



SHEFF MOVEMENT LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2012

The Sheff Movement's overall goal is to include racial and economic school integration as a core educational priority for the State of Connecticut, as a crucial component of a "quality, integrated education." School diversity and reduction of racial isolation should be required and incentivized in all state education programs – not just the minimum legal requirement by the *Sheff v. O'Neill* court order.

This principle applies to any state supported early childhood education program, any new or expanded charter school, the ECS funding system, and all state school construction funding. School integration improves student achievement, increases racial tolerance and understanding, improves long term education outcomes, and better prepares students to participate effectively in a diverse society. Connecticut is already recognized nationally for its school integration programs in the Hartford region – it should build on this strength and continue to expand quality, integrated education programs in Hartford and across the state.

1. Expand and Improve the Open Choice program

Last year, the legislature and governor increased the economic incentive for suburban districts to participate in Open Choice, but unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles remain in place. These remaining barriers to participation need to be eliminated.

- ¶ Establish March 1 deadline for superintendents to declare available Open Choice seats (with incentive for earlier declaration); require SDE to fill all seats by June 1.
- ¶ Give the Commissioner of Education authority to mandate additional seats in specific grade levels to meet unmet demand -- based upon state SDE analysis of space availability in eligible suburban towns.
- ¶ Expand funding for student placement and support services, and suburban teacher professional development to enhance multicultural competency in receiving districts.
- ¶ Expand funding to support Open choice students' full participation in host school programs: i.e. late buses, funds to access and participate in after school programs, athletics, field trips and tutoring.
- ¶ Support pilot program to encourage volunteer families in suburban districts to house middle and high school Open Choice students during the school week to avoid the necessity of long bus rides.
- ¶ Direct the SDE to develop a multi-year plan for expansion and support of the Open Choice program in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport, taking into account long term enrollment projections in each region.
- ¶ Ensure that any proposed changes in the education funding system create strong incentives for expansion of the Open Choice program and cooperation among city and suburban districts.

2. Expand and improve the state's interdistrict magnet school program

- ¶ Continue to add new regional magnet schools in the Hartford region, focusing on replicating successful school models, including new magnet designs that have succeeded elsewhere (e.g., dual language immersion).
- ¶ Expand magnet school options for children in the Bridgeport region.
- ¶ Ensure that any proposed changes in the education funding system create strong incentives for magnet school development and cooperation among city and suburban districts.

3. Prioritize Integrated Charter Schools

The state's charter school system was intended to be part of the Sheff remedy, but so far the state has not taken advantage of this opportunity.

- ¶ Statewide, priority should be given to charter schools proposals that would affirmatively increase racial and economic integration in their regions.
- ¶ In the greater Hartford region, all new charters should be part of the Sheff remedial structure (the state should not support the development of new racially isolated schools in the Sheff region). Integrated Hartford-area charters should be entitled to the same school construction and transportation reimbursement as interdistrict magnet schools.

4. Quality, Integrated Early Education

Expansion of early education was one of the legislature's key responses to the Sheff v. O'Neill ruling in the 1997 legislative session. Connecticut needs to build on this track record by making quality, *integrated* preschool education universally available for 3- and 4-year olds in Connecticut. Some key principles:

- ¶ Connecticut should avoid creating a separate preschool education system for low income children of color.
- ¶ To the greatest extent possible, preschool education should be racially and economically integrated, and not be restricted to town of residence. The Hartford region's successful preschool magnet schools demonstrate that this is feasible, and popular with parents.
- ¶ Strong financial incentives should be put in place to encourage integrated preschool and early education programs – including combining children in private and state-supported pre-K programs, and offering free or reduced price seats to suburban children in city-based preschool programs.
- ¶ Within the greater Hartford region, all state or federally funded preschool programs should be included in the Sheff remedial structure.
- ¶ Connecticut's early education system should create a pipeline for low income children of color into integrated K-12 classrooms (both Open Choice and magnet schools).
- ¶ Hartford children attending pre-K in eligible suburban communities should be guaranteed a seat in that school district through the Open Choice program.

¶ The state should remove residency restrictions in the school readiness program, so that low income families are not prevented from moving to a higher performing school district.

¶ The reimbursement rates in the Care 4 Kids program should be increased over time to current market rates, so that low income families can have access to the same preschool programs that middle class children attend.

5. Closing the Achievement Gap

¶ Set a statewide benchmark for reading and math proficiency for all 3rd graders in Connecticut.

¶ Explicitly tie achievement gap policy agenda to progress on reduction of racial isolation statewide.

6. Coordinating Housing and School Policy

¶ Institute a state Rental Assistance Program demonstration (similar to prior legislative proposals in the 1990s) to offer rental vouchers to qualified families to move to an apartment in the town where their children are enrolled in the Open Choice program.

¶ Add incentives to the revised ECS formula to encourage increased racial and economic integration, and include additional financial incentives for wealthy towns that add new low income housing units.

¶ Conduct an independent school diversity impact assessment of all state housing programs to ensure that they are contributing to racial and economic school integration.