

## New data: Majority of Hartford schools still segregated

By: JACQUELINE RABE THOMAS | January 21, 2016

Nearly 20 years after the Connecticut Supreme Court ordered the state to eliminate the inequities caused from the isolation of black and Hispanic students in the capital city, the latest data show that the majority of Hartford's children still attend segregated schools.

Additionally, the new data show, promises made last year by state officials to enroll hundreds of additional Hartford students in a more diverse educational environment have come up short.

According to data released Thursday night by the State Department of Education, 11,670 black and Hispanic children who live in Hartford are currently attending segregated schools. The number is slightly higher than last year, though still better than previous years. Segregated schools are defined as those where at least three-quarters of the students are minorities.

The data disclosure comes as the state attempts to end court oversight in complying with the landmark *Sheff v O'Neill* ruling made in 1996.

State officials last year entered into an agreement promising to add an additional 1,000 seats in magnet schools that enroll a diverse student body from the region, but data show enrollment increased in magnet schools by only 74 students. There has been considerable reluctance among state legislators to fund these expensive programs.

The state also set a target of offering 325 more Hartford students seats in nearby suburban schools through the Open Choice program, the least expensive option for integrating schools. However, nearby districts did not offer substantially more seats than the previous year, so that program grew by only 77 students.

"We are still proud for the progress we've made over the years in placing more Hartford resident minority students in reduced isolation educational settings. We remain committed to diversity and improving educational outcomes for Hartford resident students," Education Department Spokesman Abbe Smith said in an emailed statement.

Attorneys who represent the parents in their suit against the state are disheartened by the lack of progress. "It has been tremendously disappointing and frustrating that the State is in non-compliance and more progress has not been made to date, particularly when there have been identified cost effective ways to substantially increase participation," said Martha Stone, an attorney and leader of the Center for Children's Advocacy.

The data was released following a meeting Thursday in Hartford Superior Court morning between the lawyers representing the state and the lawyers representing the parents who successfully sued the state in the desegregation case.

A few floors up in the same courthouse, a trial is taking place that is exploring the conditions in schools throughout the state, including Hartford, and will determine whether the state is providing all Connecticut students with the education the state Constitution requires.

Attorneys in the Hartford desegregation case are now attempting to reach an agreement that could impact school choice options for students next school year.

Almost 6,000 Hartford students -- about one-third of the capital city's students -- applied to leave their neighborhood schools for this school year. Thousands were not offered a seat. (See which school your child has the best chance in winning admittance to here.)

Over the last decade, the state has made progress providing more city residents a desegregated school. During the 2007-08 school year, 1,800 Hartford students were attending integrated schools, or 11 percent of the district's students. Today, 9,743 students, or 45.5 percent, attend an integrated facility.

However, the state agreed to reach the 47.5 percent mark by this school year.

"In essence, we have missed the compliance mark by the thinnest of margins—one student," said Smith.

The spokesperson was referring to the rule that defines an integrated school as one that is no more than 75 percent minority. One school missed that designation by one student while several others missed the target by many more students.

A school-by-school breakdown of enrollment demographics was not immediately available.