An Alternative Magnet High School: Sports & Medical Sciences Academy

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Research Question

- What makes students and teachers choose to attend or teach in the Sports & Medical Science Academy in Hartford?
The Significance of this Research to Educational Studies

- The affect of Sheff v. O’Neil on public education
- Implementation of Charter and Magnet Schools in Connecticut
- Understanding what factors comprise teachers and students decision of teaching or attending an alternative high school
Sheff v. O’Neil: History and Impact

- 1989 Supreme Court case that argued racial isolation found within the Hartford Public Schools as well as the differing quality of education between suburban and urban schools was cheating urban students of their Constitutional rights.
- In result of this case a variety of school choice options took place in the state (including charter schools, magnet schools, vocational-technical schools, lighthouse schools, and The Open Choice Program).
- Currently, in Connecticut there are 31 magnet schools, 13 Charter Schools, 18 regional vocational-technical schools, and 19 regional agricultural centers.
Implementation of Charter and Magnet Schools in Connecticut

- Definition of a Charter School in comparison to the definition of a Magnet School.
- In Connecticut the first regional magnet school was opened in 1991 in New London, while the first charter school was opened in 1997.
Why Choose The Sports & Medical Sciences Academy?

- Students & teachers have so many choices of schools and school types.
- The location of the Sports & Medical Sciences Academy is not an ideal learning environment.
- If why students & teachers choose the Sports & Medical Sciences Academy can be figured out then more schools can attempt to replicate the environment and succeed as well.
History of the Sports & Medical Sciences Academy

- Started in 1997 by Karen Finder as a Charter School called the Sports Sciences Academy.
- In the 1997-1998 school year there was 54 black students, 52 Hispanic students, and 4 White students.
- Goal of a “supportive learning community”.
- Dr. Joseph R. Gallucci took over as principal in July 2002 and has improved the school dramatically.
Sports and Medical Sciences Academy Today

- A magnet school, that has made significant strides to diversify its student body.
- The student body is made up of 141 blacks, 156 Hispanics, 13 Whites, and 1 other.
- 17% of school population was from one of the 14 suburban school districts.
- Emphasis on demanding academics and creating lifelong learners.
- Currently a full lottery system type of enrollment into school.
Existing Research on School Choice

- “Do Magnet Schools Boost Achievement?” – Adam Gamoran
- “Why Do Parents Choose Alternative Schools?” – Sally Bomotti
Research Method

- Qualitative study
- Interviews with 5 students, 5 teachers, and two interviews with Principal Gallucci.
- An IRB form was filed and approved through Trinity College, where the anonymity of those interviewed was declared.
Thesis

- The Sports and Medical Sciences Academy provides a safe and supportive learning environment for students and faculty.
- Faculty choose to work at the school for its collegial atmosphere, focused programming, and engaged student population.
- Students choose to attend the school for its rigorous curriculum, technological advantages, and improved opportunities for future learning.
Interviews with Teachers and Dr. Gallucci

- Small class size is key
- Technology is top quality
- Everyone has say on how school is run through new school organizational system
- Block scheduling is extremely helpful in getting all material in one class that is needed
- Student population, as a whole, is comprised of engaged learners
- CAPT scores are best in the city
Interviews With Students

- All students interviewed made the choice to attend the school by themselves
- Small class sizes (15.5 Students in 10th Grade English class)
- Technology
- Access to honors and AP classes
- Want to attend some type of college
- Students accept more demanding academic work
- Job shadowing and internships allow students to prepare for future
- College classes can be taken for up to 12 college credits
- Teachers “show they care about students in and outside of school”
Technology at the Sports and Medical Sciences Academy

- Every classroom has a Smart Board (with some rooms switching to Smart Board 2).
- Average of one computer per 3.8 students, all of which are of high or moderate power.
- Every teacher is given a laptop.
- Two portable laptop carts (12 laptops each) that can travel around the school.
- Several rooms have wireless internet connections.
- Fully functional wireless computer lab.
- Special marketing computer lab.
The Smart Board

“The protective overlay adds interactive whiteboard functionality to your plasma or liquid crystal display (LCD) panel. You simply touch the display to control any computer application or write in digital ink and then save all your work to print, e-mail or post online.” (www2.smartech.com)
Block Scheduling

Daily Schedule

7:45-9:10  Block 1
9:13-10:38  Block 2
10:41-12:41  Block 3
12:44-2:09  Block 4
School Meetings

- Cluster Team Meetings
- Academic Leaders
- School Improvement Team
- Directors Group
- Monthly Meeting with New Teachers
Senior Project

- Write a resume
- Write a 5-8 paragraph essay
- Complete a college/program search
- Complete a financial aid search (if necessary)
- Letters of recommendation
- Parental and school staff consultations
CART Achievements

- In 2004 the Sports and Medical Sciences Academy had six students pass all four sections of the CART test, and these six students each received a Dell laptop at a ceremony from the school.
Conclusion

- Small class sizes help to create an atmosphere that fosters learning that both students and teachers appreciate.
- The high level of technology that the Sports and Medical Sciences Academy has benefits both the teachers and the students.
- Despite stereotypes, many teenagers like academically rigorous programs that will help them prepare for their future, and having engaged students helps the teachers significantly too.
- Magnet and Charter schools are a step in the right direction in order to help education inequalities, but more needs to be done in order to correct this problem.
Any Questions?

SPORT & MEDICAL SCIENCES ACADEMY