

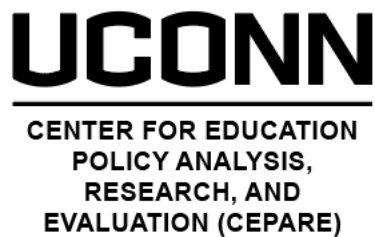
School Lottery Family Decision Analysis: Patterns Among Decliners

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by

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an analysis of Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) lottery applicants pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement between the CSDE and UCONN. There were two main strands of analysis. The first was a quantitative analysis of the administrative data from the 2019-2020 RSCO lottery. The goal of this analysis was to explore patterns among lottery acceptances, declines, and administrative declines of offers for interdistrict magnet schools and Open Choice schools. Specifically, lottery offer outcome data were disaggregated by relevant demographic subgroups, geographies, offer rounds, applicant choice preferences, and choice programs. We looked for associations between lottery offer outcomes and various moderating variables that may explain those outcomes. The second strand was a qualitative analysis of data collected from interviews with families who – actively or passively – declined offers from the RSCO Lottery. The quantitative portion of the study allowed us to explore broader patterns behind *what* patterns exist among lottery acceptances, declines, and administrative declines. The qualitative inquiry complements this information by seeking to understand *why* families actively or passively declined offers from the school choice lottery, as well as *how* families are experiencing the lottery process and what, if any, aspects of the lottery process may help explain their declining.

Findings from the quantitative study were based on an analysis of over 20,000 applications from the 2019-2020 lottery. We focused heavily on magnet school applications as these accounted for nearly all applications in the lottery. For instance, 79.5% of the lottery applications were for magnet schools *only* while applicants seeking both magnets and Open Choice made up another 18.9%. Two-thirds (67.2%) of the magnet applications were from suburban residents while one-third (32.8%) were submitted by Hartford families. A total of 16,276 unique households applied to the lottery (across all programs¹), with 40% of them submitting an application for more than one child. Most applications involved children at the preschool level and the transition grades of Kindergarten, Grade 6, and Grade 9. Approximately 25% of the applicants identified as Latino or Latino-multi-racial. A little over 13% identified as Latino-Black. Another roughly 35% identified as Black/African American or Black/African American-multi-racial. White families were over-represented among “magnet-only” applications.

Of the magnet applications, RSCO made 7,961 offers, 61.5% of which were accepted, 13.4% actively declined, and 25.1% administratively declined. Administrative declines occur when families do not communicate to RSCO that they are declining an offer or fail to register the student *after accepting an offer*. Among magnet administrative declines, 72.5% fell into the former category (“the parent failed to respond before the deadline”) while nearly all the remaining cases were because the family did not register the child after accepting the offer. It does not appear that magnet school choice preference made a difference here, as this reason was comparably represented across first through fifth choice offers. Administrative declines are, however, somewhat related to grade level. That is, families of PreK students administratively declined at relatively lower rates. Overall, non-transition grades tended to exhibit higher than

¹ This report focuses on two RSCO programs: interdistrict magnet schools and Open Choice. Suburban and Hartford families may apply to either or both.

expected administrative decline rates. There were not substantial differences between suburban and Hartford resident applicants in terms of administrative declines, although suburban families were slightly more likely to administratively decline relative to all magnet offers.

Nearly two-thirds (66.4%) of magnet offers made to applicants' first choices were accepted. Acceptance rates dropped to below 50% with second-choice offers and below 40% for third to fifth-choice offers. The main reason listed by families for actively declining a first-choice magnet school offer was that "the student wanted to stay in their current school or district" (this accounted for half of all the survey responses for active declines). With respect to magnet school decliners, suburban families were relatively more likely to opt to stay in their own school or district than Hartford families.

Among magnet offers, there appears to be a relationship between offer outcome and number of siblings in the lottery. That is, families with more than one child in the lottery were more likely to decline than those with one child in the lottery. Of the 7,926 magnet offers, 4,911 were made to families with one child in the lottery, of which 3,210 accepted (65.4%). In comparison, of the 2,114 offers made to families with two children in the lottery, 1,197 were accepted (56.6%). For families who entered more than one child in the magnet lottery, the decline rates were relatively higher than expected across the board.

Magnet offer acceptance rates were the highest at early PreK levels and transition grades. For instance, PK3 and PK4 offers were accepted about three-quarters of the time. The transition grades of Kindergarten and Grade 9 were modestly lower at 62.4%, while the Grade 6 acceptance rate was 71.6%.

Finally, there was a distinct relationship between seat offer period and offer outcome, although the vast majority of offers were made in the spring – specifically, in April and May. The later the seat offer, the less likely applicants were to accept: 71.9% of magnet offers were accepted in the spring, 56.8% in summer, and 41.7% in fall. Hartford families accepted their offers at higher rates than suburban families across all three seat offer time periods, and this pattern occurred for both first-choice and second-choice offers. For instance, Hartford residents accepted 78.5% of their first-choice spring offers compared to 67.0% among suburban families. Irrespective of residence location, administrative declines increased over each successive seat offer period.

The quantitative analysis allowed us to obtain descriptive data on lottery applications, discern patterns of behavior in terms of where families applied and what decisions they made upon receiving an offer. We also examined possible relationships between factors such as school order preference, number of siblings in the lottery, timing of offers, and family residence and their ultimate decisions. The quantitative analysis very much informed our qualitative inquiry, in which we gathered data from interviews with parents/caregivers of families who declined an offer. Qualitative analysis thus allowed us to attend to the *why* and explore the experiences and decision-making processes among parents.

Findings from the qualitative analysis are presented in three main subsections: 1.) families' experiences (why they apply, what they value in a school, and how they experienced the application process); 2.) alignment with RSCO data; and 3.) primary reasons for decline. In this executive summary we present only findings surrounding the primary reasons for decline.

Interviews with parents and caregivers demonstrated that families rarely make decisions based on one factor – decision making processes are complex and families are balancing many different considerations. These decisions are also deeply contextualized in a wide range of historical and cultural factors. Findings from the qualitative analysis showed five main themes related to why families are declining lottery offers. First, the most prominent reason that factored into families' decision to decline was that they – knowingly or unknowingly – applied to the school choice lottery with substantive information gaps. The new or additional information acquired after receiving an offer led to their decision to decline. Second, many families declined lottery offers because the student offered a seat had sibling(s) that were not offered a seat or were not offered a seat in the same school or district. Third, families declined lottery offers due to changes in the family's or the child's circumstances that occurred between the time they applied and the time they received an offer. Changes in circumstances that most influenced families' decision to decline fell into four categories: personal; academic opportunities at current school; extracurricular opportunities at current school; and an evolution in the student's interests. Fourth, moving – actual or intentional – factored into decisions to decline lottery offers. Finally, for many participants, the COVID-19 pandemic was a “last straw” factor that led to a decision to decline as it created circumstances that compounded other reasons they had for potentially declining.

The qualitative analysis also evidenced two secondary findings that were not as prevalent across all participants but that nonetheless stood out to us as interesting and worthy of consideration. First, we discuss in the report families' incomplete understandings of choice application processes. The perceived ambiguity surrounding, and opacity of choice application processes prompted some families to attempt to “game the system,” which contributed to their declines. Specifically, some families declined because the offer they received was the result of an application or choice they did not intend to accept submitted by the parent in a – misinformed – effort to improve their chances for a different application or choice. Families also described wanting only their top one or two choices but including additional choices thinking that if they decline an offer to a ‘false’ choice they could remain on a waitlist for the choice they actually want, improving their chances. Another secondary finding that emerged from interviews is that families may decline an offer because they applied to the school choice lottery uncommittedly – only in an effort to explore their options or to see what their options could be.

We conclude this report with suggestions based on the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Note that we did not triangulate the findings from interviews with parents. This means that the suggestions rooted in these findings may include something that RSCO or a partner is already doing. However, even if that is the case, the lack of awareness in our participants suggests that improvements could be made on the part of the providers.

Summary of Suggestions based on these Findings

We first summarize suggestions that could be implemented to support families' pre-application processes. Subsequently, we offer suggestions for RSCO's internal processes after the application period ends (post-application). The bulk of our suggestions, however, are those directed at supporting families after they receive an offer to a school of choice (post-offer).

Pre-Application

- Develop a more centralized hub of information on schools that includes information parents are expressing to be most relevant to their decision-making processes.
 - Include information in non-text forms as well – for example, in a short video.
 - Consider including a chat feature that would allow parents/caregivers to chat with a support person from RSCO when a question arises.
- Provide increased transparency about RSCO Lottery processes, including factors that do or do not impact a family's "chances."
 - Encourage magnet applicants to list more than one school, if they would consider a second, third, etc., choice.

Post-Application

- Investigate possible ways to account for siblings applying to the RSCO Lottery at the same time in such a way that would keep the process fair for single applications as well.
- To the extent possible, ensure that if a family is applying with more than one child that their offer notifications go out at the same time.
- Consider changing the rule surrounding Hartford families' eligibility for their Open Choice placement if they move out of Hartford.
- Increase clarity and explicitness around the timing of offers and provide rolling updates to applicants regarding their offer status.

Post-Offer

- Increase availability and improve accessibility of open houses.
 - Hold more than one open house during different seasons (i.e., in addition to holding open houses in the pre-application season, hold open houses in the post-offer season).
 - Vary the days and times of open house offerings.
 - To the extent practicable, ensure the open houses of partner schools do not conflict.
 - Consider hosting virtual open houses which could be recorded and viewed by families on their own schedule.
- Facilitate intentional connection of accepted families and students with each other and with enrolled families and students.
 - Host events for accepted families and/or students so they could connect with each other and have a chance to start building community.

- Connect parents who receive an offer with parent volunteers whose child already attends (or attended) the school or district.
- Create virtual spaces where accepted families and enrolled families can network, ask questions, and share experiences.
- Host panels of diverse parents whose children attend magnet and Open Choice schools – parents who receive offers could attend the panels to hear lived experiences and ask questions. These panels could additionally be expanded to “families” and include the voices of enrolled students.
- Host panels of educators from Open Choice and magnet schools – families who receive offers could attend the panels to hear their perspectives.

Introduction

This report presents findings from an analysis of Connecticut’s Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) lottery applicants pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement between the CSDE and UCONN. A preliminary, draft report was shared with representatives from RSCO and the *Sheff* plaintiff team in December 2020. Discussions of that draft report prompted additional analyses, which are reflected in this document. A separate study examining student attrition from RSCO choice schools will be released in the spring.

There are two main sections to this report, both of which focus heavily on lottery offer decliners. Part I provides a quantitative analysis of the administrative data from the 2019-2020 RSCO lottery. Part II offers an in-depth qualitative examination via interviews with a random sample of lottery participants who declined or administratively declined² an offer. We conclude with a brief discussion of implications and suggestions based on the findings of both main sections and offer next steps.

Part I: Quantitative Analysis

Per the MOA, our task was to analyze administrative data from the 2019-2020 RSCO lottery to investigate patterns among lottery acceptances, declines, and administrative declines. The two key choice programs subject to analysis included interdistrict magnet schools and Open Choice, the latter of which involves separate lotteries for Hartford and suburban residents. Lottery offer outcome data were disaggregated by relevant demographic subgroups, geographies, offer rounds, applicant choice preferences, and choice programs. We also looked for associations between lottery offer outcomes and various moderating variables that may explain those outcomes. The analysis focused heavily on the magnet school lottery, which accounts for the vast majority of applications.

Data Sources

The CSDE’s Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) provided administrative data from the past four lotteries, including the most recent lottery conducted for 2020-2021. The data fields are essentially the same for each lottery year. Variables in the lottery data set include: demographic indicators for the parents (as applicants) and students, resident address, email, phone number, choice program applied, applicant choice school/district preferences, late application status, whether and when an offer was made, an account of the offer outcome (i.e., accept, active decline, or administrative decline), and for decliners a RSCO-survey response indicating the reason for decline (active decliners would respond to the survey themselves while administrative decline survey responses are RSCO-designated). To briefly expand on this last data element, families who indicate their decision to decline an offer in the RSCO lottery portal are asked to provide a reason via an exit survey; to do so, they choose from a dropdown list of reasons which

² Families who receive an offer but do not respond to the offer or do not end up registering at the choice school are considered “administrative declines.” These are also sometimes referred to as “passive” declines.

include, among them, “student wants to stay in his/her current school/district,” “parent did not get their first choice,” and “student will be going to a private/parochial school.” If the family does not end up responding to the offer or they fail to register the student at the choice school after accepting the offer, they are considered administrative decliners and RSCO attempts to assign them to one of those two categories (i.e., either “parent/guardian failed to register student at the school after accepting an offer” or “parent/guardian failed to respond before the deadline”). In our 2019-2020 data set, demographic indicators for parents or adult caregivers were limited to primary language; for students, demographics were limited to gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level. The 2020-2021 data set contains newly collected fields such as family socioeconomic status indicators and the number of children in the applicants’ households.

This report relies heavily on the 2019-2020 data, which is in keeping with the expectations of the MOA. But there are other sensible reasons to analyze these data. One reason is that this is the first attempt at analyzing lottery data and it is more efficient to take a deep dive into one set of data. A more exploratory approach using one data set may surface specific areas deserving further inquiry or inquiries that can then be examined in other years of data. Another reason is that the 2019-2020 lottery data represents a more “normal” year, outside the context of a highly disruptive pandemic.

Data Analysis

The analyses presented here are predominantly descriptive and include examinations of single variables and, in many cases, two variables simultaneously. Where appropriate, inferential statistics were applied to inspect for the possibility of statistically significant differences or relationships. Frequency distributions were compared among accepters, active decliners, and administrative decliners by program and other relevant factors. Specifically, we examined lottery offer outcomes by number of siblings in lottery, racial/ethnic subgroup, grade level, late application status, applicant school/district order choice, seat offer date, and applicants’ location of residence. For instance, we present results on how, if at all, certain factors appear to be associated with “decliners” in the lottery (e.g., how do decline rates compare across the race/ethnicity of applicants?). We also examined how, if at all, certain pairs of variables interacted to influence decline rates (e.g., how does seat offer date interact with magnet school choice preference order?).

Findings

We first provide statistical summaries of lottery application data. Then we offer a series of analyses that describe offer outcomes by choice program. Please note that some summary totals may not be consistent across some of the following tables due to small nuances within the data or in instances where cells contain missing data. For instance, some applicants received more than one offer so “total number of applications” does not equal “total number of offers.” Thus, in some instances, splitting up the data by subgroup and program type can yield slightly different totals. Such disparities are generally too small to interfere with the ability to make valid inferences.

Summary Characteristics of 2019-2020 Lottery Application Data

Table 1 presents the distribution of applications across the five program categories. The vast majority of applications were for magnet seats only (79.5%), followed by applicants seeking both magnets and Open Choice (18.9%). Total applications numbered above 20,000.

Table 1. Lottery Applications by Choice Program, 2019-2020

	No.	%
Magnet only	16,167	79.5%
Open Choice Hartford (OCH) Resident only	256	1.3%
Open Choice Suburban (OCS) Resident only	83	0.4%
Magnet & Open Choice Hartford (OCH) Resident	2,438	12.0%
Magnet & Open Choice Suburban (OCS) Resident	1,399	6.9%
	20,343	100.0%

Table 2 presents the number of applications across program categories by municipality or town. The same data is accounted for in Table 3 but instead of by town, condenses resident location into just two categories – Hartford and the suburbs. Table 2 shows that among *Sheff* towns, the largest number of applications came from Hartford (6,811). The next largest groups of applications originated from East Hartford (2,015), Manchester (1,671), and New Britain (1,813). As evidenced in Table 3, there was a total of 13,414 suburban family magnet school applications compared to 6,555 Hartford-based family magnet applications. There were 1,482 applications to the Open Choice program for suburban residents and 2,685 applications to the Open Choice program for Hartford residents.

Table 2. Number of Lottery Applications by Program and Town, 2019-2020

	Program Applied					Total
	Magnet only	OCH only	OCS only	Magnet & OCH	Magnet & OCS	
ANDOVER	13	0	1	0	0	14
ANSONIA	2	0	0	0	4	6
ASHFORD	5	0	0	0	0	5
AVON	165	0	0	0	1	166
BARKHAMSTED	12	0	0	0	0	12
BERLIN	74	0	2	0	5	81
BETHEL	2	0	0	0	0	2
BLOOMFIELD	654	0	1	0	69	724
BOLTON	29	0	0	0	1	30
BRANFORD	4	0	0	0	0	4
BRIDGEPORT	33	0	0	0	12	45
BRISTOL	312	0	7	0	39	358

BROOKLYN	2	0	0	0	0	2
BURLINGTON	31	0	0	0	1	32
CANTON	59	0	0	0	3	62
CHAPLIN	2	0	0	0	0	2
CHESHIRE	13	0	0	0	1	14
CHESTER	1	0	0	0	0	1
COLCHESTER	59	0	0	0	0	59
COLEBROOK	1	0	0	0	1	2
COLUMBIA	11	0	0	0	0	11
COVENTRY	37	0	0	0	0	37
CROMWELL	111	0	0	0	9	120
DANBURY	2	0	0	0	0	2
DERBY	1	0	0	0	1	2
DURHAM	6	0	0	0	0	6
EAST GRANBY	58	0	0	0	1	59
EAST HADDAM	22	0	0	0	0	22
EAST HAMPTON	64	0	0	0	7	71
EAST HARTFORD	1,779	0	11	0	220	2,010
EAST WINDSOR	149	0	1	0	17	167
EASTFORD	0	0	0	0	2	2
EASTON	1	0	0	0	0	1
ELLINGTON	125	0	0	0	6	131
ENFIELD	266	0	2	0	22	290
FAIRFIELD	3	0	0	0	0	3
FARMINGTON	125	0	0	0	6	131
GLASTONBURY	295	0	0	0	3	298
GOSHEN	4	0	0	0	0	4
GRANBY	69	0	0	0	0	69
GROTON	2	0	0	0	0	2
GUILFORD	1	0	0	0	0	1
HADDAM	2	0	0	0	0	2
HAMDEN	12	0	0	0	0	12
HAMPTON	1	0	0	0	0	1
HARTFORD	4,126	237	0	2,429	0	6,792
HARTLAND	7	0	0	0	0	7
HARWINTON	9	0	0	0	1	10
HEBRON	35	0	0	0	0	35
KENT	1	0	0	0	0	1
KILLINGWORTH	1	0	0	0	0	1
LEBANON	6	0	0	0	0	6
LEDYARD	1	0	0	0	0	1
LYME	1	0	0	0	0	1
MANCHESTER	1,462	0	3	0	205	1,670
MANSFIELD	8	0	0	0	0	8
MARLBOROUGH	30	0	0	0	0	30

MERIDEN	124	0	1	0	26	151
MIDDLEBURY	1	0	0	0	2	3
MIDDLEFIELD	7	0	0	0	2	9
MIDDLETOWN	287	0	2	0	51	340
MILFORD	1	0	0	0	0	1
MONROE	1	0	0	0	0	1
MONTVILLE	1	0	0	0	0	1
MORRIS	1	0	0	0	0	1
NAUGATUCK	11	0	1	0	1	13
NEW BRITAIN	1,457	0	9	0	342	1,808
NEW HARTFORD	27	0	0	0	0	27
NEW HAVEN	13	0	0	0	2	15
NEW LONDON	3	0	0	0	1	4
NEWINGTON	255	0	2	0	23	280
NORFOLK	2	0	0	0	0	2
NORTH HAVEN	1	0	0	0	0	1
NORWICH	2	0	0	0	0	2
OLD SAYBROOK	1	0	0	0	0	1
ORANGE	2	0	0	0	0	2
OXFORD	1	0	0	0	0	1
PLAINVILLE	67	0	0	0	5	72
PLYMOUTH	19	0	0	0	1	20
PORTLAND	46	0	0	0	1	47
PROSPECT	3	0	0	0	0	3
ROCKY HILL	448	0	0	0	38	486
SALEM	1	0	0	0	0	1
SEYMOUR	1	0	0	0	1	2
SHELTON	1	0	0	0	0	1
SIMSBURY	194	0	0	0	3	197
SOMERS	14	0	0	0	3	17
SOUTH WINDSOR	344	0	2	0	14	360
SOUTHBURY	1	0	0	0	0	1
SOUTHTON	122	0	0	0	6	128
STAFFORD	27	0	0	0	3	30
STAMFORD	2	0	0	0	0	2
SUFFIELD	64	0	0	0	3	67
THOMASTON	6	0	0	0	0	6
TOLLAND	48	0	0	0	0	48
TORRINGTON	157	0	2	0	10	169
TRUMBULL	1	0	0	0	0	1
VERNON	330	0	1	0	48	379
WALLINGFORD	19	0	0	0	5	24
WARREN	3	0	0	0	0	3
WATERBURY	54	0	3	0	30	87
WATERTOWN	2	0	0	0	3	5

WEST HARTFORD	514	0	2	0	34	550
WEST HAVEN	3	0	2	0	3	8
WESTBROOK	0	0	0	0	1	1
WETHERSFIELD	321	0	2	0	17	340
WILLINGTON	17	0	0	0	0	17
WINCHESTER	21	0	0	0	2	23
WINDHAM	15	0	0	0	4	19
WINDSOR	621	0	5	0	70	696
WINDSOR LOCKS	140	0	0	0	6	146
WOLCOTT	7	0	0	0	0	7
WOODBIDGE	2	0	0	0	0	2
WOODBURY	0	0	0	0	1	1
WOODSTOCK	2	0	0	0	0	2
<missing>	26	0	0	8	0	34
<i>Total</i>	<i>16,167</i>	<i>237</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>2,437</i>	<i>1,399</i>	<i>20,302</i>

Note. OCH = Open Choice Hartford or applicants residing in Hartford; OCS = Open Choice Suburban or applicants residing in suburbs.

Table 3. Number of Lottery Applications by Program and Hartford-Suburban Residence, 2019-2020

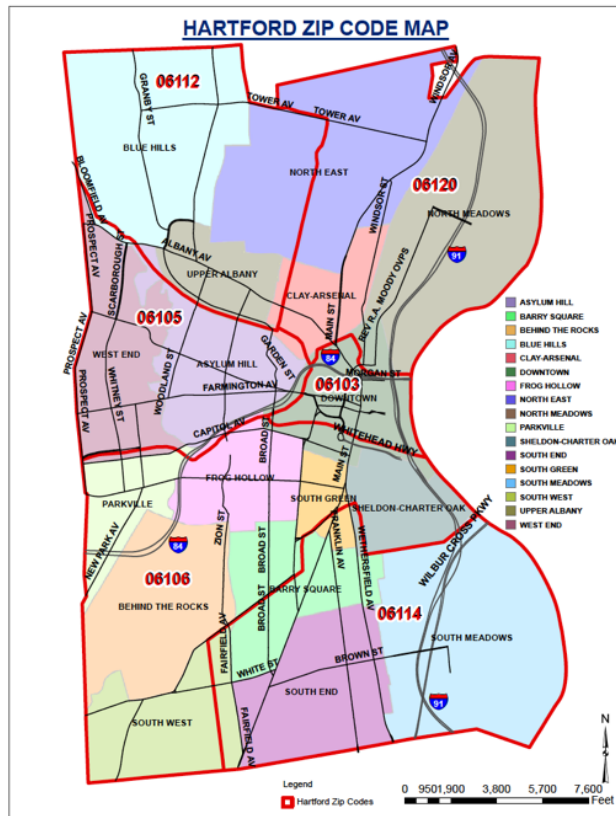
<i>Residence</i>	<i>Program Applied</i>					<i>Total</i>
	Magnet only	OCH only	OCS only	Magnet & OCH	Magnet & OCS	
Suburban	12,015	0	62	0	1,399	13,476
Hartford	4,126	237	0	2,429	0	6,792
	<i>16,141</i>	<i>237</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>2,429</i>	<i>1,399</i>	<i>20,268</i>

Table 4 presents the number of applications to programs available to Hartford residents by zip code. Figure 1 helps contextualize these data by showing a map of Hartford with zip code boundaries. The data in Table 4 show that the proportions of applications to each program are generally similar across zip codes for the two large programs of “magnet only” and “magnet and Open Choice.” The table also suggests that Hartford residents appear least interested in the Open Choice program, at least as their only choice, when compared to the large number of magnet-only applications. Interview data discussed in the second half of this report demonstrate a similar finding. (Given this, one might not be surprised to see high decline rates of Open Choice offers.) The upper section of Table 4 includes population estimates for each zip code. The estimates are taken from the 2015 American Community Survey (U.S. Census) and do not reflect the school-age population. They provide a rough idea of how the number of applications stack up to the relative populations across Hartford’s zip codes. The 06105 zip code may be modestly under-applying to the lottery (10.9% relative to 15.6%), although these population estimates are dated and not representative of school age children. The 06106 zip code appears to be applying to the Open Choice program at a relatively lower rate given its population.

Table 4. Applications by Program and Hartford Zip Code Relative to Populations, 2019-2020

	Hartford Zip Code	06103	06105	06106	06112	06114	06120	Total
Magnet only	Total Pop Estimates (2015)	1,410	19,392	39,902	22,879	27,449	12,887	123,919
	% of Total Pop	1.1%	15.6%	32.2%	18.5%	22.2%	10.4%	
	Count	40	433	1345	843	939	522	4,122
	% within Program Applied	1.0%	10.5%	32.6%	20.5%	22.8%	12.7%	100.0%
	Count	0	40	63	54	65	34	256
	% within Program Applied	0.0%	15.6%	24.6%	21.1%	25.4%	13.3%	100.0%
OCH only	Count	14	269	811	452	614	261	2,421
	% within Program Applied	0.6%	11.1%	33.5%	18.7%	25.4%	10.8%	100.0%
Magnet & OCH	Count	54	742	2,219	1,349	1,618	817	6,799
	% within Program Applied	0.8%	10.9%	32.6%	19.8%	23.8%	12.0%	100.0%
Total								
	Count	54	742	2,219	1,349	1,618	817	6,799
	% within Program Applied	0.8%	10.9%	32.6%	19.8%	23.8%	12.0%	100.0%

Figure 1. Hartford Zip Code Map



Tables 5 and 6 contain information on siblings in the lottery. We caution that these data are our best estimates given that the number of actual siblings is unknown – as previously mentioned, this information is not included in the 2019-2020 data set. We searched for duplicate emails in the lottery application data to identify parents submitting for more than one child. We do not know how many other siblings live at a different address or how many other siblings already attend a choice program. Nevertheless, these data offer some insight into the size of families participating in the same lottery. Table 5 shows that a total of 16,276 unique households submitted applications to the lottery, but many of them submitted for more than one child. For instance, 2,938 parents had two children in the lottery; 596 parents had 3 children; 109 had 4; and so on. Table 5 shows that of the 20,272 total lottery applications, nearly 60% (59.2%) are accounted for by single-child applications and the remaining 40% represent multi-sibling applications. In Table 6 we provide, again, rough estimates of sibling numbers, but this time present the number of siblings by program application.

Table 5. Applications by Number of Siblings in the Lottery, 2019-2020

Sibling Groups	No. of Families	Total No. of Children in Lottery	% of Total Applications
1	12,008	12,008	59.2%
2	2,938	5,875	29.0%
3	596	1,789	8.8%
4	109	437	2.2%
5	30	150	0.7%
6	1	6	0.0%
7	1	7	0.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>16,276</i>	<i>20,272</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note. Of the 20,306 total applications, 34 had missing information, yielding the total number of valid cases here of 20,272.

Table 6. Applications by Program and Number of Siblings in Lottery, 2019-2020

	<i>No. of Siblings in Lottery</i>							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Magnet only	9,772	4,650	1,296	313	104	6	0	16,141
OCH only	145	57	23	12	0	0	0	237
OCS only	38	14	9	1	0	0	0	62
Magnet & OCH	1,314	690	300	79	39	0	7	2,429
Magnet & OCS	737	462	161	32	7	0	0	1,399
	12,006	5,873	1,789	437	150	6	7	20,268

Table 7a shows the breakdown of program applications by grade level. Unsurprisingly, most applications are for children in pre-K grades and the transition grades of Kindergarten, Grade 6, and Grade 9. Grades 1 and 2 show fairly high numbers as well. Table 7b presents the number of magnet applications and offers made at each grade level. The last row allows comparisons among percentages of offers across grades, including between transitional and non-transitional grades. Relatively high proportions of offers were to applicants for the transition grades 6 and 9.

Table 7a. Applications by Program and Grade Level, 2019-2020

	<i>Grade Level</i>															Total
	PK3	PK4	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	
Magnet only	3,080	2,170	1,491	845	734	695	694	728	1,572	719	601	1,712	500	451	149	16,141
OCH only	0	24	51	16	12	12	18	20	16	10	16	19	23	0	0	237
OCS only	0	0	12	3	3	3	7	3	7	5	4	3	5	4	3	62
Magnet & OCH	0	267	369	128	156	144	161	158	237	150	132	421	106	0	0	2,429
Magnet & OCS	0	0	243	149	136	113	96	88	147	80	58	160	63	50	16	1,399
	3,080	2,461	2,166	1,141	1,041	967	976	997	1,979	964	811	2,315	697	505	168	20,268

Table 7b. Magnet Applications and Offers by Grade Level, 2019-2020

<i>Magnets</i>	PK3	PK4	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
# Applic.	3,080	2,437	2,103	1,122	1,026	952	951	974	1,956	949	791	2,308	771	503	166	20,089
# Offers	1,291	431	687	334	281	314	330	288	1,413	271	189	1,476	301	248	72	7,926
% w/in Grade	41.9%	17.7%	32.7%	29.8%	27.4%	33.0%	34.7%	29.6%	72.2%	28.6%	23.9%	63.7%	44.7%	49.1%	43.0%	39.6%

Note. Highlighted cells represent transitional grades.

Table 8 presents application numbers by the racial/ethnic groups self-identified by applicants. (More later in this report on the nature of the race/ethnicity variable in our data set.) Approximately 25% of the applicants identified as Latino or Latino-multi-racial. A little over 13% identified as Latino-Black. Another roughly 35% identified as Black/African American or Black/African American-multi-racial. White families were over-represented among “magnet-only” applications – 94.6% of White families’ applications were for “magnet-only.” Comparatively, the overall percentage of magnet-only applications across Non-White race/ethnicity groups was 79.6%.

Table 8. Applications by Program and Race/Ethnicity, 2019-2020

<i>Program Applied</i>		<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>									Total
		White	Latino	Ameri Indian /NA	Black	Asian & Asian /AI	Latino/ Black	Native Haw/ PI	Latino Multi- racial	Black Multi- racial	
Magnet only	No.	3,723	3,510	140	4,349	2,026	1,921	20	257	170	16,116
	% w/in race	94.6%	74.4%	82.8%	74.2%	90.7%	70.7%	76.9%	72.6%	75.9%	79.6%
OCH only	No.	18	80	0	95	2	38	0	2	2	237
	% w/in race	0.5%	1.7%	0.0%	1.6%	0.1%	1.4%	0.0%	0.6%	0.9%	1.2%
OCS only	No.	6	21	0	23	3	8	0	1	0	62
	% w/in race	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
Magnet & OCH	No.	65	789	15	909	46	504	4	66	28	2,426
	% w/in race	1.7%	16.7%	8.9%	15.5%	2.1%	18.5%	15.4%	18.6%	12.5%	12.0%
Magnet & OCS	No.	125	315	14	486	157	247	2	28	24	1,398
	% w/in race	3.2%	6.7%	8.3%	8.3%	7.0%	9.1%	7.7%	7.9%	10.7%	6.9%
Total	No.	3,937	4,715	169	5,862	2,234	2,718	26	354	224	20,239
	% w/in race	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 9 compares on-time and late applications. The total row at the bottom of the table indicates that, across all program types, the percentage of on-time applications was 90.5% and the percentage of late applications was 9.5%. Comparing these baseline percentages to those for each program reveals if and where discrepancies occur within each of the program categories. Generally speaking, in the largest program groups (magnet-only and magnet and Open Choice), the relative proportions are similar. In other words, there is no relationship between late application status and program application type.

Table 9. Number of Applications by Program and Late Application Status, 2019-2020

		On-time	Late App	<i>Total</i>
<i>Magnet only</i>	No.	14,478	1,663	16,141
	% w/in Program Applied	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%
<i>OCH only</i>	No.	225	31	256
	% w/in Program Applied	87.9%	12.1%	100.0%
<i>OCS only</i>	No.	65	18	83
	% w/in Program Applied	78.3%	21.7%	100.0%
<i>Magnet & OCH</i>	No.	2,283	146	2,429
	% w/in Program Applied	94.0%	6.0%	100.0%
<i>Magnet & OCS</i>	No.	1,320	79	1,399
	% w/in Program Applied	94.4%	5.60%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	No.	18,371	1,937	20,308
	% w/in Program Applied	90.5%	9.5%	100.0%

MAGNET LOTTERY

The remainder of the quantitative analysis provides details on the magnet lottery applications. To reiterate, we focused heavily on magnet school applications because, as evidenced above, these accounted for nearly all applications in the lottery (79.5% of lottery applications were for magnet schools *only* while another 18.9% were applications for both magnets and Open Choice). We begin by providing summary statistics on magnet applications. We then delve into magnet offers and outcomes.

Summary Data on Magnet Applications

Tables 10 and 11 show the distribution of magnet applications by town and by race/ethnicity, respectively. Table 10 displays the towns ordered highest to lowest in terms of number of applications submitted. Hartford owns the top spot for highest number of magnet applications at 6,794; this accounts for one-third of all magnet applications. Families from East Hartford, Manchester, and New Britain are significant participants in the magnet lottery as well.

Table 10. Towns with Highest Number of Magnet Applications (minimum>50), 2019-2020

Town	No.	%
HARTFORD	6,794	33.50%
EAST HARTFORD	2,010	9.90%
NEW BRITAIN	1,809	8.90%
MANCHESTER	1,670	8.20%
BLOOMFIELD	724	3.60%
WINDSOR	696	3.40%
WEST HARTFORD	550	2.70%
ROCKY HILL	486	2.40%
VERNON	379	1.90%
SOUTH WINDSOR	360	1.80%
BRISTOL	358	1.80%
MIDDLETOWN	340	1.70%
WETHERSFIELD	340	1.70%
GLASTONBURY	298	1.50%
ENFIELD	290	1.40%
NEWINGTON	280	1.40%
SIMSBURY	197	1.00%
TORRINGTON	169	0.80%
EAST WINDSOR	167	0.80%
AVON	166	0.80%
MERIDEN	151	0.70%
WINDSOR LOCKS	146	0.70%
ELLINGTON	132	0.70%
FARMINGTON	131	0.60%
SOUTHINGTON	128	0.60%
CROMWELL	120	0.60%
WATERBURY	87	0.40%
BERLIN	81	0.40%
PLAINVILLE	72	0.40%
EAST HAMPTON	71	0.30%

GRANBY	69	0.30%
SUFFIELD	67	0.30%
CANTON	62	0.30%
COLCHESTER	59	0.30%
EAST GRANBY	59	0.30%

Table 11 portrays magnet applications by student race/ethnicity. Black/African American and Black/African American-multi-racial students represent nearly 30% of all applications, and this does not include the Latino-Black subgroup. Latino and Latino-multi-racial students account for about one-quarter of all magnet applicants, again excluding the Latino-Black subgroup, which alone accounts for 13.4% of all magnet applications.

Table 11. Magnet Applications by Race-Ethnicity, 2019-2020

Race/Ethnicity	No.	%
White or unknown	3,913	19.6%
Latino	4,615	23.1%
American Indian or NA	169	0.8%
Black	5,744	28.7%
Asian & Asian AI	2,229	11.1%
Latino Black	2,672	13.4%
Native Haw or PI	26	0.1%
Latino Multi-racial	351	1.8%
Black Multi-racial	222	1.1%
<missing>	63	
<i>Total</i>	<i>19,941</i>	

Number of Magnet Schools Listed by Applicants

Table 12 displays the number of magnet schools listed by applicants on each magnet application. Applicants can list anywhere between 1 and 5 magnet schools, in order of preference. Table 12 indicates that 1 of every 5 magnet applicants listed a single magnet school (their top and only choice). In comparison, about 36% of the applications included the maximum number of 5 magnet selections.

Table 12. Number of Magnet School Choices Listed on the Application, 2019-2020

No. of Magnet Schools listed per Application	No.	%	
1	4,127	20.6%	← 1 in 5 applications list only a single magnet school
2	2,974	14.9%	
3	3,587	17.9%	
4	2,196	11.0%	
5	7,120	35.6%	← Nearly 36% of applications list the maximum five magnet school choices
<i>Total</i>	<i>20,004</i>		

Table 13 shows that Suburban applicants were more likely than Hartford applicants to list only one magnet school as a choice (23.0% vs. 15.8%). Hartford applicants were more likely to list the maximum of five choices relative to Suburban applicants (40.2% vs. 33.3%).

Table 13. Number of Magnet School Choices Listed on the Application by Suburban-Hartford Residence, 2019-2020

	No. of Magnets Listed	No.	%
Suburban	1	3,083	23.0%
	2	2,105	15.7%
	3	2,372	17.7%
	4	1,385	10.3%
	5	4,469	33.3%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>13,414</i>	
Hartford	1	1,038	15.8%
	2	861	13.1%
	3	1,209	18.4%
	4	810	12.4%
	5	2,638	40.2%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>6,556</i>	

Magnet Lottery Offers and Outcomes

Table 14 below displays magnet offers and outcomes for the 2019-2020 lottery. In that year, there was a total of 20,004 magnet applications. RSCO made 7,961 offers, 61.5% of which were accepted, 13.4% declined, and 25.1% administratively declined. Administrative declines occurred at almost twice the rate as declines. Table 14 also shows offer outcomes by applicant choice preference. The table, for instance, shows that 66.4% of offers made to applicants' first choices were accepted. Acceptance rates dropped to below 50% with 2nd choice offers and below 40% for 3rd to 5th choice offers. Notably, 12.6% declined their first choice and another 21.0% were administratively declined; however, this table does not account for *when* seats were offered. Seats can be offered between April through the beginning months of the next school year. The *vast* majority of offers are made in April and May (see Tables 23a and 23b for decision data tabulated by seat offer date).

Table 14. Magnet Offer Outcomes by Applicant Order Choice, 2019-2020

<i>School Order Choice*</i>	<i>Offers</i>	Accepted		Actively Declined		Admin Declined	
1st	6,301	4,186	66.4%	792	12.6%	1,323	21.0%
2nd	897	417	46.5%	152	16.9%	328	36.6%
3rd	413	159	38.5%	64	15.5%	190	46.0%
4th	199	77	38.7%	36	18.1%	86	43.2%
5th	151	59	39.1%	24	15.9%	68	45.0%
<i>Overall</i>	<i>7,961</i>	<i>4,898</i>	61.5%	<i>1,068</i>	13.4%	<i>1,995</i>	25.1%

* Listed by families on the application.

Reasons for Declines Recorded by RSCO

Magnet Active Decliners

Table 15a presents reasons why active decliners declined disaggregated by applicants' magnet school choice preference – specifically, offers made to first-choice and second-choice schools only. We include only the first two choice preferences as they represent the majority of cases. Response categories are arranged in order of most frequent to least frequent. Table 15a shows that half of the survey responses by those actively declining an offer to a first-choice magnet school indicated the student wanted to stay in their current school or district. There are also several responses related to transportation, which when combined account for roughly 11% of all reasons. A small, but not inconsequential, percentage (6.6%) indicated the school was too far away. It is unclear why 17 parents declined yet were categorized as “the offer was not their first choice” – given this was listed as a first choice on their application. They may have considered choices outside the magnet lottery (e.g., Open Choice) or their choice selections may have changed since filling out the lottery application. We include a discussion of survey responses and explore potential reasons behind seemingly unclear responses in the qualitative findings as well.

Table 16 shows that about 40% of active decliners of a second-choice magnet school indicated on their survey that the student wanted to stay in their current school or district. The second and third reasons account for roughly another 30% of all responses, both of which suggest the parent was heavily interested in their first-choice school. Keep in mind the number of active decliners for the second-choice magnets is relatively small at 146 total cases, which is consistent with the fact that most magnet offers are first-choice offers.

The RSCO survey response, “Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district” is a fairly broad, catch-all reason. Thus, we further explored the characteristics of those 393 families in Table 15a who chose that response when actively declining their first-choice magnet offer. Table 15b shows the grade level distribution among these 393 decliners, relative to the overall distribution of magnet offers. There does not appear to be an association between grade level and this particular decline response among the 393 families. Nearly 30% of decliners in this group of 393 were from PreK grade levels, which is roughly the same percentage of all magnet offers for

these grade levels. Table 15c presents the same data as Table 15b, but by resident location, instead of grade level. This table shows that the group of 393 decliners is disproportionately over-represented by suburban families. Suburban families represented 56.7% of all magnet offers but accounted for 78.6% of the group of 393 decliners (“Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district”). These data suggest that suburban families are relatively more likely to opt to stay in their own school or district than Hartford families.

Table 15a. Reasons for Actively Declining First-Choice Magnet Offer, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Decline Reason First Choice</i>	No.	%
Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district.	393	49.6%
Student will be going to a private/parochial school.	57	7.2%
The school/district is too far away.	52	6.6%
The offer was made too late in the year. School has already started.	49	6.2%
Family is moving out of state.	40	5.1%
Parent/guardian wants a different magnet school.	39	4.9%
Transportation is not available.	31	3.9%
Transportation pick-up/drop-off times are not convenient.	31	3.9%
Parent/guardian did not receive placement offers for all his/her children who applied.	21	2.7%
The offer was not the first choice.	17	2.1%
Transportation will not be available until after school starts.	13	1.6%
Student will be going to a Technical High School	11	1.4%
Student will be retained in his/her current grade.	11	1.4%
Transportation centralized stops are too far away.	8	1.0%
Parent/guardian wants Open Choice, not a magnet school.	4	0.5%
Transportation bus stops for each of my children are in different places, but the pick-up time is the same.	4	0.5%
Parent/guardian failed to register student at the school after accepting an offer.	3	0.4%
Parent/guardian provided incorrect information on the application.	3	0.4%
The student will be going to an Agri-Science Center.	3	0.4%
Parent/Guardian wants a different technical high school.	1	0.1%
Student will be attending an Open Choice District.	1	0.1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>792</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 15b. Active Decliners of First-Choice Magnet School Offer by Grade Level, 2019-2020

	No.	%	% of All Magnet Offers
PK3 – 3 Years Old	55	14.0%	16.3%
PK4 – 4 Years Old	14	3.6%	5.4%
Kindergarten	47	12.0%	8.7%
Grade 1	21	5.3%	4.2%
Grade 2	13	3.3%	3.5%
Grade 3	15	3.8%	4%
Grade 4	14	3.6%	4.2%
Grade 5	12	3.1%	3.6%
Grade 6	66	16.8%	17.8%
Grade 7	14	3.6%	3.4%
Grade 8	16	4.1%	2.4%
Grade 9	71	18.1%	18.6%
Grade 10	20	5.1%	3.8%
Grade 11	11	2.8%	3.1%
Grade 12	4	1.0%	0.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>393</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 15c. Active Decliners of First-Choice Magnet School Offer by Residence, 2019-2020

	No.	%	% of All Magnet Offers
Suburban	309	78.6%	56.7%
Hartford	84	21.4%	43.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>393</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 16. Reasons for Actively Declining Second-Choice Magnet Offer, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Decline Reason Second Choice</i>	No.	%
Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district.	58	39.7%
Parent/guardian wants a different magnet school.	28	19.2%
The offer was not the first choice.	15	10.3%
The offer was made too late in the year. School has already started.	10	6.8%
The school/district is too far away.	8	5.5%
Student will be going to a private/parochial school.	7	4.8%
Transportation is not available.	7	4.8%
Parent/guardian did not receive placement offers for all his/her children who applied.	2	1.4%
Parent/guardian wants Open Choice, not a magnet school.	2	1.4%
Student will be going to a Technical High School	2	1.4%
Transportation bus stops for each of my children are in different places, but the pick-up time is the same.	2	1.4%
Transportation pick-up/drop-off times are not convenient.	2	1.4%
Family is moving out of state.	1	0.7%
Parent/Guardian wants a different technical high school.	1	0.7%
Transportation centralized stops are too far away.	1	0.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Magnet Administrative Decliners

The reasons for decline listed in RSCO data are less specific with administrative decliners, for obvious reasons. Administrative decliners represent those families who did not communicate their decision to decline to RSCO. As such, these are sometimes referred to as “passive” declines. In nearly all cases, attempts by RSCO to make contact with them were unsuccessful. Table 17a shows the top three reasons for administrative declines – which account for nearly all the reasons recorded. The top reason cited – accounting for 72.5% of all administrative declines – was the parent failed to respond before the deadline; this is in essence the definition of an administrative decline. The second most frequent reason, which also accounted for nearly all of the remaining cases, was the parent failed to register the student at the school *after accepting an offer*. These cases deserve further exploration, if possible, to interrogate why the parent accepted but then did not act on that acceptance; these cases represent over a quarter of all magnet administrative declines (523/2003=26.1%). (In rare cases, some applicants declined more than once when receiving two offers.) It does not appear that magnet school choice preference made a difference here, as this reason was no more frequent for third-, fourth-, and fifth-choice offers. Finally, although infrequent, it appears RSCO was able to obtain a reason for some administrative declines, likely occurring very late in the process. The two most common

designated reasons for administrative declines were either that the student wanted to remain in their current school/district or the parent preferred a different magnet school than was offered.

We explored further the characteristics of the nearly two thousand families who administratively declined a magnet offer from Table 17a. In terms of grade level, there are some differences among the group of administrative decliners. In particular, Table 17b shows families of PreK students administratively declined at lower rates than expected;³ for example, PK3 – 3 Years Old applicants account for 16.3% of all magnet school offers but less than half that percentage (7.3%) administratively declined. Overall, non-transition grades tended to exhibit higher than expected administrative decline rates.

There were not substantial differences between suburban and Hartford resident applicants, although suburban families were slightly more likely to administratively decline relative to all magnet offers (Table 17c). Lastly, Table 17d presents the schools that were administratively declined relative to the number of offers made to those schools. Comparisons between the percentage of all magnet offers (far right column) to the number of administrative declines among the group (second column in from the right) provide information on the relative “administrative decline” rates across magnet schools. For instance, offers to Capitol Prep schools, both upper and lower grade levels, were administratively declined at higher rates relative to their allotment of offers in the lottery. Put another way, 211 offers were made to Capitol Prep Upper School, which represented 2.7% of all magnet offers and 93 of these offers were administratively declined, which represented 4.7% of all administrative declines. A similar pattern was observed with the Lower School, where 5.4% of those offers were administratively declined relative to their overall 3.5% percentage of offers. Two other schools with large numbers of administrative declines show a similar pattern (Global Experience Magnet School and Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts-Half-Day). The larger than expected administrative decline rates among these schools may be, in part, a function of the large number of offers made. Some caution is advised in drawing inferences from these comparisons, as we do not know the specific reasons why families administratively declined. At the very least, Table 17d shows magnet schools where most declines occurred, both in absolute and relative terms.

³ By “lower rates than expected” we mean lower than what was expected if there was no relationship between grade level and administrative decline rates.

Table 17a. Top Three Reasons for Administratively Declining a Magnet Offer (across all choice preferences), 2019-2020

	No.	%
Parent/guardian failed to respond before the deadline.	1,444	72.5%
Parent/guardian failed to register student at the school after accepting an offer.	523	26.3%
Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district OR Parent wants a different magnet school	24	1.2%
	1,991	100.0%

Table 17b. Group of Administrative Decliners from Table 17a ($n=1,991$) by Grade Level, 2019-2020

	No.	%	% of All Magnet Offers
PK3 – 3 Years Old	143	7.3%	16.3%
PK4 – 4 Years Old	73	3.7%	5.4%
Kindergarten	149	7.6%	8.7%
Grade 1	112	5.7%	4.2%
Grade 2	89	4.5%	3.5%
Grade 3	119	6.0%	4.0%
Grade 4	126	6.4%	4.2%
Grade 5	107	5.4%	3.6%
Grade 6	259	13.1%	17.8%
Grade 7	101	5.1%	3.4%
Grade 8	62	3.1%	2.4%
Grade 9	357	18.1%	18.6%
Grade 10	120	6.1%	3.8%
Grade 11	121	6.1%	3.1%
Grade 12	33	1.7%	0.9%
Total	1,971	100.0%	100.0%

Note. Some values were missing thus the total n here was 1,971 and not 1,991.

Table 17c. Group of Administrative Decliners from Table 17a ($n=1,991$) by Family Residence, 2019-2020

	No.	%	% of All Magnet Offers
Suburban	1,190	60.4%	56.7%
Hartford	781	39.6%	43.3%
Total	1,971	100.0%	100.0%

Note. Some values were missing thus the total n here was 1,971 and not 1,991.

Table 17d. Group of Administrative Decliners from Table 17a ($n=1,991$) by School Declined, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet School</i>	No. Admin. Declines (Table 17a)	% Admin. Declines	% of All Magnet Offers
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	4	0.2%	1.1%
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School	12	0.6%	1.6%
Academy of Science and Innovation	43	2.2%	3.6%
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School	53	2.7%	3.1%
Betances Early Reading Lab Magnet School	88	4.4%	3.5%
Betances STEM Magnet School	58	2.9%	1.9%
Breakthrough Magnet School, North	49	2.5%	2.4%
Breakthrough Magnet School, South	5	0.3%	0.7%
Capital Preparatory Magnet School - Upper School Program	93	4.7%	2.7%
Capital Preparatory Magnet School – Lower School Program	108	5.4%	3.5%
Civic Leadership High School	33	1.7%	2.1%
Classical Magnet School	45	2.3%	1.9%
Connecticut IB Academy	7	0.4%	0.9%
Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin College	31	1.6%	2.4%
CREC Montessori Magnet School	16	0.8%	1.5%
Discovery Academy	13	0.7%	1.5%
Environmental Sciences Magnet School at Mary M. Hooker	51	2.6%	2.8%
Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School	21	1.1%	1.9%
Global Experience Magnet School	101	5.1%	2.2%
Great Path Academy at Manchester Community College	30	1.5%	1.7%
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts (GHAA) / Middle	43	2.2%	2.0%
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts [Full Day]	35	1.8%	2.0%
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts [Half-Day]	158	7.9%	5.0%
Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy - (Grades 6-12)	58	2.9%	3.1%
Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy - (Grades 6-8)	20	1.0%	1.0%
Hartford PreKindergarten Magnet School	55	2.8%	2.4%
International Magnet School for Global Citizenship	80	4.0%	3.0%
Metro Learning Ctr Magnet for Global and Internat'l Studies	35	1.8%	2.8%
Montessori Magnet at Batchelder	47	2.4%	2.1%
Montessori Magnet School at Annie Fisher	48	2.4%	2.2%
Museum Academy	30	1.5%	2.4%
Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet School	36	1.8%	2.2%
Pathways Academy of Technology and Design	51	2.6%	2.2%
R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Performing Arts	60	3.0%	2.6%
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts	74	3.7%	3.6%
Riverside Magnet School at Goodwin College	28	1.4%	2.1%
Sport and Medical Sciences Academy	67	3.4%	2.6%
STEM Magnet School at Annie Fisher	66	3.3%	2.1%
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School	54	2.7%	4.6%
University High School of Science and Engineering	51	2.6%	2.7%
University of Hartford Magnet School	26	1.3%	1.9%
Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School	11	0.6%	2.4%

1,994

Note. Some values were missing thus the total n here was 1,971 and not 1,991.

Siblings and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Among magnet offers, there appears to be a relationship between offer outcome and number of siblings in the lottery. That is, families with more than one child in the lottery were more likely to decline than those with one child in the lottery. We walk the reader through the data presented in Table 18 – represented below in two tables for the purpose of highlighting different aspects of the data. In the bottom right corner of either table, one can see that 7,926 magnet offers were made. There were 4,911 magnet offers made to families with one child in the lottery (first column in the sibling field), of which 3,210 accepted (65.4%). In comparison, of the 2,114 offers made to families with two children in the lottery, 1,197 were accepted (56.6%). Obviously on the opposite end of an acceptance is a decline. The patterns in Tables 18 and 19 show there were higher percentages of declines – both active and administrative – among families with more than one child in the lottery, relative to families with only a single child in the lottery. To reiterate, it is unknown if those families with a single child in the lottery already have a sibling enrolled in a choice program. Nonetheless, looking at these two variables together, it appears as if number of siblings in the lottery makes a considerable difference in terms of offer outcomes. Our interview data validate this finding.

Table 18. Offer Outcome by Number of Siblings in the Lottery, 2019-2020

			Sibling							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
MagnetDecisionGroup	Accept	Count	3210	1197	369	90	26	0	0	4892
		Expected Count	3031.1	1304.8	420.3	97.5	36.4	1.2	.6	4892.0
	Active Decline	Count	603	327	92	19	12	1	0	1054
		Expected Count	653.1	281.1	90.6	21.0	7.8	.3	.1	1054.0
	Admin Decline	Count	1098	590	220	49	21	1	1	1980
		Expected Count	1226.8	528.1	170.1	39.5	14.7	.5	.2	1980.0
Total	Count	4911	2114	681	158	59	2	1	7926	
	Expected Count	4911.0	2114.0	681.0	158.0	59.0	2.0	1.0	7926.0	

Parents with 2 and 3 kids in the same lottery were “under” accepting relative to parents with 1 child in the lottery. E.g., among parents with 2 kids, 1,197 accepted but the expected number was higher at 1,305.

Same table as above, but with rates of accept, decline, & admin decline. Accept rates generally decrease as sibling #s go up. Conversely, admin decline rates go in the opposite direction. Parents with 3 kids in lottery admin decline at almost 1.5x rate as parents with 1 child.

MagnetDecisionGroup * Sibling Crosstabulation

			Sibling							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
MagnetDecisionGroup	Accept	Count	3210	1197	369	90	26	0	0	4892
		Expected Count	3031.1	1304.8	420.3	97.5	36.4	1.2	.6	4892.0
		% within Sibling	65.4%	56.6%	54.2%	57.0%	44.1%	0.0%	0.0%	61.7%
	Active Decline	Count	603	327	92	19	12	1	0	1054
		Expected Count	653.1	281.1	90.6	21.0	7.8	.3	.1	1054.0
		% within Sibling	12.3%	15.5%	13.5%	12.0%	20.3%	50.0%	0.0%	13.3%
	Admin Decline	Count	1098	590	220	49	21	1	1	1980
		Expected Count	1226.8	528.1	170.1	39.5	14.7	.5	.2	1980.0
		% within Sibling	22.4%	27.9%	32.3%	31.0%	35.6%	50.0%	100.0%	25.0%
Total	Count	4911	2114	681	158	59	2	1	7926	
	Expected Count	4911.0	2114.0	681.0	158.0	59.0	2.0	1.0	7926.0	
	% within Sibling	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 19 shows the percentages of any type of decline for magnet offers. If there was no relationship between the number of siblings in the lottery and decline rates, then decline rates for each sibling group would be similar to the overall decline rate across all groups – 38.3% (see last row of Table 19). However, the “decline” column in Table 19 shows that only the single-child sibling group declined at a rate lower than the overall rate (34.6% vs. 38.3%). For families who

entered more than one child in the magnet lottery, the decline rates were relatively higher than expected across the board. For example, families with two children in the lottery declined a magnet offer at a higher rate than would be expected (43.4% vs. 38.3%). The differences in decline rates are modest but they are statistically significant.

Table 19. Sibling Application by Magnet Offer Outcome, 2019-2020

			Magnet Lottery Offer		
			Accept	Decline (any type)	Total
Sibling	1	No.	3,210	1,701	4,911
		% within Sibling	65.4%	34.6%	100.0%
	2	No.	1,197	917	2,114
		% within Sibling	56.6%	43.4%	100.0%
	3	No.	369	312	681
		% within Sibling	54.2%	45.8%	100.0%
	4	No.	90	68	158
		% within Sibling	57.0%	43.0%	100.0%
	5	No.	26	33	59
		% within Sibling	44.1%	55.9%	100.0%
	6	No.	0	2	2
		% within Sibling	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	7	No.	0	1	1
		% within Sibling	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	No.	4,892	3,034	7,926	
	% within Sibling	61.7%	38.3%	100.0%	

Race/Ethnicity and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 20 below shows magnet offer outcomes by racial/ethnic categories self-identified by applicants. Acceptance rates are fairly similar across the largest racial/ethnic categories, hovering around 60-65%. Administrative decline rates are also all fairly similar.

Table 20. Magnet Offer Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity, 2019-2020

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
White	No.	989	317	361	1,667
	Expected No.	1,029	222	417	1,667
	% w/in race	59.3%	19.0%	21.7%	100.0%
Latino	No.	1,117	189	464	1,770
	Expected No.	1,092	236	442	1,770
	% w/in race	63.1%	10.7%	26.2%	100.0%
American Indian/NA	No.	42	12	26	80
	Expected No.	49.4	10.7	20	80
	% w/in race	52.5%	15.0%	32.5%	100.0%
Black	No.	1,477	250	583	2,310
	Expected No.	1,425	308	577	2,310
	% w/in race	63.9%	10.8%	25.2%	100.0%
Asian & Asian/Al	No.	442	146	216	804
	Expected No.	496.1	107.1	200.9	804
	% w/in race	55.0%	18.2%	26.9%	100.0%
Latino/Black	No.	688	113	269	1,070
	Expected No.	660	143	267	1,070
	% w/in race	64.3%	10.6%	25.1%	100.0%
Native Haw/PI	No.	9	2	3	14
	Expected No.	8.6	1.9	3.5	14
	% w/in race	64.3%	14.3%	21.4%	100.0%
Latino Multi-racial	No.	77	14	28	119
	Expected No.	73.4	15.8	29.7	119
	% w/in race	64.7%	11.8%	23.5%	100.0%
Black Multi-racial	No.	43	11	28	82
	Expected No.	50.6	10.9	20.5	82
	% w/in race	52.4%	13.4%	34.1%	100.0%
Total	No.	4,884		1,978	7,916
	Expected No.	4,884	1,054	1,978	7,916
	% w/in race	61.7%	13.3%	25.0%	100.0%

Among the larger race/ethnic groups, not many differences in accept, decline, and admin decline rates for magnet offers.

Grade Level and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 21 below shows magnet offer outcomes by applicant grade level. The focus here is on acceptance rates; decline rates represent combined active and administrative declines. Note, the offer outcomes are collapsed across magnet school choice order. Acceptance rates were the highest at early PK levels and transition grades. For instance, PK3 (3-year olds) and PK4 (4-year olds) offers were accepted around three-quarters of the time. The transition grades of Kindergarten and Grade 9 were modestly lower at 62.4%, while Grade 6 acceptance rates were 71.6%.

Table 21. Magnet Offer Outcome by Grade Level, 2019-2020

		Accept	Decline (any type)	Total
PK3 – 3 Years Old	No.	985	306	1,291
	% w/in grade	76.3%	23.7%	100.0%
PK4 – 4 Years Old	No.	312	119	431
	% w/in grade	72.4%	27.6%	100.0%
Kindergarten	No.	429	258	687
	% w/in grade	62.4%	37.6%	100.0%
Grade 1	No.	156	178	334
	% w/in grade	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%
Grade 2	No.	149	132	281
	% w/in grade	53.0%	47.0%	100.0%
Grade 3	No.	146	168	314
	% w/in grade	46.5%	53.5%	100.0%
Grade 4	No.	159	171	330
	% w/in grade	48.2%	51.8%	100.0%
Grade 5	No.	145	143	288
	% w/in grade	50.3%	49.7%	100.0%
Grade 6	No.	1,012	401	1,413
	% w/in grade	71.6%	28.4%	100.0%
Grade 7	No.	130	141	271
	% w/in grade	48.0%	52.0%	100.0%
Grade 8	No.	94	95	189
	% w/in grade	49.7%	50.3%	100.0%
Grade 9	No.	927	549	1,476
	% w/in grade	62.8%	37.2%	100.0%
Grade 10	No.	122	179	301
	% w/in grade	40.5%	59.5%	100.0%
Grade 11	No.	96	152	248
	% w/in grade	38.7%	61.3%	100.0%
Grade 12	No.	30	42	72
	% w/in grade	41.7%	58.3%	100.0%
Total	No.	4,898	3,043	7,941
	% w/in grade	61.7%	38.3%	100.0%

Late Application Status and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 22 shows that the administrative decline rate for the nearly 300 late applicants to the magnet program was over 50%. The administrative decline rate for on-time applications was half that rate, at 24.0%. Correspondingly, acceptance rates differed widely between the two groups (62.8% for on-time and 35.2% for late applications).

Table 22. Magnet Offer Outcome by Late Application Status, 2019-2020

		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
<i>On time</i>	No.	4,787	1,013	1,828	7,628
	% within Late App.	62.8%	13.3%	24.0%	100.0%
<i>Late Application</i>	No.	105	41	152	298
	% within Late App.	35.2%	13.8%	51.0%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	No.	4,892	1,054	1,980	7,926
	% within Late App.	61.7%	13.3%	25.0%	100.0%

Seat Date Offer and Offer Choice and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 23a displays magnet offers across three general time periods – spring, summer, and fall – by choice preference. The spring period was roughly between April and June; the summer period July through mid-August; and the fall period went from August 19 on. The table shows that a total of 7,961 magnet offers were made in 2019. Of those, 5,753 (72.3%) offers occurred in the spring session at the onset of lottery; nearly 86% (4938/5753) of those spring offers were made to a first-choice school. A total of 6,301 offers were made to a first-choice school across all three time periods, with the vast majority, 78.4%, being made in the spring. Table 23b disaggregates seat offer date by precise date – not grouped by a seasonal time period.

Table 23a. Magnet Offers by Seat Date Period and Order Choice, 2019-2020

	<i>1st Choice</i>		<i>2nd Choice</i>		<i>3rd Choice</i>		<i>4th Choice</i>		<i>5th Choice</i>		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Spring	4,938	78.4%	530	59.1%	177	42.9%	61	30.7%	47	31.1%	5,753	72.3%
Summer	449	7.1%	129	14.4%	79	19.1%	31	15.6%	20	13.2%	708	8.9%
Fall	914	14.5%	238	26.5%	157	38.0%	107	53.8%	84	55.6%	1500	18.8%
<i>Total Offers</i>	6,301		897		413		199		151		7,961	

Table 23b. Magnet Offers by Exact Seat Date and Order Choice, 2019-2020

MagSeatDateChoice1			MagSeatDateChoice2			MagSeatDateChoice3			MagSeatDateChoice4			MagSeatDateChoice5		
Date Offer	No.	%	Date Offer	No.	%	Date Offer	No.	%	Date Offer	No.	%	Date Offer	No.	%
22-APR-19	3,997	63.4	22-APR-19	273	30.4	22-APR-19	73	17.7	22-APR-19	23	11.6	22-APR-19	24	15.9
29-APR-19	1	0.0												
08-MAY-19	9	0.1												
14-MAY-19	501	8.0	14-MAY-19	89	9.9	14-MAY-19	50	12.1	14-MAY-19	10	5.0	14-MAY-19	6	4.0
03-JUN-19	1	0.0	03-JUN-19	76	8.5	03-JUN-19	18	4.4	03-JUN-19	14	7.0	03-JUN-19	9	6.0
03-JUN-19	201	3.2												
18-JUN-19	218	3.5	18-JUN-19	92	10.3	18-JUN-19	36	8.7	18-JUN-19	14	7.0	18-JUN-19	8	5.3
21-JUN-19	10	0.2												
10-JUL-19	180	2.9	10-JUL-19	56	6.2	10-JUL-19	25	6.1	10-JUL-19	11	5.5	10-JUL-19	6	4.0
12-JUL-19	1	0.0												
24-JUL-19	118	1.9	24-JUL-19	32	3.6	24-JUL-19	15	3.6	24-JUL-19	11	5.5	24-JUL-19	6	4.0
25-JUL-19	6	0.1	25-JUL-19	4	0.4	25-JUL-19	1	0.2	25-JUL-19	1	0.5			
26-JUL-19	1	0.0												
07-AUG-19	143	2.3	07-AUG-19	37	4.1	07-AUG-19	38	9.2	07-AUG-19	8	4.0	07-AUG-19	8	5.3
19-AUG-19	104	1.7	19-AUG-19	38	4.2	19-AUG-19	30	7.3	19-AUG-19	14	7.0	19-AUG-19	10	6.6
20-AUG-19	22	0.3				20-AUG-19	4	1.0	20-AUG-19	2	1.0			
27-AUG-19	128	2.0	27-AUG-19	23	2.6	27-AUG-19	13	3.1	27-AUG-19	12	6.0	27-AUG-19	10	6.6
28-AUG-19	8	0.1												
28-AUG-19	1	0.0												
			30-AUG-19	4	0.4	30-AUG-19	7	1.7	30-AUG-19	2	1.0	30-AUG-19	2	1.3
04-SEP-19	217	3.4	04-SEP-19	44	4.9	04-SEP-19	29	7.0	04-SEP-19	13	6.5	04-SEP-19	9	6.0
05-SEP-19	31	0.5	05-SEP-19	3	0.3				05-SEP-19	6	3.0	05-SEP-19	5	3.3
09-SEP-19	18	0.3	09-SEP-19	5	0.6	09-SEP-19	5	1.2	09-SEP-19	3	1.5	09-SEP-19	6	4.0
10-SEP-19	165	2.6	10-SEP-19	26	2.9	10-SEP-19	22	5.3	10-SEP-19	20	10.1	10-SEP-19	6	4.0
12-SEP-19	9	0.1	12-SEP-19	6	0.7				12-SEP-19	1	0.5	12-SEP-19	7	4.6
13-SEP-19	9	0.1	13-SEP-19	1	0.1									
13-SEP-19	6	0.1												
16-SEP-19	4	0.1	16-SEP-19	1	0.1	16-SEP-19	3	0.7	16-SEP-19	3	1.5	16-SEP-19	3	2.0
18-SEP-19	81	1.3	18-SEP-19	41	4.6	18-SEP-19	18	4.4	18-SEP-19	15	7.5	18-SEP-19	12	7.9
19-SEP-19	9	0.1												
20-SEP-19	4	0.1										20-SEP-19	2	1.3
23-SEP-19	1	0.0												
24-SEP-19	4	0.1	24-SEP-19	2	0.2									
24-SEP-19	4	0.1												
25-SEP-19	83	1.3	25-SEP-19	43	4.8	25-SEP-19	25	6.1	25-SEP-19	15	7.5	25-SEP-19	12	7.9
26-SEP-19	4	0.1	26-SEP-19	1	0.1	26-SEP-19	1	0.2	26-SEP-19	1	0.5			
27-SEP-19	1	0.0												
27-SEP-19	1	0.0												
Total	6,301	100.0	Total	897	100.0	Total	413	100.0	Total	199	100.0	Total	151	100.0
Missing	14,005		Missing	19,409		Missing	19,893		Missing	20,107		Missing	20,155	
	20,306			20,306			20,306			20,306			20,306	

One way to assess whether there is a relationship between seat offer time period and offer outcome is to look at the two variables simultaneously. To do so, we crosstabulated seat offer time period (i.e., seasonal time period) with the group of applicants who received offers to their first-choice magnet - Table 24a below. This table shows that 4,938 spring offers were made for a first-choice magnet school. Of those, 3,550 were accepted (71.9%), 604 actively declined (12.2%), and 784 administratively declined (15.9%). Not unexpectedly, accept rates decline as the offers get closer to the start of the school year (56.8% in summer, 41.7% in fall). The percentage of administrative declines is nearly 3x higher in the fall compared to the spring (44.3% to 15.9%), although it is important to emphasize these are relative percentages and do not reflect the number of affected students. We computed a chi-square test of independence to test whether there was a statistical relationship between offer time period and offer outcome. The results indicated a statistically significant association ($p < .001$), at least for the first-choice magnet offers. Inspecting the cells in the table, the “expected” and actual number of accepts and administrative declines during the fall time period are particularly discrepant. As a reminder, the “expected” numbers are what one would expect if there was no relationship between offer time period and offer outcome.

Tables 25-28 show the same crosstabulations for groups offered their second- through fifth-choice magnets. As evidenced in Table 25a, there were fewer offers to second-choice magnets, 897, and they were distributed across the three time periods much the same as first-choice offers, with the majority ($530/897 = 59.1\%$) occurring in the spring. Again, there is evidence of an association between seat offer time period and offer outcome; accept rates were 53.8% in the spring vs. 48.8% in summer and 29.4% in fall. Generally speaking, the fall seat offer time period acceptance rates are much lower among the second- through fifth-offer choice groups compared to first choice offers (see bottom left corner area of Table 24a where the comparison is 41.7% accepts for first choice offers in fall compared to Tables 25a, 26, 27, and 28 which show 29.4%, 31.2%, 27.1%, and 29.8%, respectively for second- through fifth- offer groups). These results indicate an interaction between seat date time period and which choice was offered. In other words, both factors played some role together to influence offer outcomes. As expected, the later the seat offer, the less likely applicants were to accept. And the lower the choice offer in terms of the applicants’ preferences, the less likely they were to accept. When those two are working together in the positive (early seat offer, first choice), acceptance rates are highest.

Finally, Tables 24b and 25b present magnet offer outcomes by seat offer date period for first and second-choice schools, respectively, and disaggregated by resident location. Hartford families accepted their offers at higher rates than suburban families across all three seat offer time periods, and this pattern occurred for both first-choice (Table 24b) and second-choice offers (Table 25b). For instance, Hartford residents accepted 78.5% of their first-choice spring offers compared to 67.0% among suburban families. Irrespective of residence location, administrative declines increased over each successive seat offer period (see shaded portions in Table 24b).

Table 24a. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period for First-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring (school in session)	No.	3,550	604	784	4,938
	Expected No.	3,280.5	620.7	1,036.8	4,938.0
	% within Seat Date	71.9%	12.2%	15.9%	100.0%
Summer (school not in session)	No.	255	60	134	449
	Expected No.	298.3	56.4	94.3	449
	% within Seat Date	56.8%	13.4%	29.8%	100.0%
Fall (school in session)	No.	381	128	405	914
	Expected No.	607.2	114.9	191.9	914
	% within Seat Date	41.7%	14.0%	44.3%	100.0%
Total	No.	4,186	792	1,323	6,301
	Expected No.	4,186	792	1,323	6,301
	% within Seat Date	66.4%	12.6%	21.0%	100.0%

Table 24b. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period by Residence Location, First-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Residence Location</i>			<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
			Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Suburban	Spring	No.	1,914	467	475	2,856
		% within Seat Date	67.0%	16.4%	16.6%	100.0%
	Summer	No.	158	40	99	297
		% within Seat Date	53.2%	13.5%	33.3%	100.0%
	Fall	No.	213	85	228	526
		% within Seat Date	40.5%	16.2%	43.3%	100.0%
	Total	No.	2,285	592	802	3,679
		% within Seat Date	62.1%	16.1%	21.8%	100.0%
Hartford	Spring	No.	1,633	137	309	2,079
		% within Seat Date	78.5%	6.6%	14.9%	100.0%
	Summer	No.	96	20	35	151
		% within Seat Date	63.6%	13.2%	23.2%	100.0%
	Fall	No.	167	43	175	385
		% within Seat Date	43.4%	11.2%	45.5%	100.0%
	Total	No.	1,896	200	519	2,615
		% within Seat Date	72.5%	7.6%	19.8%	100.0%

Table 25a. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period for Second-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			<i>Total</i>
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring	No.	285	83	162	530
	Expected No.	247	86.3	196.8	530
	% within Seat Date	53.8%	15.7%	30.6%	100.0%
Summer	No.	63	23	43	129
	Expected No.	60.1	21	47.9	129
	% within Seat Date	48.8%	17.8%	33.3%	100.0%
Fall	No.	70	40	128	238
	Expected No.	110.9	38.7	88.4	238
	% within Seat Date	29.4%	16.8%	53.8%	100.0%
Total	No.	418	146	333	897
	Expected No.	418	146	333	897
	% within Seat Date	46.6%	16.3%	37.1%	100.0%

Table 25b. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period by Residence Location, Second-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Residence Location</i>			<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			<i>Total</i>
			Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Suburban	Spring (school in session)	No.	128	52	98	278
		% within Seat Date	46.0%	18.7%	35.3%	100.0%
	Summer (school not in session)	No.	22	11	23	56
		% within Seat Date	39.3%	19.6%	41.1%	100.0%
	Fall (school in session)	No.	27	25	78	130
		% within Seat Date	20.8%	19.2%	60.0%	100.0%
	Total	No.	177	88	199	464
		% within Seat Date	38.1%	19.0%	42.9%	100.0%
Hartford	Spring (school in session)	No.	156	30	63	249
		% within Seat Date	62.7%	12.0%	25.3%	100.0%
	Summer (school not in session)	No.	41	12	20	73
		% within Seat Date	56.2%	16.4%	27.4%	100.0%
	Fall (school in session)	No.	43	15	49	107
		% within Seat Date	40.2%	14.0%	45.8%	100.0%
	Total	No.	240	57	132	429
		% within Seat Date	55.9%	13.3%	30.8%	100.0%

Table 26. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period for Third-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring	No.	88	22	67	177
	Expected No.	68.6	26.1	82.3	177
	% within Seat Date	49.7%	12.4%	37.9%	100.0%
Summer	No.	23	12	44	79
	Expected No.	30.6	11.7	36.7	79
	% within Seat Date	29.1%	15.2%	55.7%	100.0%
Fall	No.	49	27	81	157
	Expected No.	60.8	23.2	73	157
	% within Seat Date	31.2%	17.2%	51.6%	100.0%
Total	No.	160	61	192	413
	Expected No.	160	61	192	413
	% within Seat Date	38.7%	14.8%	46.5%	100.0%

Table 27. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period for Fourth-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring	No.	36	11	14	61
	Expected No.	23.6	11	26.4	61
	% within Seat Date	59.0%	18.0%	23.0%	100.0%
Summer	No.	12	5	14	31
	Expected No.	12	5.6	13.4	31
	% within Seat Date	38.7%	16.1%	45.2%	100.0%
Fall	No.	29	20	58	107
	Expected No.	41.4	19.4	46.2	107
	% within Seat Date	27.1%	18.7%	54.2%	100.0%
Total	No.	77	36	86	199
	Expected No.	77	36	86	199
	% within Seat Date	38.70%	18.10%	43.20%	100.00%

Table 28. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period for Fifth-Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring	No.	30	6	11	47
	Expected No.	18.4	7.2	21.5	47
	% within Seat Date	63.8%	12.8%	23.4%	100.0%
Summer	No.	4	7	9	20
	Expected No.	7.8	3	9.1	20
	% within Seat Date	20.0%	35.0%	45.0%	100.0%
Fall	No.	25	10	49	84
	Expected No.	32.8	12.8	38.4	84
	% within Seat Date	29.8%	11.9%	58.3%	100.0%
Total	No.	59	23	69	151
	Expected No.	59	23	69	151
	% within Seat Date	39.1%	15.2%	45.7%	100.0%

Another way to look at relationship between seat offer time period and offer outcome for magnets is to crosstabulate offer time period with offer outcome irrespective of choice order (collapsing offers to first- through fifth-choice magnets). Table 29 below shows that spring offers, which account for 72.2% of all magnet offers, yielded a 69.5% accept rate. This rate was significantly higher than offers made during the summer (50.6%) and fall (36.9%). The administrative decline rates are nearly at 50% (48.1%) among the fall offers. This provides additional evidence that offer seat time period is strongly associated with offer outcomes.

Table 29. Magnet Offer Outcome by Seat Date Period across All Choice Offers, 2019-2020

<i>Magnet Seat Date (all choices)</i>		<i>Magnet Decision Group</i>			Total
		Accept	Active Decline	Admin Decline	
Spring	No.	3,987	724	1,024	5,735
	Expected No.	3,537.3	762.6	1,435.0	5,735.0
	% within	69.5%	12.6%	17.9%	100.0%
Summer	No.	357	107	242	706
	Expected No.	435.5	93.9	176.7	706
	% within	50.6%	15.2%	34.3%	100.0%
Fall	No.	554	225	721	1,500
	Expected No.	925.2	199.5	375.3	1,500.0
	% within	36.9%	15.0%	48.1%	100.0%
Total	No.	4,898	1,056	1,987	7,941
	Expected No.	4,898	1,056	1,987	7,941
	% within	61.7%	13.3%	25.0%	100.0%

Town and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 30. Magnet Lottery Offer Outcomes by Town, Sorted by #Applications (minimum # applications >50), 2019-2020

	No. Accept	%	No. Active Decline	%	No. Admin Decline	%	Total Apps
HARTFORD	2,335	68.1%	309	9.0%	786	22.9%	3,430
NEW BRITAIN	344	59.2%	62	10.7%	175	30.1%	581
EAST HARTFORD	372	65.4%	63	11.1%	134	23.6%	569
MANCHESTER	336	61.4%	79	14.4%	132	24.1%	547
WEST HARTFORD	136	60.2%	36	15.9%	54	23.9%	226
BLOOMFIELD	147	71.4%	23	11.2%	36	17.5%	206
WINDSOR	96	47.1%	38	18.6%	70	34.3%	204
BRISTOL	70	54.3%	18	14.0%	41	31.8%	129
ENFIELD	68	55.3%	25	20.3%	30	24.4%	123
MIDDLETOWN	59	53.2%	18	16.2%	34	30.6%	111
VERNON	62	55.9%	14	12.6%	35	31.5%	111
SOUTH WINDSOR	40	37.7%	23	21.7%	43	40.6%	106
ROCKY HILL	41	41.8%	18	18.4%	39	39.8%	98
SIMSBURY	49	59.0%	19	22.9%	15	18.1%	83
TORRINGTON	59	71.1%	7	8.4%	17	20.5%	83
WETHERSFIELD	50	61.0%	11	13.4%	21	25.6%	82
GLASTONBURY	46	56.8%	14	17.3%	21	25.9%	81
SOUTHINGTON	42	54.5%	20	26.0%	15	19.5%	77
NEWINGTON	38	52.8%	9	12.5%	25	34.7%	72
ELLINGTON	33	47.8%	14	20.3%	22	31.9%	69
AVON	36	58.1%	13	21.0%	13	21.0%	62
EAST WINDSOR	34	55.7%	10	16.4%	17	27.9%	61
FARMINGTON	30	50.8%	18	30.5%	11	18.6%	59
WINDSOR LOCKS	21	41.2%	18	35.3%	12	23.5%	51
PLAINVILLE	24	60.0%	12	30.0%	4	10.0%	40
GRANBY	20	57.1%	11	31.4%	4	11.4%	35
MERIDEN	15	42.9%	4	11.4%	16	45.7%	35
COLCHESTER	12	37.5%	11	34.4%	9	28.1%	32
EAST HAMPTON	13	43.3%	6	20.0%	11	36.7%	30
TOLLAND	15	50.0%	7	23.3%	8	26.7%	30
CANTON	16	59.3%	6	22.2%	5	18.5%	27
BERLIN	16	61.5%	5	19.2%	5	19.2%	26
EAST GRANBY	16	61.5%	5	19.2%	5	19.2%	26

Hartford Zip Code and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 31 shows offer outcomes by Hartford zip code. There are not many differences across the highly populated Hartford zip codes in terms of accept and decline rates. Applicants from zip codes 06112 and 06120 exhibited a slightly higher administrative decline rates than the others; their corresponding accept rates were lower as well.

Table 31. Magnet Lottery Offer Outcomes by Hartford Zip Code, 2019-2020

<i>Hartford Zip</i>	No. Accept	%	No. Active Decline	%	No. Admin Decline	%	Total Apps
06103	15	60.0%	5	20.0%	5	20.0%	25
06105	266	70.2%	27	7.1%	86	22.7%	379
06106	746	69.1%	91	8.4%	242	22.4%	1,079
06112	488	66.9%	63	8.6%	178	24.4%	729
06114	537	69.3%	72	9.3%	166	21.4%	775
06120	277	64.0%	49	11.3%	107	24.7%	433
	2,329		307		784		3,420

Specific Magnet Schools and Magnet Offer Outcomes

Table 32 presents offer outcomes for the 2019-2020 lottery by magnet school.

Table 32. Magnet Offer Outcomes by School, 2019-2020

	Accept		Decline (any type)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	172	3.5%	142	4.7%	314	4.0%
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Element.	130	2.7%	105	3.5%	235	3.0%
Academy of Science and Innovation	205	4.2%	98	3.2%	303	3.8%
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School	146	3.0%	97	3.2%	243	3.1%
Betances Early Reading Lab Magnet School	115	2.3%	77	2.5%	192	2.4%
Betances STEM Magnet School	60	1.2%	33	1.1%	93	1.2%
Breakthrough Magnet School, North	85	1.7%	47	1.5%	132	1.7%
Breakthrough Magnet School, South	66	1.3%	39	1.3%	105	1.3%
Capital Preparatory Magnet School - Upper School	61	1.2%	65	2.1%	126	1.6%
Capital Preparatory Magnet School – Lower School	136	2.8%	128	4.2%	264	3.3%
Civic Leadership High School	121	2.5%	60	2.0%	181	2.3%
Classical Magnet School	65	1.3%	68	2.2%	133	1.7%
Connecticut IB Academy	56	1.1%	36	1.2%	92	1.2%
Connecticut River Academy at Goodwin College	136	2.8%	54	1.8%	190	2.4%
CREC Montessori Magnet School	102	2.1%	55	1.8%	157	2.0%
Discovery Academy	138	2.8%	56	1.8%	194	2.4%
Environmental Sciences at Mary M. Hooker	137	2.8%	48	1.6%	185	2.3%
Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School	121	2.5%	43	1.4%	164	2.1%
Global Experience Magnet School	37	0.8%	45	1.5%	82	1.0%
Great Path Academy at MCC	67	1.4%	39	1.3%	106	1.3%
Greater Hartford Acad of the Arts (GHAA) / Middle	96	2.0%	74	2.4%	170	2.1%
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts [Full Day]	134	2.7%	85	2.8%	219	2.8%
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts [Half-Day]	121	2.5%	115	3.8%	236	3.0%
Hartford Trinity College Academy - (Grades 6-12)	237	4.8%	128	4.2%	365	4.6%
Hartford Trinity College Academy - (Grades 6-8)	28	0.6%	15	0.5%	43	0.5%
Hartford PreKindergarten Magnet School	113	2.3%	89	2.9%	202	2.5%
International Magnet School for Global Citizenship	96	2.0%	80	2.6%	176	2.2%
Metro Learning Ctr Magnet Global & Int'l Studies	132	2.7%	59	1.9%	191	2.4%
Montessori Magnet at Batchelder	80	1.6%	56	1.8%	136	1.7%
Montessori Magnet School at Annie Fisher	87	1.8%	74	2.4%	161	2.0%
Museum Academy	115	2.3%	64	2.1%	179	2.3%
Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet School	132	2.7%	55	1.8%	187	2.4%
Pathways Academy of Technology and Design	101	2.1%	47	1.5%	148	1.9%
R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Performing Arts	132	2.7%	117	3.8%	249	3.1%
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts	133	2.7%	98	3.2%	231	2.9%
Riverside Magnet School at Goodwin College	124	2.5%	62	2.0%	186	2.3%
Sport and Medical Sciences Academy	158	3.2%	129	4.2%	287	3.6%
STEM Magnet School at Annie Fisher	81	1.7%	95	3.1%	176	2.2%
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School	208	4.2%	74	2.4%	282	3.6%
University High School of Science and Engineering	139	2.8%	98	3.2%	237	3.0%
University of Hartford Magnet School	149	3.0%	75	2.5%	224	2.8%
Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School	146	3.0%	19	0.6%	165	2.1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>4,898</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>3043</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>7,941</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Summary

Findings from the quantitative study were based on an analysis of over 20,000 applications from the 2019-2020 lottery. We focused heavily on magnet school applications as these accounted for nearly all applications in the lottery. Of the magnet applications, 7,961 offers were issued between April and the beginning of the 2020 school year – with a substantial number issued in April. Among these offers, 61.5% were accepted, 13.4% actively declined, and 25.1% administratively declined. Administrative declines were modestly related to grade level, as families of PreK children administratively declined at relatively lower rates than other grades. Non-transition grades tended to exhibit higher than expected administrative decline rates. There were no substantial differences between suburban and Hartford applicants in terms of administrative declines, although suburban families were slightly more likely to administratively decline relative to all magnet offers.

Nearly two-thirds (66.4%) of magnet offers made to applicants' first choices were accepted. Acceptance rates dropped to below 50% with second-choice offers and below 40% for third to fifth-choice offers. The main reason listed by families for actively declining a first-choice magnet school offer was that "the student wanted to stay in their current school or district" (this accounted for half of all the survey responses for active declines). With respect to magnet school decliners, suburban families were relatively more likely to opt to stay in their own school or district than Hartford families.

Families with multiple siblings in the lottery appeared to play a factor in decisions. Our analysis showed that families with more than one child in the lottery were more likely to decline than those with one child in the lottery. In terms of grade levels, magnet offer acceptance rates were the highest at early PreK levels and transition grades. For instance, around three-fourths of all PK3 and PK4 offers were accepted.

Finally, we ascertained a distinct relationship between seat offer period and offer outcome, although it is important to note that the vast majority of offers were made in April and May. The later the seat offer, the less likely applicants were to accept: 71.9% of magnet offers were accepted in the spring, 56.8% in summer, and 41.7% in fall. Hartford families accepted their offers at higher rates than suburban families across all three seat offer time periods, and this pattern occurred for both first-choice and second-choice offers.

The quantitative analysis allowed us to obtain descriptive data on lottery applications, discern patterns of behavior in terms of where families applied and what decisions they made upon receiving an offer. We also examined possible relationships between factors such as school order preference, number of siblings in the lottery, timing of offers, and family residence and their ultimate decisions. The quantitative findings informed and complemented our qualitative analysis, which is described next. The qualitative analysis thus allowed us to attend to the *why* and explore the experiences and decision-making processes among parents.

Part II: Qualitative Analysis

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach which broadly seeks to understand how individuals interpret, construct, or make meaning of their world and experiences (Merriam, 2002, 2009). Adhering to a constructivist paradigm, our research questions will explore families' experiences, understandings, and what led them to decline a RSCO lottery offer (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative portion of the study allowed us to explore broader patterns behind *what* patterns exist among lottery acceptances, declines, and administrative declines. Our qualitative inquiry compliments this information by providing a rich description of *how* families are experiencing the lottery process and making decisions.

Participants

This report is based on data collected from interviews with 36 families who the CSDE lottery data set indicated had either actively declined an offer from the school choice lottery or who were administratively declined an offer from the school choice lottery. Our goal was to obtain a reasonably balanced proportion of families from the following groups: active vs. administrative decline; Hartford residents vs. suburban residents; children's grade level. See Table 33 for sample demographics.

To recruit participants, we first used a statistical software package (SPSS) to randomly sample from the population of decliners provided in the CSDE lottery data set. We engaged in three rounds of recruitment wherein we randomly sampled 50 individuals from the population of magnet decliners and 50 individuals from the population of open choice decliners. During each round we first reached out to each family via email. For those who responded we followed up separately to set up a time and date for the interview. For those who did not respond we sent a follow up message via text. Our final correspondence to those who did not respond was another follow up message via email. Recruitment emails and texts were provided in English and in Spanish for those whose primary language was listed as such. These three rounds of recruitment resulted in 30 completed interviews. After these three rounds of recruitment, we analyzed participant demographics to see if the sample adequately reflected the population. We found the magnet sample contained an overrepresentation of families from the suburbs. Thus, we engaged in three more rounds of recruitment wherein we randomly sampled a total of 150 individuals from the population of Hartford magnet decliners.

Following the first two rounds of recruitment of randomly sampled families we engaged in an additional recruitment method wherein we administered flyers seeking volunteers who have had the experience of actively or passively declining. Flyers were administered electronically via professional networks, personal networks, and social media. The flyer included a number to text if interested. The initial round of flyer distribution resulted in 2 completed interviews. The families interviewed did not actually seem to meet our desired criteria of families who declined lottery offers. After a cost-benefit analysis, we did not engage in another round of flyer distribution.

The final participant sample included 36 families that comprised 62 student applicants to the RSCO Lottery and 44 declines of Lottery offers. Twenty-five families (39 students) applied to magnets only; 11 families (25 students) applied to Open Choice and magnets. As was presented in the first half of this report, the vast majority of total applications to the RSCO Lottery were for magnet seats only, the next largest percentage of applications were for both magnets and Open Choice - these overall preferences seem to be reflected in our sample. Participating families comprised 21 active declines and 23 administrative declines.⁴ Of these declines, 24 declined offers to their first choice (the first school or district listed in their magnet or Open Choice preferences). Seven of these declines were to second-choice offers; 3 to third-choice offers; 1 to a fourth-choice offer; and 2 to fifth-choice offers. Table 34 shows the survey responses for participants who were active decliners. Of administrative decliners, 11 were identified in the RSCO data as having failed to respond to their offer by the deadline and ten failed to register their student after accepting an offer.

Table 33. Participant Demographics as Reported in RSCO 2020-2021 Lottery Data

		% of Total Sample of Families [Magnet Decliners and Open Choice Decliners]
Geographic Region	Hartford	56%
	Non-Hartford	44%
SES Tier	A	33%
	B	22%
	C	39%
Grade Level	PreK	10%
	K-5	32%
	6-8	28%
	9-12	30%
Race	Asian	19%
	Black or African American	36%
	Hispanic or Latino	17%
	Hispanic or Latino AND Black or African American	6%
	White	22%

⁴ Note that the two flyer respondents are not included in this count. One respondent could not be found in RSCO data; the other accepted a seat for the school year 2018-2019.

Table 34. RSCO Survey Responses of Participants as Reported in RSCO 2020-2021 Lottery Data

Type of Decline	Survey Response	No.	% of Declines
Administrative	Parent/guardian failed to respond before deadline	12	27%
Administrative	Parent/guardian failed to register student at the school district after accepting	11	25%
Active	Student wants to stay in his/her current school/district	10	23%
Active	Parent/guardian wants a different magnet school	2	5%
Active	Family is moving out of state	1	2%
Active	Parent/guardian did not receive placement offers for all his/her children who applied	1	2%
Active	Parent/guardian wants a magnet school, not open choice	1	2%
Active	Public health crisis	1	2%
Administrative	Student will be attending an open choice district	1	2%
Active	Student will be going to a private/parochial school	1	2%
Active	Student will be going to a technical high school	1	2%
Active	The offer was not the first choice	1	2%
Active	The school was too far away	1	2%

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2013). Each participant was interviewed once for approximately 30 minutes.⁵ Interviewing is a typical qualitative data collection procedure and data collection via single interviews is accepted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). See Appendix A for the interview protocol.

Interviews were conducted at a time most convenient to participants and via a medium they were most comfortable with – in person using masks and following social distancing guidelines or via a phone or video call. Of the 36 participants, 35 chose to conduct the interviews virtually by phone or video call. One interview was conducted in-person at a location of the participant’s choosing. All interviews were digitally audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews – with no identifiable information – were imported to NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, and analyzed thematically via a process that included multiple rounds of both inductive and deductive coding. Following systematic procedures, we moved from narrow units of analysis (e.g., significant statements) to broader units (e.g., meaning units) with the goal of describing: a.) why families actively or passively declined offers from the school choice lottery; b.) what, if any, aspects of the lottery process may help explain their declining; and c.) how families are experiencing the lottery process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

⁵ When we developed the interview protocol, we estimated this as the time for completion and informed participants of this during recruitment. In practice, interviews ranged from 18 minutes to 37 minutes.

We engaged in an initial phase of deductive coding where we applied broad deductive codes developed from literature on school choice processes and family experiences with school choice. We subsequently engaged in an initial phase of inductive coding to follow themes surfacing from the data that may not be captured by the broader deductive codes. We organized this first phase of coding in a codebook including for each code a definition, an example, notes, and a frequency count.

Following this first phase of deductive and inductive coding, we conducted a second phase of focused coding to find prominent emergent themes pertinent to the research questions (Miles et al., 2014). During this process we refined the codebook and wrote analytic memos. This iterative process also included frequent returns to the data set to ensure a closer and more accurate interpretation of the data. After coding all data, we created a variety of matrices to help develop interpretations and check for disconfirming evidence (Miles et al., 2014).

To limit bias in analysis and interpretation of data, we conducted peer debriefing and engaged in reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To further avoid bias and increase validity and reliability of the data we engaged in cross-checking of codes as well as member checking of emergent themes.

Findings: Families' Experiences

While this inquiry focused on exploring the reasons families' decline offers from the RSCO Lottery, we were also interested in families' experience applying to the lottery as this could provide insight into important contextual factors influencing decisions to decline. All names presented are pseudonyms.

Why Families Apply and What they Value in a School

Families are influenced by a variety of factors when making decisions within school choice programs. For example, prior research has found parents value aspects of a school beyond its test scores (Bell, 2009; Lareau & Goyette, 2014; Reay, Crozier, & James, 2011; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). Studies of school choice programs have examined choice sets among families and determined that school geographic locations, demographic characteristics, and academic performance are all considerations for parents, but that decisions are also unique to family situations. Our findings on why families apply and what they value in a school are in line with, and add some nuance to, prior research.

Location. Location is a top consideration for most families. Families expressed a desire for a school to be close to their home or their place of employment. Families with multiple children also prefer their children to be in the same district and the same school, when possible. Prior research consistently demonstrates families' preferences for nearby schools (Hasting et al., 2005; Pattillo, 2015; Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

Our study demonstrates another interesting dynamic related to location. Three Hartford parents described their experience learning about the RSCO Lottery after seeing a school in their

neighborhood and subsequently figuring out how to ensure their child may go to school there. As one mother, Hanna, described,

I had seen a school there that they were finishing up making. ... And that's how I learned all about the program was, they're like, "Yeah, you can't just get into the school. You have to literally apply through this system and that's where you can get in." And that's how I found out about [the RSCO Lottery] So that's when I started applying because at the time, the [Magnet School] was very close to where I live and I'm like, "Oh it'd be perfect ..."

This comment highlights the preference for schools close to home and the complexity some families face when they do not have automatic access to schools in their neighborhood.

Location was important across the board, but it is important to note that some families had the privilege to be more flexible.

School specialization. As is widely documented, families apply to the RSCO Lottery because they and/or their child(ren) are interested in a school's theme. For example, Bertha said of her daughter, "I already knew that she was into robotics and science. And so I wanted to steer her that way, and public schools ... they don't offer any STEM programs ... I just figured it would be a better way, just to get her into what she likes."

Some families described how their child was not flourishing in a public-school setting and that they believed a more specialized educational experience would help their children. The following comments from Priya illustrate these parents' concerns, "I feel he's struggling only because the way the school does structured. Public schools are very, they're not targeted. They're doing everything. And I feel like he would have thrived better in a dedicated environment." Josephine expressed something similar about her son,

he's interested in some version of STEM probably, but more in the sort of creative technical areas. So programming, video game design, that sort of thing. So on the one hand we were looking for a school experience that would help him focus on that a bit, not to the exclusion though of other academic subjects. And then also he was struggling a bit in the public school because there was a lack of focus, because he was struggling to be focused in this general environment. That's just not ... He's just not into school for school's sake. So we were trying to figure out how to give him a little focus, a little motivation by directly connecting the dots between what he wants his life to be about and what his school was about.

These comments evidence parents seeking out a more focused or specialized environment to help their children succeed. Relatedly, several Non-Hartford families described how they sought a magnet school placement for their children who are, as one mother phrased it, not "traditionally easy to educate." Parents talked about their discontent with the public-school experiences of their children who have ADHD, are gifted, and/or who have autism. Prior research has also shown

that more advantaged families tended to use school choice to find options that met their unique needs or desires (Makris, 2018).

Families also liked that magnet schools' themes could allow their child(ren) to explore or better prepare them for a potential career path, as evidenced in the following quotes:

There's more creativity, it's offering drama, it's offering things like technology, video editing, those types of things, where a traditional academic setting is just offering math, science, reading, your normal sort of subjects. Whereas this one has more of a creativity element to it and sort of a platform for stepping into maybe a higher education in film or TV or things like that. My kids are interested in that. (Laura)

The medicine one, first we were excited because we want to explore. I like the thing that in high school that they explore, even though if they don't feel like that they can't do it, so at least at this level they will know I tried and I don't think so, I will pursue this career or something. So that's why I want him to see that medicine to see if he will go to that field or not. (Fatima)

[Son] had a very clear path in mind. He really wanted to go to the school of Aerospace and Engineering or Science and Innovation. He's always been a kid that's been very much into design of vehicles, cars, et cetera. (Elsa)

There were similar sentiments expressed about the technical schools as well. For example, one mother, Ginnie, asserted they offer better opportunities because, unlike public schools, students “can come straight out of school with having a trade to do” but that the technical schools also prepare students to get “into good colleges.”

For families with young children, however, too much emphasis on a specialization may be a deterrent as some parents expressed that when their children are young, they want them to be “exposed to everything” Additionally, this particular motivation for applying was expressed most often – though not exclusively – by Non-Hartford families. In contrast, many Hartford families expressed a desire for an overall better education, without specific mention of themes or specialization.

Better education. Interviews revealed that families applied to the RSCO Lottery seeking better educational opportunities for their child(ren). How families determine the quality of education and their perspectives on what constitutes “better” varies. This aligns with prior research suggesting that different families draw on different cultural logics (Fuller & Elmore, 1996) to define a quality education (Beal & Hendry, 2012) but that valuing high quality education – however defined – is what attracts families to magnet programs (Hastings, Van Weelden, & Weinstein, 2007).

For the most part, families described a “better” education in vague terms. Parents most frequently cited “curriculum” but also mentioned “academics.” However, when pressed for details about what aspects of the curriculum they were drawn to, parents remained vague. This

suggests that parents' may be pushed by the perceived inadequacy of their default public school option rather than pulled by something specific another choice is offering – a phenomenon evidenced in prior literature (Makris, 2018; Pattillo, 2015). Although, sometimes, parents would be more specific by comparing the curriculum or “academics” to other schools in which they had experience. For example, “I’ve read the curriculum and I’m like, ‘This is great. Hartford doesn’t offer this.’” A couple parents described how they wanted a school that was not “behind,” that would appropriately advance their child(ren)’s learning.

The desire for an appropriately challenging education closely ties into how families conceptualized a better education as one that prepares their child(ren) for college. For example, “I went to school in the Hartford school systems... I feel like when I went to college I wasn't prepared enough, and I've heard so many good things about magnet schools ... I thought really magnet schools probably have a better curriculum than a regular public school.” Other studies have also demonstrated that families believe “a quality school featured a curriculum that prepared students for college” (Pattillo, 2015; see also Ellison & Aloe, 2019). Eleven families also shared that they consider a school’s “rating” – that is, test scores – when determining its quality (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Pattillo, 2015; Smrekar & Honey, 2015). Additionally, seven families’ definition of a better education included smaller class sizes. This was a priority expressed by Hartford and Non-Hartford families. Ellison and Aloe found that “small class sizes are bound up with parents’ perceptions of good teaching and academics, which they understand as preparing their children for college” (p. 1150).

Interestingly, several Hartford families were very explicit in mentioning that the schools they were applying for had more resources – and were thus interpreted as being able to offer better educational opportunities. The following observations by Cindy encapsulate these interpretations:

Simsbury school district is better than Hartford school district. ... they have more resources. Her first orientation day, she goes to school and they have two gyms, they have an art room, they have a music room. These are things that she didn't have access to before. So while other kids are kind of looking at her like, “yeah, we have this stuff,” she's all amazed, and they're confused, but she didn't have that stuff. And she would see it on TV. They had lockers, they had a playscape. She didn't have access to those things. So those were especially with my eight-year-old why I wanted to get her either into a magnet school or the open choice program.

Parents and students are savvy about the differential resource allocation across schools and districts. In some cases, they see schools with more resources as being able to provide something extra, e.g., “[the Open Choice school] had more funding, so they were able to do more things with the children besides just learning.” In other cases, they saw how a lack of funding in their public school was impacting their child’s ability to get the academic support they needed, e.g., “the funding had been cut. So there were no extra tutors. They just didn’t have the resources to help her.” Overall, parents apply to the RSCO Lottery looking for what they perceive to be the best educational opportunities for their children.

The Influence of Valuing Racial/Ethnic Diversity on Choice Program Preference

Another school characteristic families value is racial and ethnic diversity. Interviews revealed that parents considered a school racially and ethnically diverse if it was not predominantly one race. Prior research suggests that families seek schools with a student population that reflects their own racial background (Beal & Hendry, 2012) – our study both corroborates this to some extent and breaks from this to some extent. While diversity is not often the sole motivating factor for their application, ten Black and/or Latine⁶ families expressed that it is a top consideration in deciding whether to choose a school. For families of color living in Hartford, this value seemed to shape their preference for magnets. For example, a parent of a child who was identified as Black or African-American shared that she “chose both [magnet and open choice] but ... was more hoping that he would get into a diverse type school,” which she understood to be a magnet setting. She went on to say, “diversity is big for me and his father and that’s not something that he will get going to school in the Hartford area.” These quotes demonstrate how families of color value diversity in it’s true sense – a balanced representation of race and ethnicity – and that they recognize that public schools both in Hartford and outside of Hartford are largely segregated, dominated by one racial group (Ellison & Aloe, 2019; Smrekar & Honey, 2015). The preference for magnets is also reflected in the quantitative data which shows that out of 6,811 Hartford applicants only 256 applied to Open Choice only – 61% of these families applied to magnets only and 36% applied to magnets and Open Choice.

The following insight from Bonnie – whose children were identified as Hispanic or Latino – is illustrative of how parents’ value for diversity impacted their preferences:

I feel like the magnet schools have more a different demographics. At the current [magnet] school they’re in, they have a little bit of everything, but if you attend the Open Choice program ... it’s more of a white population. So, of course, they will be the minorities over there. Whereas the current schools, they’re just students, they wouldn’t even be considered the minority because the majority of the school is so split up.

The sentiment expressed here is representative of a common motivation for wanting a diverse school – that is, parents do not want their children to be minoritized, racialized, or stigmatized. Cindy expressed a similar sentiment about her daughter, “I don’t want her to be labeled as ‘this is a Hartford kid’ ... even though we are from Hartford I just don’t want anyone to treat her any differently.” She wanted her daughter to be proud of her “identity,” and seemed to believe there was a risk that going to a predominantly white school might undermine that development. Another parent, Katia, explained that when exploring the magnet and Open Choice schooling options she will “look into the percentages of minorities that attend the school.” Katia emphasized that she is seeking a diverse school because, “my kids are both Hispanic and Black, so I just want to make sure they don’t forget their culture or get treated any kind of way because of who they are or something.”

Moreover, it seemed that parents’ concerns about the lack of diversity in Open Choice settings are not unfounded. Two Hartford families who identified as Black or African American

⁶ We use “Latine” as a gender-neutral neologism.

told stories about their children's negative racialized and stigmatizing experiences in Non-Hartford, predominantly white schools. Prior research has found similar impacts, for example, Ispa-Landa (2013) found that Black students participating in an inter-district program were racially stereotyped at their predominantly white suburban school.

Bonnie (quoted above) illustrated another reason parents want a diverse school as she went on to say,

[a]ctually in the middle school ... they have a lot of transgender [students] ... They really do have everything in that school. [Children] have to learn sometime – so, when those questions come up, I can answer those questions for them. 'You don't have to follow them, but you can see that everyone is different, and they have to be treated the same way.'

Thus, parents also value diverse schools because they want their child(ren) to learn about different perspectives and to be socioculturally aware and competent. Another Hartford mother explained, "I want her to be able to communicate and to all types of people. We talk about that a lot, I tell her, no matter what color, race." Another parent whose child was identified as Black or African American connected this motivation to their own experience, "I'm a product of a magnet school. ... and I want him to have the same experiences that I did because it was still really good getting out of the inner city and just being around different people and learning different cultures."

The desire to have their children in diverse settings to learn different perspectives and develop their cultural and social competence was also expressed by White families but only if they were explicitly asked about it. That is, White families were not independently citing diversity as a primary consideration when deciding whether to choose a school. When explicitly asked about the racial and socioeconomic integration goals of magnet schools, parents were largely supportive and appreciative but emphasized it was a secondary consideration represented in the following quote,

No, [diversity] was a bonus. It was a benefit. I won't say that it was the primary thing why he was there, which is probably the root of the magnet system is like, well, yeah, it's not going to be the primary thing that most people are after. But it was clearly a positive.

As alluded to here, families emphasized that while they would be happy with a diverse environment, their primary consideration is getting the best school option possible for their child. For example, "I do like that about the school [the diversity] ... just the schools are rated like, on great schools, 4 and 5 out of 10. You want your kid in a 10 out of 10." This espoused consideration is interesting in context of prior literature suggesting that White families sometimes use a school's racial makeup as a proxy for quality (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Smrekar & Honey, 2015). Moreover, while prior research found that White families are more likely than families of color to report that student diversity is important (Schneider et al., 2000), "there is often a gap between what parents say and what parents do, with some parents seeking to

give ‘socially desirable’ responses” (Beal & Hendry, 2012, p. 527; Smrekar, 2009).

So, overall diversity was a primary consideration for families of color in their decision-making processes whereas for many White families it was perceived as a secondary “bonus.” For families of color the value of diversity was rooted in ensuring their child’s identity was respected and celebrated and that they learned to respect and celebrate others’ identities. This value seemed to shape Black and Latine Hartford parents’ preferences for magnet schools. Hartford families’ preference for magnet schools over Open Choice schools was evident in how they focused on their magnet school choices when discussing their motivations for applying to the RSCO Lottery. Open Choice schools are primarily seen as a backup option. As Hermine explained,

I did both magnet and Open Choice, not necessarily because I wanted to - because I didn't - but because I was given the insight that if you're not offered a magnet ... then you're kind of assed out, basically, excuse my French, on having a better option for your child to go to school...that's why I did Open Choice.

This comment exemplifies the preference of Hartford parents in the study for magnet schools but also their concern for missing out on any form of “better option.” In addition to applying to Open Choice as a backup, in some cases, there was a misconception that applying for Open Choice was a requirement (this phenomenon is discussed in more detail below).

The exception to the preference for magnet schools were three Hartford parents who had personal experiences in an Open Choice district or had someone close to them with personal experiences in an Open Choice district.

Families’ Perspectives on the Application Process

Interviews revealed that families found the application process technically easy but substantively challenging. The application process was technically easy insofar as the families did not experience challenges in accessing or filling out the application. When asked about their experiences applying for the lottery parents from all residential, demographic, and educational backgrounds said things such as: “it was easy;” “you just go online and do it;” “overall the process was very easy, very good communication;” “the application process is really straightforward;” “it was very simple.” Among the families we spoke to, there were no fundamental concerns regarding technological access or use. With a couple exceptions, families largely expressed their content with RSCO notifications and updates. For example, “they did very good. I think they almost text you, email you, and phone you, so you get communication multiple ways.”

However, for families, the application process spans months - from deciding to apply, to applying, to being notified of an offer (or not), and then making decisions about that outcome. Thus, while submitting the application is “easy,” the lifespan of the application can present challenges for many parents. Specifically, interviews revealed challenges around: parents acquiring valid and reliable information about school choice processes and school characteristics; the timing of offers; and understandings of waitlists.

Parents in this study faced challenges acquiring valid and reliable information about RSCO Lottery processes and school characteristics. This is not uncommon as prior research on various models of school choice continuously find that parents perspectives and decision-making processes are not always based on rational choice and objective data and that families have differing access to quality information (Jochim et al., 2014; Makris, 2018).

Indeed, families in this study described three primary information sources. First, parents frequently referred to doing “research.” For example, parents said things such as: “I basically just looked up and started doing research about all the schools;” “I can do a lot of research. I could find a lot of data and information about the academic performance ... specific demographics ... that’s very helpful to make decisions;” “I do my own little research on the school. I look at the reviews and stuff and read up on stuff.” Often research entailed investigating something they heard via their social network or on the news. When pressed on their specific sources families frequently said “Google,” but they also relied on schools’ websites as well as websites such as Greatschools (greatschools.org) and Niche (niche.com).

However, families frequently expressed challenges in finding the variety of information they were looking for. Even highly educated parents felt that information on lottery processes and options was not robust or accessible enough. For example, one high SES, highly educated parent expressed “[choosing a school] is a really, really big decision. And I think we’re expected to make it with very little information and assistance.” She went on to say, “I wish I had had the time to put more effort into learning about [all of the options] ... we might have made different choices ... had I understood that the effort put into it might be worth it in the end.” Moreover, while lower-SES families were slightly less likely than higher-SES families to be explicit about their challenges finding information, they were equally – if not more – likely to demonstrate incomplete understandings or misinformation. Not all families have the time and means to be engaged in such detailed investigation which can result in “information stratification that renders the school choice process more serendipitous than rational” (Beal & Hendry, 2012, p. 525; see also Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

Second, parents also frequently referred to attending school choice fairs and/or open houses. For example, Viki shared, “when we knew we were actually going to apply, we went to the different open houses of the schools we were interested in.” Grace asserted that, “you really wanted to be able to go to the open house to get the best information.” However, the value of open houses as an information source was only expressed by families applying exclusively to magnet programs. Hartford families applying to both Open Choice and magnet schools did not include open houses as a source of information. This may be because access to open houses was also a struggle for many parents who lamented they were not offered frequently enough, or that they had to “take off work or skip something,” or they were only offered “in the evening [when] we were all exhausted,” or that they wanted to attend open houses at multiple schools, but they were being held all on the same day.

Finally, families seemed to most frequently rely on, and most value information obtained from social networks – their friends, families, and to a lesser extent, colleagues. Indeed, decisions are not made based on individual tastes alone, rather, preferences are influenced by social factors (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). Research on school choice suggests that families from

different backgrounds use their social networks to guide their school choices (e.g., Bell, 2009; Holme, 2002; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). In many cases, parents trust their informal social networks more than formal information provided by schools (Ball & Vincent 1998; Berends & Zottola 2009; Holme 2002). Breaking slightly with prior research (Beal & Hendry, 2012), our study suggests there was an equal reliance on both social networks and formal information across demographic, geographic, and educational characteristics. However, like differential access to formal information, families' social networks differ in the types of information they convey (Makris, 2018; Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Additionally, parents are most likely seeking out personal connections to whom they are alike and might end up obtaining information that reinforces decisions they would have made otherwise (Yettick, 2016). In the findings section below detailing reasons for declining, we describe how the challenges families face in acquiring valid and reliable information result in incomplete understandings and information gaps that contribute to declines.

Another aspect of the application process that parents in this study took issue with was the timing of offers. For example, Josephine commented, "The only thing that was at all confusing or stressful about it is the ambiguity about when the decisions come down. Once you've submitted, then it's like, 'well, you will hear some time in the spring' ... so you just have to sit around and wait, and until you've heard, you can't make any other sort of plan." In other cases, parents asserted they only had a couple days following their offer to make a decision or register their child. Another issue was when families received offers for multiple children at very different times – in some cases this just left them in a similar holding pattern as other families but in two cases it caused them to assume only one child would be receiving an offer which contributed to their decision to decline. These concerns were expressed equally across demographic groups. Note, while many parents brought this up as an issue it did not emerge as a frequent enough contributor to declines to be included in the findings below.

Compounding the issue of timing was confusion around waitlist processes. A few families expressed their discontent specifically with changes to the waitlist process that occurred in the 2020-2021 application cycle. For example, Kate explained,

In prior years, you're given a number that your place on the wait list. ... This past year, they did not have a position on the wait list - it was just "you're on the wait list." They did info sessions on Facebook, like every week, and I would attend those to just try to get a better understanding ... does [daughter] have a chance of getting in or do I need to be researching other schools? And they were really vague like, "Well, there's some diversity stuff..." They just weren't giving a straight answer. ... It was a little bit frustrating. I did not think it was a good change.

Other parents expressed confusion regarding if and how one was able to know their placement on a wait list. Related to the perception of changes, a couple participants asserted that there were no wait lists for this application cycle. For example, Paulette – reportedly informed by reaching out to RSCO – explained, "this year, they weren't doing a waiting list." Elsa also recounted,

In the past if you were given an offer to one of the schools and you declined, you still remained on a waitlist for another school. And that was not the case this year. The offer email said something like, “in the year 2020, that’s it. If you decline, you’re off the list.” Which is really disappointing.

These accounts were contradicted by other participants’ stories of being on wait lists this year. We did not verify the existence of these changes with RSCO. These concerns were expressed equally across demographic groups. Again, however, for the families we spoke to this did not contribute to their decision to decline.

Findings: Alignment with RSCO Data

In the presentation of findings, we do not differentiate between active decliners and administrative decliners. Interviews revealed that the overwhelming majority of those who administratively declined had actively made a decision to decline and simply failed to appropriately inform RSCO.

Only one administratively declined participant seemed to be an unintended loss of an offer. The parent shared that she accepted the offer, but the timing was such that when she was supposed to register at the actual school, there was a storm and they lost power “for a week or more,” causing her to miss registration. Once power was restored, she sent an email to RSCO “saying ‘Hey, my son was chosen. I said I wanted him to attend this school, but I missed the registration part because of the storm we didn’t have any power I just got power back.’ I never heard from anyone.” It seems that, ultimately, this parent’s inability to enroll was due to an unfortunate miscommunication. This unintentional decline is an important learning opportunity; however, interviews overall strongly suggest a pattern that families labeled as administrative declines are most often actively deciding to decline but failing to inform RSCO.

When a family actively declines a lottery offer on the RSCO portal, they are required to fill out a survey indicating a reason for their decline. When a family is administratively declined, a RSCO representative is required to fill out a survey indicating a reason for the decline. Of the 36 participants, the survey responses of 6 were a close match to the reason for declining expressed in the interview. For example, the survey response of one Hartford parent who actively declined indicated “student wants to stay in his/her current school/district.” This was exactly the reason expressed in the interview – her teenage daughter wanted to apply to a magnet school that a few of her friends were attending but upon receiving the offer, the student did some more research and decided that she would rather stay in her current school. The survey response of another family who actively declined indicated “family is moving out of state.” Indeed, the interview revealed that the parent was completing the interview over the phone from Arizona.

For 13 participants, the survey responses only partially reflected the reason for declining. For example, one family’s survey response indicated “the offer was not the first choice.” The interview revealed that, while this was true, other factors more strongly contributed to their demotivation for accepting the offer to their second-choice school. Additionally, the survey response of another parent indicated “parent/guardian wants a magnet school, not open choice.”

The interview revealed that this preference was true but that the reason for decline was due to the fact the student was unexpectedly unable to complete a move from Jamaica.

For 15 participants, the survey response did not accurately reflect the reason for declining. Predictably, the majority of these are administrative declines who despite “fail[ing] to respond before the deadline” or “fail[ing] to register the student at the school district after accepting an offer,” had other rationale for their choice to decline. However, another example includes a family whose survey response indicated “the school/district is too far away.” In the interview the parent explained that since applying for the RSCO Lottery they had moved to a different town. However, despite the move, they strongly considered accepting the offer because the magnet school was very close the mother’s place of employment, and they still really liked the school. Ultimately, COVID-19 complicated their situation and their “new reality” motivated them to choose the public-school option in their new town.

Another interesting finding was that two families were misidentified as decliners – these families were identified as declines in the RSCO data but, in reality, had accepted and were attending the choice school offered to them. The RSCO data indicated that one family, whose child was offered a seat in a magnet school, had failed to respond before the deadline. Mirna explained how the school helped accommodate them to ensure their registration,

The principal actually called and said “I noticed that [child] had an acceptance letter and I don’t see that you’ve started the application process.” And I said “no, it actually sent me something back saying that because I did not accept the offer in time the offer had now been rescinded.” And she literally said, “give me two seconds.” She made a phone call and she said “hey listen, I just sent you an email you’re now able to get the application [registration] process started.” ... I guess if you didn’t accept it by a certain date it was – they just take you off of the list and stuff. So, then the principal called and said, “do you really want to put him in? I will be able to get you in there.” I am extremely grateful for them.

In this case, the principal seems to have gone out of her way to facilitate this families’ enrollment.

The other case was a Hartford family who applied her two children into the Open Choice and magnet programs. The RSCO data shows that this parent received an Open Choice offer for one of her children in April and accepted. The data also indicates that this parent received an Open Choice offer for her other child in June and actively declined it, the survey response listed is, curiously, “student will be attending an open choice district.” In the interview the parent asserted that she had not declined an offer this year but did mention that her third-grade daughter was “accepted into a different school” than her other daughter and that she contacted the school and “asked for them to put them both in the same school, so that worked out well.” Perhaps the RSCO data reflected something resulting from this accommodation.

Findings: Primary Reasons for Decline

Findings on the factors contributing to families' decision to decline are presented in two subsections: primary reasons for decline and secondary findings. Main reasons for decline are overarching categories of factors that were identified as influential by at least five participants. Secondary findings, while not as prevalent across all participants, nonetheless stood out as interesting and worthy of consideration.

Applied with Incomplete Information

The most prominent reason that factored into families' decisions to decline a lottery offer was that they – knowingly or unknowingly – applied to the school choice lottery with substantive information gaps. While we introduced this issue above, here we break down different gaps in understanding and how they contributed to fifteen families' decisions to decline.

Incomplete understandings of options and operators. Interviews revealed that families struggled to understand the difference among RSCO, CREC, Open Choice, and Hartford Public Schools. Some families were aware there was a difference but found learning the details challenging. Josephine described her experience which is illustrative of a few others,

When [son] came home and said, “there’s this arts magnet school.” I was like, “oh, well, get on the Google.” And so it was a little challenging to figure out well, which organizations were in charge of that ... There’s CREC and then there’s RSCO, and then there’s the Hartford school district. It wasn’t entirely clear who I should go to to look for that information. So I spent a little bit of time sort of wandering aimlessly about going, “well, there’s this - the footer on this website, says copyright of blah, blah, blah.” It was investigative things and as opposed to it just being, “if you are interested in attending a Hartford area magnet school here is your website.” ... Just, that part wasn’t clear, Took a lot of figuring out.

Through word of mouth, this parent learned about the existence of a potential school of choice with very little accompanying information. She subsequently put in a significant amount of effort to figure out first, if it was possible to apply and, if so, how. Most families were directed specifically to the RSCO Lottery by a friend or family member – thus, they had a slightly more direct line to information about their options but faced similar uncertainties and, Rene put it, “muddled [their] way through it.” For example, “... I still don’t understand the difference between CREC and RSCO and Magnet versus Charter versus Open Choice. There’s just a lot of terminology that I’m not even clear on, after going through it.” These parents are representative of those interviewed who had incomplete understandings but nonetheless a vague awareness of the different terms and operators. Prior studies focused on choice lottery information sources similarly found that information provided by schools and districts can be difficult to understand due to an abundance of jargon (Torres, 2012; Yettick, 2016).

Relatedly, as the adage goes, you don’t know what you don’t know. For many families, their incomplete understanding was revealed in the way they misused various terminology. For example, several families referred to all magnet schools as CREC schools. The following quote

is Nicole's description of the lottery process and is representative of families' incomplete knowledge of the different terms, operators, and options available to them,

The school that we got the first time, I don't think it was one of those schools where they just put them out of every town and bring them together. I think it was one of those schools where it was ... how should I actually say this? Like a school that's just in that town, for those students and then they fill up those seats with other kids. That's what I didn't like.

We draw attention to this confusion here not to blame or shame any family but rather to highlight the difficulties that parents of all backgrounds have in obtaining quality information to navigate the choice system (Jochim et al., 2014).

It seems that incomplete understandings of operators and options were translating into confusion about what their choices were. Specifically, families expressed incomplete understandings about choice application processes related to their ability to apply for multiple schools and/or programs. For example, the following quote from Rene is an excellent representation of frequently voiced confusion,

There's language about like, if you choose this, then your other option is not an option. And so you're confused as to whether can you apply for multiple schools? But then if one picks you, then the other ones can't pick you? You're not really sure when you're doing the application how it's decided, where you get chosen, and what that does to your other applications. And so the whole process, trying to figure out, are you applying for open choice or are you applying for a Magnet School? What options are available to you? And then if you, if one accepts you, can the other ones still accept you or not accept you? We weren't really sure, even the second time we did it, I still wasn't a hundred percent sure about just what the terminology was as far as what I was applying to and what that meant- ... as far as like getting chosen for one or another.

Here this parent expresses a few different concerns that are illustrative of those shared by many other families. First, there is confusion about which program one is applying to – whether they are choosing a magnet school, and Open Choice option, or both. As another parent corroborated, “I had a hard time figuring out what schools I was able to choose from, or what pool they would be put into.” Parents were also unsure if they were able to apply for both. As Katia shared, “I don't know if I can do both [magnet and open choice], but I would do it for a school that's closer to where I live in Hartford if I could.” One Hartford parent who had applied and declined a magnet school was unaware that the Open Choice program was an option at all.

The quote from Rene above also exemplifies another incomplete understanding frequently expressed – “if one accepts you, can the other ones still accept you ...?” Indeed, a couple families seemed to be under the impression that each choice made is a standalone application – that is that they would be either “accepted” or “rejected” from each school they applied to. These families were, understandably, confused as to why they had received an update (in these cases, in

the form of an offer) for only one school to which they applied.

There are more widespread misunderstandings about whether and how the choices one lists on their application impact each other in ways that would negatively or positively shape the chances of receiving an offer. Some families, like Rene above questioned if some choices cancelled out others. For example, “those two different programs [magnet and Open Choice] were confusing as to whether or not you elected this one, if it disqualified you from that one.” However, there were also misunderstandings about the impact of listing multiple schools on your chances of getting your top choice(s). This may speak to findings from the quantitative analysis that showed 1 in 5 applications list only a single magnet school.

Families’ incomplete understandings appear rooted in a lack of systemic transparency about these school choice processes. Without formal sources of information, families turn to informal sources of information, predominantly social networks. Most families described making application decisions based on – well-intentioned but often misguided – advice from friends and family who also participated in the RSCO Lottery. For example, Rafiq lamented, “there is no guidelines ... some people told me if I only applied for one school the chances of you to get that is higher but I didn't even know that, I was applying all four or five choices. ... So those kinds of things are not there, not really.” Misconceived strategies on how to enhance one’s chances are commonly shared among social networks. Another parent revealed an interesting phenomenon where families were building their own data sets to analyze in an attempt to understand “what is going on behind the screen.” Priya explained, “I had so many Excel sheet. ... This is going to sound crazy, but you won't believe how much time people spend looking into all these, like who is getting in and who is not.” The conclusions she and her social network were drawing from this data were contributing to the spread of incomplete understandings. Another example of this is Bertha, who asserted that she was told by a representative at an open house that she was required to only list one school, “EC Goodwin said, ‘If you pick only EC Goodwin there’s a 99% chance you’ll get in because it’s the only school that you’re picking for the choice program.” She was very certain about receiving this advice and explained how she directed four of her friends to follow the same advice.

Families’ incomplete understandings of school choice processes were also revealed in their uncertainties surrounding whether they had a choice at all. That is, many families, particularly those who applied to Open Choice, asserted they had not made a choice. For example, “Pretty much [magnet and open choice] are the same thing. I’m not really sure if I got a choice at all;” “I don’t think we got to pick.” While it is our understanding that Open Choice is slightly more limited due to it being based on a family’s zone of residence, many parents did not seem to be privy to this information. For example, Paula asserted about her application process, “it is kind of limited, the choice. But, I’m like, ‘if they’re going to be bused out, why does it matter [where they are bused out to]?’” This incomplete understanding also manifested in some families’ assertions that they were offered a school to which they did not apply. For example, Mirna stated, “I do know that the school he was accepted into was not any of the ones that I had chosen.” Another parent similarly asserted, “I don't believe that they even gave us a choice [of district] if I was being completely honest, because I would've never even clicked for that [the district in which she received an offer].”

Overall, these incomplete understandings influenced families' decision to decline insofar as it led to them having information gaps about the schools they are offered – which itself is a separate finding we discuss below. That is, because these families believed they did not have a choice, they did not spend extra time to do background research on the schools they were applying for. Incomplete understandings of school choice processes also led to families' attempts to game the system – a secondary finding also elaborated on below.

Incomplete information about school or district. Families also applied to the RSCO Lottery with incomplete information about the school or district to which they were applying. Some families applied for a school knowing they had incomplete information. One of these families expressed they did not have time to fully inform themselves before the application deadline. However, a couple others expressed that they thought their chances of receiving an offer were so low that it was not worth putting in the effort to fully inform themselves until they received an offer. Additionally, to as mentioned above, incomplete understandings of choice program options and their ability to choose contributed to information gaps surrounding school or district characteristics. The Open Choice applicants who reported not having a choice in what district they were applying for had, perhaps unsurprisingly, not done any prior research on those districts. In contrast, other families, upon being offer a seat, learned that they were misinformed or mistaken about the choice they made.

Whether families were aware or not aware of their information gaps upon applying, these gaps were a large contributor to declines. That is, families declined lottery offers was because learned new or additional information about the school or district after submitting the application or after being offered a seat and determined the offer was either not actually feasible or not actually a good fit for the student. Important to note that in these cases, no other circumstances changed, the new or additional information about the school or district motivated the decline.

Information that most influenced families' decision to decline fell into five categories: school rating; school curriculum, programs, extracurriculars; school location; school culture and climate; and diversity.

Two families described learning more information about the school's climate and culture after submitting an application. One parent, learned new information the school's culture and climate that made her question her choice,

Bullying and language and maybe graphic nature and just what he would get exposed to. ... I heard some things basically that I think could go in and just love it and thrive or, if they don't fit in, it would be a bad experience. So, it felt like I didn't have consistent feedback on the school. Some people said positive things, some people just said negative things. I didn't have enough data points to really feel comfortable either way. ... I looked at suspension rates and it was higher than his current school. So, that could be interpreted as they're doing a great job, they're taking action on kids that are with poor behavior but -

This new information was just one of a few factors that led to their choice to decline. However, this quote also exemplifies the weight parents put on feedback from other people, especially

when more formal sources of information may be ambiguous.

Four families' decisions to decline were influenced by learning the rating of the school after receiving an offer. For example, "we pulled the data comparing [local public school option] to [magnet option] and obviously ... our kindergarten in our district – in reading and math did quite a bit better than [magnet]. Those metrics were a big part of it." Another family was initially interested in their offer but after they "checked the rating and all that" they didn't "feel as comfortable."

Seven families declined their offer after learning new or additional information about the school's curriculum, programs, and/or extracurricular offerings. Dolly described learning more information about the school to which her daughter received an offer, realizing that she had been misinformed upon applying,

She got accepted for engineering and I guess the school program for that one doesn't have an art program it's just all engineering which I did not know that. If I knew that I wouldn't have applied but that was my fault on my side. But we declined it because it wasn't the art program that she wanted ... I sat down with her and we looked at [the school where she was offered a seat] and she was like 'no mom that's not what I want.'

Another family learned that the art school they were offered did not have courses for the specific type of art their child was interested in, "We absolutely would have said yes to that option, but it did not seem geared towards the graphic design piece that she wanted. That was also unclear...it's hard to really know what the programs offer." Wanda shared, "the reason why she didn't take it - because researching that school wasn't a better school than she was she had. And they also didn't have a volleyball team. They didn't have sports in that particular school. I don't think [child] really did her research on the school she got accepted to [prior to applying]."

Six families explained that the location of the school they were offered contributed to their decision to decline. Four of these families received an offer for an Open Choice school and subsequently researched the location. Two of these families learned that they were misinformed about the location of the magnet school they applied to after receiving an offer. For example, Fay explained, "I was super excited, and I was like 'Oh, yay she got into school' and I was extremely happy. And then when I read the location I was like, 'Oh, I read that very wrong.'"

Five families explained that after receiving an Open Choice offer, they learned about the school's lack of diversity and determined it was not a good fit for their child. For example, Paula shared that after receiving her offer she investigated the school's website,

That's another thing too – not to make it a race thing but there weren't teachers that looked like my kids. Socially, especially what we're dealing with right now, they kind of need to see people that look like them are educators as well. So I had thrown that in as a factor too, because it would have been a complete culture shock coming from a predominantly mixed area to something that's not mixed.

Paula also said that she read “something in the paper like, ‘Oh, Bolton’s racist.’” And while she did not experience that personally on her visit to school’s office, “You don’t want your kid going there after you just seen something in the paper.” Another parent relatedly expressed, “Based on the area it was in, I just didn’t feel, because my son is African American, I didn’t feel like because of where the school is located it would have been diverse enough for him. And that’s very important to me.” Another parent, Arlene, recounted the following:

And I was like, okay, I’m not a hundred percent sure if I want to put her in Simsbury on top of the fact that we are African-American and at that moment in time, the Black Lives Matter movement was very, very, is going on a great deal. We were experiencing, she was actually starting to experience racism for the first time. And Simsbury is very predominantly Caucasian town. And I actually more so did not allow her to go to Simsbury, because of the dynamic and what was happening in the economy at that time. I was concerned that she was going to go and it was going to be something that she had never experienced before. And I, as a mother, wanted to shelter her from that ... So I have to say there were three reasons as to why I didn’t [accept], but... the main two that I said was, because I was moving and the racist piece, I didn’t know what she might’ve been walking into.

This is an important reminder of how choices are deeply contextualized in social, political, and cultural contexts.

Sibling(s)

Nine families’ decisions to decline a lottery offer was because the student offered a seat had sibling(s) that were not offered a seat or were not offered a seat in the same school or district. This issue is prominent among families who have multiple children entering the lottery at the same time or who have multiple children re-entering the lottery during a transition year because sibling preference is not triggered in these cases. It is also particularly difficult for single parents and caregivers to potentially accommodate children attending different schools. This finding builds on a preliminary finding from the quantitative analysis that showed higher percentages of declines among parents with more than one child in the lottery, relative to parents with only a single child in the lottery. Quotes from Priya, Bonnie and Hanna are representative of this finding:

I applied for all three of them both the boys got in and the twin sister didn’t get in. So, that wasn’t working out for us ... we want to keep them together.

I did the Open Choice. ... Even though they were siblings they would be in two different towns and that’s another reason why I didn’t choose to go that route ... If they were in the same district, I probably would’ve kept them in there. It would have been a nice change for them.

[Declined] just because they wouldn't be in school together in the same district, with the same days off, it would make it more difficult. And I also have two kids in a pre-school so I'm just – I cannot deal with all of that having to drive from one school to another to pre-school to pick everyone up. Or, god forbid somebody misses the bus - how long is it going to take me to get there? And then with the distance also for having to drive all the way to Enfield is probably like a 45-minute drive from [home town] and there's always traffic and, yeah, it just wasn't reasonable to have just one child going there.

For some families, keeping siblings together is important for them for social emotional reasons – they want their children to be able to have each other's support in making the shift or in traveling a long distance. For many families, keeping siblings in the same school and/or district is a logistic necessity. These considerations were important to families regardless of their child(ren)'s grade level(s).

Changes in Circumstances

Families also declined due to changes in the family's or the child's circumstances that occurred between the time they applied and the time they received an offer. Note this theme does not include changes in circumstances related to moving as this will be discussed separately below. Changes in circumstances that most influenced families' decision to decline fell into four categories: personal; academic opportunities at current school; extracurricular opportunities at current school; and an evolution in the student's interests. Findings that fell into the latter three categories came from families with older children.

For three families, changes in personal circumstances significantly contributed to their decision to decline. Specifically, their circumstances changed such that they no longer thought the school they were offered was the best option for them or their children. As one mother described, "I have gone through a divorce, and moved, and we've had a very significant change in circumstances, and I wasn't sure what my housing is going to look like, the car that I had, I don't have any more." Amidst all this change she felt it best to not further complicate their situation by making another big change to her children's schooling.

Another mother, Rina, expressed that she had submitted a RSCO Lottery application due to concerns she had regarding her daughter's behavior at her current magnet school. Rina said that her daughter was getting mixed up in "too much drama" and she wanted to have a backup plan for what she saw was not working out at this current school. By the time they received an offer, the situation had improved and Rina no longer felt that the change in school was necessary.

Four parents explained that they declined their lottery offer due to a change in circumstances at their current school that motivated them to stay. For two students, their change in circumstances related to their involvement in extracurricular activities. Two other students experienced a change in academic opportunities. For example, one student applied to the lottery in part because he felt he would not be able to take courses that aligned with his interests at his public school, "...the AP subjects or the honors that he wanted to get, he didn't get those because he was a transfer – we had just come into town. So that's the reason why we applied. However, he ended up getting those subjects ... between the time I applied and his eventual admission."

Another student learned that her public high school would be implementing a STEM program.

Relatedly, one parent described how their child's interests had evolved between the time they applied and the time they received their offer, "last year he took a real liking to coding. And they said coding wasn't a choice there so that's why we declined our spot." Depending on the motivation for applying, a very minor change in circumstances could prompt a family or student to decline.

Moving – Actual or Intentional

Moving factored into decisions to decline RSCO Lottery offers in two different ways. First, some families moved and that changed their circumstances enough that they no longer preferred the school/district in which they were offered a seat. For example, "I ended up not taking [offer] because right when she got chosen, I was in the middle of moving – it was just a lot in the air, a lot going on." Another parent went into more detail about how their move was a factor that complicated their decision,

We moved from Hartford to [town] ... When we got the acceptance letter, we were like 'okay do we keep him in the charter school? Or we now have a choice to bring him to [magnet] or put him in the [local public] schools.' So we had a little bit of a tough decision there to make. But then the pandemic started two weeks later, and it became easier to make that choice because we knew I was going to be working from home [her work was very close to the magnet school]. My husband was injured at work. It just became easier to take him here rather than to drive to Hartford in the mornings.

This quote shows how moving to a different town was the most significant factor in declining their offer but that ultimately the decision was influenced by other circumstances as well. For another family who moved out of state, obviously, their decision to decline was simple.

Second, families considering moving out of Hartford in the near future knew that doing so would make them ineligible for the seat offered and did not want to disrupt their child's education more than was necessary. For example,

But with Open Choice, if you move outside of Hartford you would lose your place unless you moved to that town. And that's why I didn't choose it. ... at the time my husband and I were planning to move outside of Hartford. We talked about it, we asked someone from Open Choice, 'well, how would that affect?' and they said if we move outside of Hartford the kids would no longer be eligible to attend that school.

While not related specifically to reasons for declining a RSCO Lottery offer it is relevant to this finding that families also discussed how they feel unable to move because of an Open Choice placement. As Cindy described,

And that's another good thing because, so the pre-schooler she's there, she'll be in the same school with her sister up until her sister goes to middle school and then high school

if we continue to live in Hartford which I do ... And it's funny, I was talking to someone at work, her daughter just graduated from Farmington high school and she was saying like, the only reason why she still lives in Hartford is because she didn't want to mess up the fact that her daughter goes to that school. And that she loved the open choice program. And so, hearing the different experiences and stuff like that, it's kind of like, okay, well, if they're getting the education, you kind of just sacrifice versus staying in Hartford if you don't really want to, but educational-wise, they're great.

Here we see the sacrifices families are willing to make to ensure consistent access to quality schooling. Relatedly, intentions to move also factored into families' application decisions. For example, one parent who was hoping to move in the near future asserted that she was applying to Open Choice schools "anywhere outside of Hartford [in] areas where I would move to." There also seemed to be confusion about how moving impacted students' eligibility for their magnet placement. One parent asserted they were more interested in magnets because if they moved their child could stay in their school; another parent said the opposite.

However, not all families were aware of this potential constraint. For example, one parent shared her experience of being surprised that her son was ineligible for his open choice placement after moving out of Hartford explaining that,

...when I moved from Hartford, I called and updated to give them my address. And they were like, "Oh, we have to remove him from the program." ... And I just thought it was really ridiculous. I was like, "Why do I have to go through putting him through a lottery again?" This just makes no sense to me."

This confusion – and frustration – is again inextricably tied to a lack of transparency and consequent frequent incomplete understandings of school choices processes. Indeed, another participant recognized that the constraint of open choice placement on moving may not be widely known information. "I just want to help other parents out in making the decision because if you live in Hartford and you get accepted into the Open Choice program ... you got to think about your decision before moving."

COVID-19 Pandemic as a Common Compounding Factor

For one participant, the COVID-19 pandemic was the primary reason for declining because due to the way COVID-19 impacted immigration processes, it prevented the child for whom she received an offer from completing a move from Jamaica. For many participants, however, the COVID-19 pandemic was a "last straw" factor that led to a decision to decline as it created circumstances that compounded other reasons they had for potentially declining. For example, parents shared: "I thought about enrolling her ... but then COVID hit and that kind of changed everybody's game plan;" "Because of COVID I just kept her home ... because of my health I did not want her being in school all day and then coming home;" "The main thing was – and COVID made it complicated. It made it very – I actually would say that I'm still very conflicted."

Secondary Findings

While not as prevalent across all participants, there were two findings that nonetheless stood out to us interesting and worthy of consideration.

Gaming the System

The lack of transparency surrounding choice application processes discussed in more detail above prompted some families to attempt to game the system, which contributed to declines. Specifically, some families declined because the offer they received was the result of an application or choice submitted by the parent in a – misinformed – effort to improve their chances for a different application or choice. For example, Laura’s explanation is illustrative of how some families employ misinformed strategies,

I had applied hoping that my son would get into the Performing Arts Academy, the middle school / high school. And I applied for [daughter] as a package deal just to kind of see if that would help ... and basically, the kid that I wanted to get into the school didn’t get selected and the kid that was not interested did get selected.

Here, the family wanted to get their son into a specific magnet school and thought it might improve their chances to apply both their son and their daughter to the school but then only the daughter received an offer.

Families also described wanting only their top one or two choices but including additional choices thinking that if they decline an offer to a ‘false’ choice they could remain on a waitlist for the choice they actually want, improving their chances. For example,

[Child] only wanted top two choices. [We] put the third choice, maybe to increase his chance ... Maybe part of it was misunderstanding on our own part ... In the past if you were given an offer to one of the schools and you declined, you still remained on a waitlist for another school. And that was not the case this year. ... Which is really disappointing because he would’ve stayed on the list. Even a month into school would have – if he had gotten in for this that or the other reason you know people dropping out or moving or whatever – he still would’ve accepted to go to one of those other 2 schools.

The use of strategy – however misinformed – appeared as a factor only among Non-Hartford participants. Gamesmanship and strategic play have been observed in other school choice programs as well – often these decisions are based on misinformed beliefs and are particularly prevalent when processes are opaque (Kapor, Neilson, & Zimmerman, 2020; Makris, 2018; Pattillo 2015).

Applied to Explore Options

Another secondary finding that emerged from talking to participants is that some may decline an offer because they applied to the school choice lottery uncommittedly – only in an effort to

explore their options or to see what their options could be. A few comments from parents that illustrate this include: “I think I should be honest. I just filled it out kind of more – I wasn’t being serious, put it that way;” “this year, we applied without giving any thought at all because I just wanted to try my luck ... I just wanted to see if we get;” “we kind of wanted to have options.” Again, this rationale was expressed only by Non-Hartford participants. On this finding, Ana offers an insightful observation,

I think that by the nature of the Lottery because you can pick so many choices. I don't know how common it is. I think that probably people just... It's free to apply. It's easy to apply. You could do it seriously or you could do it not seriously. And then try to imagine that it's not uncommon for people to be feeling out their choices. But when rubber hits the road would you actually send your child to that school?

Summary: Choosing to Decline

Rarely do families make decisions based on one factor. Decision making processes are complex and families are balancing many different considerations. These decisions are also deeply contextualized in a wide range of historical and cultural factors.

While perhaps an obvious observation, families are more likely to decline if they are overall content with their alternative. Of the Hartford decliners we spoke to, nine children are still in a choice school (magnet, Open Choice, or technical school), seven children are in charter schools, and one is in a private school. Only one parent expressed disappointment with their current placement in a Hartford Public School nonetheless, this parent made an active choice based on the location of the school and her desire for her children to attend school together.

Any discontent, frustration, or anxiety expressed by parents seemed to be rooted in having to apply – and in some cases reapply – at all (Makris, 2018). These perspectives are illustrated well by Fay’s comments,

I just wish that there wasn't a lottery. I wish if my kid, if I want to send them there, I wish that I could just send them there.... why is it that they do the lottery? That's more of a question if anything, but I'm just curious, why do they do a lottery, why're some kids chosen, why're other kids not chosen et cetera.

Hartford families want quality education without the uncertainty that a lottery presents them. Non-Hartford families do not feel the same pressure. While they overwhelmingly expressed that they were “happy the magnet system exists,” they consider it an accessory rather than a necessity, evidenced by Kate’s comment, “I think part of why people choose [town] is because of their school. So, whereas, I think a lot of times ... if you live in a town where your public schools aren't as good, then you might look more to a magnet school.” Indeed, studies show middle-class and/or White families living in the suburbs primarily choose to send their children to the public schools (Goyette, 2008; Makris, 2018). For Hartford families who perceive – whether true or not – their public schools as less worthy, the uncertainty of the lottery system can

feel less like an opportunity and more like a burden (Makris, 2018; Pattillo, 2015). Comments from Hermine elaborate this idea well, “that's the struggle, I don't feel like I should have to fight and always advocate, but it's fully tooth and nail to kind of figure out the education system.”

Limitations

As with all studies, there are limitations to this work. First, as a qualitative interview-based study, findings are not generalizable but can provide us important insight into why families are declining RSCO Lottery offers and how they are experiencing lottery processes. The voluntary nature of participation may have biased the sample – that is, parents with stronger opinions either way may have been more inclined to respond. Additionally, despite the fact that we recruited families using materials in both English and Spanish, according to RSCO data, 35 of 36 participants listed English as their primary language and 1 participant listed Hindi as their primary language. Thus, the sample is not representative of the significant portion of the population who are Spanish speaking.

There are also limitations with the quantitative analysis. First, this report considers only one year of lottery application and decision-outcome data. Notably, that data set pre-dates RSCO's use of SES indicators to conduct lottery assignments per the latest *Sheff* settlement agreement. We were also constrained by the variables in the administrative data sets. The data set did not include indicators at the student level that may bear upon their choices of where to apply as well as the decision outcomes among lottery winners. Because we were unable to obtain CSDE Student Identifiers (SASIDs) – codes that identify students in the state education system – we could not consider such variables as academic achievement (per state assessments), English language learning status, or special education status. This information would be helpful and relevant as prior research demonstrates that English language learning status and special education status shape if and how families engage with school choice (Jessen, 2015; Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj, 2015). Other cautions with respect to the quantitative analysis include any inferences we made about cause and effect; our research design is not sufficiently equipped to yield causal inferences, although inferential statistics allowed us to detect if there were associations or relationships between two variables. For instance, we were able to establish the magnitude and direction of the relationship between number of siblings in the lottery and offer decision outcomes, but we cannot know for certain if in fact families with more than one sibling in the lottery *caused* families to decline offers at relatively higher rates. Our analysis relied heavily on bivariate statistical techniques that do not take into account multiple other influences on family decisions – observed or unobserved.

Implications and Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this study provides important insights into families' decisions and has implications for RSCO and their partners. We conclude this report with suggestions based on the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Note that we did not triangulate the findings from interviews with parents. This means that the suggestions rooted in these findings may be something that RSCO or a partner is already doing. However, even if that is the case, the lack of awareness in our participants suggests that improvements could be made on the part of the providers.

We organize this section by first discussing suggestions that could be implemented to support families' pre-application processes. Subsequently, we offer suggestions for RSCO's internal processes after the application period ends (post-application). The bulk of our suggestions, however, are those directed at supporting families after they receive an offer to a school of choice (post-offer).

Pre-Application

The theme surrounding families applying with information gaps seem to point to an overarching difficulty in families' ability to obtain accurate, timely, well-rounded information about a school or district in which they may be interested. Indeed, participants did not find the actual process of applying to the RSCO Lottery challenging but they frequently expressed frustration over the time it takes to learn about schools. Some spoke to the research process they carried out while others lamented a lack of time to engage in such a process. Participants who attended open houses found these to be the most useful way to learn about a school. However, many described the difficulty of attending open houses for multiple schools when they are frequently held on the same day, at a time that is not convenient for some, only once a month.

We suggest that RSCO develop a more centralized hub of information on schools that includes information parents are expressing to be most relevant to their decision-making processes. It is vital that information on websites and in print publications is accessible and clear to all parents (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Smrekar, 2009). As such, this information hub should include information in non-text forms as well – for example, in a short video. A heavier lift would be to add a chat feature to the hub that would allow for parents/caregivers to chat with a support person from RSCO when a question arises.

This study also highlighted issues caused by a – likely unintentional – lack of transparency and, in turn, incomplete understandings of choice application processes. We suggest RSCO provide increased transparency about these processes including factors that do or do not impact a family's "chances." This could reduce misunderstandings such as feeling the need to strategically apply for multiple children or include options that the student is not actually interested in. While it may seem counterintuitive, there is evidence that more transparency can increase overall satisfaction with choice programs (Makris, 2018) and families' sense of involvement and agency (Pattillo, 2015). It may also be beneficial to encourage magnet applicants to list more than one school, if they would consider a second, third, etc., choice. Indeed, there were also a couple participants who believed that putting only one school would

increase their chances of being offered a seat at that particular school – one parent seemed to believe that for the school she was applying to it was a requirement. The data show that 20.6% listed only a single magnet school as a choice. To be sure, the lottery placement protocol may not be sensitive to number of choices and, in fact, Table 35 below shows there is not a large difference in “offer rates” between applicants listing one school (39.9% offers) and those listing five schools (43.0%). That being said, perhaps these offer rates would look different had more of the single-school magnet applicants increased their choice sets.

Table 35. Number of Magnet Schools Listed on an Application by Offer, 2019-2020

No. of Magnets Listed on App.		No. of Magnet Offers			Total
		0	1	2	
0	No.	302	0	0	302
	Expected No.	183.9	117.8	0.3	302
	% w/in No. Magnets	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
1	No.	2,480	1,647	0	4,127
	Expected No.	2,513.1	1,609.9	4.1	4,127
	% w/in No. Magnets	60.1%	39.9%	0.0%	100.0%
2	No.	1,936	1,037	1	2,974
	Expected No.	1,811	1,160.1	2.9	2,974
	% w/in No. Magnets	65.1%	34.9%	0.0%	100.0%
3	No.	2,265	1,317	5	3,587
	Expected No.	2,184.2	1,399.2	3.5	3,587
	% w/in No. Magnets	63.1%	36.7%	0.1%	100.0%
4	No.	1,335	857	4	2,196
	Expected No.	1,337.2	856.6	2.2	2,196
	% w/in No. Magnets	60.8%	39.0%	0.2%	100.0%
5	No.	4,047	3,063	10	7,120
	Expected No.	4,335.6	2,777.4	7	7,120
	% w/in No. Magnets	56.8%	43.0%	0.1%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>12,365</i>	<i>7,921</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20,306</i>
	<i>Expected No.</i>	<i>12,365</i>	<i>7,921</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20,306</i>
	<i>% w/in No. Magnets</i>	<i>60.9%</i>	<i>39.0%</i>	<i>0.1%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Post-Application

A prevalent reason for declines was because the student offered a seat had sibling(s) that were not offered a seat or were not offered a seat in the same school/district. This issue is most frequent when multiple children from a family are entering the lottery or when multiple children from a family are re-entering the lottery during a transition year because sibling preference is not triggered in these cases. Perhaps there is a way for RSCO to be taking siblings into account in these cases while keeping the process fair for single applications. At the very least, to the extent possible, RSCO should try to ensure that if a family is applying with more than one child than their offer notification goes out at the same time. In a couple cases, notifications received months apart led to confusion and to families declining an offer they may not have needed to.

Another factor that caught our attention was Hartford families declining because they were considering moving out of Hartford in the near future and knew that doing so would make them ineligible for the seat offered and did not want to disrupt their child's education more than was necessary. Indeed, low-income students from racially minoritized backgrounds are those more likely to move (Welsh, 2017). Research further shows that switching schools negatively impacts educational outcomes (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010; Welsh, 2017). It may be worth considering a change in this rule to encourage participation.

Post-Offer

Our findings, and RSCO data, also suggest that motivating families to applying is not the issue but that there is a potential leak of families occurring following their receiving an offer. Here we recommend a number of ways RSCO and their partners may help families make the most informed decisions possible about their offer based on the findings from this study and others (Cucchiara, 2013; Makris, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Smrekar & Honey, 2015; Teske et al., 2007).

First, schools should offer additional open house opportunities across the period of time that families are receiving offers so that families have an opportunity to attend an open house at the school where they were offered a seat. We suggest all open house opportunities vary in the days and times they are offered. That is, partner schools should ensure their open house does not conflict with other schools – to the extent practicable. Additionally, in recognizing that parents work different kinds of jobs and have different kinds of availability and capacity, we suggest schools hold more than one open house during different seasons (i.e., in addition to holding open houses in the place pre-application season, hold open houses in the post-offer season) to maximize the opportunity for all families to attend. The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed to us the different appetites for virtual opportunities. For some community members, virtual events have been a blessing – allowing for the flexibility to engage where they would not have been able to in person. It would not be a heavy lift to conduct open house opportunities via live streaming that allows for audience interaction. Furthermore, if recorded, families would have ongoing access to this resource. For those families offered seats in the spring while school is still in session, there should be opportunities for, at least older students, to shadow at their prospective school. Parents in our study suggested that they were offered opportunities to shadow only after they specifically requested. These experiences are found to be valuable and should be accessible. Providing these opportunities to students after they received an offer could reduce declines by transforming the offer from an abstract idea to a concrete experience that they can more accurately compare to their current circumstances. It seems particularly important to ensure that open house and shadowing opportunities are also made available by Open Choice schools and districts – such opportunities would be most helpful to families post-offer.

Additionally, many families are doing “research” after receiving an offer and they value information from social networks – friends, family, people they feel are similar to them. Parents in this study suggested that information from social networks provided “the real picture” that they sometimes believe is not represented in open house-type experiences where schools are “putting forth their best face.” To help facilitate this process RSCO or partner schools could host events for accepted families and/or students so they could connect with each other and have a chance to start building community. RSCO could also connect parents who receive an offer to a

parent whose child already attends (or attended) the school or district. Getting feedback and connecting with a similarly situated parent has the potential to greatly reduce declines among Hartford families concerned about Open Choice offers as well as Non-Hartford families who are hesitant about their magnet or Open Choice offers. Another less personalized way to do this might be to create a private group on Facebook or other such platform for parents who received an offer to a particular school or district. Parents can choose to join the group where they could solicit feedback and advice from similarly situated parents. Such groups would require ongoing monitoring to ensure no misinformation is shared. Another way to facilitate a similar experience would be to host panels of diverse parents whose children attend magnet and Open Choice schools – parents who receive offers could attend the panels to hear lived experiences and ask questions. These panels could additionally be expanded to “families” and include the voices of enrolled students. Building from this idea, RSCO could host panels of educators from Open Choice and magnet schools. Parents in our study value the voices of educators and care about the quality of their children’s teachers. All of these suggestions help to fill the leak caused by a lack of information or misinformation provided in parents’ social networks which they significantly value in their decision-making processes.

Other areas where it seems RSCO could provide more clarity to parents include the timing of offers and waitlist options. We acknowledge the complexity of school choice processes but believe it would help families decision-making if RSCO could provide them with a date by which they will receive an offer. This could be a rolling update. That is, upon application families are notified they will receive a first-round update by April 15, for example. That update would contain an offer or let parents know that they were not picked yet and will receive a second-round update by June 1, for example. Parents in this study felt like the period of time following the application was long and left them uncertain – without any information some got anxious and made decisions that contributed to their ultimate decline. Additionally, the RSCO data demonstrates that the majority of offers are made in April and May (and that these offers have higher acceptance rates) - if families have a limited understanding of lottery processes and are primarily relying on social networks for information, it made add to their confusion if they are seeing people in their networks receiving offers but they have not received any update. Our suggestions regarding the waitlist are very broad, we only want to emphasize that parents expressed confusion around the existence of a waitlist, how to get on a waitlist, and where they were on the waitlist.

Other

Finally, our quantitative analysis demonstrated that it would be beneficial to link lottery applications to SASIDs. Although SASIDs were included in the raw lottery data for some lottery applicants, others were not listed. Logistics of obtaining SASIDs notwithstanding, there are several benefits of having linked to lottery applications. SASIDs are connected to a wide range of CSDE administrative data, allowing the potential to conduct additional analyses to help evaluate the Choice programs. At the most basic level, SASIDs are linked to many other important student descriptor variables, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ELL status, and whether the child qualifies for special education services.

Continuing Research

Future analyses will involve multivariate modeling that can offer estimates of the relative influence of multiple factors on offer outcomes. In addition, we have established an initial data set within a geographic information system (GIS), which affords the potential to examine applicant decision behaviors by space and place. Finally, the next major analysis will address student attrition.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study seeks to better understand how families make decisions in the school choice process. Specifically, we want to better understand why some families decline lottery offers. You are being asked to participate because you were at some point offered a seat at a school through the lottery process. Findings from the study will be used to help the state improve the lottery system.

The interview will be audio recorded but everything you say will be kept confidential – your name, your child’s name, any identifying information will be obscured and assigned a pseudonym.

Any questions before we begin?

Background

- You were randomly selected based on your application for [child’s name], do you have other school aged children?
- Where do they attend school?
- Where did [child] go for [prior grades]?
- What town do you live in? How long have you all been in town?
- Did you grow up in Connecticut?
 - Did you attend public school?

Choice

- How did you first learn about the School Choice Lottery application?
 - Potential probes:
 - From whom did you first hear about it?
 - How did you get more information about it?
- Tell me about some of the reasons for why you applied to the lottery.
 - Which schools were you hoping to get into and why?
 - [potential probe: What did these schools offer that your neighborhood school did not offer? Were there things these schools did not offer that you were comfortable giving up?]
 - What were you hoping to get from applying to the school choice lottery?
 - Did you and your child/children have the same reasons for applying?
- What did you know about the public schools overall? / What was the neighborhood school to which you were automatically assigned?
 - Potential Probes:
 - What did you know about this school before applying to the lottery?
 - What were some of the things you liked about this school?
 - What were some of the things you did not like about this school?

- Tell me about your experience applying to the school choice lottery - what was easy about the process and what was challenging about the process?
 - Who from your family was most involved? Why?
 - Was your child/children part of the decision-making and application process?
 - Who did you reach out to for help if something was challenging? (Prompt about RSCO office technical help, district welcome center, partner school outreach)
 - [If not covered in response probe about technology access and functionality]
- How were you informed of the lottery offer (and do you remember when)?
 - What was your initial reaction? Why?
 - What was your child's/children's initial reaction? Why?
 - Did the school engage you in any way?
 - [if not covered in response, probe into whether they were contacted in a way they were expecting - i.e., were they expecting a phone call, email, or letter?]
- Tell me about your decision-making process surrounding the lottery offer.
 - What was your final decision?
 - [If active decliner] What were some of the major reasons you declined your lottery offer?
 - [if not covered in response probe into issues of Covid and racial discrimination]
- How did you inform the School Choice Office about your decision?
- What school is your child/children enrolled in now?
 - Are you happy with the school? Why or why not?
 - Is your child/children happy with the school? Why or why not?
- Do you think you'll reapply?
- Are there things you wish were different about the School Choice lottery?