al mismo tiempo que asistía a la escuela fuera de Hartford. Su hijo fue elegido porque él o ella asiste a una escuela secundaria en el programa Open Choice CREC. Esta forma le dará la información que necesitas para entender por qué este estudio se está haciendo y lo que debes hacer SI NO desea que su niño participe. Le pido que lea esta forma y preguntar cualquier duda que tenga antes de aceptar que su niño participa en el estudio. Si decide permitir que su niño participe, ninguna acción adicional se requiere. Su niño automáticamente se matriculará en el estudio. Sin embargo, si decide que no quiere que su niño participe o si decide más tarde que no prefiere tener los datos de su hijo usarse en el estudio, por favor firme la forma adjunta y devuélvala al especialista de apoyo de su niño por _____. Este estudio se realizará por Loida Reyes, un candidato al doctorado en la escuela de trabajo Social de la Universidad de Connecticut (UCONN).

¿Por Qué se Está Haciendo este Estudio?

El objetivo de este estudio de investigación es ganar un mejor entendimiento de el nivel de interés en la escuela de los estudiantes de la escuela secundaria participando en el programa de CREC Open Choice. Y averiguar si esto es diferente para estudiantes de raza(carrera) diferente y etnicidad y por la escuela a la cual asisten. También el estudio mirará cómo bien su hijo sea aceptado en su escuela fuera de Hartford. El estudio mirará lo que la escuela de su hijo hace para hacer a su hijo sentir que pertenecen. Este estudio es importante porque un poco de investigación declara que cómo su hijo se siente sobre la escuela afecta cómo bien hacen en la escuela.

¿Cuáles son los Procedimientos de Estudio? ¿Qué le Pedirán a Mi Hijo Hacer?

Hay dos partes al estudio de investigación. En la primera parte a su hijo le pedirán llenar una revisión preguntándoles sobre cómo les gusta la escuela y lo que sienten sobre su escuela. La revisión tomará 20 minutos del tiempo de su hijo. Esto pasará durante el almuerzo, un período libre(gratis), o después de la escuela. No se tomarán de la clase a fin de participar. En la segunda parte del estudio de investigación puede ser que su hijo se le pedirá que participe en un grupo de discusión. Sólo los estudiantes de las escuelas seleccionadas, donde el principal acepta participar en una entrevista por separado, se le pedirá que participe en esta parte del estudio. Se les pedirá una vez que participen en la encuesta y en vista de la fecha para el grupo de enfoque. Si están de acuerdo con su participación en esta parte, el grupo se tomará unos 45 minutos y va a ocurrir en la escuela, después del horario escolar. Se proporcionó transporte en el retraso del autobús.

La encuesta se compone de tres partes. La primera parte les pedirán información general sobre cuál es el grado en el que se encuentran, sus calificaciones escolares el pasado año y el nombre de su escuela. A continuación, hay 43 preguntas acerca de cómo se sienten, actuar y aprender en la escuela. Estas preguntas serán respondidas por acuerdo o no estar de acuerdo con la pregunta. La última parte será una lista de 13 posibles los clubes o las actividades de la escuela (deportes) y se les pedirá que marque los que asisten. No escribir su nombre en el formulario y sólo será codificada por el número de estudiante investigador, su escuela, o CREC, no sé que responde a las preguntas. La lista de códigos con el nombre de su niño se mantendrá sólo hasta el sorteo(ver más abajo) se completa y, a continuación, será destruida. Su hijo puede omitir cualquier pregunta y detener su participación en cualquier momento durante el estudio.

El grupo de estudio se compone de 6 a 8 estudiantes de la misma escuela. Hay ocho preguntas que se le pide al estudiante investigador y tienen que ver con la forma en que su hijo se siente sobre su escuela y si no sienten que pertenecen. Su hijo no tendrá que compartir su nombre real. El grupo de enfoque conversación será audio grabado, de modo que el estudiante investigador puede ir hacia atrás y anote las respuestas que dieron los alumnos a las preguntas para el estudio de investigación. Este casete de audio serán destruidos una vez el estudiante investigador escribe la información en papel.

¿Si no quiere que su hijo participe, qué hará en cambio?

Si decide no tener su hijo participar no se parte del estudio y, por lo tanto, no es necesario para reunirse con el investigador durante su período libre, almuerzo o después de las escuelas.

¿Cuáles son los Riesgos o Inconvenientes del Estudio?

Creemos que no existen riesgos conocidos para su niño, debido a su participación en el estudio de investigación; sin embargo, un posible inconveniente puede ser el tiempo que se tarda en completar el estudio, estudio y o en grupos de enfoque. Algunos sentimientos de malestar puede ocurrir, si participan en el grupo de discusión y compartir historias de no pertenecer o ser discriminado. Estudiante investigador será hablar de esta cuestión en el comienzo del grupo y el estado que pueden dejar de contestar a las preguntas en cualquier momento y el estudiante investigador se pregunta si alguien se siente incómodo al final de la discusión en grupo. Su hijo se le darán información de contacto a su especialista de apoyo y/o la trabajadora social escolar si necesitan hablar más sobre esto después de su participación en el estudio de investigación.

¿Cuáles son las ventajas del estudio?

Esperamos que la participación del niño en el estudio puede ayudar a las escuelas y CREC aprender más sobre la experiencia estudiantil mientras participa en el Programa de Selección. Esta información es importante que la opción Abrir programa continúa creciendo. También puede ayudar en la comprensión de lo que las escuelas necesitan con el fin de que su participación del niño en opción con éxito. Además, un beneficio individual para el niño es el tener una voz y se les dé tiempo para pensar sobre la única circunstancia que se encuentran en por participar en el programa.

¿Mi hijo recibirán pagos de participación? ¿Hay costos para participar?

No hay ningunos gastos para usted y su hijo para participar en este estudio. Para participar en la revisión su hijo se entrará en una rifa para una posibilidad(azar) de ganar un certificado de regalo de \$85 de la Tienda(Depósito) de Deportes de Campeones en la Alameda de Granjas de Oeste. Habrá cinco certificados de regalo rifados y su hijo será puesto en contacto por su especialista de apoyo de CREC si ganan la rifa. Si su hijo participa en el grupo de muestra recibirán una tarjeta del cine de \$5 durante el día de participación. También, el refrigerio y un bocado ligero(claro) se proporcionarán durante el tiempo participan en la una o la otra parte del estudio de investigación.

¿Cómo será mi hijo de protección de la información?

Los resultados del estudio serán compartidos con el superintendente de la escuela y director principal, CREC, y la Facultad de Trabajo Social. Nombre de su hijo no se registrarán en alguno de los datos que están siendo compartidos. Los resultados de estas evaluaciones se harán en nombre de todos los estudiantes que participan en el estudio que no cualquier estudiante.

Los investigadores guardarán todos los archivos de estudio (incluso cualquier código a los datos de su hijo) cerrado con llave en una posición segura en el archivador de la oficina de PhD y marcado por el nombre del investigador estudiantil. Los archivos de investigación se marcarán por un código. El código se sacará de la última inicial de su hijo seguida de un número que reflexiona cuanta gente se ha matriculado en el estudio. Una llave maestra que une(relaciona) nombres y códigos se mantendrá en una posición separada y segura. La llave maestra y audiotapes se destruirán después de que la disertación se complete. Todos los archivos electrónicos (p.ej., base de datos, hoja de cálculo, etc.) contener la información identificable será la contraseña protegida. Cualquier ordenador que recibe tales archivos también tendrá la protección de la contraseña para prevenir el acceso por usuarios no autorizados. Sólo los miembros del personal de investigación tendrán el acceso a las contraseñas. Los datos que se compartirán con otros se cifrarán como descrito encima para ayudar a proteger la personalidad de su hijo. En la conclusión de este estudio, los investigadores pueden publicar sus conclusiones. La información se presentará en el formato sumario y su hijo no se identificará en ninguna publicación o presentaciones.

Haremos todo lo posible para proteger la confidencialidad de la información recopilada de su hijo, pero no podemos garantizar 100% confidencialidad. Si su hijo decide participar en el grupo de enfoque no hay ninguna garantía de que otros estudiantes que participan en el grupo no compartan lo que se discute. El investigador se va a hablar con los estudiantes acerca de no compartir la información antes de iniciar el grupo. Este investigador también es una persona asignada y no será capaz de mantener la información sobre el maltrato infantil y el abandono confidencial.

Usted también debe saber que la Universidad de Connecticut Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB) y la Oficina de Investigación estudio Cumplimiento podrá inspeccionar los registros como parte de su programa de auditoría, pero estos comentarios sólo nos centraremos en los investigadores y no en las reacciones de su hijo o de la participación. El IRB es un grupo de personas que revisan los estudios de investigación para proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes en la investigación.

¿Puede mi hijo dejar de estar en el estudio y qué es mi y los derechos de mi hijo?

Su hijo no tiene que estar en este estudio si no quiere que él participe. Si da el permiso para su hijo de estar en el estudio, pero más tarde cambiar de opinión, puede retirar a su hijo en cualquier momento. No hay ningunas penas o consecuencias de ninguna clase si decide que no quiere que su hijo participe. Esto no afectará sus grados.

Para las encuestas y el grupo de enfoque su hijo no tiene que responder a cualquier pregunta que no quiere responder. Esto será discutido y repasa con su hijo durante el estudio de investigación. Si los comportamientos disruptivos de niño o llega a ser molesto cuando la encuesta o participar en el grupo de enfoque pueden ser retirados. Si su hijo tiene 18 años de edad estarán obligados a firmar su propio consentimiento independiente de como se consideran ser adulto.

¿Con quién puedo contactar si tengo preguntas acerca del estudio?

Tome el tiempo que quieras antes de tomar una decisión. Estaremos encantados de responder a cualquier pregunta que tengas sobre este estudio. Si tiene más preguntas acerca de este estudio o si tiene un problema relacionado con investigación, puede ponerse en contacto con el investigador principal, Kay Davidson, en 860-570-9018 o el estudiante investigador, Loida Reyes, al 860-944-6738. Si tiene alguna pregunta relativa a su hijo sus derechos como participante en la investigación, puede ponerse en contacto con la Universidad de Connecticut Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB) al 860-486-8802

Forma de Notificación para Participación en un Estudio de Investigación



Investigador Principal: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Estudiante Investigador: Loida Reyes, MSW

Título del Estudio: Eel Compromiso Escolar de los Estudiantes de Hartford Open Choice: El Papel de Características Individuales y Atributos Escolares.

Patrocinador: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Notificación de Denegación:

He leído esta forma y he decidido que no doy el permiso para mi niño de participar en el estudio descrito encima. Mi firma también indica que he recibido una copia de esta forma de la notificación paternal. Por favor devuelva esta forma al especialista de apoyo del niño.

Nombre del niño

Fecha:

Firma del padre:

Nombre letrado:

Fecha:

Relacion del nino (e.g. madre, padre, guardian): _____

Firma de la persona
Obteniendo el consentimiento

Nombre letrado:

Fecha:

 University of Connecticut
Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Student Researcher: Loida Reyes, MSW

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.

Sponsor: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study to look at how you act, learn, and feel while attending your school out of Hartford. You were selected because you attend a high school through the CREC Open Choice Program. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. This study will be conducted by Loida Reyes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut (UCONN).

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of CREC Open Choice high school students' level of interest in school. And to find out whether this is different for students of different race and ethnicity and by the school they attend. Also the study will be looking at how well you are accepted into your school outside of Hartford. The study will look at what your school is doing to make you feel like you belong. This study is important because some research states that how a student feels about school affects how well they do in school.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

There are two parts to the research study. In the first part you will be asked to fill out a survey asking you about how you like school and what you feel about your school. The survey will take 20 minutes of your time. This will happen during lunch, a free period, or after school. You will not be taken out of class in order to participate. In the second part of the research study you may be asked to participate in a focus group. Only students from selected schools, where the principal agrees to participate in a separate interview, will be asked to participate in this part of the study. They will be asked after they participate in the survey and given the date for the focus group. If you agree to participate in this part the group will take about 45 minutes and will happen at your school, after school hours. You will be provided transportation on the late bus.

The survey is made up of three parts. The first part will ask you general information about what grade you are in, your school grades last year and the name of your school. Then there will be 43 questions about how you feel, act and learn while at school. These questions will be answered by either agreeing or not agreeing with the question. The last section will be a list of 13 possible clubs or school activities (sports) and you will be asked to check off the ones that you attend. You will not write your name on the form and it will only be coded by number so student researcher, their school, or CREC will not know who answered the questions. A list of the codes with your name will be kept only until a raffle (see below) is completed and then it will be destroyed. You can skip any question and stop your participation at any time during the study.

The focus group will be made up of 6-8 students at the same school. There are eight questions that will be asked by student researcher and have to do with how you may feel about your school and whether or not you feel like you belong. You will not share your real name. The focus group conversation will be audio recorded so that student researcher can go back and write down the students answers to the questions for the research study. This audio cassette will be destroyed once the study is completed.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?

We believe there are no known risks to you because of your participation in the research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study, survey and or focus group. Some feelings of uneasiness may occur, if you participate in the focus group and share stories of not belonging or being discriminated. Student researcher will talk about this issue at the beginning of the group and state that you can stop answering questions at any time and student researcher will ask if anyone feels uneasy at the end of the group discussion. You will be given contact information to your support specialist and or the school social worker if you need to talk more about this after your participation in the research study.

What are the benefits of the study?

You may benefit from this research by being given a voice about your experience in the Open Choice Program. And we hope that your participation in the study may help schools and CREC learn more about student's experience while participating in the Open Choice Program. This is important information to have as the Open Choice Program continues to grow. It may also help in understanding what the schools need in order to make your participation in Open Choice successful.

Will you receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. For participating in the survey you will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win an \$85 gift certificate from Champs Sports Store at West Farms Mall. There will be five gift certificates raffled and you will be contacted by your CREC support specialist if they win the raffle. If you participate in the focus group you will receive a \$5 i-tunes card on the day of participation. Also, refreshments and a light snack will be provided during the time you are participating in either part of the research study.

How will your information be protected?

The study results will be shared with the school superintendent and principal, CREC director, and the UCONN School of Social Work. Your name will not be recorded in any of the data that is being shared. The results will be made on behalf of all the students that participate in the study not any specific student.

The researchers will keep all study records (including any codes to your child's data) locked in a secure location at the PhD office file cabinet and labeled with student researcher name. Research records will be labeled with a code. The code will be derived from your last initial followed by a number that reflects how many people have enrolled in the study. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be destroyed after the dissertation is completed. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. Data that will be shared with others will be coded as described above to help protect your identity. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. If you choose to participate in the focus group there are no guarantees that other students participating in the group will not share what is discussed. The researcher will talk to the students about not sharing any of the information before starting the group. This researcher is also a mandated reporter and will not be able to keep information about child abuse and neglect confidential.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Can you stop being in the study and what are your rights?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to participate. If you give permission for to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. This will not affect your grades.

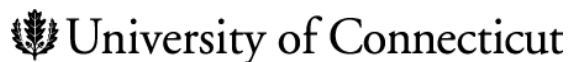
For surveys and the focus group you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. This will be discussed and reviewed with you during the research study.

If you display disruptive behaviors or become upset when taking the survey or participating in the focus group you may be withdrawn.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Kay Davidson, at 860-570-9018 or the student researcher, Loida Reyes, at 860-944-6738. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study



Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Student Researcher: Loida Reyes, MSW

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.

Sponsor: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Documentation of Permission:

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the study described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of my involvement and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

(18 yrs. +)Student Signature:

Print Name:

Date

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent

Print Name:

Date:

Appendix D: Invitation to the Superintendent

INVITATION LETTER

Dear (name of town) Superintendent,

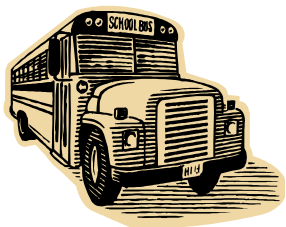
My name is Loida Reyes. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my doctoral degree. I would like to invite your district to participate. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of school engagement and explore what the suburban schools are doing to promote the engagement and integration of these students. In addition, how school social workers might promote this engagement is also explored. The study has been approved by CREC and the UConn Institutional Review Board.


If you decide to allow your district to participate, participation will be two-fold. First, your high school principal(s) and/or designee will be asked to meet with me for an interview about what the school(s) is/are doing to promote Open Choice student engagement and their integration. Their participation involves completing an interview that should take approximately 45 minutes of their time and is confidential. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me as I will need to transcribe and analyze them. The tapes will then be destroyed.

Secondly, Open Choice students attending high school(s) in your district will be asked to complete a survey about school engagement. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes of their time, and can be administered during their free period or after school. Participation is confidential and voluntary. In addition, a minimum of 6-8 students will be selected to participate in a focus group discussion about their integration experience.

Thank you for your consideration. Attached you will find the interview guide for your preview. If you have a research related question or a question about this study, you may contact me, Loida Reyes at 860-944-6738. You may also contact my advisor, Dr.Kay Davidson at 860-570-9018.

Thank you.



 University of Connecticut



Open Choice Student Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of engagement (interest) in school, and to find out whether this is different for students of different race and ethnicity and by school. All students will be asked to participate in a student survey that will take 20 minutes. Some students will also be asked to participate in a focus group to discuss how they are accepted in their suburban school.

Participants' that complete a survey will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win an \$85 gift certificate from West Farms Mall. There will be five gift certificates raffled. Also, those students that participate in the focus group will receive a \$5 movie pass.

This research will be conducted at your school. To learn more about this research please contact your support specialist or me, Loida Reyes, student researcher at 860-944-6738. This research is directed by Dr. Kay Davidson, principal investigator at the UCONN School of Social Work.

Appendix F: Invitation to the Principal

INVITATION LETTER

Dear (name of town) Principal or designee,

My name is Loida Reyes. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my doctoral degree. I would like to invite you to participate. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of school engagement and explore what the suburban schools are doing to promote the engagement and integration of these students. In addition, how school social workers might promote this engagement is also explored. The study has been approved by CREC and the UConn Institutional Review Board.

I have reached out to your superintendent who has agreed to allow your participation, which will be two-fold. First, you and/or a designee will be asked to meet with me for an interview about what your school is doing to promote Open Choice student engagement and their integration. This interview should take approximately 45 minutes and is confidential. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me, as I will need to transcribe and analyze them. The tapes will then be destroyed.

Secondly, Open Choice students attending your school will be asked to complete a survey that asks about school engagement. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes of their time, and can be administered during their free period or after school. Participation is confidential and voluntary. In addition, a minimum of 6-8 students may be selected to participate in a focus group discussion about their integration experience. Focus group will only occur if you are one of the schools randomly selected to participate in the administrator interview.

Thank you for your consideration. Attached you will find the interview guide for your preview. If you have a research related question or a question about this study, you may contact me, Loida Reyes at 860-944-6738. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Kay Davidson at 860-570-9018.

Thank you.

Appendix G: Student Survey

Student ID Code: _____

SCHOOL ATTACHMENT AND ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**Current Grade (circle one):** 9 10 11 12 **Age:** _____**Race (check the one that applies):**
 Asian AA/Black Native American Multi Racial White Not

Known

 Other: please specify _____
Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino (please check one):
 Yes No
Name of *current* school: _____**Name of *previous* school:** _____**How are you doing in school (list letter grade for each class)?** _____

Please answer the following questions as they relate to your CURRENT school. This survey will ask you questions about your experience as an Open Choice student. Please take your time placing an X in the box that best describes your answer to each question.

For this section: answer the questions based on how you feel and how you act during a normal day of school.

	QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1	I do my homework.				
2	I participate in class discussions.				
3	I participate in class activities.				
4	I follow classroom rules.				
5	If I do not understand something in class I keep working until I find the answer.				
6	I am able to concentrate during class.				

7	I do my schoolwork because I want to get good grades.				
	QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
8	I do my schoolwork because I know it will help me in the future.				
9	I skip classes during school.				
10	I try to stay home from school.				
11	I feel as if I don't have a lot of control over my grades.				
12	In school, good luck is more important than hard work for success.				
13	I like when I have to think really hard about an academic problem.				
14	I take pride in my assignments.				
15	Most of my school work is interesting.				
16	I do my schoolwork because I want to learn as much as I can.				
17	I talk with people outside my school about what I am learning in class.				
18	I learn more outside of school than inside.				
19	The topics we are studying in school are usually interesting.				
20	If I don't understand what I read, I go back and read it again.				
21	I try my best at school.				
22	I will graduate from high school.				
23	I want to go to college.				
24	The topics we study in school are challenging.				
25	I feel good about myself.				
26	When I first walked into my school I thought it was Good.				
27	When I first walked into my school I thought it was Bad.				
28	When I first walked into my school I thought it was Friendly.				
29	When I first walked into my school I thought it was Unfriendly.				
30	I feel I do not have much to be proud of in school.				
31	I like coming to my school.				
32	I feel safe in my school.				
33	I often feel bored at school.				
34	Most of my teachers care about how I am doing.				
35	Most of my teachers understand me.				

	QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
36	I feel I can go to my teachers with the things that I need to talk about.				
37	I often count the minutes before school ends.				
38	I enjoy the work I do in class.				
39	I have been sent to the office or detention because I was misbehaving.				
40	I have been sent to the office or received detention because of problems with my schoolwork.				
41	My parents have received a warning about my grades.				
42	My parents have received a warning about my behavior.				
43	I have gotten into a physical fight with another student.				

Source: National Center for School Engagement, 2006; Sbrocco (2009); Scheidler, 2012)

For this section: Please put an X in the box that best describes your answer for each activity listed, only include activities for THIS SCHOOL YEAR.

Clubs/School Activities	School does not have	Did not participate	Participated
Band, orchestra, chorus, choir, or other music group.			
Drama club, school play or musical			
Student government			
National Honor Society, other academic honor society			
School yearbook, newspaper, or literary magazine			
Service clubs (Key club, American Field Service)			
Academic clubs (Art, Computer, Math, Science, Psychology, Philosophy, etc.)			
Hobby clubs (photography, chess, etc.)			
Future Teachers of America, Future Homemaker of America, Future Farmers of America or vocational education or professional club			
Interscholastic sports– competition with teams from other schools			
Intramural sports – competition between teams in your school			

Source: Jordan & Nettles, 1999(items 1-9); Scheidler, 2012 (items 10-11).

Appendix H: Student Survey Assent

Student Assent***Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.***

Dear Student:

My name is Loida Reyes. I am a doctoral student at the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut. I am asking you to participate in a study so that I can gain a better understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of engagement (interest) in school. Also the study will be looking at how well you are integrated (accepted) into this school, which is outside of Hartford.

I am asking you to complete a survey that will take about 20 minutes. Your parents or legal guardians have already given permission for you to participate in this study, but you do not have to participate if you choose. You may quit this study at any time by simply writing on the questionnaire "Stop" or "I do not wish to participate." Your participation in this study will not affect your grades in any way. There are no known risks involved in this study and you be entered into a raffle as compensation. To protect your confidentiality, the questionnaire will not be shared with anyone nor will it require you to put your name. These questionnaires will be kept by me and once the data is entered they will be destroyed. Neither your school nor your parents will know if you chose to participate in this study or the answers you provide on the survey. If you have any question about this study, please talk with your Open Choice Support Specialist or me.

Agreement

I agree to participate in this research study and I have received a copy of this form.

Student's Name (Please Print)

Date

Student's Signature _____

I have explained to the above named individual the nature and purpose, benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research. I have answered all questions that have been raised and I have provided the participant with a copy of this form.

*Student Researcher**Date*

Appendix I: Interview Guide for Administrators

Administrator ID Code: _____

Date: _____

Position: _____

Interview Guide for Administrators

In this interview I am interested in learning about the Open Choice students' integration experience. This interview is confidential and voluntary. If at any time you want to skip a question or cease your participation in the study, you may do so. This interview will take about 30 minutes. At any time during the interview you may ask questions or request clarification of any question being asked of you.

Question #1: How do the town resident students in your school respond to having Open Choice students at their school?

Question #2: Do Open Choice students have any barriers to integrating into the school community? If so, can you explain?

Question #3: Have there been conflicts between Open Choice students and town resident students? If so, what seemed to cause the conflict? How did the conflict end?

Question #4: Have there been activities that have resulted in better interaction and communication between town resident students and Open Choice students? If so, describe them?

Question #5: Are there certain procedures or practices that have been developed at your school for welcoming and /or involving Open Choice students and or their family? If so, tell me about them?

Question #6: Tell me some stories of Open Choice students interacting with town resident students?

Question #7: How do the Open Choice students interact with other students in their classes? At lunch? After school?

Question #8: Do you have a late bus to allow Open Choice students to participate in after school activities?

Question #9: Do you have a bus to allow Open Choice students to participate in community activities?

Question #10: How do you think the school could improve in helping Open Choice students feel like they belong in your school?

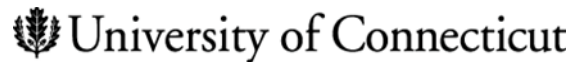
Question 11: What multicultural trainings do you provide for staff? How often? Are they required?

Question #12: What role does the school social worker play in the integration process of Open Choice students?

Question #13: Would you like to add anything else about the experience of Open Choice students?

Source: Adapted Questions from Lasso and Soto, 2009; Lock, 2010.

Appendix J: Focus Group Questions



This focus group is being conducted to discuss your feelings about attending a school outside of the community that you live. Some questions will ask that you share about times when you have felt like you did not belong and this student researcher knows this can be difficult. This student researcher would ask that all participants not share what is discussed in this group outside of this room, but I can't guarantee confidentiality. This student researcher will also need to audio record the group discussion in order to be able to go back and write down your responses to the questions for the study results. Your name will not be used and I would ask that you use your code when responding to the questions so that I can record that it is a different or the same person responding. You may stop participating at any time. I would just ask that you stay in the room; although, you may go outside of the circle.

Focus Group Questions

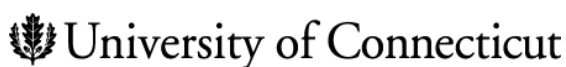
Please answer the following questions as honestly and *completely* as you can.

1. How do the town resident students in your school respond to having Open Choice students at their school?
2. What do teachers do that indicates to you that they care about you? What about other staff?
3. Discuss what gets in the way of you feeling like you are a part of your school.
4. Have there been activities that have resulted in better interaction and communication between town resident students and Open Choice students? If so, describe them?
5. What has been helpful in making you feel like you are a part of your school?
6. How much do you interact with the town resident students in your class? At lunch? After school?
7. How do you think the school could help Open Choice students feel more like they belong in your school?
8. Would you like to add anything else about your experience as an Open Choice student?

Source: Lasso and Soto, 2009; Lock, 2010.

Appendix K: Administrator Interview Consent

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study



Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Student Researcher: Loida Reyes, MSW

Study Title: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes.

Sponsor: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study to assist us in gaining an understanding of Open Choice high school students' level of school engagement and to address whether engagement differs by race and ethnicity and school attributes. The study will also explore what the suburban schools are doing to promote the engagement and integration of these students. In addition, the school social workers possible role in supporting the process of person: environment fit in the desegregation process will be examined. The study has been approved by CREC, your superintendent and the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board. Your school has been randomly selected to participate in this interview segment due to your District Reference Group (DRG) and the amount of Open Choice students attending your school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

There are three parts to this research study. First, Open Choice students attending your school will be asked to complete a survey that asks about school engagement. Second, you and/or a designee will be asked to meet with me for an interview about what your school is doing to promote Open Choice student engagement and their integration. This interview should take approximately 45 minutes of your time and is confidential. The interview guide consists of 12 descriptive questions; 6 of which are similar to the questions to the students participating in the focus group to determine if administrators and students view the integration experience in the same way. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me as I will need to transcribe and analyze them. The tapes will then be destroyed. Lastly, a minimum of 6-8 students may be selected to

participate in a focus group discussion about their integration experience. Focus group will only occur if you or your designee elects to participate in the administrator interview.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?

We believe there are no known risks to you because of your participation in the research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study. However, the interview questions will be shared with you ahead of time to allow you to prepare. This student researcher understands your time is of value and will not go over the agreed upon time of 45 minutes, unless you agree.

What are the benefits of the study?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may help suburban schools that participate in Open Choice Program learn more about student's experience while participating in the program. This is important information to have as the Open Choice Program continues to proliferate. Study results may also assist you in understanding how you can create an environment that promotes engagement and successful integration which may lead to better outcomes for the students in the program. The study results will also be shared with CREC which may assist them in determining others ways to support participating districts.

Will I receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

There are no costs to you and or your school for participating in this study. You will not receive payment for participation; however, you will receive a copy of the research results at the end to enable you to learn if students attending the Open Choice program are engaged in school and if they are being integrated. Also you will learn from other administrators about what they are doing to promote engagement and integration.

How will my personal information be protected?

The study results will be shared with the school superintendent and principal, CREC director, and the UCONN School of Social Work. Your name will not be recorded in any of the data that is being shared. The results will be made on behalf of all the students and administrators that participate in the study not any specific person.

The researchers will keep all study records (including any codes to your data) locked in a secure location at the UConn School of Social Work PhD office file cabinet and labeled with student researcher name. Research records will be labeled with a code. The code will be derived from your last initial followed by a number that reflects how many administrators have enrolled in the study. The audiotapes will be kept in a secured file cabinet, as well. The audiotapes and files

will be destroyed after the dissertation is completed. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. Data that will be shared with others will be coded as described above to help protect your identity. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. However, the data will be aggregated and summarized in such a way that no particular school, and therefore no particular administrator, could be identified. This researcher is also a mandated reporter and will not be able to keep information about child abuse and neglect confidential.

You should also know that the UCONN Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Kay Davidson, at 860-570-9018 or the student researcher, Loida Reyes, at 860-944-6738. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

Appendix L: Focus Group Assent

Information Sheet for Open Choice Focus Group



Principal Investigator: Kay Davidson, D.S.W.

Student: Loida Reyes, MSW

Title of Study: Hartford Open Choice Students' School Engagement: The Role of Individual Characteristics and School Attributes

You are invited to participate in this focus group about Open Choice student integration experience (how you are accepted into your school). I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, and I am conducting this focus as part of my dissertation work. I am interested in finding out how you feel about your school, outside of your community and whether or not you feel like you belong

Your participation in this study will require you to answer questions about how you feel when attending school. This should take approximately 45 minutes of your time. Your participation will be anonymous and you will not be contacted again in the future. Participants' that participate in this focus group will be given a \$5 movie pass. This focus group does not involve any risk to you. However, the benefits of your participation may impact society, your school and CREC by helping to increase knowledge about the experience of students attending school outside of their community through the Open Choice Program.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer for any reason. We ask that you be completely honest about your answers. I will tape record the group discussion and make written copy of the discussion from the tape. Your name will not be on any of the written record of the group. We will not tell anyone at the school or CREC about what you say in the group. I will only share what the general topics are about what the group thinks about the school. I will also ask that you do not share the group discussion with anyone that is not in the room.

If you or your parents have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me, Loida Reyes at 860-944-6738 or my advisor, Kay Davidson at (860) 570-9018. If you agree to participate, please sign below and join the focus group discussion. Thank you.

I, _____ (print name)

Agree _____

Do not agree _____

To be in the Open Choice student research study.
