

**Sheff Movement**



**Quality Integrated Education for All Children**

## ***Sheff vs. O’Neill***

Sheff vs. O’Neill is a 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court case involving a 1989 lawsuit filed by Elizabeth Horton Sheff and other Hartford area parents on behalf of their children against Governor William A. O’Neill. The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the conditions of segregation and racial isolation in the Hartford schools violated the state’s affirmative obligation to provide Connecticut’s school children with a substantially equal educational opportunity under the Connecticut Constitution.

The court decision spoke to the importance of integrated education to society, citing *Brown v. Board of Education* and noting that "it is crucial for a democratic society to provide all of its schoolchildren with fair access to an unsegregated education," and that "the elimination of racial isolation in the schools promotes the attainment of equal educational opportunity and is beneficial to all students, both black and white."

The Court deferred the development of a remedy to the Connecticut legislature, retaining jurisdiction for future remedial proceeding in the trial court. In 1997, the legislature adopted a basic two-way integration system that serves as the foundation of today’s Sheff remedy. This system has been supplemented by a series of court-ordered settlement agreements intended to implement the state supreme court’s integration mandate.

***For more information:***

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## ***Sheff vs. O'Neill Today***

The Sheff magnet schools and the Open Choice program (which allows Hartford students to attend schools in suburban school districts) serve approximately 19,000 students. There are 21 Hartford host magnet schools, 19 CREC magnet schools, 2 magnet schools operated by LEARN/Goodwin College, 2 host magnet schools operated by Bloomfield Public Schools, and 1 host magnet school operated by East Hartford.

The total number of students enrolled in Sheff magnet schools for 2013-2014 is 16,965. As of 10/1/2013 Hartford host magnet schools enroll 8,282 students, CREC magnet schools enroll 7,318 students, Goodwin College magnet schools enroll 627 students, Bloomfield magnet schools enroll 541 students, and East Hartford's magnet school enrolls 197 students.

The Open Choice program has grown from 469 students in 1996-97 to 1,971 students in 2013-2014; a 320% increase in student enrollment. There are 25 suburban school districts currently participating in the Open Choice program. Participation is voluntary and rates vary by school district. For actively participating school districts, an average of 2.4% of the enrolled student population is made up of students in the Open Choice program.

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## ***Sheff vs. O'Neill: How are Children Chosen to Attend Sheff Schools?***

Children are picked to attend the Sheff magnet schools and the Open Choice Program by a “blind lottery” run by the State Department of Education. No seats are given to students outside of the lottery. The application does not include any tests of competency. Most Sheff magnet schools have about the same percentage of children with special needs as districts statewide.

Sheff programs have proven to be popular with both urban and suburban families. This year, there were 20,568 applicants to the RSCO lottery. 2/3 of those applications came from communities other than Hartford. Any student who resides in Connecticut is eligible to apply and must submit a RSCO lottery application, where they may select up to five magnet schools and/or the Open Choice Program.

The Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) was created by the Connecticut State Department of Education to assist families interested in learning about and applying to magnet schools and the Hartford Region Open Choice Program in the Greater Hartford area. The Regional School Choice Office has increased its efforts in recent years to affirmatively recruit families from Hartford’s poorest neighborhoods, with an increased number of satellite offices in the community.

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## ***Sheff vs. O'Neill and the Achievement Gap***

Students in regional magnet and Open Choice schools performed very well when compared with Connecticut's state averages for all students. This indicates that the achievement gains generated by Connecticut's school integration programs are helping to close the "achievement gap." Hartford students in magnet and Open Choice school programs show higher student test scores than Hartford non-magnet students in every subject, including reading, writing, math, and science, significantly exceeding state proficiency standards (and with a substantial number of students meeting or exceeding state academic "goals").

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## ***Sheff vs. O'Neill: The Financial Impact on Surrounding Districts***

There are several types of financial impacts on towns in the Hartford region that participate in Sheff v. O'Neill.

**Open Choice:** For suburban towns accepting Open Choice students from Hartford, the state makes a per-pupil payment to that town of between \$3,000 and \$8,000 per student per year, depending on the number of seats the town has opened to Hartford children as a percentage of their overall student enrollment (the state formula incentivizes higher participation rates). By opening up more seats for Open Choice students, towns receive up to \$8,000 for each Open Choice student they enroll, plus additional funding for academic and social support.

**Magnet tuition:** Under state law, about half of the Sheff magnets (RESC Sheff magnet schools) are permitted to charge tuition to the sending town to make up for the difference between the state per pupil payment and the total per pupil cost of running the schools (tuition runs between \$3-5,000 per student. Hartford "host" magnets have a different funding formula and do not charge tuition.

For all Sheff magnet schools, a town's Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is not reduced relative to the number of students attending magnet schools. In addition to receiving ECS for students attending magnet schools, the school district continues to collect tax dollars from the town for each student enrolled in a magnet school. The average school district cost for educating a child is currently \$14,498, within a range of \$9-18K, depending on the district.

For wealthier, low ECS towns, these tuition charges can impact the local educational budget, but they are usually outweighed by the incoming payments from the state for Open Choice children. For towns with greater need and higher ECS, there will usually not be income from the Open Choice program; however, state ECS payments will generally be much higher than the average tuition payments charged by the magnet schools. Because these towns are permitted to retain their ECS payments for all resident children, if large numbers of children leave the district to attend magnets schools, high ECS towns may realize financial savings.

For example, when a child from district A chooses to attend a CREC magnet school, A Public Schools pays "tuition" to CREC for that student. The tuition is different for each school, but the average is about \$4,250. However, A Public Schools continues to receive money from the State of Connecticut (the ECS payment) for that child, even after they have enrolled in a magnet school. In 2013, that amount from the state for district A was \$5,733 per child. A Public Schools also continue to receive money for that child from the taxpayers in A town's budget. In 2013, for each child (including children in magnet schools), A Public Schools received \$6,443 per child. Together, those two amounts total \$12,176 per child. Therefore, although A Public Schools pays Sheff magnet schools tuition of \$4,250 per child, it is able to keep the remaining difference of \$7,926 per child, even though the child is not educated in A Public Schools. This calculation is different for districts that receive a smaller ECS per pupil payment or have a higher or lower per pupil allocation in the local budget.

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