

Test Scores Helping to Close State's 'Achievement Gap' in Education

School Fairs Draw Large Crowds

About 1,150 people interested in magnet and Open-Choice schools in the Greater Hartford region attended the most recent magnet school and Open Choice fairs.

Event organizers said the “contact information is registered for one member per family, [but] total walk-in attendance is much larger.”

Fairs were held from October 13th through January 12th at AI Prince Technical High School

in Hartford; Conard High School in West Hartford; Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School in Glastonbury; Trinity College in Hartford and Sports and Medical Sciences Academy in Hartford.

The amount of students and families wanting to attend the magnet and Open Choice schools remains consistently large each year. The Magnet-School Open Choice Lottery ended in January and students will receive notifications of acceptance in the Spring.



For the first time, new data received separately for Hartford students in all magnets and Open Choice schools, shows striking achievement results for Hartford children attending racially and economically integrated magnet schools and children attending suburban schools through the “Open Choice” program.

The data, obtained by the Center for Children's Advocacy from the Connecticut Department of Education, reveals students in regional magnet and Open Choice schools not only outperformed non-magnet schools in Hartford, but also performed extremely well compared with the state's averages for all students. These achievement gains by Connecticut's school integration programs are helping to close the “achievement gap”.

Test results included both the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), grades 3-8, and the Connecticut Academic Performance (CAPT), grade 10. The data reinforces national research on the benefits of racial and economic integration for all students, including enhanced cultural competence, reduced levels of prejudice, as well as improved academic achievement scores.

“The clear, ongoing success of students of color, who go to regional magnets and Open Choice is incredibly encouraging and inspiring,” said Susan Eaton, Research Director at Harvard Law School (and author of *The Children in Room E-4*). “The narrowing of racial achievement gaps suggests that opportunities for students to attend smoothly functioning, rigorous, supportive, welcoming and diverse schools should be expanded and offered to far more young people in the region and the state.”

Hartford magnet and Open Choice school programs show higher student test scores in every subject including reading, writing, math and science – significantly exceeding state proficiency standards (and with a substantial number of students meeting or exceeding state academic “goals”).

For more data, visit www.sheffmovement.org, and visit the National Coalition on School Diversity's website for more information on this national research.

Where ARE they NOW?

Magnet School Diversity Struck a Chord with a Wethersfield Music Student

By Grace Clark

WETHERSFIELD, CT – As a Wethersfield public school student, Caleb Herring never seemed to fully find his niche. Since elementary school, Caleb, was an artist who needed a more vibrant environment to pursue his music and writing interests. Instead, he felt out of place. According to his mother, there was barely any other outlet to explore his talent besides textbooks and academic tests. He had a hard time making good grades.

“They just did not know how to encourage his strengths,” said Caleb’s mother, Deby Gould, a resident of Wethersfield for 35 years.

It wasn’t until Caleb’s mom insisted on taking him on a “field trip” to the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts in Hartford, while he was in middle school, that his eyes were opened to the possibilities.

“We’re five feet into the lobby and Caleb stops. He’s sitting there, dead in his tracks,” said Gould. “Mom, smell the air! This is the cleanest air I’ve ever smelled. I want to go here.”

Besides the retro design and upgraded educational amenities of a magnet school, Caleb, now 24, said he believes many town residents have a limited view of what a magnet school offers.

“There’s a need to get past all the stigmas that get stuck in your head,” Caleb said recently. “It’s a towny mentality that gives you a limited view of the world, like all that’s in it is what you see.”

After that first GHAA tour, Caleb participated in the magnet school’s summer theater program for two

years and then applied to attend the high school. He auditioned for programs in creative writing, graphic arts and music and was accepted into two of those programs. Caleb chose music and began his Freshman year of high school at the GHAA in the half-day program (which means students attend the magnet school for specialized theme classes and their town school for core curriculum academics).

“He began his four years of a love affair with the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts,” said Gould. “He never lost that feeling that he was one with the world.”

In Caleb’s eyes, the magnet school was a whole new universe from the town of Wethersfield. For the first time, he was exposed to a diverse population of students from different races, cultures, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, religions and alternative lifestyles.

Even more important, he was able to cultivate his love of music, playing his 7-foot tall stand-up bass in classical performances, school shows, the jazz ensemble, as well as learning theory and improvisation. Among his favorite classes was an elective course in Jazz History Stage Combat.

“Me growing up as an imaginative kid, you can imagine what that was like for me swinging swords,” said Caleb. “I got to do so many things that I could never do at my regular school.”

Because he was able to hone his craft, Caleb had other opportunities to pursue his music. At the HARTT School of Music at the University of Hartford, he was the youngest classical student ever to be taught by a resident musician from the Hartford and Providence Symphonies; he also played music for Guakia, an afterschool program aimed at getting inner city kids off the street. Often one of the only white performers in the program’s all Latin Jazz band, Caleb said studying with students from diverse backgrounds at GHAA helped him to grow.

“That’s the key to the kingdom. When you can give your child the freedom to look past stereotypes, they’ll be able to survive in society, regardless of what their skills are,” Gould said. “To give your children the ability to be everybody and not judge anybody. [Parents] really should be sending kids in these towns [to magnet schools] to compare and contrast the world around them.”

She also attributes the GHAA’s strong academic curriculum to preparing Caleb for higher learning.

“He would have never gotten a scholarship to the Berklee College of music,” said Gould. “When you are around people who are doing what you can be doing and loving it, it’s a tidal wave. You get swept up.”

After attending Berklee for two years, Caleb



Caleb Herring of Wethersfield is an alumni of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.

decided to broaden his artistic repertoire. He currently attends the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, CA, studying film to broaden his career after graduation. He also works as a

set designer, writer and sound producer for an area theater company.

Caleb said his education at the GHAA well prepared him for his professional career.

“If I had not gone to the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, I would not have been as open-minded about San Francisco as I am,” said Caleb. “Black, white, Hispanic – you get this melting pot there and everyone is okay with it. You start to get a different feel for life and a different walk for life.”

Caleb’s younger brother, Clark Herring, is a tenth grade student at Pathways to Technology, a magnet school in Windsor, CT. He also wants to attend the GHAA.

Magnet School Settles Into Long Awaited Glastonbury Home

By Grace Clark

GLASTONBURY, CT – Longtime Glastonbury resident, teacher and magnet school parent, Donna Rand believes there is a big misconception about what magnet schools bring to a suburban community.

Students and staff of Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School, where Rand has been teacher a science teacher for 20 years, moved to a new home in Glastonbury last August. The school had outgrown its 60-year-old building on May Road in East Hartford. The science and technology-

themed magnet opened in 1992 and is one of the oldest in Hartford area.

Perched near Route 2 on Oak Street in Glastonbury, the new 68,000 square foot school features state-of-the-art classrooms, labs and recreational facilities, and is set to break ground in April on a new planetarium that will house NASA artifacts. The planetarium will be operated by town officials, who will be responsible for scheduling field trips and community events in the space.

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Pictured above, from L to R: Donna Rand, science teacher at Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School; Shamel Lewis, teacher at Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School; Glen Peterson, school principal, helps a student at lunch.

(Long Awaited Glastonbury Home...continued from Page 2)

In addition to the planetarium, the school comes with a new soccer field, a full-sized gymnasium and indoor/outside basketball courts. Aside from also now having running hot water and air conditioning, a simple beam of sunlight through huge classroom windows sheds light on the possibilities for the modernized magnet school's 380 students and the town.

"We have a real opportunity to bring the community here because of these physical things first," said Rand, a resident of Glastonbury for 35 years. Rand's son, Jonathan, entered Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet in the second grade and was in the school's first graduating class nearly 20 years ago. She said over time, she has seen attitudes in town towards the magnet school evolve from skepticism to acceptance.

"Since I grew up in a white neighborhood in Connecticut, and then I was living in a white neighborhood, that was my world," said Rand. "When I came to a magnet school, people were all different colors and all different backgrounds... I just started realizing, 'My God, I am so happy that my kids are not in this isolated world of only going to school with white kids.'"

At many magnet schools in the region, differences in race, culture and socio-economic backgrounds are not highlighted in student classrooms and activities. It is simply a part of the culture in which they learn.

"Magnet schools are reflective of society," said Shamel Lewis, a first-grade teacher at Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet. "If you look at corporate America, the business world, you see all different kinds of nationalities in the workforce, not just specific to who lives in that region."

A former student at Annie Fisher Elementary School in Hartford, Lewis added that many parents

don't know that magnet school curriculums are "based on a higher standard than those at many public schools."

"If you look at the statistics of our secondary education, a lot of our students are college bound in universities across the country," said Lewis, who holds who has a Bachelor's degree in Human Science Services and two Masters degrees in Early Childhood Education and Education. "I think that's a big plus."

Like other magnets, Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet, operated by Capital Region



Nathan Andrews, 5th Grader

Education Council (CREC), offers project-oriented, authentic learning that gives students a wealth of hands-on study experiences. Unlike in public schools, students are required less to study books and worksheets, and more on seeing first-hand how concepts work in the real world.

It's one of the things that Nathan Andrews, a fifth-grade student and Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet likes most about his school.

"I have to do some hands on somewhere," said

Andrews, who wants to one day be a Video Engineer (a digital computer designer). His goal is to attend the Academy of Aerospace and Engineering magnet school in Bloomfield, CT next year. "Sooner or later when you read and book about how to do [something] – 'How are you going to really do it?' " In Rand's science class, Andrews and his classmates have participated in a lot of interactive projects including: operating a 850-thousand pound telescope in California from a computer in the school's science lab; collecting data on black holes so that scientists at NASA can use the information; and communicating with two other teachers in Houston, Texas while students went on a weightless aircraft with experiments they designed for study.

The school also offers foreign language classes in Chinese and Japanese, and various technology practicums.

School principal, Glen Peterson, said in addition to a rigorous and innovative curriculum, his school, like many of the magnets, offers families a unique relationship experience.

"We have a different customer service orientation, more like private school than a public school," said Peterson, who was principal at a public school in Eastern Connecticut for years, before joining Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet in 2003." Let's say you think your child is accelerated and you put them in our school, and you're not happy with what is going on. In a typical elementary school, the answer may be we don't do that. Here, the answer is 'We haven't done that, but let's talk about it and figure out a way that we can help you.'"

Now in new territory, Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School is set to attract more students and town residents to see first-hand the asset it brings to its community.

Higher Graduation Rates for Magnets

The Sheff Movement recently analyzed graduation rates using new data from the state Department of Education and found that our regional magnet high schools have higher graduation rates most of the school districts in the Hartford region, especially for lower income children (those who receive “free and reduced price lunch”).

This data is consistent with national research in the fields of economics and public policy that has demonstrated important relationships between high school graduation rates and school diversity. For instance, recent evidence suggests that court-ordered desegregation improved black students’ high school graduation rates, while post-desegregation racial “resegregation” increased black dropout rates in the north. Additionally, a study of 30 years of data from Cleveland, OH before, during, and after desegregation concludes that desegregation had a positive effect on the dropout rate while resegregation had a negative effect on it. See www.sheffmovement.com for more details.

More than 120 Sheff Movement supporters attended our “Celebration of Progress” at the Hartford Public Library in the fall. Honorees were Dr. Steve Perry, principal of Capital Preparatory Magnet School (Hartford); Norma Neumann-Johnson, principal of Breakthrough Magnet School (Hartford); and Dr. Bruce Douglas, Executive Director of Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). Performances were given by the Dance Ensemble of the R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Arts (Hartford) and the Jazz Ambassadors of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. The event was held to celebrate the legacy and achievement of the Sheff Movement in promoting and supporting quality integrated education.



About The Sheff Movement

The Sheff Movement is a coalition of parents, citizens and educators working to support effective, voluntary two-way inter-district integrated schools and education programs to meet the goals of the Sheff v. O’Neill schools desegregation case in Connecticut. We engage in public education, organizing and advocacy to support and expand the inter-district integration programs.

In 1996, the Connecticut state Supreme Court ruled in Sheff v. O’Neill that racial and economic isolation violate the Constitutional rights of Hartford Children. As a result, beginning in 1997, the state made some progress in expanding racially and economically integrated, cross-district school choices and programs, creating opportunity for more equal educational opportunities.

The main tools have been inter-district magnet schools and an Open Choice program, which sends city students to suburban schools. Without integration in education, both urban and suburban children are deprived of the important benefits of going to school with classmates who reflect the true diversity of our society.

Sheff Moment in History

On February 25, 2003:

The House of Representatives voted 87-60 to approve an out-of-court settlement in the Sheff vs. O’Neill case, an agreement that includes plans for eight new integrated magnet schools in Hartford over the next four years.

JOIN US!

SHEFF MOVEMENT MEETINGS
3rd Saturday of every month:
9:30am-11am
Capital Preparatory
Magnet School
1304 Main Street, Hartford, CT

To sign up for our email list & newsletter,
email grace.clark@sheffmovement.org