



Key features of the 2008 Settlement Agreement in *Sheff v. O'Neill*

The new Sheff Settlement agreement represents an important step forward in achieving the goal of quality integrated education for all Hartford children. It is a major improvement on the prior 2003 settlement, which made some significant progress in developing new magnet school options, but ultimately fell short of the agreed upon goal.

The new 18-page “Stipulation and Proposed Order”, covering the period 2008-2013, is a fairly complex legal document that cannot be fully summarized in one or two pages. In this summary, we have tried to answer some frequently asked questions and capture some of the most important points.

What happens now?

The Settlement Agreement has been agreed to by both the state and the plaintiffs, and has been submitted to the legislature for review (legislative review is required when legal settlements with the state will cost above a certain amount). If the legislature votes in favor of the settlement, or decides not to vote, then the settlement will be deemed approved, and it can be filed with the Superior Court with a recommendation to be approved by the presiding judge in the case.

What are the basic requirements of the agreement?

The Settlement Agreement commits the state to continuing to expand integrated educational options for Hartford minority schoolchildren in schools that have a minimum level of racial integration. The state is expected to provide enough spaces to meet the demand of Hartford students for integrated magnet schools, Choice placements, and other eligible choices (see below for more discussion of this new demand principle). The agreement also provides, as a fallback, that by 2009-10, at least 27% of Hartford minority schoolchildren should have access to eligible integrated placements (this minimum number will increase to 41% by 2012-13, but the larger goal will be to satisfy as much of the demand for these programs as possible).

The options for Hartford students who wish to participate are primarily the **Interdistrict Magnet Schools** and the **Project Choice program** in the suburbs, but they can also include vocational-technical schools, vo-ag schools, and charter schools that are designed to reduce racial isolation. The settlement also encourages development of magnet schools for both Hartford and suburban students in nearby suburbs.

The Agreement requires the development of a **Comprehensive Management Plan** to guide implementation, and establishes a **Regional School Choice Office** to implement the

plan and make sure all city and suburban students have full and equal access to information about their choices. The agreement also has numerous compliance, monitoring, and quality control provisions that were not sufficiently included in the earlier settlement.

What does it mean that the future goals of Sheff will be driven by “demand”?

The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Sheff* established that all students in the Hartford region have a right to an integrated education, and this settlement moves toward a system in which every student who wishes to exercise this right can do so. The Settlement defines long term compliance as meeting the demand of at least 80% of Hartford minority students for magnets and choice (currently there are annual waiting lists for the Project Choice program, and only a small fraction of Hartford students get into a magnet school of their choice). Using the demand of students and families to guide magnet school and choice offerings is an innovative concept. There are still benchmarks in the Agreement to make sure that the opportunities for integrated education increase steadily over time. The state must meet these numerical goals, but the aim is to make the availability of integrated education proportionate to the demand for it over time.

The settlement requires the State to plan more effectively to make sure that *Sheff* solutions actually work.

A Comprehensive Management Plan will outline goals and how the State will meet and measure them. The settlement requires this plan to be very detailed. *This is the first time the state has ever implemented a comprehensive plan to coordinate all Sheff remedies.*

The SDE Sheff Office will oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Management Plan and serve as the central authority responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of all *Sheff* programs.

The agreement also creates a Regional School Choice Office, which will support collaborations between the State and stakeholders, including CREC and the City of Hartford, who will implement *Sheff* programming. This office will include a representative of the *Sheff* plaintiffs.

The agreement makes the state accountable for taking certain clearly defined steps and meeting goals for integrated education.

The settlement increases the plaintiffs’ ability to have input into and enforcement of the terms of the agreement, and provides plaintiffs with meaningful opportunities to go back to court if the state isn’t complying.

The settlement requires the State to increase the success of *Sheff* schools

Among other goals, the plan requires that the state conduct outreach to Hartford and suburban parents to help determine which types of programs will be most popular; establish methods to determine capacity in suburban districts for Open Choice, and to increase participation by suburban districts; establish clear processes for choosing the location and

design of new magnet schools; and help magnet schools improve educational performance and become more integrated

The settlement requires concrete improvements that will help make it easier for families to participate in *Sheff* schools

These improvements include:

- A single application process for Hartford-resident minority students who wish to apply to any *Sheff* program
- A new information service center for families seeking information and advice on options for integrated education
- General marketing and targeted recruiting in historically underrepresented communities to let families know about *Sheff* options
- Academic and social support services for students participating in interdistrict schools, particularly to support out-of-district students
- Expanded options for racially integrated pre-schools
- Review and improvement of transportation services for students in *Sheff* schools

The settlement aims to improve educational quality of all Hartford-area schools, whether or not they are *Sheff* schools

The settlement requires that all Hartford regular, non-magnet schools with *Sheff* magnet schools, to make sure that all HPS students benefit from *Sheff*. High-performing magnet schools will serve as training centers for teachers and administrators throughout the *Sheff* region.

The settlement requires plaintiff input and oversight.

The settlement requires the plaintiffs to have input and sign-off on the Comprehensive Management Plan. Plaintiffs will have a representative in the Regional School Choice Office, partially funded by the State, who will be involved in the planning and implementation of *Sheff* initiatives. The state will give plaintiffs' expert access to information, pay the costs of plaintiffs' expert up to \$7500/year and meet regularly with the plaintiffs.

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