



DESIGN CHALLENGE ATTENDEES DELIBERATE ABOUT WAYS TO #IMPROVESHEFF (OCTOBER 2016)

**What is the Sheff Movement?** We are a coalition of parents, students, educators, and community members working to expand awareness about Connecticut’s successful voluntary, two-way interdistrict school integration programs and promote improvement and expansion of these programs. Our ultimate goal is to promote quality integrated education for all children.

**Sheff Movement’s Goals**

- 1** Increase public awareness about the importance of integrated education.
- 2** Ensure that parents and policymakers have access to data and information that helps them make sound decisions about whether to support and/or participate in our region’s integration programs.
- 3** Identify policies, practices, and attitudes that undermine our efforts to provide quality integrated education for all children and take steps to improve them.
- 4** Grow a network of parents, educators, and community members who are willing to speak to legislators and school boards, attend legislative hearings and events, and write op-eds or letters to the editor in response to relevant news items or developments.
- 5** Provide a space for families, students, educators, and integration supporters to coalesce around a shared commitment to quality integrated education for all.

As we reflect on a year full of hard work, exciting ideas, and stronger alliances, we enter 2017 with a reinforced spirit and commitment to achieve quality integrated education for all children. ***The Sheff Movement coalition’s dedication to this critical work is stronger than ever!***

We are deeply frustrated by the State of Connecticut’s refusal to expand the magnet school, Open Choice, and other Sheff programs. Progress toward quality integrated education for all Hartford children is not happening quickly enough. The Sheff Movement coalition recognizes the important role that Hartford’s district schools provide in educating our youth, supporting our families, and enhancing our communities. We support, encourage, and hope to help facilitate an open dialogue that addresses ongoing inequities in Hartford public school education.

Too many children who live in Hartford still do not receive the education they deserve. We call upon community leaders, families, educators, policymakers, and all who are invested in the future of our students to work together, to think creatively, and to co-create innovative new models that fully serve the needs of all our students.

### Priority #1

Ensure that state education finance reforms strongly support and incentivize racial and economic integration both at the district and interdistrict levels.

- A revised funding system should support, not undermine, integration. It should also enable local school districts to adequately support traditional schools.
- Interdistrict magnet schools need a clear, reliable, predictable funding system that will eliminate the confusion and misinformation created by the current system.
- Remove the six-year freeze on magnet school tuition reimbursements, which has hindered the development and achievement potential of magnet programs as school costs have increased.
- Restore the \$2.5 million in *Sheff* program cuts, which are essential services to implement the court decision.
- Restore grants for social and academic support in the Open Choice program so that all city children and families receive a welcoming, inclusive, and safe educational experience.

### Priority #2

Develop a unified and sustainable *statewide* school integration program.

- It is time that the State of Connecticut—via its legislature, state officials, and the Department of Education—embrace its legal obligation under *Sheff v. O’Neill* to provide quality integrated education to students across the state, not just in Hartford. A strong commitment to diversity and educational equity should be part of “who we are” as a state.
- Embed school integration into other state education priorities and programs.
  - For example, if Connecticut aims to expand access to early childhood education, dual language immersion programs, and/or science, technology, engineering, and math, it should align these other important priorities with integration efforts, by prioritizing specific learning models and targeting areas where the need for, or interest in, desegregation is strong.
  - If Connecticut funds new charter schools, they should be expected to contribute to integration goals.
  - Integration can help address declining enrollment in suburban districts through Open Choice expansion.
- Aside from the legal obligation to provide quality integrated education, a strong body of research supports the effectiveness of school integration as an educational reform strategy. Legislators should draw from that evidence base when structuring programs and priorities.
- As the Hartford *Sheff* programs illustrate, school integration works best when racial and economic integration go hand in hand.
- Connecticut’s school integration system is a *two-way* system, bringing suburban children into magnet schools in or near the central city of the region, and opening seats for city children in suburban schools. The city-to-suburban part of this system (Open Choice) has been held back for years by the state’s failure to mandate specific enrollment goals for suburban districts. This is a long overdue step—the legislature should empower the Commissioner of Education to establish goals for Open Choice districts.

### Priority #3

Require that “progress toward racial and socioeconomic integration” be included in Connecticut’s education accountability systems.

- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that state education agencies develop accountability indicators for elementary, middle, and high schools. ESSA gives states significant flexibility for adding their own metrics to the state accountability plan, as long as they: 1) allow for meaningful differentiation in school performance; and 2) are valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide.
- Study and monitoring of integration progress, both within and across districts, should be in service of improving our efforts to reduce racial isolation and poverty concentration. Are our schools and districts moving in the direction of greater racial and economic integration, or not? What is the rate of progress over time?
- The burden of monitoring progress on school integration should not be placed on individual schools and school districts. The availability of this information will help ensure that our efforts are successful and that every school district in the state is held accountable.

