

## **Access to Better Schools:**

### **How will declining enrollment and school choice shape our region?**

**Friday, Dec. 11, 2015**

**7:30 - 9:30 AM**

Trinity College

Washington Room at Mather Hall

300 Summit Street, Hartford

## **Agenda**

**7:30 – 8:00** Refreshments and registration

**8:00 – 8:05** Introductory remarks – Xiangming Chen, Trinity College

**8:05 – 8:15** Making Choices - based on the [Connecticut ALICE report](#)

**8:15 – 9:25** Panel and audience discussion

Moderator: Richard Sugarman, Hartford Promise

Panelists:

- Robert Cotto, Jr., Director of Urban Educational Initiatives and Lecturer in Educational Studies, Trinity College
- Bruce E. Douglas, Ph.D., Executive Director, Capitol Region Education Council
- Lon Seidman, Chairman, Essex Elementary Board of Education
- Mike Zuba, AICP, Associate, Director of Planning, Milone & MacBroom

**9:25** Closing remarks – Xiangming Chen, Trinity College

**Robert Cotto, Jr., Director of Urban Educational Initiatives and Lecturer in Educational Studies**

**Trinity College**

Robert Cotto, Jr. is Director of Urban Educational Initiatives and a Lecturer in Educational Studies at Trinity College. Since arriving at Trinity in April 2014, Robert has helped expand urban educational initiatives and other projects that connect Trinity to the City of Hartford. Previously, he was a Senior Policy Fellow in K-12 Education at CT Voices for Children, where he published reports on Connecticut's testing system, public school choice, and K-12 education data and policy. Before CT Voices, he was a social studies teacher at the Metropolitan Learning Center for seven years. A Connecticut native, Mr. Cotto earned his B.A. at Dartmouth and his Ed.M. at Harvard. In 2014, he earned an M.A. at Trinity. He currently is serving his second term on the Hartford Board of Education. Robert writes about school choice and education policy at The Cities, Suburbs, and School Project.

**Bruce E. Douglas, Ph.D., Executive Director**

**Capitol Region Education Council**

Bruce E. Douglas, Ph.D. has been an educator for 47 years. Dr. Douglas is an experienced administrator, having served as executive director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) since 2001, assistant executive director of CREC, and superintendent and assistant superintendent of Suffield Public Schools. He began his career in the Bloomfield Public Schools, where he was a teacher, coach and school administrator. He is a relentless social justice advocate for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. In pursuit of that goal, he works tirelessly to eliminate local, national, and global achievement gaps and to ensure that every single child receives a world-class public education. He develops policy and legislation that drive public education to the forefront of the Connecticut General Assembly's agenda each year. During his tenure at CREC, his advocacy and leadership have led a measurable growth in the high-quality educational opportunities available to Connecticut's children.

**Lon Seidman, Chairman**

**Essex Elementary Board of Education**

Lon Seidman, 39, is chairman of the Essex Elementary Board of Education. He was first elected in 2003 and was re-elected for a third six-year term in November 2015. Lon previously served on the Westbrook Board of Education. He has been working with colleagues and administrators as well as legislative leaders to effectively consolidate district governance for all grade levels in Chester, Deep River and Essex. The towns currently share a middle school and high school but maintain separate elementary school districts and school boards. The Boards in the three towns are sharing Special Education and other expenses through an innovative cooperative agreement called the Supervision District that was created under section 10-158(a) of the Connecticut General Statutes. Lon is a partner in his family's business, The Safety Zone, an importer of gloves and personal protection products. Lon served as campaign manager for Congressman Joe Courtney in 2006 and 2008.

**Mike Zuba, AICP, Associate, Director of Planning**

**Milone & MacBroom**

Mike Zuba, AICP, is the Director of Planning for Milone & MacBroom's public, private, and educational planning and development projects. Since 2000, Mr. Zuba has assisted more than 35 Connecticut public school systems on a variety of projects ranging from enrollment projections and redistricting to long-range facility plans. Mr. Zuba understands the complexity of modern planning projects, balancing input from many stakeholders, managing project dynamics, and fostering public involvement. He has designed and implemented GIS-based demographic models for school systems as well as various public and private clients. He has been actively involved in a variety of community planning assignments, including the preparation of community comprehensive plans; housing studies; residential and commercial market studies; and projects requiring revitalization, redevelopment, and reuse planning. Additionally, Mr. Zuba serves as a facilitator for public planning processes including school redistricting, facility master plans, and community comprehensive plans.

## How will declining enrollment and school choice shape our region's schools?

### **What do we already know?** *Key facts from Progress Points and other analyses and reports*

- Enrollment has declined by 10% at district schools in the Hartford region over the past five years. Every town has had declining enrollment in district ('neighborhood') schools. [10]
- The school-age population for the region is projected to decline by 13% from 2010 to 2025. [10]
- In the 2015 lottery, 30 percent of students who wanted to leave a city school for a suburban school won a spot, while two-thirds of the entrants into the school choice lottery were suburban students. [9]
- In 2012, in the 20 percent of schools with the largest kindergarten classes, a majority of students were not white (78%) and were eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals (76%). [18]
- Participation in school choice is significantly lower among English language learners and those with special needs, and significantly higher among students with high CMT scores and those who live in areas with higher incomes and higher home ownership. [19]
- In Connecticut, 52% of local spending goes toward education, as of 2010. [8]
- Connecticut's per student spending on education ranks as the 5th highest in the United States. [8]

### **What has already been said?** *Recommendations from several reports are digested below.*<sup>1</sup>

**School choice:** School choice programs and systems should seek to “balance enrollment” in “regional magnet schools,” “across suburban districts,” and to “improve inclusion in regional magnet schools.” “Magnet school pathways” should be expanded with a focus to “develop and retain an educated workforce pipeline.” Parents would benefit if “the CT Department of Education work[ed] with CREC, HPS, and all magnet providers to develop a unified system of preferences for school admission that is fully transparent to parents and consistent across different magnet schools in the system” to “reduce confusion in the application process and the lottery system.” Outreach should focus on removing “barriers to enrolling ELL students and students with disabilities in choice programs...and [the] disincentives to enroll these children.” Pre-K providers “should continue targeted and coordinated outreach to Hartford families about their full range of options.” [Sources: 5, 7, 11, 15, 16, 18]

Beyond improving the mechanisms for choice, “Connecticut should investigate forces that drive segregation by race and class, and explore means of ensuring equal access to integrated schools and neighborhoods.” Since “most school districts assign children to schools by neighborhood...low-income people of color often cannot move to neighborhoods with high performing schools unless they are able to move into affordable and/or government subsidized housing.” An alignment of “state housing and education policy [would] promote integration.” [Sources: 1, 15, 18]

**Finance:** Education finance reform has been a frequent area of attention, from the “nine task forces established since 1977” to study the topic to the 2003 *Metropatterns* report call to “move more of the cost of K-12 public education from local property taxes to the statewide revenue system, at least to the 50-50 cost-sharing level long identified as a goal for Connecticut.” One area of agreement is that “Connecticut and its schools should increase transparency in how education money is spent,” through support for the “uniform

---

<sup>1</sup> Quotations do not constitute endorsement of the conclusions

chart of accounts...and publish[ing] each board of education's detailed expenses online."

Education funding should take into account the needs of vulnerable populations, such as "youth and adults who 'fall between the cracks' of the K-12 system and adult education" and should seek to address disparities in the existing system. Connecticut "should establish a system of education funding that ensures every child attends a school with the resources necessary to offer them a high quality and substantially equal education that meets their needs, regardless of the property tax base in the student's town of residence." Districts face pressures due to "state underfunding of regular education programs," through the ECS, "state underfunding of special education" and "state underfunding of districts with significant student-performance challenges" which could be addressed "by increasing funding for categorical grants and expanding state technical assistance" and minimizing the "wide disparities in municipal service demand (municipal overburden)." [Sources: 3, 17, 18]

**Intra- and inter-municipal cooperation:** Any focus on consolidation should look to "organizational functions, not specific schools" and to "re-deploy resources toward the support of effective teaching, not to save money *per se*." It is "unrealistic at this point in time to expect new regional districts to form" without increases in shared services. Functions to consider include: "transportation contracts, health insurance, food service, building and grounds, professional development activities and common curriculum development projects" and services like "insurance, maintenance and operations, computer hardware and software and finance office operations." Regional transportation could yield savings through "a model administrated by the RESCs, public transit districts, or some other regional entity to transport students with disabilities." (In general, "increased information sharing can explain 'what the RESCs are all about'" and "how they provide needed services and access to resources.") Subsidies should "be expanded to provide Hartford families with pre-K transportation to magnet schools within Hartford." Shared functions could be established through a "pilot program which provides financial incentives" or "small mini-grants" to "facilitate the necessary analyses and feasibility studies" and for districts to "voluntarily collaborate...to identify and execute mechanisms that will achieve savings on the education side of the budget through cost reductions, shared services, or intra-/inter-municipal collaboration." In addition, "regional collaboration between higher education (public and independent institutions) with K-12" can increase college/career-readiness. [Sources: 2, 4, 11, 13, 14]

1. [Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice](#). Connecticut Fair Housing Center, 2015.
2. [CAPSS Position on School District Capacity](#), 2013.
3. [CCM Public Policy Report: Education Finance in Connecticut](#). Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, 2012.
4. [CCM recommendations for Consideration by the Board of Education Functions Working Group of the MORE Commission](#), Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, 2013.
5. [Choice Watch: Diversity and Access in Connecticut's School Choice Programs](#). Robert Cotto Jr. and Kenneth Feder, CT Voices for Children, 2014.
6. [Connecticut Metropatterns](#), Ameregis and Metropolitan Research Corporation, 2003.
7. [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#), Metro Hartford Alliance and CERC.
8. [Examining the Effective Delivery of Public Services in Connecticut](#), Institute for the 21st Century, 2012.
9. [Is school choice really a choice, or a chance?](#) Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, Connecticut Mirror, September 10, 2015.
10. [Metro Hartford Progress Points: Access to Opportunity](#), 2015.
11. [Pre-Kindergarten Availability and Access in Hartford Region Magnet and Open Choice Schools](#), Mira Debs for Sheff Movement, 2015.
12. [Recommendations](#), MORE Commission Board of Education Functions Sub-Committee, 2013.
13. [2015 Recommendations for Legislative Action](#), MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group 2015.
14. [Shared Services White Paper](#), Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, 2015.
15. [Sheff Movement Coalition Legislative and Advocacy Agenda 2014-15](#). Sheff Movement.
16. [Simplifying the Lottery Process: Preferences](#), Mira Debs for Sheff Movement, 2014.
17. [Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Connecticut](#), Planning Commission for Higher Education, 2015.
18. [Unequal Schools: Connecticut's Racial, Socioeconomic, and Geographic Disparities in Kindergarten Class Size and Teaching Experience](#). Kenneth Feder, Sarah Iverson, and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D., Connecticut Voices for Children, 2015.
19. [Who Chooses in Hartford?](#) Dougherty, Jack, Diane Zannoni, Marissa Block, and Stephen Spirou, Cities Suburbs Schools Project at Trinity College, 2014.