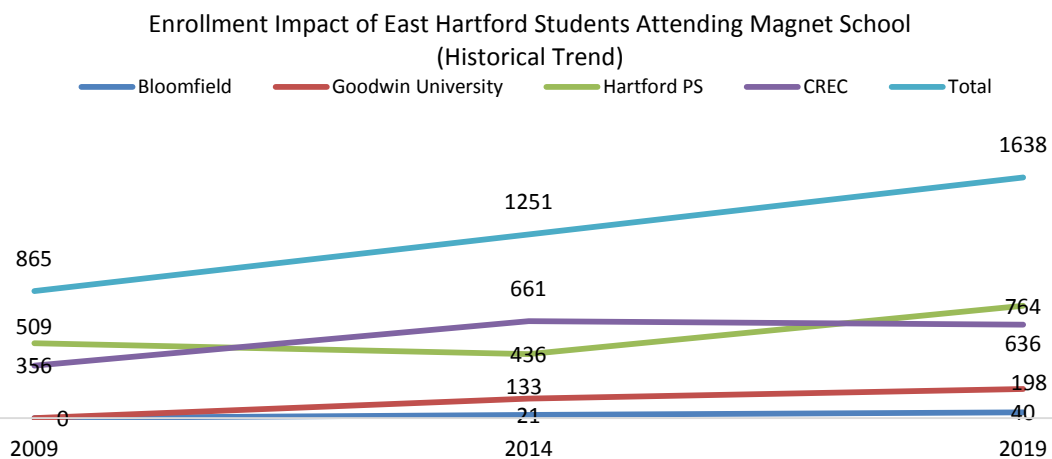


Dear Friends,

This month, we wanted to use our column to provide you with a brief summary of a lengthy case study we recently produced highlighting some of the unintended consequences of the 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court decision, *Sheff v. O'Neil*. In response to the recent Phase IV Settlement and Order that was released in January 2020 including the creation of 1,000 new magnet seats in the region, we felt it was necessary to raise awareness of the negative and unintended impacts this case is having on our school system as we work to provide high quality learning experiences for all children. This is an extremely complex and serious topic and we appreciate your attention in advance.

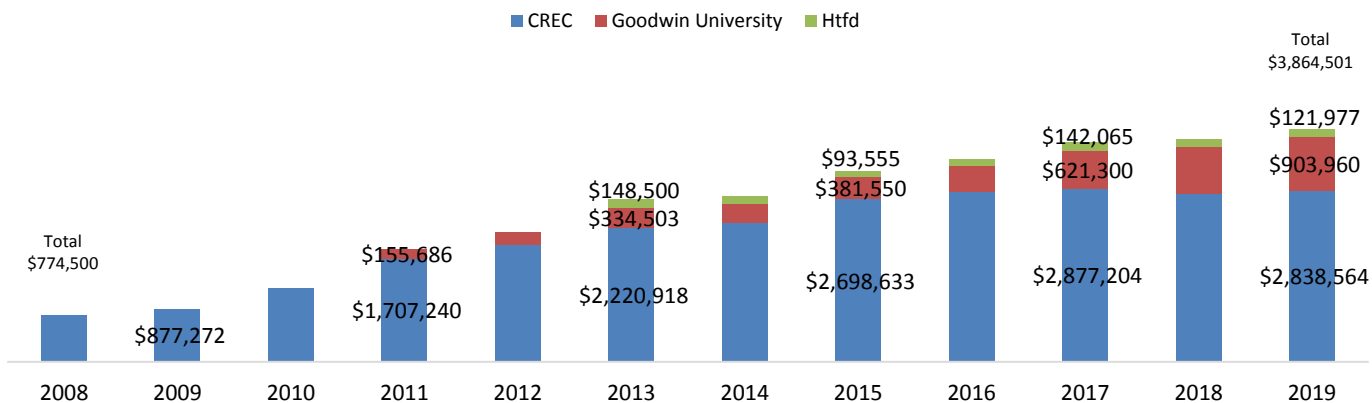
As we begin this column, we want to make it crystal clear that we share the aspirations of providing all children with excellent schools in desegregated settings. However, this study attempts to expose some of the challenges that have emerged for districts in the Hartford region implementing this suit over the past 23 years. It is sincerely hoped that this study sparks dialogue for leaders interested in long-term regional solutions that will improve education and opportunity for all children. For a complete copy of the case study, please visit [www.easthartford.org](http://www.easthartford.org).

As the geographic host to four Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) magnet schools as well as the operator of the Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy (CIBA), East Hartford is deeply involved in the magnet system. In addition to the schools within the town's limits, the close proximity to dozens of magnet schools in the Hartford region promote significant East Hartford enrollment numbers. Since 2008, enrollment of East Hartford students in magnet schools has steadily increased to an all-time record of 1,638 students in 2019-2020. As such, nearly 20% of the total population of students residing in East Hartford (8,404) attend magnet schools contributing to nearly 9% of the enrollment of entire Sheff program (18,403). Among other outcomes, this over enrollment has furthered the negative stigma of large urban school systems and promoted an inequitable system of "winners" and "losers" for families and children. While unintended in the original premise of the case, the current magnet school system continues to further segregate and homogenize schools in the region based on race, special needs and income.



Fueled by the over-enrollment of East Hartford students in Sheff magnet schools, a second related issue with the current system is the escalating and disproportionate costs levied on EHPS to support the tuitions of outgoing students. Under the current funding system, EHPS tuition costs for students attending magnet schools has grown from \$774,500 in 2009 to \$3,864,501 in 2019.

### EHPS Magnet School Tuition Payments



As a result of these growing costs and faced by the challenging fiscal reality of our community, EHPS has been forced to make difficult decisions in terms of resource allocations on an annual basis. While there is clear evidence of the need for additional programming and services to support EHPS students in terms of academic achievement, the disproportionate costs of magnet school tuitions erodes resources targeted towards these needs. As such, EHPS maintains razor thin staffing profiles while educating at nearly \$2,500 below the state NCEP Average (\$16,988). Though EHPS students need additional enriching classroom experience including exposure to music, the arts, technology or health education, these positions are continually threatened in an underfunded, cost-impaired environment that is required to respond to annual increases in magnet school tuitions. While magnet schools add planetariums to provide their students with a three-dimensional viewing portal, EHPS scraps together funding to replace leaky roofs and over-aged boilers. While magnet providers celebrate remarkable opportunities for students to expand learning, travel abroad or access 1:1 technology platforms, EHPS cuts back on field trips and falls behind on technology. In a time and in response to a settlement based on the premise of equity, fiscal realities have created a state system that leaves local districts lacking, left behind and economically isolated.

We share this sobering message today not to alarm, not to discourage nor to anger but rather to inform and inspire towards action. Developing and implementing an improved approach for excellence and equity for all Connecticut children is the necessary next step of advancing the legacy of nearly 30 years of *Sheff* litigation. As in all successful movements, change is a necessary component of sustainability. While the current model was designed in 1989 to focus and solve the concept of providing an equitable and high-quality education for children attending Hartford Public Schools, today's region possesses very different racial, socioeconomical and political conditions. As such, in this moment we must realize the power of shared learning, best efforts, unintended consequences and future opportunities to create a state-wide educational system where all children have the same opportunities to succeed. By boldly moving to make these just and necessary changes, we provide a strong statement regarding our committed belief in the power of education to transform the communities we serve.

If we can be of service to you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us at your convenience Mr. Hall – [hall.br@easthartford.org](mailto:hall.br@easthartford.org), Mr. Quesnel – 860-622-5107 [quesnel.nd@easthartford.org](mailto:quesnel.nd@easthartford.org).

With Great East Hartford Pride!

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