

Chapter 1

Connecticut Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Their Characteristics

Introduction

This first chapter of the Connecticut Magnet School Evaluation Report begins by examining the national and state judicial decisions that provided the momentum behind the establishment of interdistrict magnet schools, along with Connecticut's enabling legislation, which defines the criteria for and purposes of interdistrict magnet schools in the state. The research questions this report will address and the data sources that will be used in answering the questions follow. The chapter closes with descriptions comparing magnet schools to the other choice programs available to students and their parents in the state and a profile of the magnet schools that were in operation in Connecticut during the 2000-01 school year.

National Historical Context

The courts provided the impetus behind the desegregation of the nation's public schools. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision; to separate children in public schools solely on the basis of race was a violation of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. In the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, Chief Justice Warren delivered the opinion of the Court which concluded that, in the field of public education, "the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of equal protection of the laws

guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.” The decision effectively denied states with segregated schools a legal basis on which to continue segregating children.

Magnet schools represent one of the efforts states have employed to reduce racial isolation and enhance educational quality. The U. S. Department of Education characterizes magnet schools as schools that offer a specialized curriculum, provide parents and students a choice of school, enroll students from a broader geographic region beyond the school or district boundaries, and play a unique role in voluntary desegregation within the district. During the 1970s magnet schools emerged in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Cincinnati, Ohio, as vehicles to desegregate those urban districts by offering a curricular specialty and open-enrollment programs to draw students who share a common interest.

Connecticut’s Historical Context

Nearly forty years after the *Brown* decision, Connecticut’s minority population is predominately located in the state’s urban centers and the state’s urban public schools still remained virtually segregated. The *Sheff v. O’Neill* complaint filed in Hartford in 1989 contended that racial isolation within the Hartford public schools, and the great disparity between urban and suburban students’ educational opportunities, denied children the quality education that the state’s constitution guarantees. In response to the *Sheff* case, then Governor Lowell P. Weiker signed into law Public Act 93-263, “An Act Improving Quality Education and Diversity,” which was the impetus directing the state public school districts to examine their needs and to determine ways in which districts could contribute to solving the state’s racial isolation problem. On July 9, 1996, seven years after the complaint was filed, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled in favor of the

Sheff plaintiffs, mandating the racial integration of the state's public schools and directing the Governor and state legislature to remedy the *de facto* segregation of the state's public schools. Public Act 97-290, "An Act Enhancing Educational Choices and Opportunities," was enacted in response to the court's directive. This act amended the magnet school statutes and expanded the options for reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation among the state's public school students.

Connecticut had already begun to support a variety of initiatives designed to reduce racial isolation within the state prior to the *Sheff* decision. Magnet schools, which were first piloted in the 1970s within school districts, are among the major public school choice programs that are currently offered in the state. At the beginning of the 2000-01 school year, 22 full-day magnet schools and half-day magnet school programs were in operation in the state, many of which have been operating as interdistrict schools for nearly a decade.

Connecticut Legislation Defining Criteria for, and Purposes of, Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Section 10-264l, as amended by Public Act 02-7 and incorporated herein, of the Connecticut General Statutes defines the criteria on which magnet school funding is based in Connecticut, the purpose of interdistrict magnet schools within the state's public school education system, and the formula used to appropriate funds to the districts where magnet schools are located.

Sec 10-264l. Grants for the operation of interdistrict magnet school programs.

(a) The Department of education shall, within available appropriations, establish a competitive grant program to assist local and regional boards of education, regional educational service centers and cooperative arrangements pursuant to section 10-158a with the operation of interdistrict magnet school programs. For the purposes of this section "an interdistrict magnet school program" means a program which (1) supports

racial, ethnic, and economic diversity, (2) offers a special and high quality curriculum, and (3) requires students to attend at least half time. An interdistrict magnet school does not include a regional vocational agriculture school, a regional vocational technical school or a regional special education center. On and after July 1, 2000, the governing authority for each interdistrict magnet school program that is in operation prior to July 1, 2005, shall restrict the number of students that may enroll in the program from a participating district to eighty per cent of the total enrollment of the program. The governing authority for each interdistrict magnet school program that begins on or after July 1, 2005, shall (A) restrict the number of students that may enroll in the program from a participating district to seventy-five per cent of the total enrollment of the program, and (B) maintain such a school enrollment that at least twenty-five per cent but not more than seventy-five per cent of the students enrolled are pupils of racial minorities, as defined in section 10-226a.

(b) Applications for interdistrict magnet school programs operating grants awarded pursuant this section shall be submitted annually to the Commissioner of Education at such time and in such manner as the commissioner prescribes. In determining whether an application shall be approved and funds awarded pursuant this section, the commissioner shall consider, but such considerations shall not be limited to: (1) Whether the program offered by the school is likely to increase student achievement; (2) whether the program is likely to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; (3) the percentage of the student enrollment in the program from each participating district; and (4) the proposed operating budget and the sources of funding for the interdistrict magnet school. If requested by the commissioner, the applicant shall meet with the commissioner or the commissioner's designee to discuss the budget and sources of funding. The commissioner shall not award a grant to a program that is in operation prior to July 1, 2005, if more than eighty per cent of its total is from one school district, except that the commissioner may award a grant for good cause, for any one year, on behalf of an otherwise eligible magnet school program, if more than eighty per cent of the total enrollment is from one district. The commissioner shall not award a grant to a program that begins operations on or after July 1, 2005, if more than seventy-five percent of its total is from one school district or if less than twenty-five percent or more than seventy-five percent of the students enrolled are pupils of racial minorities, as defined by 10-226a, except that the commissioner may award a grant for good cause, for one year, on behalf of an otherwise eligible interdistrict magnet school program, if more than seventy-five percent of its total is from one school district or if less than twenty-five percent or more than seventy-five percent of the students enrolled are pupils of racial minorities. The commissioner may not award grants pursuant to such an exception for a second consecutive year.

Research Questions and Data Sources

The purpose of this report is to describe the role of magnet schools in Connecticut's public school system, and to evaluate the contribution these schools are making in

reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation within the state and improving the quality of the state's public school education programs. The report will address the following research questions:

1. Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Their Characteristics: Creating a Context
What characteristics define interdistrict magnet schools and what is their function in Connecticut public school education? How do interdistrict magnet schools differ from each other and from other 'choice' schools?
2. Reduction of Racial Ethnic and Economic Isolation
What impact have interdistrict magnet schools had on reducing the racial, ethnic, and economic isolation for Connecticut public school students?
3. Student Academic Performance and Opportunity
How does the academic performance of magnet school students compare to that of other Connecticut public school students? How does the school-wide performance of magnet schools in providing opportunities for students compare to other public schools in the state?
4. Perceptions of the Constituents
What are the teacher, parent, and student perceptions of aspects of interdistrict magnet schools such as the school climate, academic standards, diversity, program quality and effectiveness?
5. Unique Aspects of Interdistrict Magnet Schools
What unique curricular and instructional practices emanate from the 'special and high quality programs' that magnet schools offer, which have promise for other public schools?

The data used to answer the questions in this report are drawn from a variety of sources including the 2000-01 magnet school final reports, annual Strategic School Profiles (SSP), state Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) files, Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) files, and surveys of magnet school teachers, parents, and students during the 2001-02 school year from the 22 magnet schools that were operating for at least one year. A description of the surveys and samples follows.

Early in 2002, CSDE conducted a survey of a sample of interdistrict magnet school parents and guardians. For the purpose of this report ‘parent’ refers to parents and guardians. The survey contained statements to gather information about parents’ perceptions of the climate, program quality, diversity, and resources of the interdistrict magnet school their children were attending. In addition, parents were asked to respond to statements about their child’s performance in the school, their own level of involvement in the school, and the importance of several factors affecting their decision to enroll their child in the school. The sample was stratified by school and grade level (grades two, five, eight, and ten), proportional to school enrollment, and selected randomly. The response rate was 61.3 percent. Parents were also given the opportunity to make additional comments about their child’s magnet school or program and their child’s experience in the magnet school. More than half of the parents (54.1%) wrote specific comments about the magnet schools their children attended. Appendix A contains a copy of the ‘Parent and Guardian Survey.’

During the late spring 2002, the CSDE surveyed teachers and certified professional staff members from the 22 magnet schools. In the discussion of survey responses ‘teacher’ refers to all certified staff members including classroom teachers, special area teachers (arts, bilingual, special education, health, vocational or technical), administrators, and support staff such as counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and librarians. Five hundred fifteen (71.5%) members responded to the survey. The survey asked the magnet school and program teachers to respond to statements about the school’s mission, curriculum, expectations for learning, resources supporting the instructional program,

instruction and student assessment, parental involvement in the school, the school climate, diversity, leadership, and their satisfaction with their position and the school's operation. Teachers were also given the opportunity to make comments about their magnet school's program and their experiences in the magnet schools, or to expand on their responses to the statements about various aspects of the magnet school. Appendix B contains a copy of the 'Teacher and Professional Staff Survey.'

In May 2002, surveys were also administered to all interdistrict magnet students in grades five, eight, and ten to gather information about students' perceptions of their magnet schools' climate, diversity, academic program, theme, resources, and parental involvement. A total of 1077 students responded, accounting for nearly 17 percent of the students enrolled in Connecticut interdistrict magnet schools or magnet school programs. Appendix C contains a copy of the 'Student Survey.'

The parent, teacher, and student survey responses are disaggregated throughout this report by the following interdistrict magnet school groups: elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and half-day magnet programs. This permits examining the extent to which perceptions are similar or different by the level and type of schools students attend and teachers work in.

The remainder of this chapter will address the first set of research questions listed above in order to create the context for subsequent chapters and provide a profile of Connecticut's current interdistrict magnet schools.

A Comparison of Choice Options in Connecticut: How do interdistrict magnet schools differ from other schools of choice?

This section describes the various choice options that are available to students and parents in Connecticut. It addresses factors that distinguish the choice options from each other, such as the purpose, governance, financing, and unique characteristics. Appendix D contains a chart summarizing the characteristics of all of the state's choice options.

Interdistrict Magnet Schools

The purpose of interdistrict magnet schools is to voluntarily reduce ethnic, racial, and economic isolation by enrolling students from different school districts and to offer a special and high quality program to improve student academic achievement. During the 2000-01 academic year, 22 interdistrict magnet schools and half-day magnet programs were providing educational programs in Connecticut. These schools attract PK – 12 students from more than one school district by offering specialized curriculum and instructional program based on a unifying educational theme. They provide innovative educational opportunities for elementary, middle, and high school students who benefit from a range of themes or teaching philosophies that include the performing arts; math, science, and technology; international studies; early childhood; college preparation; community service; and multicultural education. Admission to these schools is open to all students in the participating districts and students are selected by lottery. When the number of applicants exceeds the number of available seats, interdistrict magnet schools establish waiting lists to fill any vacancies that occur during the school year. While interdistrict magnet schools draw students from several different districts, intradistrict magnet schools draw students from several schools within a single school district. Many

of the state's currently operating interdistrict magnet schools opened in the early and mid 1990s and were initially intradistrict magnet schools.

Single school districts, a regional school district, regional education service centers (RESCs), or a cooperative of school districts can operate a publicly funded interdistrict magnet school. Operating costs are funded by 1) state grants, 2) contributions from local boards of education, 3) federal grants, 4) corporate contributions, and 5) in some cases, tuition paid by parents. Based on available funds, transportation costs up to \$1200 are paid through a state grant, the excess of which may be funded by local districts or parental contributions.

Interdistrict magnet schools provide for the needs of special education students. The district where the student lives is responsible for holding the planning and placement team meeting and the magnet school is responsible for insuring the services are delivered. The district in which the student resides may provide the services directly or pay the magnet school for the cost of the services.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are a second school choice option for public school students in Connecticut and operate under an autonomous governance structure. The State Board of Education authorizes state charter schools and grants state charters to schools, which may enroll students from grades PK through 12 as established in their charters. A state charter school is a public non-sectarian school organized as a non-profit corporation and is operated independently of any local or regional board of education. During the 2000-01 academic year, 16 charter schools were in operation in Connecticut and authorized to enroll 2000 students. Both state and local charter schools provide educational programs

to a limited number of students and are managed by a governing board comprised of teachers, parents or guardians of the students in the school, and community members. Charter schools offer a range of thematic educational programs, small class size, and enhanced teacher-parent communication.

The purpose of charter schools is to 1) improve achievement, 2) foster educational innovation, 3) reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation, and 4) offer students and parents a choice of public educational programs. Charter schools are open to all students, but the charter may limit the geographic areas from which students can choose to attend. Charter schools are required to hold a lottery if the number of applicants exceeds the number of available spaces.

Parents do not pay tuition to send their children to charter schools. A state grant of \$7000 per student enrolled (2000-01) funds the operating cost of each state charter school and the districts in which local charter schools are situated pay the amount stipulated in the charter. Charter schools are eligible for federal and state comprehensive grants including a federal charter school start-up grant during their first three years. Like interdistrict magnet schools, transportation for charter school students is funded through a state grant for costs up to \$1200. The local or regional board of education in which the charter school is situated must provide transportation to the charter school for students who reside in the district, while parents of students who do not reside in the district where the charter school is located may be required to provide transportation if the charter school does not.

State charter schools provide for the needs of special education students, working cooperatively with the student's home district, with the same division of responsibilities as interdistrict magnet schools.

Lighthouse Schools

A 'lighthouse school' is an existing public school or a public school planned before July 1, 1997, in a priority school district that (1) has a specialized curriculum and (2) is designed to promote intradistrict and interdistrict public school choice. During the 2000-01 academic year five lighthouse schools were operating in Connecticut. The State Department of Education provided up to \$100,000 in grants to schools in each of the state's three largest urban districts, Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven, to support the development of lighthouse schools into regional interdistrict magnet schools. Over a three-year period, each school must develop a unique educational theme, devise a governance agreement, revise its curriculum, establish a contract with surrounding school districts that will become feeders for the magnet school, recruit a diverse student body, and provide professional development for its teachers. After up to three years of funding as a lighthouse school, the school must open as an interdistrict magnet school whose purpose is to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. As a result of the lighthouse program, one elementary school and one middle school opened as interdistrict magnet schools in September 2001.

Other Choice Public School Programs

The state's Open Choice Program allows students from large urban districts and the surrounding suburban community's opportunities to enroll in a school in a district where

they do not reside, on a space-available basis. During the 2000-01 school year 1477 students participated in the Open Choice Program in five regions across the state.

In addition to the types of schools described in the previous sections, the state's regional vocational-technical high schools and regional vocational agricultural high schools offer full-time, part-time, and evening programs, which prepare students for entry-level employment or higher education in skilled technology areas or agricultural science. During 2000-01, more than eleven thousand students enrolled in these choice options.

The Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program is funded through state grants in disciplines such as mathematics, science, environmental science, visual and performing arts, world languages, and international studies. These programs, which enrolled 89,763 students during the 2000-01 school year, ranged from one week in length to an entire school year. They focus on students' academic improvement in diverse educational settings across the state and foster an understanding of diversity among the students who participate and share common academic interests.

A Profile of Magnet Schools in Connecticut

Many features distinguish interdistrict magnet schools from traditional public schools. This section will provide a brief profile of the characteristics of the state's secondary and elementary interdistrict magnet schools. Chapter 8 will present more in-depth information about the varied governance structures of interdistrict magnet schools and programs, the unique curriculum each magnet school or program has developed, and the

varied instructional and assessment strategies their teachers employ, many of which provide promise as practices for improving public schools in general.

Funding

Table 1.1 summarizes the grant funding that the state of Connecticut has provided from 1994 to 2001 to support the construction and operations of its interdistrict magnet schools. In the 1994 fiscal year Connecticut appropriated \$11,852,000 in grants to initiate the funding of seven interdistrict magnet schools within the state: \$2,389,000 in operating grant funds and \$9,463,000 in construction grant funds. Over the course of the eight year timeframe, the state has invested a total of \$348,631,000 to support the development and operation of 18 full-time magnet schools and 4 half-time programs that were operating during the 2000-01 school year, with a total of \$255,204,000 allocated for

Fiscal Year	Number of Schools	Operating Grants*	Transport.* Grants	Planning/ RESC Grants	Total Appropriations Grants	Construct. Grants	Total Payments
1994	7	2,389,000	0	0	2,389,000	9,463,000**	11,852,000
1995	7	3,311,000	0	0	3,311,000	11,521,000	14,832,000
1996	8	5,127,000	522,000	0	5,649,000	18,173,000	23,822,000
1997	12	6,824,000	770,000	0	7,594,000	16,094,000	23,688,000
1998	13	8,784,000	1,053,000	0	9,837,000	5,104,000	14,941,000
1999	16	13,037,000	1,674,000	900,000	15,611,000	30,262,000	45,873,000
2000	18	16,920,000	2,175,000	100,000	19,195,000	97,172,000	116,367,000
2001	22	22,061,000	2,780,000	5,000,000	29,841,000	67,415,000	97,256,000
Total		78,453,000	8,974,000	6,000,000	93,427,000	255,204,000	348,631,000

*Operating and Transportation grants were funded through the Interdistrict Cooperation grant appropriation until FY1999.

**Includes a payment of \$931,000 released in FY1993.

Data Source: CSDE Division of Grants Management

constructing buildings and renovating facilities. As a result, nine of the state's interdistrict magnet schools are now housed in state-of-the-art facilities with a wide range of modern technology and facilities designed to support their programs. In addition, the state allocated \$78,453,000 in operating grants, \$8,974,000 for magnet school transportation, and \$6,000,000 in planning grants. In fiscal year 2001, 22 magnet schools and magnet school programs were operating in Connecticut, with state grant support of \$97,256,000.

Subsection (c) of Section 10-264l, as amended by Public Act 02-7 and incorporated herein, defines the formula the state applied to appropriate the 2000-01 Interdistrict Cooperative Grant For Magnet School Enrollment funds to districts in which magnet school programs are located.

(c) (1) The maximum amount each interdistrict magnet school program shall be eligible to receive per enrolled student shall be determined as follows: (A) For each participating district whose magnet school program enrollment is equal to or less than thirty percent of the magnet school total enrollment, ninety per cent of the foundation as defined in subdivision (7) of section 10-262f, as amended; (B) for each participating district whose magnet school program enrollment is greater than thirty percent but less than or equal to sixty per cent of the magnet school program total enrollment, a percentage between sixty and ninety per cent of said foundation that is inversely proportional to the percentage of magnet school program enrollment from such district; and (C) for each participating district whose magnet school program enrollment is greater than sixty percent but less than or equal to ninety per cent of the magnet school program total enrollment, a percentage between zero and sixty per cent of said foundation that is inversely proportional to the percentage of magnet school program students from such district, except that the percentage determined pursuant to this subsection for a district in which the magnet school is located shall be between fifty and sixty per cent of said foundation. The amounts so determined shall be proportionally adjusted, if necessary, within the limit of available appropriation, and in no case shall any grant pursuant to this section exceed the reasonable operating budget of the magnet school program, less revenues from other sources. Any magnet school program operating less than full-time but at least half-time shall be eligible to receive a grant equal to sixty-five per cent of the grant amount determined pursuant this subsection.

For the 2000-01 school year, the ‘foundation’ was \$5,891. As the proportion of a magnet school’s enrollment from a given district declines by each one percentage point from 90 percent to 60 percent, the percentage of the foundation appropriated to the magnet school increases from zero to 60 percent by two percentage points. For example, if 75 percent of a magnet school’s enrollment was drawn from district A, then the magnet school would receive a per student enrollment grant of 30 percent of \$5,891, or \$1767.30. If 65 percent of a magnet school’s enrollment was drawn from district B, then the magnet school would receive a per student enrollment grant of 50 percent of \$5,891, or \$2,945.50. The percentage of students from district A and B in the magnet schools differs by 10 percentage points while the percentage of the foundation increases by 20 percentage points.

As the proportion of a magnet school’s enrollment from a given district declines from 60 percent to 30 percent by each percentage point, the percentage of the foundation appropriated to the district increases from 60 to 90 percent by one percentage point. The following examples illustrate how the formula is calculated within this range of enrollment percentages. If district C sent a number of students accounting for 50 percent of a magnet school’s enrollment, then the per student grant to the magnet school would be 70 percent of \$5,891, or \$4,123.70, while if district D sends 40 percent of a magnet school’s the per student grant would be 80 percent of the foundation, or \$4,712.80. For each percentage point decrease between 60 and 30 percent in the proportion of a magnet school’s enrollment drawn from a given district, the proportion of the foundation allocated to the magnet school in per student enrollment grants increases by one percentage point. Finally, magnet schools receiving a number of students accounting for

30 percent or less of a magnet school's enrollment from a single district would receive a per student grant of 90 percent of the foundation, or \$5,301.90.

Governance

The governance structures vary among the interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs that are currently educating children in Connecticut. In 2000-01, four of the state's regional education centers (RESCs) operated 12 interdistrict magnet schools in 2000-01: Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) - 6, Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) – 3, Cooperative Educational Services (CES) – 2, and LEARN -1. Four public school districts operated 10 interdistrict magnet schools: New Haven – 6, Waterbury – 2, East Hartford – 1, and Norwalk – 1. Magnet schools drew students from 94 local and regional public school districts during the 2000-01 school year, with individual schools recruiting students from two to 43 districts, with a median number of 11 feeding districts.

Recruitment and Admissions

Annually, either individually or through their local RESCs, magnet schools conduct extensive recruitment campaigns to attract new students to their programs. Their strategies include: informing guidance counselors and personnel in eligible feeder schools about the magnet programs through published documents, videos, presentations, and tours; press releases and broadcast media coverage; direct mailings to parents of prospective students; evening meetings at the feeder schools and open house programs at the magnet schools; and field trips to the magnet schools for students enrolled in the feeder districts. Selection is by lottery, although most interdistrict magnet schools accept siblings of students who already attend the school. When the number of applications

from any sending district exceeds the number of seats allocated to it, applicants who were not selected are placed on a waiting list and may be admitted to the school during the subsequent school year as seats become available.

Characteristics of Connecticut Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Programs

Full Day Interdistrict Magnet High Schools

Connecticut's magnet schools are organized in a variety of ways. During the 2000-01 school year eleven of the state's interdistrict magnet schools provided programs for 2,582 high school students, each typically drawing students from 15 public school districts. The high schools (full) are identified in Table 1.2., where selected characteristics are summarized using school-level data and weighted averages, based on school enrollment. Appendix E describes how 'weighted averages' in the following tables are calculated.

The number of interdistrict magnet high schools in the state has increased steadily throughout the last decade, due to the strong public financial support they have received from their districts and the state. Magnet high schools ranged in size from 61 to 714 students, with full time schools averaging 337 students in comparison to the state average size of 878 high school students. On average, three-fourths (75%) of the magnet high school students were minorities, about one-third (35%) were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the state's indicator for level of poverty, and nearly three-fourths (72%) were drawn from the school's local district or district with the largest sending population. The student teacher ratio for the magnet high schools was 12.6 students to one teacher.

The 2000-01 full-time magnet high school calendars included an average of 1199 hours of instructional time, compared with the state average for high schools of 999

hours. Each of the five full-time magnet high schools offers a comprehensive college preparatory curriculum with integrating themes such as character development in a diverse community, multiculturalism, integrated arts and humanities, business/technology and science/health, and service learning. Chapter 8 describes the unique themes and instructional practices of each interdistrict magnet school and magnet program.

Magnet School (Town)	Grades	School Group	Enroll 2000-01	Percent Minority	Percent Poverty	Percent Local District	First Year	Eligible Districts	Teachers	Students per Teacher	School Days	Hours per Year
Cooperative Arts and Humanities (New Haven)	9 to 12	full	372	72%	35%	72%	1994	17	39	7.8	182	1092
High School in the Community (New Haven)	9 to 12	full	346	56%	39%	74%	1995	17	27	12.8	186	1116
Hill Regional Career High School (New Haven)	9 to 12	full	714	86%	34%	76%	1997	17	50	14.3	186	1116
Hyde Leadership School (Hamden)	9 to 12	full	190	88%	38%	73%	1998	17	15	13.3	186	1395
Tunxis Middle College H.S. (Farmington)	10 to 12	full	61	28%	28%	16%	2000	6	5	15.0	182	1274
ACES Ed Center for the Arts (New Haven)	9 to 12	part	220	25%	**	41%	1998	19	37	15.0	142	426
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts (Hartford)	9 to 12	part	250	25%	**	20%	1989	43	83	10.0	144	468
Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science (Hartford)	9 to 12	part	148	51%	**	32%	2000	13	10	12.5	188	564
Regional Center for the Arts (Bridgeport)	9 to 12	part	122	65%	**	57%	1996	6	15	7.0	144	432
Center for Japanese Study (Norwalk)	9 to 12	sch-in-sch	84	20%	0%	67%	1991	13	6	10.0	180	1170
CT International Baccalaureate Academy (East Hartford)	9 to 10	sch-in-sch	75	63%	25%	49%	1999	7	6	12.5	180	1170
average (f)			337	75%*	35%*	72%*		15	27.2	12.6	184.4	1199
average (p)			185	37%*	**	35%*		20	36.3	11.1	154.5	473
average (s)			80	42%*	12%*	59%*		10	6.0	11.3	180.0	1170
* weighted average based on enrollment												
** free and reduced-price lunch status not reported for half-day programs												

Half-day Interdistrict Magnet Programs and School-within-School Programs

Table 1.2 also contains summary data about interdistrict magnet school programs (part-time) and school-within-a-school (sch-in-sch) programs. The four half-time magnet programs complement the traditional academic curriculum of their feeder high schools, with three providing instruction solely in the arts (dance, music, poetry/prose, theatre, and visual arts) and one emphasizing integrated mathematics, science and technology. These half-day magnet programs served 740 students and averaged 473 instructional hours during the 2000-01 school year, along with another 430 hours of rehearsal and practice time. Approximately one-third (37%) of the students were minorities and approximately one-third (35%) were enrolled from the school's local district.

Two magnet high schools operated as schools-within-schools for 159 students, enrolling 42 percent minority students, 12 percent eligible for free or reduced lunch, and 59 percent from the school's home district. One school offered an International Baccalaureate diploma and the other a program in Japanese language and culture, within the structure of an 1170-hour instructional year. The students enrolled in other academic courses and participated in non-athletic co-curricular activities in the high school that houses the magnet program.

Interdistrict Magnet 7-12 and Middle Schools

Table 1.3 contains data about the state's only 7-12 interdistrict magnet school and the two middle grade interdistrict magnet schools. The 7th through 12th grade interdistrict magnet provided an alternative middle and high school setting for 88 at-risk students from five districts who had been unsuccessful in traditional public school settings. The classes ranged in size from 8 to 14 students, averaging about 11 students, and the

program emphasizes responsible decision-making in learning and life. About one-fourth (26%) of the students in the school were minorities, 32 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 45 percent resided in the school’s local community.

Table 1.3: Interdistrict Magnet 7-12 and Middle Schools

Magnet School (Town)	Grades	School Group	Enroll 2000-01	Percent Minority	Percent Poverty	Percent Local District	Initial Year	Eligible Districts	Teachers	Students per Teacher	School Days	Hours per Year
Collaborative Alternative Magnet (Northford)	7 to 12	full	88	26%	32%	45%	1995	5	7	11	180	900
Betsy Ross Middle School (New Haven)	5 to 8	full	186	87%	72%	81%	1999	18	40	12.2	186	1116
Metropolitan Learning Center (Bloomfield)	6 to 8	full	378	72%	32%	30%	1998	6	37	13.5	180	1050
middle school average			282	77%*	45%*	47%*		12		12.9	183	1083

* weighted average based on enrollment

The two magnet schools designed for middle grade students offered full day programs, opened as interdistrict schools within the last three years, and served a total of 564 students in 2000-01. About three-fourths (77%) of the students were minorities, 45 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 47 percent were drawn from the school’s home district. The schools provided an average of 1083 instructional hours in 2000-01 during a 183-day school year. The middle schools were relatively small, housing 186 and 378 students compared with a state public middle school average of 617 students. The two middle schools had an average student-teacher ratio of 12.9 students to one teacher. The curriculum of the 6 –8 (grade 9 added in 2001-02, grade 10 in 2002-03) school emphasizes international global studies and was open to middle school students from six districts. The 5 – 8 school curriculum was based on integrating technology into the arts and academics, and is open to students from 18 districts.

Interdistrict Magnet Elementary Schools

Table 1.4 provides a summary of the characteristics of the state's elementary interdistrict magnet schools. Eight interdistrict magnet schools provided full day and extended day academic programs for children within the pre-kindergarten through grade eight age groups in 2000-01.

Table 1.4: Interdistrict Magnet Elementary Schools

Magnet School (Town)	Grades	Enroll 2000- 01	Percent* Minority	Percent* Poverty	Percent Local District	Initial Year	Eligible Districts	Teachers	Students per Teacher	School Days	Hours per Year
Six to Six (Bridgeport)	PK to 8	352	50%	10%	54%	1993	5	27	13.0	180	1209
Benjamin Jepson Magnet (New Haven)	K to 8	302	87%	52%	73%	1998	11	21	15.4	186	1209
Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet (Hamden)	K to 8	590	42%	19%	72%	1998	4	46	12.8	199	1493
East Hartford /Glastonbury Elementary (EH)	K to 6	279	38%	13%	59%	1992	2	20.8	13.4	180	979
Regional Multicultural Mag. (New London)	K to 5	440	48%	35%	42%	1991	11	40	11.0	181	924
Maloney Interdistrict Mag. (Waterbury)	PK to 5	565	51%	54%	72%	1996	10	46.5	12.2	180	976
Montessori Magnet (Hartford)	PK to 6	220	73%	17%	48%	1994	19	15	15.3	181	1177
Rotella Interdistrict Mag. (Waterbury)	PK to 5	503	45%	52%	76%	2000	8	44.5	11.3	180	976
average		406	52%	34%	67%		9	32.6	13.1	184	1105

* weighted average based on enrollment

Elementary interdistrict magnet schools ranged in size from 220 to 590 students, averaging 406 students compared with the state elementary public school average of 438 students, and drew students from two to nineteen local and regional public school districts. On average, 52 percent of the magnet elementary school students were minority, 34 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, and 67 percent lived in the school's local district or the district sending the largest percentage of students to the

school. Students attended regular school sessions for an average of 184 days, receiving 1105 hours of instruction, or 13 percent more instructional time than the 977 hours that the typical public elementary school student received in the state. The student-teacher ratio for elementary schools averaged 13.1 students to one teacher, with class sizes ranging from 8 to 24 students. The schools' academic programs are developed around a range of themes including social studies and science, multi-age groupings, technology, global and multicultural education, the Montessori developmental curriculum, and integrated arts and literacy. In addition to innovative curricular emphases, the magnet elementary schools also employed a variety of instructional strategies to deliver the curriculum and to assess student progress, with the work of several of the schools extending beyond the typical school day, school year, and school building.

Summary

Connecticut's 22 interdistrict magnet schools and magnet school programs provided school choice opportunities for more than six thousand public school students in the state during the 2000-01 school year, and the number of students attending magnet schools has increased to approximately 10,700 for the 2002-03 school year with a total of 31 interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs operating in Connecticut. Although the state's interdistrict magnet schools vary considerably in size, organization, governance, and theme, they share the common mission of 'supporting racial, ethnic, and economic diversity' and 'offering a special and high quality program.' The remaining chapters examine their success in accomplishing the two aspects of this charge.

Chapter 2

The Impact of Connecticut Interdistrict Magnet Schools in Reducing Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Isolation

Introduction

This second chapter examines the impact that interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs have had on reducing the racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of the Connecticut public school students attending them. It begins with a description of Educational Reference Groups (ERGs), the classification system the state uses to cluster its public school districts into nine subgroups (A-I) based on indicators of student need, socio-economic status, and district size. Interdistrict magnet school averages will be compared with ERG and statewide averages throughout this and subsequent chapters.

The following data are presented in this chapter to compare the diversity of Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools and programs to other public schools:

- the racial and ethnic composition of interdistrict magnet school students,
- the socio-economic composition of interdistrict magnet school students,
- the geographic (local and feeder district) composition of interdistrict magnet schools, and
- the racial and ethnic composition of interdistrict magnet schools staffs.

Survey data provides supplemental information about interdistrict magnet school teacher, parent, and student perceptions of the diversity in their schools and the interactions among and, academic opportunities for, interdistrict magnet school students from different backgrounds. For the purpose of discussions in this chapter, 'school' refers to both magnet schools and magnet programs unless specified otherwise.

Education Reference Groups in Connecticut

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) developed Education Reference Groups (ERGs) to enable educators to fairly compare groups of districts with similar characteristics. The state's 166 school districts and three academies have been divided into nine groups, identified as ERG A through ERG I, based on socioeconomic status and indicators of need from the 1990 Census, 1994 poverty data, and 1994 district enrollment. ERG comparisons are used in department reports to place district resources and district-level student achievement into perspective. ERGs were initially developed using 1980 census data and were up-dated in 1996 when the 1990 Census data were available and analyzed.

In addition to census data, the CSDE incorporated characteristics of the children who attend school in the districts and their families in developing the ERGs. Three of the characteristics measure socioeconomic status: median family income, percentage of children with at least one parent with a bachelor's degree or higher, and percentage of children's parents holding jobs in executive, managerial, or professional occupations. Three other characteristics measure need: percentage of children living in families with a single parent or in non-family households, school-age children receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1994 as a percentage of children enrolled in the district's public schools, and percentage of children whose families speak a language other than English in the home. Enrollment in districts in 1994 was divided into deciles and given half weight in the analysis. ERGs will be revised, based on 2000 Census data by 2005. Appendix F contains a table with the names of the districts in each of the Education Reference Groups.

Of the 22 magnet schools described in Chapter 1 of this report, 15 are physically located in ERG I districts, 4 in ERG H districts, and one each in ERG B, D, and F districts, although they enroll students from communities that are designated in different ERGS. As a result, the local district ERGs may not reflect the composition of the students attending the magnet schools. For the purpose of comparisons in this chapter, magnet school statistics are compared with statistics for ERG A and I districts, the two extremes in the state, and with those for the state as a whole.

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students in Connecticut Public Schools

It is well documented that Connecticut is a dichotomous state with some of the most poverty-ridden cities in the nation in close proximity to some of the wealthiest suburbs. Most Connecticut families live in metropolitan areas consisting of suburban and urban communities where housing is essentially segregated and legislated school district boundaries coincide with community boundaries. As a result, much of the current segregation in the state's public school districts is not within but between districts that vary in the racial, ethnic, and economic composition of the student populations they enroll.

One of the fundamental purposes of interdistrict magnet schools is to attract students from districts that differ significantly in student demographic composition to regional schools with unique program offerings in order to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. How effective are Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools in addressing this issue?

We will begin by examining the racial and ethnic composition of the public schools in the state. Table 2.1 summarizes public school enrollment in Connecticut by ERG and race. Statewide, 70.1 percent of Connecticut’s public school students are White, 13.7 percent are non-Hispanic Black, and 13.1 percent are Hispanic. Native American and Asian American students account for relatively small proportions of the state’s public school students, 0.3 percent and 2.8 percent, respectively.

Table 2.1: 2000 Connecticut Public School Enrollment by ERG and Race

ERG	Native American		Asian American		Black		White		Hispanic		Total
*	116	0.6%	188	0.9%	5834	27.8%	10323	49.2%	4503	21.5%	20964
A	17	0.1%	1038	2.9%	449	1.3%	33414	94.3%	524	1.5%	35442
B	122	0.1%	3630	4.3%	2407	2.9%	74821	88.6%	3502	4.2%	84482
C	216	0.5%	849	1.8%	650	1.4%	44390	94.7%	760	1.6%	46865
D	175	0.2%	2116	3.0%	4950	6.9%	61986	86.3%	2565	3.6%	71792
E	82	0.5%	174	1.0%	262	1.5%	16969	95.4%	299	1.7%	17786
F	271	0.4%	2151	2.8%	7795	10.3%	61630	81.1%	4164	5.5%	76011
G	107	0.5%	324	1.4%	534	2.3%	21717	92.9%	685	2.9%	23367
H	271	0.3%	3340	3.8%	17227	19.6%	51105	58.2%	15860	18.1%	87803
I	182	0.2%	1787	1.8%	37050	37.9%	17570	18.0%	41063	42.1%	97652
Total	1559	0.3%	15597	2.8%	77158	13.7%	393925	70.1%	73925	13.1%	562164

* students enrolled in schools, such as charter schools, that draw from more than one district
 Data Source: CSDE Bureau of Student Assessment and Research

ERG A school districts do not have high levels of poverty and need, while the opposite is true for ERG I. The contrast of the racial and ethnic composition of the schools between the state’s most affluent and most impoverished public school districts is quite stark. Examining the racial composition by ERG finds that the student population in ERG A public schools is 94.3 percent White and 2.8 percent Black or Hispanic,

compared with 18.0 percent White in ERG I and 80.0 percent Black or Hispanic. Examining the ERGs in which subgroups of students are concentrated shows that minority students are more highly concentrated in the state's urban districts than white students. For the 2000-01 school year in Connecticut, 48.0 percent of the Black students and 55.5 percent of the Hispanic students enrolled in the state's public schools attended ERG I schools, compared with only 4.5 percent of the white public school students in the state.

The Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students in Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Figure 2.1 compares the racial composition of the state's interdistrict magnet schools to that of the public schools in ERG A, ERG I, and the state as a whole. The figure illustrates that, on average, magnet schools enroll about the same proportions of Native American (0.3%) students and Asian American (3.0%) students as the state-wide average and a slightly higher proportions than the schools in ERGs A and I. Interdistrict magnet schools attract a substantially higher proportion of Black students (36.1%) than enrolled in schools in ERG A (1.3%) and schools statewide (13.7%), but only slightly lower in proportion to the Black students in ERG I schools (37.9%). The average interdistrict magnet school enrollment of Hispanic students is 17.9 percent compared with 1.5 percent in ERG A, 42.1 percent in ERG I, and 13.1 percent statewide. The proportion of White students enrolled in magnet schools is 42.7 percent, compared with 94.3 percent in ERG A, 18.0 percent in ERG I, and 70.1 percent statewide.

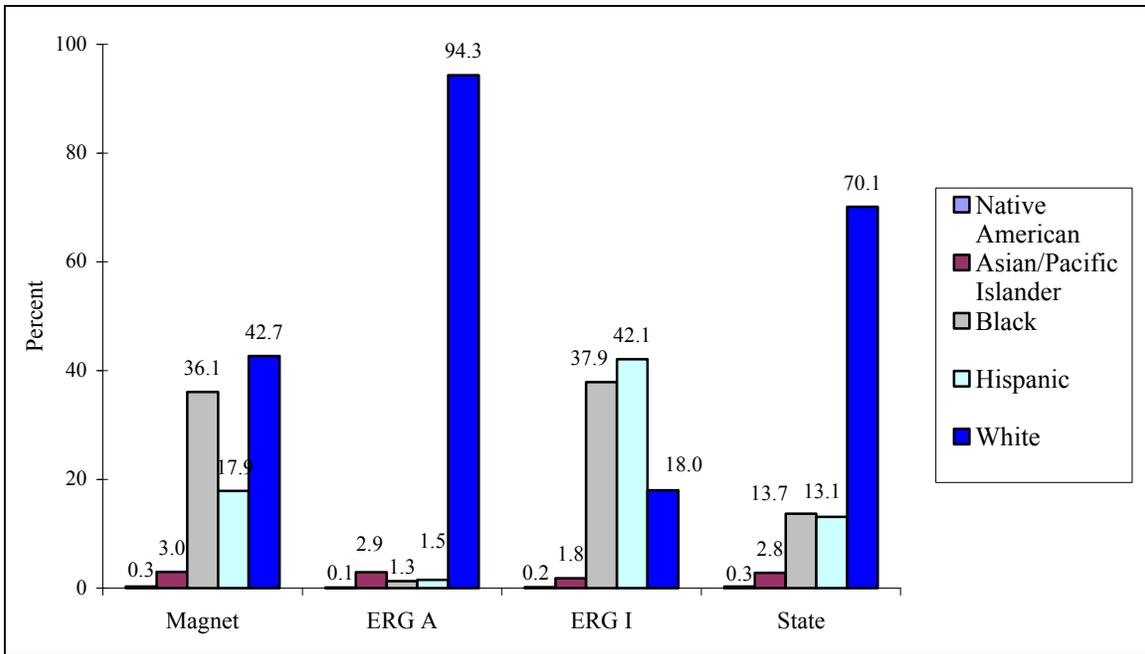


Figure 2.1: Comparison of the Racial and Ethnic Composition of Connecticut Public School Students Attending Interdistrict Magnet Schools, Schools in ERG A, ERG I, and State-wide

The data suggests that students attending interdistrict magnet schools are enrolled in more racially balanced schools than those found statewide and considerably more balanced than the schools in ERGs A and I. This creates the opportunity for magnet school students to interact with classmates who bring diverse perspectives to the classroom.

The Socio-economic Composition of Students in Interdistrict Magnet Schools

This section examines the extent to which interdistrict magnet schools in Connecticut are reducing economic isolation for the students who attend them. Figure 2.2 provides data on the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and the proportion of students from families in which English is not the primary language who attended the state’s interdistrict magnet schools during the 2000-01 school year. It

compares those statistics about the student body in the group of interdistrict magnet schools with public schools in ERGs A and I, and statewide.

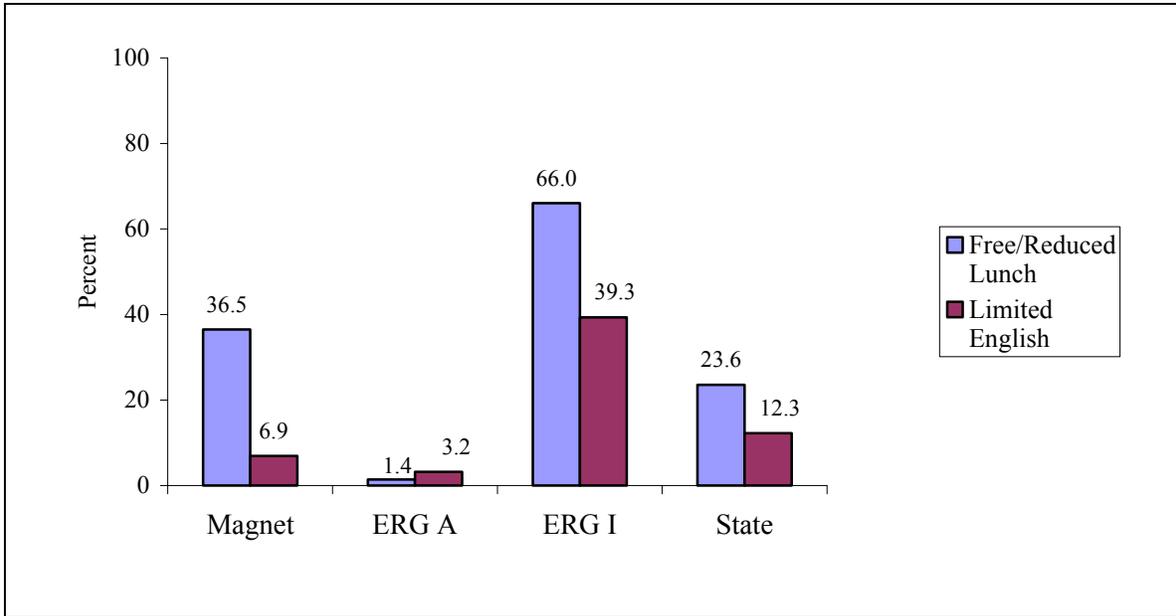


Figure 2.2: Comparison of the Socio-economic Composition of Connecticut Public School Students Attending Interdistrict Magnet Schools, Schools in ERG A, ERG I, and State-wide

The public schools in the “two Connecticuts” varied considerably in demographic characteristics for the 2000-01 school year. In ERG A, the state’s 12 highest SES districts, where 5.7 percent of the students were racial and ethnic minorities, 1.4 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 3.2 percent were from families in which English was not the first language. In contrast, in ERG I, the state’s seven lowest SES districts, where 82.0 percent of the students were minorities, 66.0 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 39.3 percent were from families in which English was not the first language. Statewide 23.6 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and for 12.3 percent of their families English was not the primary language. In comparison, for interdistrict magnet

schools 36.5 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and for 6.9 percent English was not the primary language spoken in their homes.

Local and Feeder District Composition of Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Table 2.2 summarizes the enrollment of the 22 magnet schools and magnet school programs by the proportion of students attending the school from local and feeder school districts for the 2000-01 school year. Local school districts are the districts in which interdistrict magnet schools are located. Feeder school districts are the eligible public school districts that sent students to the interdistrict magnet schools during that school year.

Across magnet schools and magnet school programs, 60.5 percent of the students who enrolled in the schools resided in the local district and 39.5 percent were drawn from other regional public school districts in the state. Three magnet schools/programs, Tunxis Middle College High School, the Metropolitan Learning Center, and the Greater Hartford Academy for the Arts, each drew at least 80 percent of their students from feeder districts. Only one magnet school, Betsy Ross Arts Middle Magnet School, drew fewer than 20 percent of the students enrolled from feeder districts. This is due primarily to its status transitioning from an intradistrict magnet school (drawing entirely from New Haven) to an interdistrict magnet school. During the transition period students from feeder district were phased into the school one grade at a time beginning with grade five, so that New Haven public school students who were attending the school during the previous years would not be displaced by out-of-district students.

Table 2.2: Enrollment by Local and Feeder Districts for Interdistrict Magnet Schools Operating in 2000-01

Magnet Schools	Local Enrollment	Local Percent	Number of Feeder Districts	Feeder Enrollment	Feeder Percent	Total
Six to Six Interdistrict Magnet	209	60.2%	4	138	39.8%	347
Jepson Non-Graded Magnet School	196	74.8%	17	66	25.2%	262
High School in the Community	254	73.6%	17	91	26.4%	345
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School	266	71.5%	17	106	28.5%	372
Hill Regional Career High School	543	76.1%	17	171	23.9%	714
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	50	19.8%	43	202	80.2%	252
Maloney Interdistrict Magnet School	404	71.5%	10	161	28.5%	565
Regional Center for the Arts	70	57.4%	5	52	42.6%	122
East Hartford/Glastonbury Elementary Magnet	165	59.1%	1	114	40.9%	279
Regional Multicultural Magnet School	182	41.4%	10	258	58.6%	440
Montessori Magnet School	105	47.7%	18	115	52.3%	220
ACES Educational Center for the Arts	91	41.4%	18	129	58.6%	220
Center for Japanese Study Abroad	56	66.7%	12	28	33.3%	84
Metropolitan Learning Center	72	19.0%	5	306	81.0%	378
Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School	422	71.5%	3	168	28.5%	590
Hyde Leadership High School	139	73.2%	17	51	26.8%	190
Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy	37	49.3%	6	38	50.7%	75
Betsy Ross Arts Magnet Middle School	150	80.6%	17	36	19.4%	186
Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science	48	32.4%	12	100	67.6%	148
Rotella Interdistrict Magnet	387	76.9%	8	116	23.1%	503
Tunxis Middle College High School	10	16.4%	5	51	83.6%	61
Collaborative Alternative Magnet	40	45.5%	4	48	54.5%	88
Total Magnet School Enrollment	3896	60.5%	268	2545	39.5%	6441
		mean=	12			
		median=	11			

The number of feeder districts sending students to particular magnet schools ranges from one to 43, with the typical magnet school drawing students from 11 or 12 districts. Across the state, about 95 public and regional school districts send students to at least one interdistrict magnet school. Hamden and New Haven send students to the greatest number of different interdistrict magnet schools, eight, followed by Wallingford and West Haven which send their students to seven different interdistrict magnet schools.

The Racial and Ethnic Composition of Interdistrict Magnet School Professional Staff

Preliminary data about public school student performance from Texas suggests that students who attend public schools with more diverse teaching staffs score higher on standardized tests (Meier, 2001). Currently, in Connecticut only about seven percent of the state's teaching force are minorities compared with about 13 percent nationwide, while 29.1 percent of the students who attend the state's public schools are minorities. Most minority teachers and students are concentrated in the state's large and small cities, while 51 of the 166 school districts in the state have no minority teachers in their classrooms.

Figure 2.3 contains the racial and ethnic composition of the teachers who taught in the state's interdistrict magnet schools for the 2000-01 school year and compares the teaching staff composition to the state-wide average and the averages for ERGs A and I. Interdistrict magnet school teaching staffs are more diverse than the teaching staffs of schools statewide. For the 2000-01 school year, 20.7 percent of the magnet school teachers were Native American, Asian American, Black, or Hispanic, compared with a 7.1 percent minority teacher average for the state's public schools.

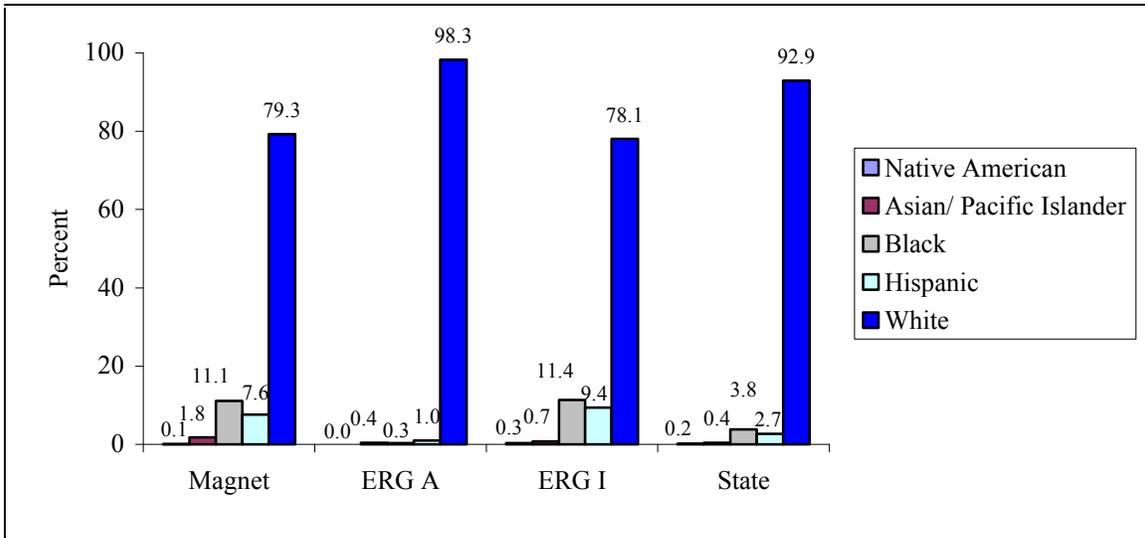


Figure 2.3: Comparison of the Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Professional Staff of Interdistrict Magnet Schools, Schools in ERG A, ERG I, and Statewide

Only 1.7 percent of the 2,629 teachers employed in the ERG A school districts were minorities, compared with 21.9 percent of the 6,315 teachers in ERG I schools. Students from non-urban communities who attend interdistrict magnet schools have greater opportunities to interact with teachers and professional staff members from different backgrounds who bring diverse perspectives to students’ educational experiences in magnet schools.

Parent, Teacher, and Student Perceptions About Magnet School Diversity

The quantitative evidence suggests that interdistrict magnet schools enroll a more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse student body than most of the public schools in Connecticut, and the magnet school professional staff is considerably more diverse than public school professional staffs across the state. However, is this merely a racial redistribution of students and teachers within geographic regions of the state, or have interdistrict magnet schools been able to successfully implement integrated learning

experiences within their schools? Survey responses from parents, teachers, and students are discussed below to answer this question.

Parent, teacher, and student surveys contained statements about the diversity of their magnet schools. They were asked to respond to each statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree, (1) to undecided (3) to strongly agree (5). Because of small numbers of responses in some categories, ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ were aggregated, and ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ were aggregated.

Survey data indicate that parents, teachers, and students share the belief that interdistrict magnet schools are truly diverse learning communities. Their responses to the statement, ‘The students in the school come from different backgrounds,’ are shown in Figure 2.4.

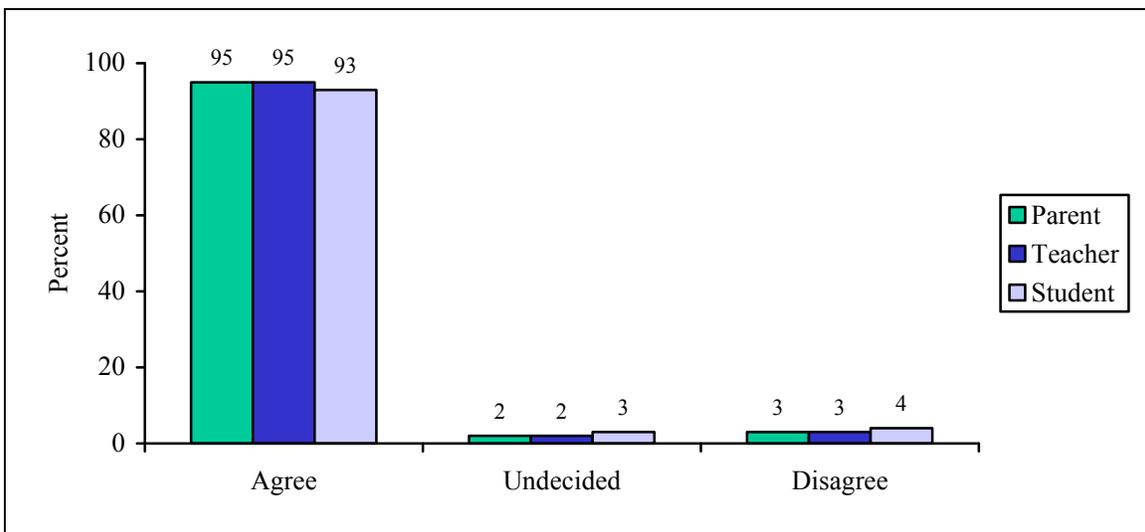


Figure 2.4: Parent, Teacher, and Student Responses to ‘The students in the school come from different backgrounds.’

Ninety-five percent of the parents and teachers, and 93 percent of the students are in agreement with the statement, while only three percent of each parents and teachers, and four percent of the students disagree. The student responses to this statement were

disaggregated by the type of magnet schools students attended: elementary, middle, or high school, or magnet program. Ninety-six percent of the elementary, 95 percent of the middle, 86 percent of the high school, and 98 percent of the magnet program students agree that the students in their schools come from different backgrounds. Only one percent of the elementary and magnet program students disagree, compared with two percent of the middle school students and eight percent of the high school students.

Parents and teachers responded to a common statement about the school’s role in promoting friendships among children from different backgrounds: ‘The school helps students develop friendships with children from different backgrounds.’ Figure 2.5 summarizes the data collected. Ninety-one percent of the teachers, compared with 82 percents of the parents, agree that magnet schools are instrumental in helping students to develop friends who come from different backgrounds. Only four percent of each group disagree with the statement. Parents (14%) were more undecided than teachers (5%) about the schools’ efforts.

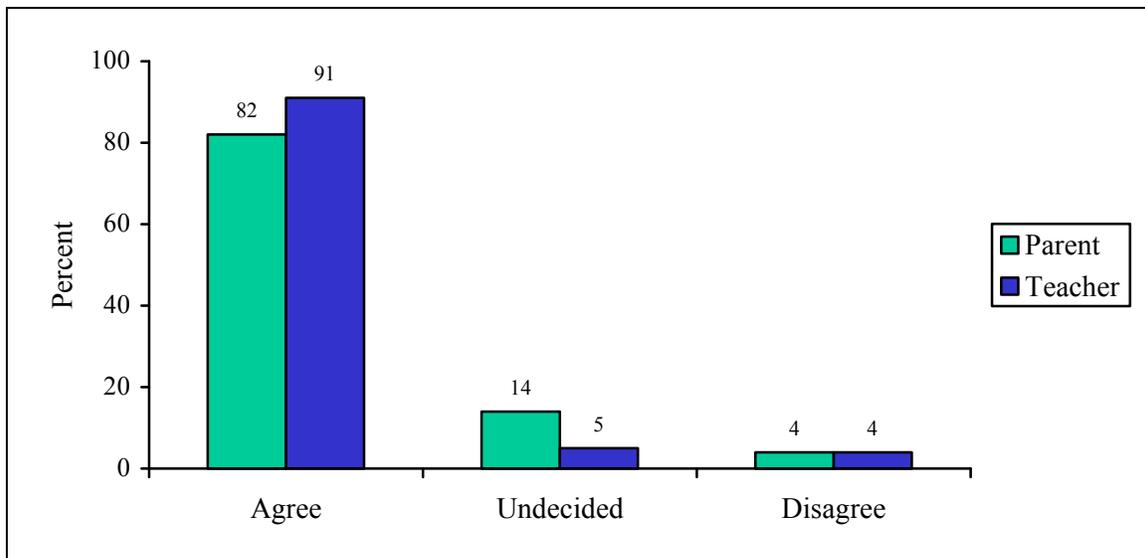


Figure 2.5: Parent and Teacher Responses to ‘The school helps students develop friendships with children from different backgrounds.’

Students were asked to respond to a similar statement, ‘Students develop friendships with students from different backgrounds.’ Figure 2.6 provides a summary of the responses by the type of magnet school students attend.

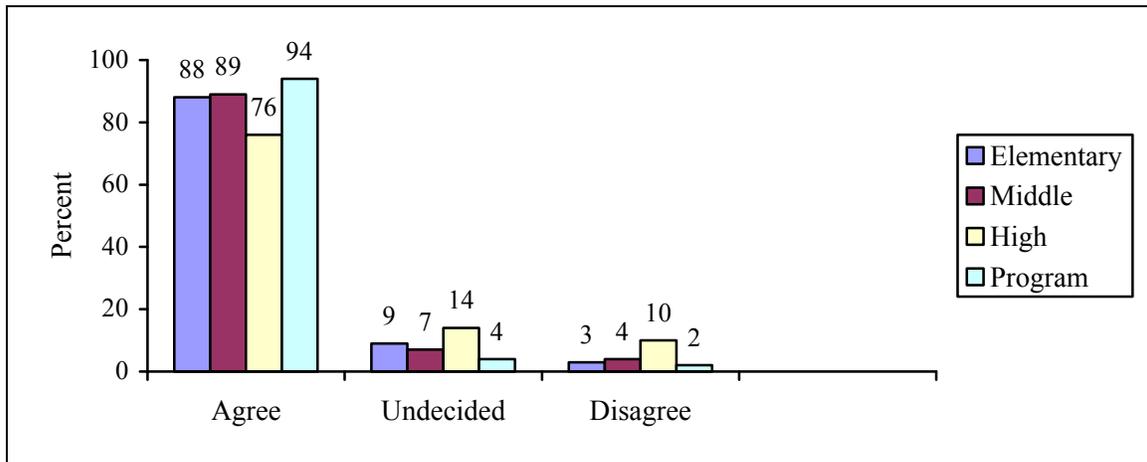


Figure 2.6: Student Responses to ‘Students develop friendships with students from different backgrounds.’ by Type of Magnet School.

The majority of students in each type of magnet school group agree with the statement. About the same percentage of elementary (88%) and middle (89%) school students are in agreement, while the highest proportion in agreement is among magnet program students (94%) and the lowest proportion among magnet high school students (76%). A magnet program student summed up his experience in the following manner: “This is an excellent school. Only now as the school year is drawing to a close, do I realize how much I will miss it. The respect and diversity permeating the school’s atmosphere is inescapable.”

Two common statements addressed whether parents and teachers perceived that interdistrict magnet school students interact with children from different backgrounds in

class and outside of class. The responses to the first statement, ‘Children from different backgrounds work on academic projects in school.’ are summarized in Figure 2.7.

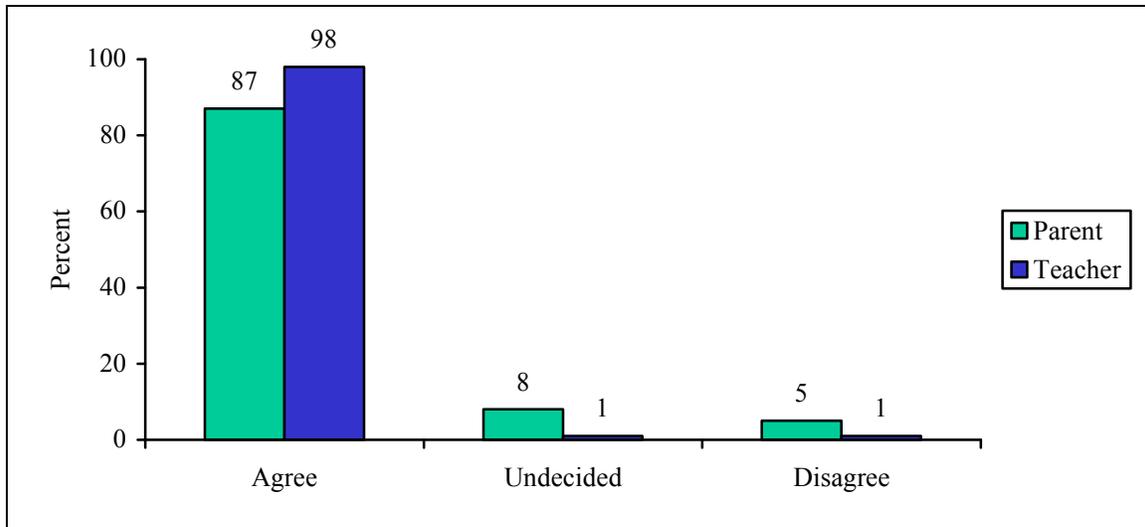


Figure 2.7: Parent and Teacher Responses to ‘Children from different backgrounds work on academic projects in school.’

The figure illustrates a high level of agreement and a low level of disagreement among parents and teachers. An overwhelming 98 percent of the teachers indicate that students from different backgrounds work together on projects and activities in their classes and in their schools, compared with 87 percent of the parents. Only five percent of the parents disagree that children from different backgrounds worked together, compared with one percent of the teachers, while the eight percent of the parents and one percent of the teachers are undecided.

Students were asked to respond to a similar statement, ‘Students from different backgrounds worked together on projects and activities in class.’ Figure 2.8 provides their responses, by the type of magnet school they attend. Again the majority of students in each magnet group school agree with the statement, with the greatest degree of agreement among magnet program (92%) and elementary (90%) students and somewhat

lower proportions of middle (84%) and high (73%) school students agreeing. Relatively large proportions of middle (14%) and high (17%) school students are undecided. Compared with students in the three other magnet school groups in which two to three percent of the students disagree, magnet high school students registered the greatest percentage of disagreement (10%).

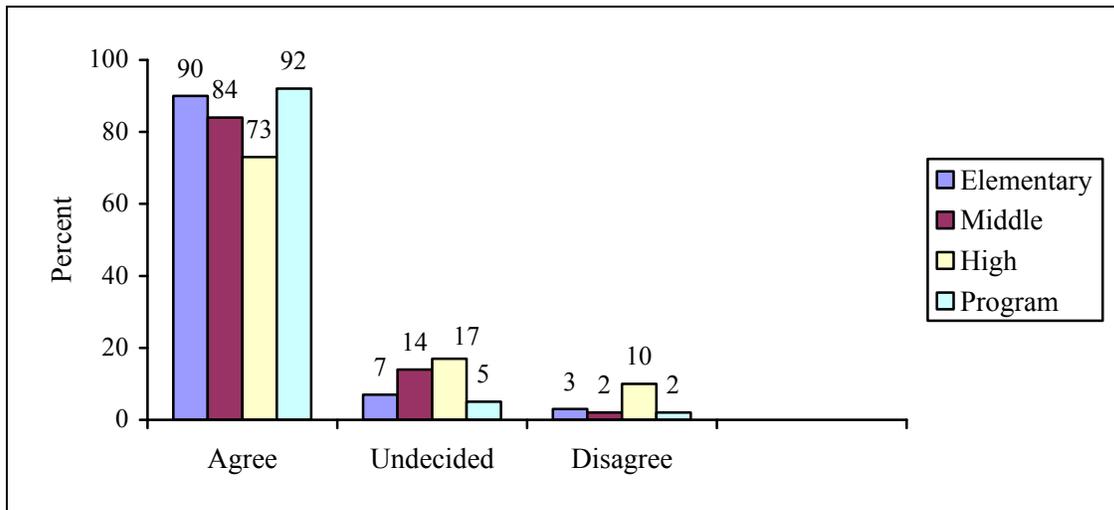


Figure 2.8: Student Responses to ‘Students from different backgrounds work together on projects and activities in class.’ by Type of Magnet School

Figure 2.9 contains a summary of the parent and teacher responses to the second statement about interactions among students in interdistrict magnet schools: ‘Students participate with classmates from different backgrounds in social activities outside of the classroom.’ Eighty-five percent of parents and teachers agree that, when given the opportunity, magnet school students participate in social activities with classmates from different backgrounds. Six percent of the parents and five percent of the teachers disagree, while nine and ten percent of each group, respectively, are undecided.

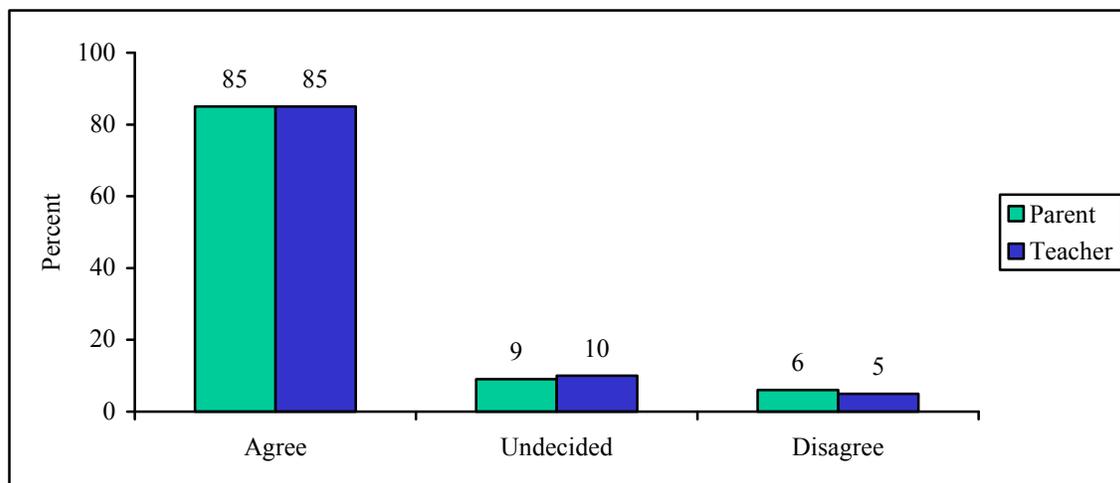


Figure 2.9: Parent and Teacher Responses to: ‘Students participate with classmates from different backgrounds in social activities outside of the classroom.’

Parents were asked to respond to two additional statements about their child’s interactions with schoolmates from different backgrounds. For the first statement: ‘My child’s friends and acquaintances come from different backgrounds.’, 80 percent agree and nine percent disagree. For the second statement: ‘My child has invited children from different backgrounds to our home.’, 68 percent of the parents agree and 22 percent disagree.

An elementary school father’s comment captured the sentiment of many parents who wrote comments about the diversity of the magnet schools their children attend: “Students are taught to respect the differences of others; and having such a diverse population allows them to experience these differences first hand, not just in a book. ... It is crucial to continue to support magnet schools and keep them small in size, yet big in opportunities.”

As noted earlier in this chapter, magnet schools where about 21 percent of the professional staff is drawn from minority groups are considerably more diverse than Connecticut public schools where about seven percent are minorities. Yet when magnet

school teachers and students were asked to respond to the statement, ‘The magnet school has a diverse staff.’ Smaller proportions agreed with this statement than with statements about student diversity. Seventy-one percent of the teachers and 79 percent of the students agree that their schools have diverse staffs, 21 percent of the teachers and six percent of the students disagree, and 8 percent of the teachers and 15 percent of the students are undecided.

Teachers were also asked to respond to two statements about academic opportunities for students in their magnets schools:

‘The school provides appropriate educational opportunities for all students, regardless of racial, ethnic, or economic background.’ (Opportunities for All)

‘The racial and ethnic composition in all classes is similar to the composition of the school as a whole. (Class Composition)

Figure 2.10 illustrates the distribution of their responses.

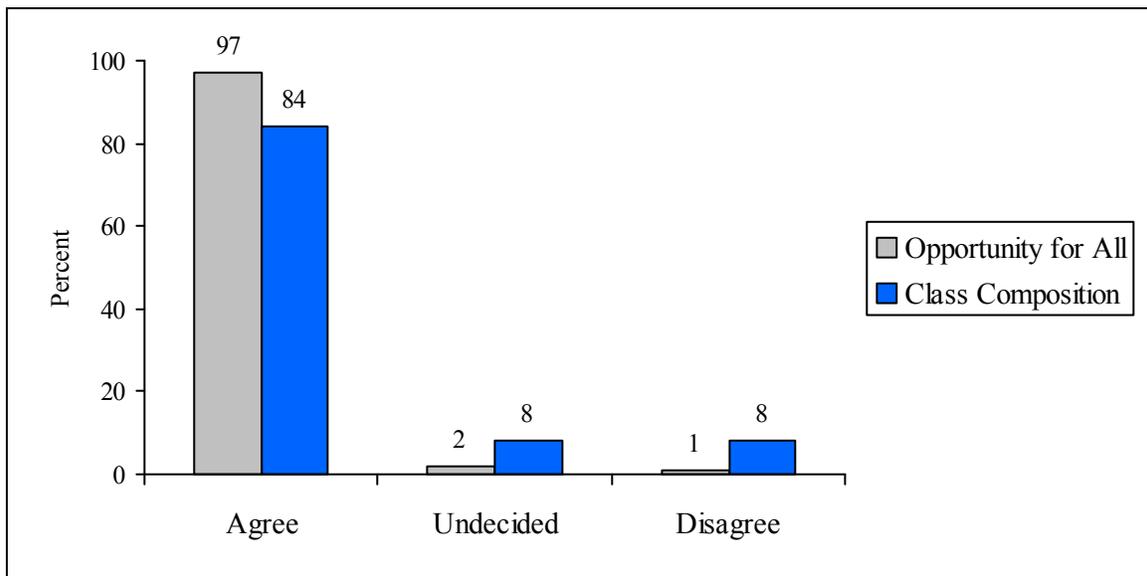


Figure 2.10: Interdistrict Magnet School Teachers’ Responses to Statements About Opportunity.

Nearly all teachers, 97 percent, agree that magnet schools provide appropriate opportunities for all students, regardless of racial, ethnic, or economic background. Only one percent disagrees with the statement and two percent are undecided. Eighty-four percent of the teachers agree that the racial and ethnic composition of students in all classes in their schools mirrors the composition of their school as a whole, while eight percent disagree and eight percent are undecided.

A magnet high school teacher shared the following comment about her experience working in a diverse interdistrict magnet school: “This school provides a safe, fun, exciting, and challenging environment for students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Diversity is a high priority for our staff, and we are actively seeking ways to build upon it. We accommodate every single student’s needs and learning style. I think this school is an excellent model for integrating schools.”

Summary

The statistics presented in this chapter show that interdistrict magnet schools and magnet school programs not only attract a more diverse student body, but also employ more diverse professional staffs than found in all but ERG I public schools across the state. Moreover, survey responses suggest that these schools provide learning experiences for students that promote connections among students from different backgrounds and academic opportunities for all students, regardless of background. The connections that begin in the classroom extend beyond it to where students have made friends with schoolmates from different backgrounds than their own, and socialize outside of class and outside of school.

