**Glass Half Empty or Glass Half Full?**

No one is more frustrated than the Plaintiffs in *Sheff v. O’Neill* that a significant number of Hartford students of color remain in highly segregated, low-performing schools more than two decades after the Connecticut Supreme Court found that, as a result of racial and ethnic isolation in Hartford’s schools, “[e]very passing day denies . . . children their constitutional right to a substantially equal education.” From the day the case was decided up to the present time, the plaintiffs have been profoundly disturbed at the both the pace and the scope of the state’s efforts to provide an education for Hartford resident children that satisfies their constitutional rights. Over the past decades, we have returned to Court multiple times to speed up the process of implementing a remedy and have consistently tried to assure that all students would have the opportunity to realize the benefits of a high quality, integrated education. Plaintiffs have acknowledged the state’s obligation to provide a high-quality education to all students regardless of which schools they attend. While fighting for the maximum number of seats in magnet and choice programs, we have also urged measures that would bring benefits to schools that were not magnets. These have included using magnet schools as partners to neighborhood schools to assist them in providing greater educational opportunities by sharing facilities and staff and training. But the fact that more than fifty percent of Hartford students remain in segregated, under performing schools and that thousands of students remain on waiting lists to get into magnet or choice schools bears witness to the inadequacy of state efforts to date.

Almost as frustrating as the slow progress since the Supreme Court decision is the suggestion that segregation and inadequate schools are somehow the consequence of *Sheff* remedial measures. The failure to provide high-quality, integrated education to Hartford students of color long predates the *Sheff* lawsuit. In the 1989 complaint, plaintiffs pointed to Connecticut students across the state who were “largely segregated by race and ethnic origin” and who suffered “severe educational burdens”.

What has happened in the intervening twenty years cannot be viewed as sufficiently successful, not as long as there are a substantial number of Hartford students who have not received the benefits of programs implemented under *Sheff*. But the fact remains that forty-seven percent of Hartford children of color are receiving opportunities that were wholly unavailable to them before the case was filed. The significance of those opportunities have not been lost on people inside and outside of Connecticut. An article in the Christian Science Monitor praising the Hartford Metropolitan areas desegregation efforts recognized that “academic transformation and racial mixing are intertwined” and quoted the former United States Secretary of Education as describing the effort as a “model for the country”.

Should we be satisfied with half of Hartford students being in segregated neighborhood schools? No. Should we tolerate dramatic disparities in educational opportunities between neighborhood schools and magnet and suburban schools? Of course not. But the solution does not lie in compromising or limiting programs whose effectiveness in addressing segregation and educational achievement has been demonstrated. What must happen instead is to build upon what works and what has achieved success so far, to create more spaces in high performing magnet and suburban schools, to eliminate the persistent waiting lists and to assure that students receive equal educational opportunities in every setting. That can best be done by raising the quality of all schools. Successful schools should be seen as models, not as threats. We owe the students of Hartford, who have endured unconstitutional unequal educational opportunities, nothing less.

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