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A Visual Guide to Sheff v. O'Neill School Desegregation

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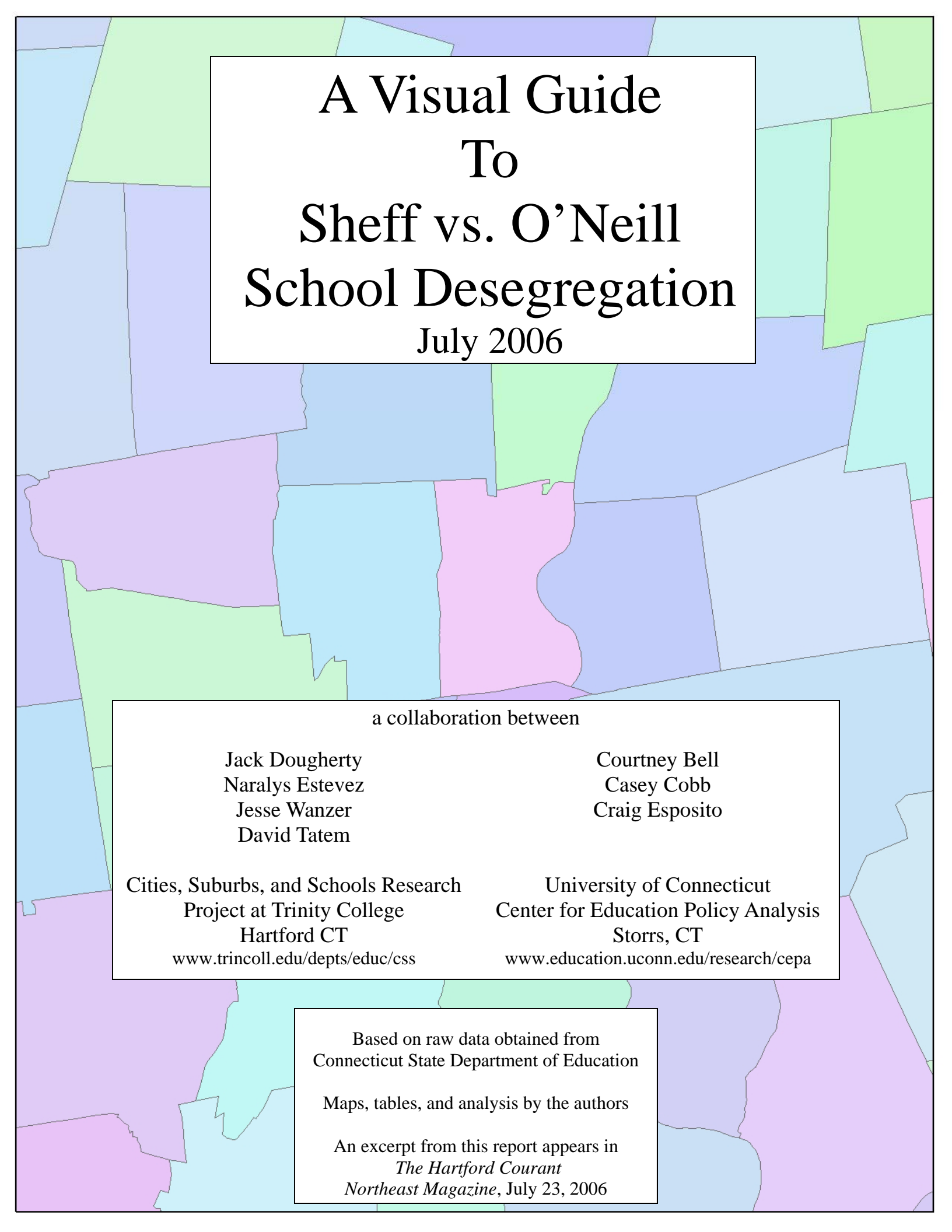
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Maps, tables, and analysis by the authors

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A Brief Chronology of Sheff vs O’Neill

1989: Sheff lawsuit filed

When Elizabeth Horton Sheff and other parents filed a lawsuit on behalf of their children against then-Governor William O’Neill in 1989, they charged that Connecticut’s system of separate city and suburban school districts led to racially segregated schools, which violated their state constitutional rights to equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination.

1996: State Supreme Court rules for Plaintiffs

After a prolonged trial, the State Supreme Court split 4-3 in favor of the Sheff plaintiffs in 1996, ruling that the racial and socioeconomic isolation of Hartford schoolchildren violated state law. However, the Court did not specify a goal, remedy, or timetable to resolve the problem, stating that this responsibility belonged to the legislative and executive branches.

2003: Sheff parties reach settlement

In 2003, all parties agreed to a settlement that relies on voluntary desegregation efforts and additional state funding to meet a specific goal and timetable:

Goal: At least 30 percent of the public school minority students residing in Hartford must be educated in racially desegregated settings by June 2007, using three voluntary programs:

1) Interdistrict magnet schools

By offering a more specialized curriculum than neighborhood schools, magnet schools are designed to attract students from residentially segregated urban and suburban districts.

2) Open Choice program

A voluntary program where city students may transfer to a suburban school district (or vice versa), modeled partly on the former Project Concern program.

3) Interdistrict cooperative grants

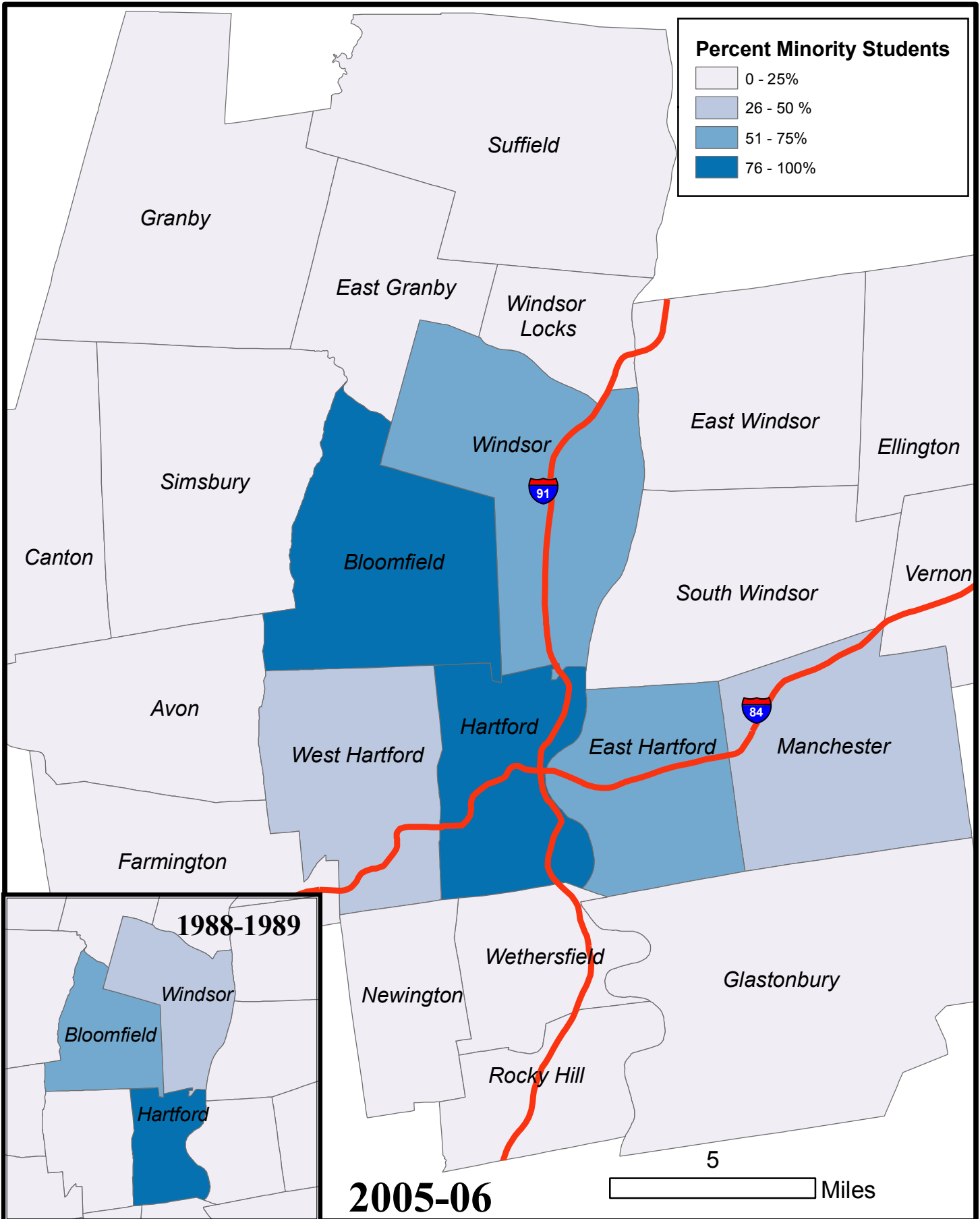
Support for part-time exchange programs between racially isolated urban and suburban schools. May count toward a maximum of 3% of the total goal if sufficiently funded. **(continued on page 4)**

Table 1: School Districts in the Sheff region, by race, then and now

Districts	Percent Minority 1988-89	Percent Minority 2005-06
Hartford	92%	94%
Bloomfield	74%	94%
East Hartford	23%	73%
Windsor	31%	63%
Manchester	12%	43%
West Hartford	12%	33%
East Windsor	10%	25%
Vernon	7%	24%
Newington	6%	20%
Wethersfield	4%	18%
Rocky Hill	6%	18%
Windsor Locks	5%	17%
South Windsor	8%	16%
Farmington	6%	16%
Glastonbury	6%	13%
Avon	4%	12%
East Granby	3%	11%
Simsbury	4%	10%
Ellington	2%	7%
Canton	2%	7%
Granby	2%	6%
Suffield	3%	5%

About racial classification: The settlement defines “minority” as Black and/or Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander. In March 2006, controversy arose about how a magnet school principal changed the designation of six bi-racial students from “Black” or “Hispanic” to “White” in an attempt to meet desegregation standards. Unlike the U.S. Census Bureau, no “multi-racial” classification exists within the settlement or CT Department of Education data.

Map 1: Racial Composition of the 22-district Sheff Region of Metropolitan Hartford, 1988-89 (inset) and 2005-06



2003 Sheff settlement (continued)

Under the terms of the settlement, the state also agreed to fund the opening of two additional magnet schools per year. But to qualify under the Sheff desegregation standards, all magnet schools must not exceed a limit on the proportion of minority students by their third year of operation. According to the settlement, the limit is set annually to the percentage of minority students in the entire 22-district Sheff region (currently 43%), plus 30 percentage points, for a total minority student cap of 73% in 2005-06.

While the overall 30% desegregation goal is **not** directly enforceable under the Sheff settlement, a lack of significant progress within the four-year period will be considered by the Court in future decisions on desegregation compliance.

2004: Sheff case returns to court, but no change

The Sheff plaintiffs returned to court, arguing that the State violated the settlement agreement by failing to fill new magnet schools to capacity, thereby stalling progress toward the 30% goal. But the State responded that it has complied with the settlement by opening two additional magnets per year, while phasing-in grade levels as planned. Although the court does not fault the State, many observers question whether the settlement goals can be achieved by 2007.

Today: Voluntary desegregation efforts yield mixed results toward 30% Sheff goal

On the tenth anniversary of the 1996 Sheff ruling, 20 interdistrict magnet schools have been established in the Hartford region, with two additional programs opening this fall. Most are managed by the Capitol Region Educational Council (CREC) or the Hartford Public Schools (HPS). But the results are mixed. On one hand, the typical magnet school is more successfully integrated than most school districts, particularly those at the two extremes: Hartford city schools (94% minority) and outlying suburbs (0-25% minority). Magnet school curricular themes and added resources have raised the level of educational opportunity for students served by this program. On the other hand, many magnet schools enroll over 75% minority students, particularly those located in temporary facilities in Hartford. (See map and table 2.) If these rates continue into the school's third year of operation, the Hartford minority students attending do not qualify toward meeting the 30% desegregation goal under the terms of the Sheff settlement.

Regarding the Open Choice program, 1062 Hartford minority students chose to enroll in suburban school districts last academic year, including both those located inside and outside of the 22-district Sheff region. (See map and table 3). While demand for access is high, the supply of seats has barely grown, because predominantly white suburban districts have not allocated as much space as anticipated. For example, the 2003 Sheff settlement forecast that 1,400 Open Choice seats would be available during the 2005-06 school year, but the actual total was 25% less.

Map 2: Interdistrict Magnets in Hartford region, by Race, 2005-06

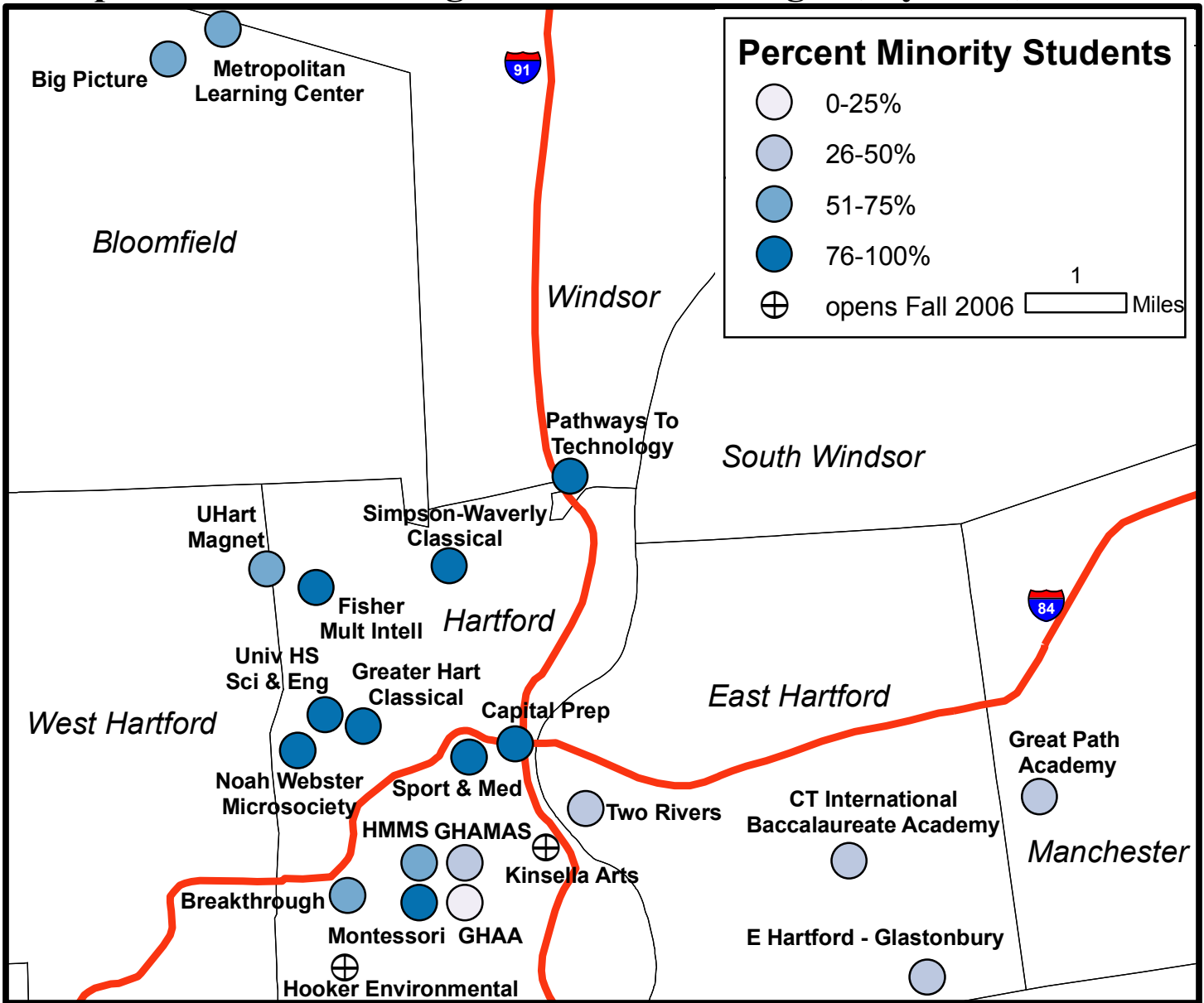
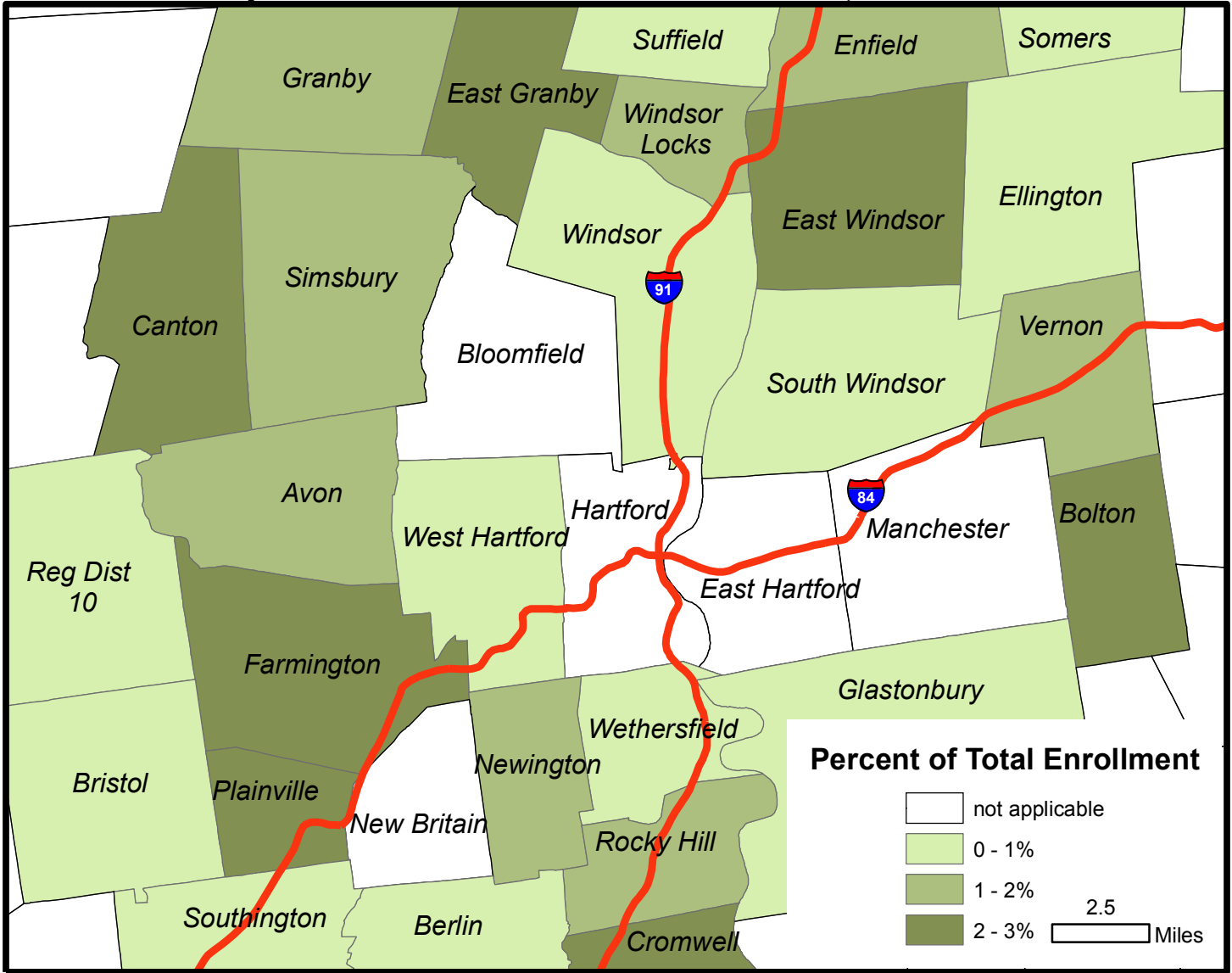


Table 2: Interdistrict Magnet Schools in Hartford area

	Year Open	Managed by	Total enrollment 2005-06	Percent Minority	Qualifies as Integrated	Hartford minority students meeting Sheff standard
GHAA - Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	1989	CREC	388	25%	Yes	44
East Hartford/Glastonbury Elem Magnet Sch	1992	CREC	249	40%	Yes	0
Great Path Academy at Manchester CC	2002	CREC	84	43%	Yes	12
GHAMAS - Greater Hartford Acad of Math & Sci	2000	CREC	204	45%	Yes	42
CT International Baccalaureate Acad	1999	E Hartford	173	50%	Yes	29
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School	2002	CREC	581	50%	Yes	128
UHMS - University of Hartford Magnet School	2001	CREC	378	70%	Yes	197
HMMS - Hartford Magnet Middle School	2002	HPS	605	73%	Yes	338
Big Picture High School	2005	Bloomfield	30	73%	Yes	0
Metropolitan Learning Center	1998	CREC	674	75%	No	0
Breakthrough Magnet School	2002	HPS	215	75%	No	0
Sport & Medical Sciences Academy	2002	HPS	400	78%	No	0
Montessori Magnet School	1990	CREC	330	80%	No	0
University HS of Science and Engineering	2004	HPS	197	81%	Yes*	121*
Capital Preparatory Magnet School	2005	HPS	209	83%	Yes*	85*
Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet School	2004	HPS	264	86%	Yes*	167*
Greater Hartford Classical Magnet School	2003	HPS	484	87%	No	0
Pathways to Technology	2003	HPS	231	92%	No	0
Simpson-Waverly Classical Magnet	2004	HPS	197	93%	Yes*	139*
Annie Fisher Magnet Sch of Multiple Intelligences	2005	HPS	149	95%	Yes*	94*
R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of the Arts	2006	HPS	na**	na**	na**	na**
Mary Hooker Environmental Stds Magnet Sch	2006	HPS	na**	na**	na**	na**
Total			6042			1396

Notes: * Currently meets Sheff standard because magnet school has not yet entered 3rd year of operation. ** Magnet does not open until Fall 2006

Map 3: Hartford minority students enrolled through Open Choice, as percent of total district enrollment, 2005-06



Inside Sheff region	Total Enrollment, 2005-06	Percent Minority	Hartford minority Open Choice students meeting Sheff standard	Open Choice as Percent of Total District Enrollment	Outside Sheff region	Total Enrollment, 2005-06	Percent Minority	Hartford minority Open Choice students meeting Sheff standard	Open Choice as Percent of Total District Enrollment
East Windsor	1563	25%	47	3.0%	Plainville	2640	14%	63	2.4%
East Granby	891	11%	24	2.7%	Bolton	931	6%	20	2.1%
Canton	1719	7%	45	2.6%	Cromwell	1954	15%	41	2.1%
Farmington	4271	16%	92	2.2%	Enfield	6617	15%	82	1.2%
Simsbury	5057	10%	100	2.0%	Somers	1743	4%	16	0.9%
Granby	2261	6%	39	1.7%	Bristol	9040	22%	43	0.5%
Rocky Hill	2537	18%	41	1.6%	Reg. S.D. 10	2795	5%	11	0.4%
Windsor Locks	1954	17%	28	1.4%	Berlin	3343	6%	10	0.3%
Newington	4602	20%	52	1.1%	Southington	6842	9%	16	0.2%
Avon	3378	12%	37	1.1%	Subtotal (outside)			302	
Vernon	3913	24%	42	1.1%	Grand Total			1062	
South Windsor	5084	16%	51	1.0%					
Suffield	2542	5%	21	0.8%					
Glastonbury	6723	13%	44	0.7%					
Ellington	2494	7%	15	0.6%					
West Hartford	9986	33%	58	0.6%					
Wethersfield	3736	18%	13	0.3%					
Windsor	4077	63%	11	0.3%					
Manchester	6798	43%	na	na					
East Hartford	7939	73%	na	na					
Bloomfield	2208	94%	na	na					
Hartford	22171	94%	na	na					
Subtotal (inside)			760						

Residency of Magnet Students

To the surprise of some observers, almost 40% of the minority students enrolled in magnet schools in 2005-06 lived in suburban school districts outside of Hartford (see table 4).

In all magnet schools, the proportion of suburban white students equals the proportion of suburban minority students (27%, see table 5). However, since fewer minority families live in the suburbs, they are choosing magnet schools at higher rates than white families.

Notes:

The "Suburban" label indicates residents outside of Hartford, but may include the City of New Britain. Big Picture HS (Bloomfield) and East Hartford/Glastonbury did not enroll any Hartford students.

Rows may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 4: Minority magnet students by residence

Magnet School	Minority Students, 2005-06	Minority students, by residence	
		Hartford	Suburban
Big Picture HS	22	0%	100%
East Hartford/Glastonbury	100	0%	100%
Great Path Academy	36	33%	67%
CT International Bacc	86	34%	66%
Metropolitan Learning Ctr	506	37%	63%
Two Rivers	293	44%	56%
Grtr Htfd Acad Math & Sci	92	45%	55%
Grtr Htfd Acad of Arts	96	46%	54%
Capital Prep	173	49%	51%
Montessori	263	54%	46%
Fisher Multiple Intell	142	66%	34%
Sport & Medical Sci	311	67%	33%
Breakthrough	162	71%	29%
Noah Webster	228	74%	26%
U Hartford	266	74%	26%
Grtr Htfd Classical	419	75%	25%
Simpson-Waverly Classical	184	76%	24%
Hartford Magnet Middle	443	76%	24%
Univ HS of Sci & Engin	159	77%	23%
Pathways to Technology	212	80%	20%
TOTAL	4193	61%	39%

Table 5: All magnet students by residence and race

Magnet School	Total Students, 2005-06	All students, by residence		All students, by residence and race			
		Hartford	Suburban	Hartford White	Hartford Minority	Suburban White	Suburban Minority
Big Picture HS	30	0%	100%	0%	0%	27%	73%
East Hartford/Glastonbury	249	0%	100%	0%	0%	60%	40%
Grtr Htfd Acad of Arts	388	13%	87%	2%	11%	74%	13%
Great Path Academy	84	17%	83%	2%	14%	55%	29%
CT International Bacc	173	21%	78%	5%	17%	46%	32%
Two Rivers	581	23%	76%	1%	22%	48%	28%
Grtr Htfd Acad Math & Sci	204	27%	73%	7%	20%	48%	25%
Metropolitan Learning Ctr	674	29%	71%	1%	28%	24%	47%
Capital Prep	209	42%	58%	1%	41%	16%	42%
Montessori	330	50%	50%	6%	43%	14%	36%
U Hartford	378	54%	46%	2%	52%	27%	18%
Breakthrough	215	60%	40%	6%	53%	19%	21%
Hartford Magnet Middle	605	62%	38%	6%	56%	21%	17%
Univ HS of Sci & Engin	197	63%	36%	2%	61%	17%	18%
Fisher Multiple Intell	149	64%	36%	1%	63%	3%	32%
Sport & Medical Sci	400	68%	33%	15%	52%	7%	26%
Noah Webster	264	68%	31%	5%	63%	8%	22%
Grtr Htfd Classical	484	69%	31%	4%	65%	10%	21%
Simpson-Waverly Classical	197	72%	28%	1%	71%	6%	23%
Pathways to Technology	231	75%	23%	3%	73%	6%	18%
TOTAL	6042	46%	54%	4%	42%	27%	27%

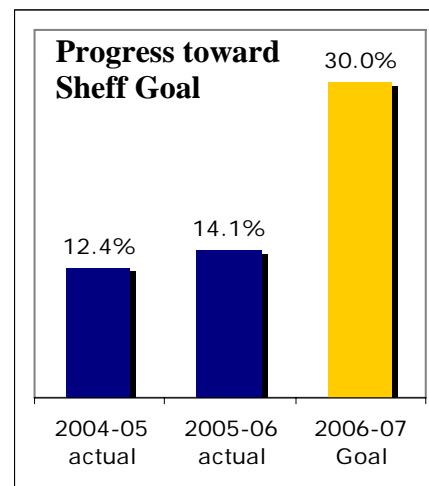
Will we meet the Sheff goal by June 2007?

In the years that have passed since the Sheff lawsuit was filed in 1989, the Hartford region has witnessed tremendous growth in the number of magnet schools. But after winning the 1996 court case, the Sheff plaintiffs have returned to court several times, charging that the state has not fulfilled its legal obligation under the 2003 settlement. The question: will we meet the Sheff goal that 30% of Hartford minority public school students will be educated in racially integrated settings by June 2007?

When the settlement was signed, all parties agreed that the 2002-03 figure stood at about 10%. To measure progress toward this goal, we obtained raw student enrollment data from the Connecticut Department of Education and calculated the percentage of Hartford minority students who were enrolled in magnet schools and suburban districts that met the Sheff settlement standards. Our most important finding was most Hartford students in magnet schools in 2005-06 were ineligible to be counted under Sheff because the proportion of minority students exceeded the standard defined in the settlement (currently at 73%), or because they were in grades that had not yet been phased-in to the new magnet school. Five magnet schools did not meet the requirement this past year, and more will be in jeopardy when the grace period ends at the beginning of each school's third year of operation. (See map 2 and table 2.)

At present, we stand less than halfway (14.1%) toward meeting the 30% Sheff settlement goal by June 2007. According to projected magnet school and Open Choice enrollment figures for the upcoming school year, it appears that progress will remain below 15%.

Table 6: Hartford minority students in public schools, 2005-06	Total students, 2005-06	Percent toward Sheff goal
Magnet schools		
- meeting Sheff standard	1396	6.3%
- not meeting Sheff standard	1141	
- grade levels not phased-in	961	
Open Choice suburban transfers	1062	4.8%
Hartford neighborhood schools	17521	
Total	22081	
Interdistrict Cooperative Grants		3.0%
Total Percent		14.1%



Why are we missing the goal? Some observers point to construction delays for new magnet school facilities, which they believe are essential to attract more white suburban families. Others question whether sufficient numbers of white suburbanites will ever voluntarily leave neighborhood schools to enroll in magnets in Hartford, or whether their suburban school districts will open up more seats for Hartford students. Still others challenge the premise that race matters with respect to the quality of a student's education. Regardless of these viewpoints, Connecticut needs to wake up to the facts: we are making limited progress toward reaching our legal requirements, and the Sheff case — particularly the children it represents — deserves more of our attention.