

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## Sheff Proponents Encouraged By Legislature's Budget Proposals

By JODIE MOZDZER | The Hartford Courant

*April 3, 2009*

Advocates for the Sheff v. O'Neill desegregation lawsuit said Thursday they were "extremely" encouraged by the budget proposed by the legislature's appropriations committee.

The proposal directs more money toward magnet schools, transportation costs and the Open Choice program — three facets of a plan to get the region's schools more racially integrated — than Gov. M. [Jodi Rell](#)'s proposal did.

"We are heartened and strongly commend the appropriations committee for the bold stand that it took to support the Sheff mandate," said Martha Stone, one of the lawyers for the Sheff plaintiffs. "This funding will go a long way in supporting the forward trajectory this case has been realizing in the last eight months."

The proposal comes close to what the state Department of Education originally requested for Sheff funding.

Under the proposal, per-pupil transportation grants for Sheff magnet schools would go from \$1,300 to \$2,500 in 2009-10, and to \$3,000 in 2010-11.

Magnet tuition payments from the state also were increased. The state would pay \$10,433 for each student attending Capitol Region Education Council magnet schools — an increase that CREC Executive Director Bruce Douglas says would prevent the council from raising tuition rates.

"This is really a demonstration of good government," Douglas said of the proposed funding. "I think the goals are achievable under these numbers, although it's going to take a little bit of fine-tuning."

Proposed increases for payments to magnet schools in Hartford will mean the city wouldn't have to start charging tuition for suburban students, as it had proposed if less money was appropriated.

But the Open Choice program, in which suburban towns enroll Hartford students, didn't see the full increase the Department of Education had requested. The per-pupil payments to suburban districts would go up by \$530 for every new student accepted into the program, but the state would continue to pay \$2,500 for each of the students already in the program.

Sheff advocates had hoped for tiered payments based on the percentage of Hartford students accepted by suburban districts.

"We are hopeful when the legislative body considers the budget as a whole, they will reinstate these original requests," Stone said.