

# 2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Photo:  
CRES Academy of  
International Studies

## Dear Legislator,

Thank you for serving our state as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact all aspects of our lives, including how Connecticut school districts navigate supporting students and families in unprecedented ways.

The State must aspire to fully address the needs of every student by implementing an educational funding mechanism that establishes a long-term funding plan for Sheff magnet schools. The continuing inequities and long standing debate over the best mechanism for funding education in Connecticut, including magnet schools (and other schools of choice), must finally be addressed. Increased state funding for Sheff magnet schools is needed to prevent additional financial burdens from being placed on our local school districts. We recognize that it is difficult to allocate limited dollars across many essential functions of our state government, but ensuring high-quality educational opportunities for all students is key to our state's long-term economic growth.

We have developed this overview of the Capitol Region Education Council's (CREC) 2022 legislative priorities along with a brief overview of the history and challenges surrounding the Sheff v. O'Neill lawsuit and its impact on the CT educational system. The history of Sheff is vast, so we only scratched the surface in this summary.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss CREC's role in the region in more detail and how we can work together to resolve this critical issue. Thank you for your commitment to our state and for your partnership in resolving the educational funding issues in Connecticut.

Sincerely,



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## **Magnet Schools**

- Resolve the outstanding financial issues surrounding implementation of the Sheff vs. O'Neill Settlement Agreement and ensure the sustainability of Sheff magnet schools.
- Enact an 8% increase for Sheff magnet schools to prevent major increases to school district tuition rates, which are unavoidable without state funding.

## **Capital Improvement for Sheff Magnet Schools**

- Formalize a mechanism for the state to cover the cost of capital improvements in the magnet schools.

## About Sheff

### What is Sheff v. O'Neill? ⓘ

Sheff v. O'Neill is a CT Supreme Court case involving a 1989 lawsuit filed by Hartford parents on behalf of their children against former Governor O'Neill, which charged CT's system of separate city and suburban school districts led to racially segregated schools and a violation of children's rights to an equal educational opportunity.

The Sheff v. O'Neill Settlement did not prescribe a system for integrating Hartford schools. Through negotiations, the state created a fully voluntary plan, including a system of regional magnet schools and the [Hartford Region Open Choice Program \(Open Choice\)](#) ⓘ, which enables Hartford residents to attend school in suburban communities. In order to be deemed "diverse", Sheff magnet schools may enroll no more than 75% students who identify themselves as Black/African American or any part Hispanic. If a school does not meet this standard, it may be subject to financial penalties from the state and students may not count toward the state's enrollment benchmarks under the lawsuit.

### What role does CREC play in Sheff?

CREC is a 55-year-old educational cooperative (also known as a "[Regional Educational Service Center](#)", or "[RESC](#)") ⓘ which is owned and governed by the 35 public school districts of the Hartford region. CREC was selected by Hartford-area superintendents, boards of education, and the State of CT as a neutral party to support the goals of the Sheff Settlement. CREC's governing board, made up of board of education members from CREC's 35 member districts, agreed to assist in the implementation of the Sheff Settlement. On behalf of the state, [CREC operates magnet schools](#) ⓘ and manages [Open Choice](#) ⓘ.

### How many students participate in Sheff programs?

Magnet schools are popular throughout CT, but only the magnet schools in the Hartford region are part of the Sheff Settlement, which are known as the "Sheff Magnet Schools." Students apply to enroll in Sheff magnet schools through a lottery managed by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Currently, approximately 19,000 students are enrolled in 40 Sheff magnet schools and programs in the Greater Hartford area. Currently, approximately 2,300 students are enrolled in 28 districts through [Open Choice](#).

80% of CREC magnet school students reside in Alliance Districts, but CREC does not receive funds as an Alliance District.

### How are magnet schools different from traditional public schools? ⓘ

Magnet schools are public schools that offer special instruction, curriculum, and programs around a specific theme that is designed to attract a more diverse student body. Magnet schools are schools of choice. Students can apply to attend interdistrict magnet schools in the Sheff region from towns throughout the state. Examples of magnet school themes include:


- » The Arts
- » STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)
- » Montessori
- » Environmental Studies



2020 High School Soccer Championship: CREC Academy of Science and Innovation vs. CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

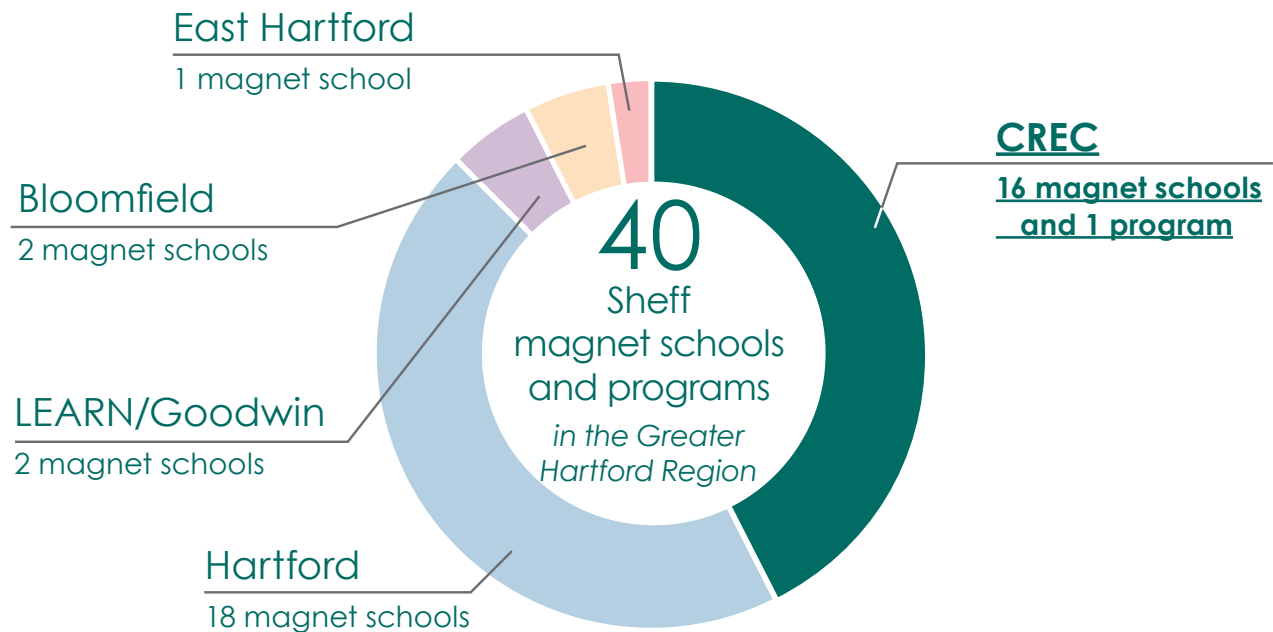


## How are magnet schools funded?

Broadly, Sheff magnets schools managed by [RESCs](#)  receive funding from three sources: state, local districts, and other sources. Sheff magnet schools operated by RESCs are statutorily eligible to receive \$10,652 for each enrolled student from the state. “Host” Sheff magnet schools, which are magnet schools operated by a traditional school that have students enrolled in each magnet school. Host magnet schools are not eligible to charge tuition. If a magnet school has expenditures in excess of the state funding and town tuition, those are paid for by other funding sources, such as grants and donations, and the remaining cost is covered by the magnet school operator. Magnet schools outside of the Sheff region generally have the same funding sources, but the funding amounts are different.

## Have magnet schools been successful?

A [report](#) from CSDE found that magnet schools have helped inner-city students achieve higher academic proficiency than their peers in the public school system. CT’s magnet schools are highlighted nation-wide and were recognized by former U.S. Secretary of Education, John King, Jr., as a model of successful integrated schools. In fall of 2018, CREC’s University of Hartford Magnet School was one of five schools in CT to be distinguished as a National Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education for its success in significantly reducing the achievement gap.





## State Funding for Sheff Magnet School Operations

When the state initially asked RESCs to open and operate magnet schools in response to Sheff, the State of CT agreed to pay the vast majority of the cost of educating a magnet school child through the state magnet grant. Unfortunately, the state has not fulfilled that commitment. The state grant payments dropped from 67% of the total cost in FY2011 to 55% of the total cost in FY2021.

The money that RESCs did not receive as a result of stagnant and eroded state funding over the past eight years is significant. Magnet schools—like all public schools—have growing costs due to contractual agreements with bargaining units. With increased costs and a concern about the burden being placed on our districts, magnet schools have made cuts to staff and programming and the providers have run deficits. To date, RESCs have made every effort to avoid raising tuition rates to the sending towns. Going forward, RESCs will be unable to sustain the growing deficits.

The parties to the Sheff v. O'Neill lawsuit have failed to establish a long-term plan for the implementation and funding of Sheff programs. Short-term funding is necessary from the state, but will only be a stop-gap measure; it will not take the place of a comprehensive solution to the many issues plaguing implementation of the Sheff Settlement.



*CREC Greater Hartford Academy  
of the Arts Half Day Program  
2021 Choreographers' Showcase*



*CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts*

## Capital Improvements

As part of the Long-Term Planning, funding is needed for the permanent facility for the CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School, which is the only Sheff school at CREC in a leased facility. With an annual cost of \$2.3 million and \$9.2 million in operating losses over the last five years, the long-term operation of the school is unsustainable. Ownership of the building allows for these funds to be utilized towards students' educational needs rather than bricks and mortar.





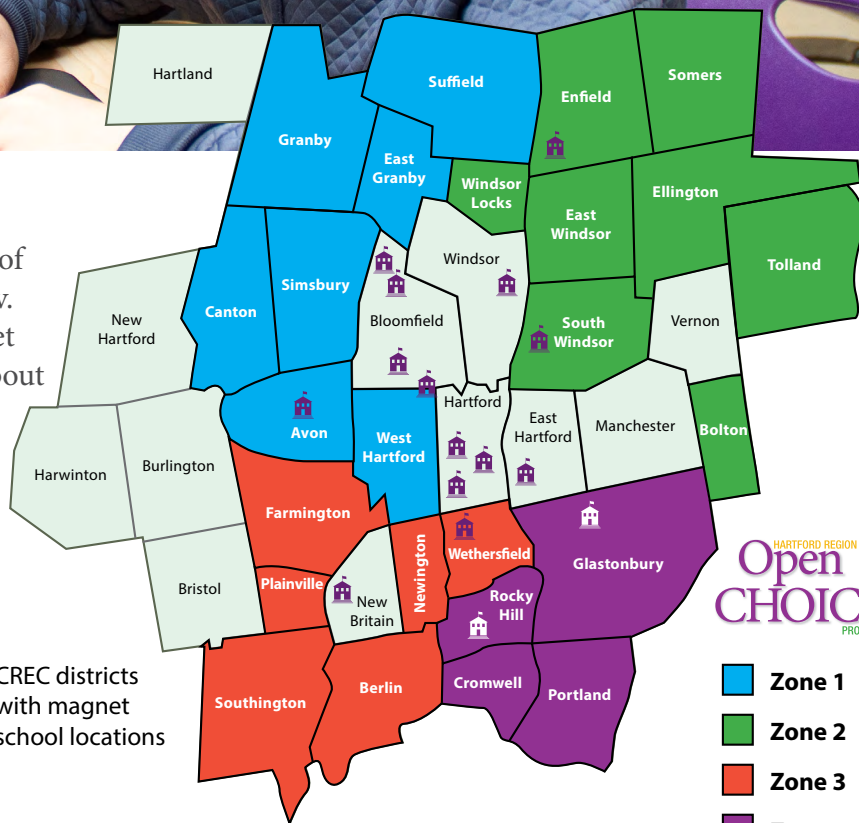
## Who else should I talk to?

This issue has many sides and there are a variety of stakeholders with valuable perspectives on Sheff v. O'Neill. We hope you will accept our offer to meet with CREC's Executive Director to learn more about the organization and CREC's role in the Sheff Settlement. Additionally, in order to develop a complete picture, we encourage you to discuss this topic with:

- » the CSDE and other representatives of the Executive Branch
- » the Sheff Plaintiffs
- » the educators, children, and families of the Greater Hartford region



CREC districts  
with magnet  
school locations



HARTFORD REGION  
**Open  
CHOICE**  
PROGRAM

- Zone 1
- Zone 2
- Zone 3
- Zone 4

## RESC Alliance Legislative Priorities

- » Magnet School Funding
- » School Readiness
- » [Teacher Diversity and Recruitment \(Teacher Residency Program\)](#)

Learn more at: [www.rescalliance.org](http://www.rescalliance.org)



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