

## EDITORIAL

# Hartford's Slow, Steady Progress In School Integration

## Sheff v. O'Neill But much integrating left to be done

Friday, December 20, 2013

The latest agreement between plaintiffs and the state in the Sheff v. O'Neill school desegregation lawsuit will inch Hartford public schools along ever so slightly toward the goal of educating all students in an integrated classroom setting.

For that small amount of progress and for other reasons, the one-year pact is welcome.

Seventeen years ago, the state Supreme Court concluded in its ruling on the Sheff case that "the existence of extreme racial and ethnic isolation in the public school system deprives schoolchildren of a substantially equal educational opportunity."

Remedial actions were ordered by the court and they have come largely in the form of magnet schools and an Open Choice program that allows Hartford students to attend school in suburban districts.

Progress has been slow — and expensive. Over the past decade, the state has spent approximately \$2.5 billion in capital and operating funds to comply with Sheff, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy observed last week.

The new Sheff agreement calls for the percentage of Hartford students attending integrated schools to climb to 44 percent by Nov. 15, 2014, up from 42.4 percent now. But great progress has been made: 10 years ago, it was only 5 percent.

Under the new pact, 500 seats will be added to the Open Choice program. Four new magnet schools will be opened, offering 407 seats. Existing magnet schools will be expanded by 696 seats.

Investment in more seats in the popular magnet schools should pay off. They work, as witnessed by improved student performance.

The agreement also provides new Sheff money for improvement of a neighborhood school — called lighthouse school — thus answering parents' pleas to upgrade existing schools close to home.

There are many reasons to applaud the new Sheff agreement, but there is, in the words of plaintiffs' attorney Martha Stone, "still much to be done. We must not forget that there still remains a majority of Hartford students relegated to poor-performing segregated schools."

That, according to the high court's justices, violates the state Constitution.