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Greater Hartford School Choice Fair Set For Saturday



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Interested in magnet schools? The next Hartford-area school choice fair is Saturday

NOVEMBER 11, 2015, 4:51 PM

The state's next Greater Hartford school choice fair is planned for Saturday at the Metropolitan Learning Center in Bloomfield.

The event, an educational marketplace of sorts for families curious about magnet schools and Open Choice, is the second of four regional choice fairs that the state Department of Education has scheduled through January to promote school options for the 2016-17 year.

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, families can expect to find information on the estimated 43 magnet schools in the area that are part of court-ordered efforts to address racial isolation in Hartford schools. Almost half of Hartford's roughly 22,000 students are now in integrated classrooms.

The magnet schools include those operated by Hartford and the Capitol Region Education Council, from prekindergarten to grade 12: Early Childhood Magnet School and Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin College; Bloomfield's Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School and The Global Experience Magnet School; and the Connecticut IB Academy, an East Hartford magnet high school.

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The regional Open Choice program, which allows Hartford students to be bused to suburban districts for their education, and vice versa, will also be marketed to families on Saturday. So will the Connecticut Technical High School System.

"Our goal is to provide information and improve access for students throughout the region who choose to apply to public schools outside of their community," Glen Peterson, division director of the state's Regional School Choice Office, said in a statement.

These days, with school districts in open competition for students, billboards and radio advertisements are just part of the marketing strategy. Last Saturday, the Hartford school system's school choice office held its own education expo with DJs, pizza, face-painting and a puppet show — an informational festival to attract families and promote the city's schools.

"Pick us," Enid Rey, Hartford's executive director of school choice, said at a city neighborhood meeting Tuesday night, describing the choice process and marketing. "Then we hope to get families to what we call the bonding and advocacy phase, and that is ... they actually come to our schools and that they continue to help us advocate for all the changes and the wonderful work that we're trying to do."

"That's choice, conceptually. But choice is really a transaction," said Rey, explaining the extensive application process and decision-making required by families. Among the dozens of magnet schools are some with specialized themes.

Students in the Hartford region can apply for magnet schools or Open Choice seats through the state-run admissions lottery. The application deadline is Jan. 29 for the 2016-17 school year; the lottery is usually held in the spring.

State education officials said more seats are typically open in the transition grades, such as pre-K, kindergarten, sixth grade and ninth grade.

Metropolitan Learning Center is at 1551 Blue Hills Ave., Bloomfield. The last two regional school choice fairs are set for Dec. 5 at Connecticut River Academy in East Hartford and Jan. 9 at Conard High School in West Hartford.

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