



Background briefing paper on the Governor’s 2009 budget and legislative package affecting voluntary integration programs

This summary is intended to provide more detailed background on the issues for supporters of voluntary integration programs who want to testify or write to their representatives in support of the Sheff magnets and choice programs. It is not necessary to present these facts and figures in your testimony. See our “Notes for Supporters” for ideas on specific themes and points we are trying to bring up with legislators.

Magnet school funding: there are two types of magnet schools in the Hartford area – schools run by the City of Hartford (“host” magnets) and schools run by a regional consortium called “CREC,” in cooperation with local districts. The Department of Education’s proposed budget called for an increase in the per pupil payments for both host and CREC magnets to prevent continuing budget deficits for these schools. The Governor’s budget includes no increase in per pupil payments, which means that the schools are likely to run a deficit (threatening their continued operation) and even worse, Hartford “host” magnets will have to start charging tuition of up to \$4600 to suburban towns for each suburban student that comes into the school (any suburban parent may choose to send their child to a magnet school, and thousands are already doing so). This unfairly transfers the cost of running the magnets – a state responsibility – to suburban school districts already struggling with their own budget difficulties.

	Current per pupil payment	SDOE proposed	Governor’s budget
Hartford host magnets	\$3000 hartford students + ECS	(no reduction in ECS for magnet students)	\$3000
	\$6730 non-resident students	\$13,054 non-resident students	\$6730
CREC magnets	\$7620 per student	\$10,443 per student	\$7620

Magnet schools cost more than \$11,000 per pupil to run. Current levels of funding for the CREC magnets have led to chronic deficits that undercut magnet education. A similar deficit in the city host magnets will force Hartford to start billing suburban towns for part of the “tuition” for suburban students, unfairly shifting the cost of magnet education from the state to the suburbs and leading to a predictable political backlash.

Magnet school transportation funding: The Governor’s refusal to adopt the Department of Education’s magnet school transportation recommendations will lead to long bus rides for children and undermine magnet school growth. The magnet transportation system (using a \$1300 per pupil figure from 2001) is already running a huge annual deficit, and magnet school ride times to and from some suburban locations are onerous and are deterring suburban student participation. The Department of Education has recommended increasing the per pupil transportation grant to \$2500 in 2009-10 and \$3000 in 2010-11.

Magnet school construction: The Governor’s budget also reduces the state contribution for magnet school construction from 95% to 80%, which will reduce the growth of new magnets and unfairly shifts the responsibility for creating magnet schools from the State (which is the defendant in Sheff v. O’Neill) to local school districts.

Project Choice funding: As described by the Sheff Movement coalition in their 2007 study of Project Choice, the failure of the state to adequately compensate suburban districts for the cost of educating incoming students is one of the main reasons for the slow growth of the program. Similar interdistrict transfer programs in other states have placed much higher levels of city students in suburban schools, when the reimbursement rates are fair. The current system unfairly shifts the cost of implementing a desegregation program from the state to suburban districts. If the state is now going to require towns to accept a higher percent of Hartford students, it needs to fairly compensate the towns.

The Department of Education’s proposes budget created incentives to suburban towns for higher participation in the program, with higher reimbursement rates at higher levels of Project Choice enrollment (as a % of total district enrollment):

	Current per pupil payment	SDOE 2009-10 per pupil	SDOE 2010-11 per pupil	Governor’s budget
	\$2500	\$3000 <2% \$4000 2-3% \$6000 >3%	\$3500 <2% \$5000 2-3% \$7000 >3%	\$2500

Project Choice management: Another disappointing change in the Governor’s budget bill is the proposed removal of the Project Choice program from CREC, the regional non-profit that has run the program since 1997, to the State Department of Education and the state’s Regional School Choice Office.

The existing Project Choice staff has set high standards of professionalism and caring and they are trusted by both Project Choice parents and suburban administrators. An experienced in-house staff provides academic and social support for participating students and intervention support where needed.

We are concerned that shifting the program to a new and untested entity will make suburban districts less willing to take on additional students and undercut the program’s potential growth at a time when it needs to double or triple in size to meet the new desegregation goals.

Background: the Sheff v. O'Neill 2008 Settlement Agreement

The recommendations of the State Department of Education for increased funding for Project Choice, interdistrict magnets, and magnet transportation were based on a need to comply with an ambitious court-ordered settlement plan that seeks to increase Hartford minority student enrollment in integrated schools up to 24% in 2009-10 (plus an additional 3% in part time interdistrict programs) and increasingly higher rates in subsequent years, up to a point where 80% of student demand for these schools is met (with a minimum goal of 41% of Hartford minority students in integrated schools by 2012-13)

Without the increased funds recommended by the State Department of Education it will not be possible to meet these ambitious goals, and Hartford students will once again be denied their Constitutional rights.

The 2008 Settlement Agreement ordered by the Court, and the 2009 “Comprehensive Management Plan” that sets out step by step goals for implementation of the Agreement, are available on the Sheff Movement website, www.sheffmovement.org