Alternative Education Programs:
School Choice & Student Benefit

Anique Thompson
Ed 400 – Senior Research Project
December 16, 2011
Background

- Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)
- Sheff vs. O’Neill ruling (1996)
- Hartford Region Open Choice Program (1997)
Significance

“Recent data shows that 72% of Blacks, 76% of Latinos, but only 11% of whites attend schools where half or more of the students are not white.” (Frankenberg, Lee and Orfield, 2003)

“Segregated schools have much higher concentrations of poverty and other problems and much lower average test scores, levels of student, teacher qualifications, and advanced courses. With few exceptions, separate schools are still unequal schools. Ending desegregation plans tends to produce a rapid increase of such schools within a district, and more qualified teachers tend to leave these segregated schools.” (Freeman, C., Scafidi, B., & Sjoquist, D.L., 2002)
Research Question

- What is the experience of students of color that navigate these schools?

- What benefits or disadvantages do they perceive as a result of their involvement in the program?
Methodology

- 16 student questionnaires
  - 1 Current Students
  - 15 Alumni

- 7 structured administrator questionnaires

- Interviews conducted by the Sheff Movement Coalition
  - 2 Current Students
  - 9 Alumni
  - 2 Parents
  - 5 Administrators
I argue that students have the tools to do well academically due in part to the support system they have through the Hartford Region Open Choice program staff.

The students who stay enrolled in this program value the educational opportunities offered in the various Open Choice schools.
“I visit the homes of the Hartford students during the summer. We need to reach out to the kids to make sure they have a great experience.” (HROC program School Principal)

“Parents who are a part of the child's educational team, students who are involved in extracurricular activities and who have good connections with school staff are the most successful.” (HROC program Administrator)

“The encouragement and support students get from support staff.” (Support Center Staff Member)
“My guidance counselor who was very special to me … I’m actually a guidance counselor now so – you know, that’s my profession and when I think back on my experiences you know he really had a lot of influence over me at that time. I was a first generation college graduate so my mom didn’t have a lot of experience about you know furthering my education beyond high school…. I’m sure that if it wasn’t for him I probably would not have gone to college.” (Sheff Movement Coalition, Alumni 1)
Disadvantages

- Length of the school day and bus rides
  - “Having to wake up so early to get on a school bus” (Alumni Questionnaire 4)
  - “Returning home late from school because of the district in which you attend school.” (Alumni Questionnaire 6)
  - “The only weakness I’ve ever experienced is dealing with the program is the buses. Sometimes they’re early so kids miss the bus and sometimes they’re late so kids are late to school.” (Alumni Questionnaire 1)
“For starters just being exposed to a new group of people, a different way of doing things. One of the things that surprised me the most was having a class where the classwork was actually done and not being disrupted for interruptions and I think all the opportunities for learning, the different exposures we had, going places I probably would have never gone to in Hartford field trips, and just learning drastically and fundamentally new and different things I think it made me a stronger more confident person…” (Sheff Movement Coalition, Current 1)
Diversity and Educational Opportunity

- Students stressed the importance of schooling over the long school days and bus rides.

- “There was always a lot of time constraints. A few things that I regret but by and large the education opportunities that I had were so profound, I don’t think I’d change it for the world.” (Sheff Movement Coalition, Current Student 1)

- “Diversity, opportunities to interact and learn about different races and cultures.” (Alumni Questionnaire 6)
“Students from urban areas are able to get an education in suburban areas and make them more diverse.” (Alumni Questionnaire 2)

“The strengths of the Open Choice program is mainly how they open up opportunities for children from urban cities, the education from suburban towns. It gives children a chance at bettering their knowledge elsewhere before going to college.” (Alumni Questionnaire 1)

“Gives children a better education than they would get in Hartford.” (Alumni Questionnaire 3)
The advantages of the program are students receive individualized attention from the staff which contributes to their academic achievement.

The length of the school day and transportation problems are aspects of the program that students cite as disadvantages as a result of their enrollment in the program.

The overall experience of attending one of the HROC schools was beneficial for their academic future.
Thank-You!

- Hartford Region Open Choice program Administration & Support Staff
- Rachael Barlow
- Professor Dyrness
- Professor Lash