

Series 2002-2003

Circular Letter: C-17

To: Superintendents of Schools
From: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education
Date: November 1, 2002
Subject: Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Interdistrict magnet schools were developed in the 1980s as a means of reducing racial, ethnic and economic isolation in Connecticut's urban and suburban school districts. In 2002-2003, regional education service centers and public school districts now operate 31 interdistrict magnet schools affecting 10,799 students statewide. The number of schools and the number of students attending them will increase for the 2003-2004 school year.

As Connecticut's public school choice program expands, it is important that you be aware of the provisions of the law that assign responsibilities to you or affect the operation of your schools in relation to a child from your town who attends an interdistrict magnet school. Some of the pertinent provisions of the law are as follows:

ECS - If you have students attending an interdistrict magnet school, you may count these pupils for ECS purposes provided that they are enrolled through your district.

Transportation – Section 10-264i of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that the board of education of a district in which an interdistrict magnet school is located provide transportation services to students attending the interdistrict magnet school who reside in the district. While boards are not required to provide transportation to students attending an interdistrict magnet school located in another town, Section 10-264i does provide transportation grants for school districts which do provide this service. The maximum per pupil grant is \$1,200 per student per year. Excess transportation costs may be claimed as part of regular transportation costs and reimbursed pursuant to Section 10-266m of the General Statutes. **Please note:** Interdistrict magnet schools are critical to achieving the state's goal of reducing racial, ethnic and economic isolation. While current law does not require school districts to transport students who attend interdistrict magnet schools in another town, or even to participate in the interdistrict magnet school program, I urge you to do both. If you have any ability to give these students assistance in attending an interdistrict magnet school or getting to an interdistrict magnet school, I hope that you will do so. For example, if you have students attending school in another district for any reason, such as attendance at a vocational technical school, an interdistrict magnet school student may be able to ride as well. It is critical that Connecticut succeed in providing students with an educational experience in an atmosphere of reduced isolation, and we need your help.

Special Education – All students are eligible to attend interdistrict magnet schools and the expectation is that all students will be included, regardless of any disability. Every effort must be made to accommodate and program for special education students. Only in the rare event that a student could not achieve satisfactorily even with the use of supplementary aids and services in the educational environment could it be found that placement in an interdistrict magnet school to be inappropriate.

Subsection (h) of 10-264l of the General Statutes requires the following: For students requiring special education services and attending an interdistrict magnet school, the school district in which the student resides shall: (1) hold the planning and placement team meeting and invite representatives from the interdistrict magnet school to participate in the meeting; and (2) pay the interdistrict magnet school an amount equal to the difference between the reasonable cost of educating the student and the sum of the amount received by the interdistrict magnet school for the student from all sources. Interdistrict magnet schools are responsible for ensuring that a special education student receives the services mandated by the student's individualized education program whether these services are provided by the interdistrict magnet school or by the school district in which the student resides.

Recruitment – Section 10-220d of the General Statutes requires that each local and regional board of education provide full access to all schools of choice for the recruitment of students attending schools under the board's jurisdiction. This means that representatives of interdistrict magnet schools and programs should be able to communicate with and make a presentation to all students and their families who are eligible to participate in interdistrict magnet schools.

Student Enrollment – Students attending an interdistrict magnet school are first required to be enrolled in their district of residence. They must be enrolled regardless of age, grade level (including all pre-kindergarten students) or whether or how much tuition is paid by the district to the interdistrict magnet school. Once a student is enrolled in an interdistrict magnet school he or she is not required to apply to remain in the school. The student remains enrolled for all grades covered by the school. State funding to the interdistrict magnet school is dependent upon the student being enrolled in the district of residence before enrollment in the magnet school.

Although there is no mandate that school districts participate in interdistrict magnet programs, I urge you to do so. The reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation is defined as an educational interest of the state in Section 10-4b of the General Statutes. Districts are required by law to report annually on their efforts to reduce student isolation. Participation in an interdistrict magnet school is an indication of your commitment to this important educational goal and I urge you to give your students the opportunity to experience an educational setting that allows them to interact with students and teachers from other backgrounds.

If you have any questions concerning the interdistrict magnet school program, please contact Charles Cassidy or William Magnotta in the Choice Unit, Office of Grant Programs and Technology, at (860) 713-6590. Thank you.

TSS:kfd

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