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## Malloy taking another route to reach desegregation goal

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Up against a looming court-ordered deadline to reduce the racial isolation of Hartford's largely black and Hispanic school population, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy has opted to take a less expensive--and arguably more effective--approach to integration.

Since the 1996 state Supreme Court's *Sheff v. O'Neill* desegregation order, the state's emphasis has been on creation of magnet schools with specialty themes in hopes of attracting a racially-diverse student population. Nearly \$1 billion has been spent to build the schools in and around Hartford and billions more reimbursing the schools \$13,000 per student a year.

But Malloy seems to be taking the advice of education officials and is changing course: He's proposing significantly reducing the state's reimbursement for construction of new magnet schools, and expanding funding for school choice programs that encourage suburban districts to accept Hartford students.

Although many suburban districts around Hartford have empty desks, they have been slow to accept city students in what's called Open Choice, often blaming the level of state reimbursement--\$2,500.

Malloy is proposing that the state's next education commissioner--who Malloy will select--be allowed to significantly increase reimbursements to suburban public schools that take Hartford students, and he wants to allocate another \$7.2 million to do it.

"We expect by increasing the reimbursement the commissioner will be able to find a sweet spot that will be able to get significant participation in the program and get to the [court-ordered] goal," Malloy budget director Ben Barnes said.

To comply with the court order, the state must find an additional 3,500 seats in an integrated

magnet, charter, technical, agricultural or suburban school by October 2012. There are currently 1,300 Hartford students attending districts other than their own, so reaching the goal through the choice program is a tall order.

Education leaders and advocates both agree the state will not meet that deadline if the state's approach remains the same and welcome the increase reimbursements for the Open Choice program.

"The Open Choice program is by far the most cost-effective option for us," said Brian Mahoney, the State Department of Education's chief financial officer.

"This is surely more of an incentive to suburban districts to participate," said Alex Johnston, leader of the New Haven school-reform group ConnCAN. "It's certainly a positive step but we are going to need a system where schools are funded fully and not partially for the students they have."

Martha Stone, a lawyer for the Sheff plaintiffs, said Wednesday she is "heartened" by the increase and believes it will help get the state closer to reaching the required 41 percent of Hartford's 21,713 minority students attending integrated schools by November 2012. They're at 25 percent now.

Malloy's proposal coincides with a State Board of Education recommendation made in November that would put more focus and money on sending students to suburban schools than on magnet schools.

"I imagine a court mandate will look very similar to what I am proposing," former education commissioner Mark McQuillan said at the time.

But the SBOE's proposal went one step further than Malloy's in suggesting the education commissioner have the authority to require suburban districts enroll a certain number of Hartford students.

There are currently 27,000 students attending magnet schools across the state and 5,700 attending charter schools. Malloy's budget proposal does increase state spending for magnet and charter schools for seats that were already approved long before he became governor.

The legislature's Education Committee will hear public testimony Wednesday on the governor's proposed changes to education and also on a separate proposed change in the kindergarten entrance age.

## Education

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