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Connecticut & Region

Hartford schools sign agreement to run Great Path

[Print Page](#)

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Published: Thursday, June 7, 2012 12:35 PM EDT

MANCHESTER — The Hartford Public School system on Wednesday signed off on a five-year agreement with Manchester Community College to run Great Path Academy on the college's campus.

Beginning July 1, the school system will take over the day-to-day operations of the middle college high school from the Capitol Region Education Council.

David Medina, a spokesman for the Hartford school system, said recently that Great Path will be hiring new faculty because of the addition of the ninth grade and because many CREC employees are leaving.

"A number of teachers have accepted our offers, and we are still waiting to hear from several others," Medina said. "It appears, however, that the district will not be retaining a majority of the CREC employees."

According to Medina, 351 students applied to Great Path through the Regional School Choice lottery system; 123 from Hartford and 230 from other towns. In the second round of the lottery, for Grade 9 only, more than 100 applications were received.

"We are excited about this new partnership and the opportunities it will afford Great Path Academy students," MCC President Gena Glickman said in a statement. "Hartford Public Schools are nationally recognized for the quality of its magnet schools; their reputation for innovation and excellence will serve the high school, the college, and our community well."

In an interview this year, CREC leaders had raised concerns over how Great Path was operating at the college, citing differences with MCC officials over how students were being disciplined and saying that CREC's "vision" for the school was "incongruent" with the college's.

Despite filing a Freedom of Information request in January over the selection of a managing entity for Great Path, CREC officials have since supported Hartford's bid to take over management of the school.

Hartford operates four other schools that are affiliated with a college or university, including the Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy and the University High School of Science and Engineering at the University of Hartford, as well as Capital Preparatory Magnet School at Capital Community College and Pathways to Technology at Goodwin College.

"Hartford's selection to manage Great Path Academy makes sense, considering our growth as a portfolio school district and our experience in implementing a range of school designs," Hartford Superintendent of Schools Christina Kishimoto said. "We look forward to an impactful, successful, and collaborative relationship with Manchester Community College and the superintendents of the partnering districts."

Several of the Hartford school system's high schools, mainly those using a magnet school model, have made U.S News and World Report's list of the country's best high schools.

Great Path, which was established in 2002, has an enrollment of 247 students in grades 10-12. Beginning in the fall, the school will offer Grade 9 for the first time, bringing an additional 80 students to the campus. A "bridge program" will be put in place to help the middle school students transition to the college environment.

Students attending Great Path live in Hartford, Bolton, Coventry, East Hartford, Glastonbury, Manchester, Tolland, and Granby.

In addition to daily operations, Hartford also will be responsible for Great Path's curriculum,

assessments, staff training, and financial management.

Since 2006, Medina said, student performance on standardized tests has risen by “record levels, surpassing statewide gains for the past four consecutive years” in Hartford schools. He attributed the gains to overhauling the school system into an “all-choice district of high-performing specialty schools and small high school academies.”

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