



**\*\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\*\***

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**Connecticut Residents Overwhelmingly Support  
Voluntary, Two-Way Integration Programs:  
*Knowledge of programs limited, but support is  
strong throughout demographic groups***

STATEWIDE – Connecticut residents strongly support the voluntary two-way integration programs that are the backbone of the Sheff v. O’Neill settlement agreement, according to a new poll released by the University of Connecticut.

The poll, conducted this spring, showed wide support for inter-district magnet schools, Open Choice programs, and allowing parents to send their children to schools outside their district for a better education.

"Connecticut residents strongly endorse the voluntary, public school choice approach toward integrating the schools," said Kenneth Dautrich, professor of public policy at the University of Connecticut, who supervised the research. "Leaders advocating the use of magnet schools and Open Choice should know they have public opinion squarely behind them in their efforts to improve education for all kids in this state."

"It is heartening to see that Connecticut residents are so widely supportive of quality integrated education," said Jim Boucher, Co-Chairman of the Sheff Movement, which organizes grassroots support for the landmark lawsuit’s solutions.

The poll also showed support for many of the benefits of integration, including a better-prepared future workforce and increased analytical and complex thinking skills for minority and white students alike.

Major findings include:

- **Connecticut residents strongly support public school choice.**

Regardless of geography, race, income, or other factors, more than 60% of all people surveyed support giving parents the option to send their children to schools outside of their district. This support has grown since the last poll in 1997. Most parents would consider sending their own child to a school outside of their district.

- **Residents are largely unaware of the Open Choice program.**

Open Choice, which allows urban students to attend suburban schools, operates in urban areas throughout the state, but was known to only 10% of respondents. However, most people were supportive of the program.

- **Support for regional magnet schools is strong and broad-based.**

An overwhelming 83% of state residents are supportive of the regional magnet school program. Support crosses all demographic groups, with 84% of urban and 83% of non-urban residents. Most people who had heard of the programs could also correctly state that they were specialized schools for urban and suburban students. The poll also found that residents were more aware of magnet schools than Open Choice, but that only 62% had heard of magnet school programs.

Commissioned by the Sheff Movement, a grass-roots coalition that builds support for quality, integrated education, the poll was created and analyzed by a team of UConn graduate students under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Dautrich. It surveyed 1,000 households selected at random from throughout the state, and was made possible with grants from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Hartford Courant Foundation.

The Sheff case became a beacon for civil rights advocates in 1996 when the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that Hartford's segregated schools violated the state Constitution, and that the state must provide a remedy.

Since then, 16 inter-district magnet schools have been created, educating more than 6,000 Hartford and suburban children. However, the voluntary two-way integration efforts did not reach the required goals for Hartford children, and the plaintiffs returned to court last year.

A new five-year settlement agreement provides for better coordination and marketing of Open Choice and Magnet schools, and requires the state to ultimately satisfy the demand of at least 80% of Hartford parents who want to enroll their children in high-quality, desegregated schools.

The complete poll and information about the settlement are available at [www.sheffmovement.com](http://www.sheffmovement.com).

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