



Sheff Movement coalition

Steady but slow progress on state integration goals

This week we received the state's report on meeting the school integration goals for 2011-12 under the court-ordered Sheff agreement to address racial and economic isolation in the Hartford Public Schools.

The good news is that we are still making progress: more and more Hartford children (over 25% this year) are attending high quality, racially and economically integrated regional magnet and Open Choice schools, and this is helping all the Hartford schools improve. Additional students are attending part-time interdistrict programs. The not-so-good-news is that the state is still falling far short of the progress that it promised for this year, and needs to work harder to add new seats for next year.

In its 2008 Sheff v. O'Neill "Comprehensive Management Plan," the state aimed to place 40% of Hartford students of color in "reduced isolation settings" by this school year. In its report this week, the state reports that it has provided spaces for only 32% of Hartford students. This means that the state will have to increase its efforts substantially to reach the higher goals for the 2012-13 school year.

How will the state meet its goals?

First, the state has to do a much better job of creating and filling new "Open Choice" seats for Hartford students in the suburbs earlier in the spring. This year, many of the new suburban openings were offered to Hartford families after their children had already started attending school in the fall. This is unacceptable. The state needs to ask for new Open Choice seats from Hartford-area towns before the lottery closes so that families can be admitted in March and start planning right away for the fall. It is unfair to expect a Hartford family to put their children's plans on hold indefinitely because of state and local bureaucratic delays.

Second, the state needs to expand existing regional magnet schools and create additional magnet schools to satisfy the overwhelming demand for these schools. It is especially important to replicate existing schools that are oversubscribed among suburban families (to ensure integration success) and to select new magnets that can be marketed successfully to both Hartford and suburban parents (for example, dual immersion language magnets have been extremely successful in other parts of the country but are not yet offered in the Hartford region).

Finally, we all know that numbers only tell part of the story - what is most important are the strong educational benefits, achievement outcomes, and the diversity benefits that extend to all students. Hartford is a leading example nationally of a successful two-way voluntary school integration program that is really delivering results - and we pledge to keep pushing and supporting this continually expanding and improving system.

[The next Sheff Movement meeting](#) is Saturday, December 3rd at 9:30 a.m. at Capital Prep magnet school (second floor) - all are welcome! (more details next week)

Happy Thanksgiving!