

Hartford To Operate Two New Sheff Magnet Schools New Magnet Programs Will Be Open For 2013-14

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HARTFORD —

As negotiations continue for a new agreement in the Sheff vs. O'Neill desegregation case, city school leaders said Hartford will operate two new magnet schools next academic year as part of the deal.

The city board of education this week approved converting the existing Moylan Montessori elementary program into a magnet school and adding 63 seats to attract suburban students. The school system also will establish a pre-kindergarten magnet school for 180 children ages 3 and 4, half of whom will be Hartford residents. Marketing the new schools will begin "immediately," Superintendent Christina Kishimoto said.

Kelly Donnelly, spokeswoman for the state Department of Education, said Wednesday that city and suburban parents can begin applying for the programs in mid-April. New admissions are decided through a lottery; students currently enrolled in the Moylan Montessori program can remain in the school.

The state did not meet its goals under the current five-year Sheff agreement, which expires at the end of this fiscal year and called for 41 percent of Hartford's minority students to be enrolled in integrated schools. The state achieved 36.7 percent, Donnelly said. Failing that, the state could have satisfied the Sheff terms if 80 percent of Hartford students attend a school of their choice, a calculation that considers magnet school applications. The state met 72 percent of demand.

"It was extremely disappointing," said Martha Stone, a lawyer for the Sheff plaintiffs. "These were not pie-in-the-sky goals. They were calculated, they were carefully thought out ... We gave them five years to do it."

State education officials are negotiating another agreement with Hartford school leaders and Sheff advocates that would last through the 2013-14 year, or possibly longer. The new magnet seats — made public during the confidential talks so Hartford can begin recruitment — assure that a Sheff extension will continue Connecticut's massive investment in magnet schools. Brian Mahoney, chief financial officer for the state education department, recently testified before the legislature's appropriations committee that the state will fund 84 magnet schools, both Sheff and non-Sheff, next fiscal year. That's an increase of seven new magnet schools, he said.

With Moylan Montessori and the prekindergarten magnet school, whose theme is being developed, the Hartford school system will operate 17 magnet schools in 2013-14, schools spokesman David Medina said. The Hartford-based Capitol Region Education Council runs 18 regional magnet schools with state funding.

At Moylan School on Catherine Street, the Montessori program enrolls 100 students whose ages range from 3 to 8, including five children who don't live in Hartford but attend the school through the state's Open Choice program, said Moylan Assistant Principal Carolyn Potoff, who oversees the Montessori curriculum.

Many of the 63 new seats will be reserved for suburban students because at least 25 percent of students at a Sheff school must be white to meet integration guidelines. The Montessori program — already cramped in a corner of the Moylan building — is scheduled to move to a new location for the 2013-14 year.

The pre-K school will be located in leased downtown space near the Connecticut Science Center. School administrators have not identified the site, but said it will be shared with Betances STEM Magnet School, a relatively new Sheff program that is temporarily located in the Betances school building on Charter Oak Avenue.

On Tuesday, Hartford accepted an additional \$600,000 from the state to lease and retrofit the downtown location in time for the 2013-14 year. The state already gave \$300,000 for the Betances STEM move.