

**SHEFF MOVEMENT COALITION
2016 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA**

Hartford is home to one of the most successful voluntary school integration programs in the United States. The regional system that was developed to implement the *Sheff v. O'Neill* ruling has brought quality integrated education to thousands of city and suburban students, and has helped to transform the Hartford Public Schools. But much more needs to be done to improve and expand this excellent system, which is reaching less than half of Hartford students this year, leaving thousands of children on long waitlists. The Sheff remedies began to be implemented in earnest less than twelve years ago – now is the time to build on our success and recommit our state to the goal of quality integrated education.

ISSUES RECOMMENDED FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Support the development of two-way dual language immersion magnet schools in the Hartford region and in other parts of the state: Two-way dual language immersion schools have been shown to be a highly successful model for improving educational outcomes for both English Language Learners (ELLs) and their English-dominant classmates, and experience in other states suggests that dual language programs will be very popular with parents from throughout the region. These schools are an ideal magnet model for the Hartford region, building on the strengths of our linguistically diverse population. The legislature should set a goal of opening at least two Hartford-based regional two-way dual language immersion magnet schools (Spanish-English) by school year 2017-18.

Eliminate the cap on expansion of existing magnet schools in the Sheff region: The statewide cap on “current service budget growth” in existing magnet schools creates vacant seats in state funded magnet school seats, leaving many families on the waitlist. The current cap is based on outdated data from the 2012-13 budget year.

Increase state reimbursement rates for regional magnet schools: State per pupil payments for our regional magnet schools have not been increased for several years. For magnet schools run by Regional Education Service Centers (like CREC), this has required shifting excess costs of this state obligation to participating towns. For “host” magnet schools run by the Hartford Public Schools (and other host districts), this has forced cities to cover an increasing share of state magnet costs out of local education budgets. In both cases, the state’s failure to fund magnet school cost increases represents an unfair shift of constitutionally mandated education costs from the state to local governments.

Support the continued expansion of Open Choice: The legislature should consider increasing the per student tuition for districts enrolling more than 6% Open Choice students to \$9,000, and add incentives for larger suburban districts that add a substantial number of Open Choice students, but that do not qualify for the percentage-of-enrollment incentives due to district size.

The Sheff Movement coalition works to educate parents and concerned residents about Connecticut’s successful voluntary two-way interdistrict school integration programs and to promote improvement and expansion of these programs. Our goal is to promote quality, integrated education for all children. To learn more about our work, to go www.sheffmovement.org.

It is also crucial to ensure continued funding in both magnet schools and Open Choice districts, for staff and teacher training to respond to increasingly diverse student populations, along with development of culturally competent curricular materials, increased teacher diversity efforts, and social and academic support for Open Choice students.

Support the improvement and continued expansion of pre-K magnet school programs:

- **The state should cover the costs of pre-K magnet school tuition.** The integrated pre-K network in the Hartford region has been one of the successes of Sheff implementation, but it is undermined by 2015 legislation seeking to charge “tuition” to suburban families participating in pre-k magnet schools. This provision should be repealed.
- **The state should provide pre-K magnet transportation to low income Hartford families.** Currently city children attending pre-K magnet classes outside the city receive free transportation, but there is no transportation provided for Hartford children attending magnet school pre-K programs inside the city. The state’s failure to provide transportation effectively excludes the 35% of Hartford families who do not have a car from participating in pre-K magnet programs within the city of Hartford.

Support the State Board of Education recommendation to lift the “moratorium” on interdistrict magnet school development outside of the Hartford region: At the height of the state’s fiscal crisis in 2009, the legislature passed a temporary moratorium on development of interdistrict magnet schools *outside* of the Hartford area. The SBOE has proposed to lift the moratorium and begin funding new magnet schools, which would bring quality, integrated education to more children in other segregated school districts.

ISSUES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
(CT Department of Education, RSCO, and Department of Housing)

Expand and enhance Open Choice: The suburban Open Choice program is playing an important supporting role in the regional integration system – but some suburban school boards are not participating fully. It is time for the state to become much more aggressive in its demands for fair participation by all suburban districts. At the same, the state and local districts need to create a supportive environment in suburban districts to ensure that Hartford students succeed. The state and local districts should create Open Choice liaison positions, and fully fund teacher training programs focused on cultural proficiency skills. Local districts should be accountable for performance and retention of their Hartford resident students.

Improve rates of inclusion in regional magnet schools: Each regional magnet school should be reviewed to ensure that its Hartford resident student population reasonably reflects the income and special needs profile of Hartford students overall; to the extent that it does not, remedial steps should be put in place to improve rates of access by low income families, English language learners and children with special needs. Such steps may include affirmative recruitment efforts by HPS and community partners, and better weighting of the magnet school lottery.

Balance Hartford and suburban enrollment in the regional magnet schools: The state should strive to maintain a roughly equal balance of Hartford and suburban students in each interdistrict magnet school. This balance has worked well in the past, but needs to be monitored. In some of the magnet schools, there is now pressure to exceed 50% Hartford enrollment, which runs the serious risk of undermining the economic diversity that helps make these schools successful.



Require any new charter schools to provide inclusive and integrated education: Any new or expanded charter schools approved by the state should comply with the statutory mandate, consistent with *Sheff*, to serve a racially and economically diverse student body. The state should follow its own statutory guidelines and avoid spending state education funds to create new racially isolated schools.

Reduce confusion in the application process and the lottery system: The current RSCO lottery and application process is confusing and difficult to figure out. This is especially true of the system of published preferences for admission to each school. As a starting point, RSCO needs to make magnet school waitlist preferences (sibling, staff, zone, pathway, neighborhood, etc) more uniform and transparent.

Fairness to repeat applicants: Schoolchildren who have been unsuccessful in the lottery in past years should receive additional weight in the RSCO lottery.

Expand magnet school pathways: Establish secure magnet school pathways for all magnet schools.

Increased collaboration among magnet school operators: All the participants in the Sheff system should work together to help recruit students to fill open seats in magnet schools and Open Choice, particularly in recruiting 5th graders for open seats in magnet middle schools and families arriving in Hartford after the closing of the RSCO lottery.

Marketing and parent education: The state should emphasize *Sheff v. O'Neill* and the social justice roots of the two-way interdistrict system in its marketing materials to parents, and current magnet schools should explain to enrolled families why the magnet school system has been established.

Align school construction spending with school integration goals: Significant school construction commitments are being considered in a number of area districts. State school construction funds should be prioritized for schools that will help to reduce racial isolation and promote diversity. The state should also work with suburban districts considering school closing and/or consolidation to find solutions to advance Sheff goals.

Align state housing and education policy to promote integration: In spite of longstanding federal and state fair housing obligations, Connecticut's state housing agencies continue to make affordable housing investments that perpetuate or increase school segregation, undermining Sheff goals. These agencies should do a better job of talking to each other and aligning their mutual civil rights policy goals.

