



WOODBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

40 Beecher Road – South
Woodbridge, Connecticut 06525

Vonda Tencza – Superintendent
vtencza@woodbridgeps.org

January 31, 2023

Ms. Lynn Bailey
Open Choice & Magnet School Parent Choice Coordinator
ACES
350 State Street
North Haven, CT 06473

Ms. Janet Foster
Education Consultant – Open Choice Programming
Office of Strategic Planning and Partnership
CT State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard - Suite 407
Hartford, CT 06103

Dr. Iline P. Tracey
Superintendent
New Haven Public Schools
54 Meadow Street
New Haven, CT 06519

Mr. Marquell Middleton
Director of School Choice
New Haven Public Schools
54 Meadow Street
New Haven, CT 06519

Dear Representatives from ACES, CSDE, and the City of New Haven:

On behalf of Woodbridge School District, we are writing to you to express a concern that our district has with the reimbursement funding our district receives from our partnership with the New Haven Open Choice program. Woodbridge has participated in the Open Choice program since its inception in the 1998/99 school year, a total of 24 successful years. We currently have 18 students attending the Beecher Road School from the New Haven Public Schools. While that number may be small compared to other participating districts, it represents a commitment and a value of our district of which we are proud, and we want to continue this partnership.

Please note that the concern we will share is not new. Woodbridge has received mixed messages for a number of years now about what type of reimbursement we can expect from New Haven for the special education services provided to our Open Choice students. For years we have not received full reimbursement for our district's Open Choice related expenses. Both ACES and the State have stated that we can bill for all reasonable special education services provided under Connecticut General Statutes, 10-266aa. However, New Haven appears to only be reimbursing us for 1:1 Para-educator expenses, which is counter to what the CT Statute indicates. This creates a financial burden that our district is not able to continue bearing.

We continue to try and rectify the problem. At this point it feels like each organization is pointing accountability at the other, and Woodbridge School District is caught in the middle with no resolution in sight. Last month, Ms. Bailey from ACES suggested we contact Ms. Foster at the CSDE to report our concerns, and Ms. Foster has written a response sharing that we need to contact Ms. Bailey for help. We are unable to determine who is able to assist us with fiscal accountability.

It is important that you realize that at our January 2023 Board of Education meeting, there was a great deal of thoughtful discussion amongst our board members around this problem. Unfortunately, due to the fact that we have not received the funds that clearly should be reimbursed to our district, the WBOE voted to not fill our newly available open slots for Open Choice for the 2023/24 school year. We cherish each learner at Beecher Road School. We value the Open Choice program. As a collective group, they were very sad to make this decision but felt that it was fiscally responsible to our Woodbridge taxpayers to pause any increase in participation at this time. The Board also has directed me to share their concerns with all lead administrators connected with Open Choice, and this communication is our effort to share our concerns with each of you so that we may identify a positive resolution.

Woodbridge School District

In Woodbridge this past month we have sent emails without receiving a clear response, and the CSDE set-up a virtual meeting to address our concerns which will occur on February 3. It needs to be noted that last year, prior to my arrival as Superintendent in Woodbridge, the Board of Education shared that they went through similar rounds of emails, phone calls, virtual meetings with all parties involved and made no progress on this issue. We are in the same spot we were last year, and in years past. We have reimbursements from Open Choice that do not come near covering the costs incurred by Woodbridge School District.

If this situation can be rectified by last year's funds being fully reimbursed, and we observe that this year's funds are reimbursed appropriately, our BOE will revisit this decision for the following school year, 2024/25. We have committed to adding the topic of Open Choice to our October 2023 Board of Education agenda for discussion, and we look forward to that date with hope.

Woodbridge is proud of our history of participating in the Open Choice program. New Haven is our neighbor and many of our families work, dine and shop in New Haven. In this instance we feel that New Haven is not upholding their end of the bargain in participating in Open Choice. Any advice or assistance you can provide with respect to a clear understanding of what Woodbridge can expect and the collection of these funds would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Vonda J. Tencza
Superintendent



Lynn Piascyk
Woodbridge Board of Education Chair

c: T. Danehy, ACES Executive Director
Mayor Justin Elicker
Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker
CSDE State Board of Education Chairperson Karen DuBois-Walton
D. Coonan, Director of Business Services / Operations