



# Crossing The Line & Closing The Gap

*Interdistrict Magnet Schools as Remedies for  
Segregation, Concentrated Poverty & Inequality*

Full working paper is available at:

<http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org/Publications/Item.aspx?id=100020>

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# Connecticut's Response to Segregation



Interdistrict magnet schools exist in every region of the state, in large part because of *Sheff*.

- Interdistrict magnet schools are one part of a school desegregation remedy put forth by the state of Connecticut in response to a legal decision, *Sheff v. O'Neill*.
- The magnet school effort offers a promising model for other organizations and educators interested in integrating students by economic class and race.
- This presentation highlights two schools in Hartford that are operated by the Capitol Regional Education Council (CREC):
  - Montessori Magnet School
  - Metropolitan Learning Center

# A Social Compact

- The magnet schools were institutionalized following the 1996 legal decision, *Sheff v. O'Neill*, by Connecticut's highest Court.
- In *Sheff*, 18 families sued the state, arguing that the segregation and concentrated poverty within the Hartford Public Schools denied them the equal educational opportunity guaranteed by the state's Constitution.
- The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the state's Constitution prohibited segregation, as demonstrated by the plaintiffs.

**"All men when they form a social compact, are equal in rights; and no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community."**

**Conn. Constitution Art. I., Sec. 1**

# The Larger Context: Inequality & Segregation

**Connecticut is a highly unequal state. It is sharply segregated by race and class.**

- Children who are poor are unevenly distributed across the state's 169 municipalities.
  - Thirty-eight municipalities posted child poverty rates of less than 2 percent in 2000.
  - Seven towns had childhood poverty rates higher than 23 percent.
- Connecticut's largest cities have extremely high child poverty rates:

Hartford	47%	New Haven	28.7%
Waterbury	31.4%	Bridgeport	28.4%

**Connecticut's Latino/Hispanic and African American children are seven times more likely to live in poverty than are white children and teenagers.**

# The Larger Context: Inequality & Segregation

These conditions are magnified within the state's public schools.

- Who attends Hartford Public Schools?
  - 70% poor students
  - 94% students of color (largely Latino and African American)
- Some suburban schools, especially those close to the city, are changing, with larger shares of students of color.

Generally speaking, the condition brought to light by *Sheff* – white, affluent suburban schools near overwhelmed schools with disproportionate shares of poor children of color – continues.

# A Likely Outcome

Gaps in achievement correspond with gaps in opportunity.

In 2007, Connecticut registered the largest achievement gap in the nation between its poor and non-poor students.

4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	• the gap was <u>3.8</u> grade levels.
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	• the gap was <u>3</u> grade levels.



# Seeking A Solution

## Capitol Regional Education Council (CREC)

- In operation since 1966
- One of six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) created under law
- Provides an array of educational services to school districts in a region (*i.e.* leadership training, professional development for teachers and administrators)
- Services provided well below market costs

# Chipping Away at Racial Isolation



- Of the 35 cities and towns served by CREC, 22 are “Sheff” towns that participate in activities to desegregate the schools in the region.
- CREC always had a regional focus, but following *Sheff*, desegregation became a central concern and activity.
- A stipulated order between the state and the *Sheff* plaintiffs calls for 27 percent of Hartford students to be in integrated schools by the 2009-2010 school year.
  - In the 2008-2009 school year, 19 percent of city students were in such schools.

# CREC's Magnet Schools

- 8 Schools
- Recent research study found the magnets “on average provide their students more diverse peer environments than they would encounter in their home districts.”
- Five of CREC's eight magnet schools meet the desegregation standards as set forth in an agreement between the state and *Sheff* plaintiffs.

# CREC's Magnet Schools Application and Enrollment

## How Do People Find Out About CREC's Magnet Schools?

- Through targeted marketing, CREC works systematically to recruit disenfranchised students, and to reach students in traditionally underserved communities. For example, principals advertise on Spanish-speaking and English-speaking radio.
- Magnet school educators host information fairs in suburban communities and urban communities.

*Racial and ethnic diversity is actively promoted as an educational benefit in the magnet schools.*

# CREC's Magnet Schools Application and Enrollment



## How Are Students Selected?

- Students selected in a blind lottery through a simple, common application.
- Race is not a factor in student selection; rather students are selected based on their geographical location.

Strategic planners at CREC and clients work to ensure that schools will offer special themes or services that traditional suburban schools do not provide, thereby attracting students from suburban communities.

# Transportation

## Making Choice Meaningful

An important feature of the interdistrict magnet program involves the transportation of students.

- Students participating in the CREC magnet schools receive free transportation.
- Working with students, families, schools, and bus providers, CREC's Transportation Office coordinates transportation services for students participating in the Choice Program, CREC's magnet schools, and the suburban students attending magnet schools managed by Hartford Public Schools.

Transportation “is critical to the participation of disadvantaged students.”



# **CREC's Magnet Schools**

## **Creating New Schools**

### **How Are New Schools Created?**

- **CREC has the power to create schools in geographic areas that would increase the chances of a racially diverse student body (e.g. within the urban center of Hartford, but close to affluent suburban districts).**
- **CREC professionals, in the areas of finance, construction and educational administration, work with clients (including local districts) to turn ideas for a school into an actual school.**



# Metropolitan Learning Center

## A Snapshot of the Metropolitan Learning Center:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Bloomfield, Connecticut (on the northern border with Hartford)</b>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Global Studies</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>749 students in Grades 6-12</b>
<b>Unique Features</b>	<b>Students expected to participate in study abroad, attend college visits and take at least three years of Spanish or Chinese</b>
<b>Closing the Gap</b>	<b>Saturday Academy provides extra help and enrichment on the weekends</b>
<b>Distinctions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Named by U.S. Department of Education as one of the nation's 8 best magnet schools</b></li><li>• <b>Magnet School of Excellence (Magnet Schools of America)</b></li><li>• <b>Goldman Sachs Award for Excellence in International Education</b></li></ul>
<b>Waiting List</b>	<b>2,000 students (more than half live in Hartford)</b>

# Eliminating Barriers



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*Desegregation sounds like an initial effort to prohibit the separation of groups. Integration, to me, has to go well beyond that, because it's not just eliminating that barrier to people being together physically, but to work, learn, and grow together...*

—Anne McKernan, Principal,  
Metropolitan Learning Center



# Metropolitan Learning Center

## Diversity at the Metropolitan Learning Center

<b>White</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Latino</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Geographic</b>	<b>Enrolls students from 15 cities and towns in the region</b>



# Funding

- The state pays for about three-fourths of the costs for each student at the school.
- Participating municipalities pay about \$2,000 for each student they send to MLC.
- State funding creates an incentive because it still receives the same amount of “Education Cost Sharing” grant money from the state as it would if the student had remained in the regular district schools.

**Per-pupil costs are higher at MLC than they are at most public schools. (Some magnet school per-pupil costs are as high as \$13,000).**

# Beyond the Three “R”s



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*...you want to develop not only good readers, writers, and mathematicians, which certainly they should be, but kids that know how to get along with each other, than can do conflict resolution, that understand differences and respect among different kinds of people from different types of community and economic groups and racial groups...I think (Montessori) appeals to a lot of different people that are looking for an alternative to a more conventional kind of an education.*

—Tim Nee, Former Principal,  
Montessori Magnet School



# Montessori Magnet

## A Snapshot of the Montessori Magnet:

<b>Location</b>	Hartford's Frog Hollow Neighborhood (predominantly Puerto Rican)
<b>Theme</b>	Montessori (CT's first public Montessori)
<b>Enrollment</b>	330 students Primary (Ages 3-5), Lower (Ages 6-9), and Upper (Ages 9-12) Elementary Divisions
<b>Unique Features</b>	Part of a multi-million dollar "Learning Corridor" complex, which also houses: –Boys and Girls Club –Girl Scouts Council –650-seat theater
<b>Waiting List</b>	500 Students



# The Montessori Magnet Approach

**Capitalize on intrinsic curiosity rather than didactic lessons.**

- 3-hour work cycle each morning that includes individualized and small group lessons while other students engaged with work.
- After work cycle, students have lunch, recess and Special Area (*i.e.* Spanish, P.E., and Art).
- Then, another two-hour work cycle.
- Kitchen and snacks available, so students learn to help themselves.



# Montessori Magnet

## Diversity at the Montessori Magnet

<b>White</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Latino</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Geographic</b>	<b>Enrollment comes from 27 cities and towns</b>
<b>Socioeconomic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Wide range of economic circumstances</b></li><li>• <b>About 30 percent of students qualify for free lunch</b></li></ul>
<b>Targeted Marketing</b>	<b>To reach groups not adequately represented in the applicant pool</b>

# Remaining Challenges



**Finances and lack of political will continue to affect the success of Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools.**

- **The schools are dependent upon financing from the state, which is politically unstable.**
- **Some legislators unsupportive of *Sheff* efforts and fund the programs only reluctantly.**
- **CREC and other advocates constantly spending time and energy lobbying state legislators.**
- **Need for a more strategic planning process, rather than *ad hoc* development of single schools based on the desires or needs of a single community.**

# Remaining Challenges

**Educators must be well prepared and supported so that they can meet the needs of all children in their diverse schools.**

- **In diverse schools, the achievement and opportunity gaps are far more apparent than in a more homogeneous one.**
- **Thus, educators in such schools are constantly challenged to meet the varying needs of youngsters.**
- **Some schools have used “tracking” – placing students in high, moderate or low groups based on academic skills, which is not always favored by educators.**
- **Educators constantly trying to meet these varying needs are vulnerable to burn out.**





## **CREC is dedicated to:**

- **Its mission of seeking out and offering opportunities to disenfranchised children;**
- **The “work in progress” of meeting the varying needs and skill sets that come with a diverse school;**
- **Achieving and retaining diversity in the magnet schools as models for the state and the nation; and**
- **The expansion of magnet school programs to increase the number of students who have the opportunity for “quality, integrated” education.**



**Connecticut's efforts provide a powerful example of how to integrate students in spite of recent limitations imposed by the U.S. Supreme Court.**

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*We looked at the mission...and I told them that I know that we could achieve this goal. If we really believe in the mission and we're all emotionally and socially in the same place, then it must be done...*

**—Bruce Douglas, Director, CREC**