

Regional School Choice Fair In Hartford

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HARTFORD — City and suburban families considering the state's Open Choice program and area magnet schools can begin applying Saturday for enrollment in the 2013-14 year.

Also on Saturday, from 8:30 a.m. to noon at A.I. Prince Technical High School in Hartford, the state will host the first of five regional school choice fairs.

Capitol Region Education Council, Hartford public schools, the Connecticut technical high school system, Goodwin College and the school districts participating in Open Choice are expected to pitch their programs to families before the Jan. 31 application deadline.

The fair comes as the state faces a mandate in the longstanding Sheff vs. O'Neill desegregation case, which calls for 80 percent of Hartford students to attend a school of their choice.

The state is analyzing current enrollment figures and "it would be premature to indicate" whether the goal will be reached by the Sheff deadline of mid-November, said Mark Linabury, the state's acting bureau chief for the Regional School Choice Office.

Martha Stone, an attorney representing Sheff plaintiffs, said Thursday that she is awaiting official word from the state but "my understanding is that they're not going to be reaching that number." She said both parties are negotiating another agreement; the current one expires at the end of 2012-13.

The state can also meet the Sheff terms if at least 41 percent of Hartford minority students are enrolled in integrated schools.

Under Open Choice, Hartford students can attend a suburban school, while suburban public school students can apply for Hartford schools. About 1,700 students in Greater Hartford are enrolled in the program after being selected through a state lottery.

State-funded, Sheff-compliant magnet schools also enroll a mix of city and suburban students.

The next regional school choice fair is planned for 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Nov. 17 at Conard High School in West Hartford. For more information, visit <http://www.choiceeducation.org> or call 860-713-6990.