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### What Makes a School Successful? A Case Study at the George Jackson Unique Magnet School in Hartford CT

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Wolliston 1

Ed 400: Senior Research Project

Fall 2010

**What Makes a School Successful?**  
**A Case Study at the George Jackson Unique Magnet**  
**School**  
**In Hartford, CT**

**Cyemone Wolliston**

**Ed 400: Senior Research Project**

**Educational Studies Program**

**Trinity College, Hartford, CT**

**Fall 2010**

## **Introduction**

As a native of Hartford and a product of the Hartford Public School system, I was most interested in researching the lawsuit that changed many lives in Hartford including mine. I attended a regular public middle school and graduated from a magnet school in Hartford. When I attended this magnet school, it was known for its superiority over other traditional schools in Hartford. Although my senior class was not as racially diverse, as time has passed, so have the racial demographics of my former school. Learning about the Sheff versus O'Neill case caused me to wonder what a successful school is. How does educational policy makers construct the definition of success, and is it different from the people who are being effected by their policies? Thus my research question was formulated, "How do students, parents, and teachers in a Sheff school define success of a Sheff school?"

Schooling has seen many transformations documenting from the 1830's when the term "schooling" may have been relatively unclear. Governing policies, pedagogical practices, curriculum standards, qualification of teachers, and the students who should be allowed to attend have all been a part of this transforming process of Schooling in America. This process has gone through several "Era's" - education reform before 1920, teaching reform and the "common-school" era, "progressive" education and reform, debates over African Americans and higher education, desegregation, and contemporary educational reform. Contemporary education includes present day schooling.

The judicial system and litigations have been extremely crucial to the most recent transformations of schooling in America; the law has become such an integral factor in the

construction of schools and the process of schooling. One of the most notable case rulings, *Brown versus Board of Education*, in 1954 in Topeka, Kansas, declared that it was no longer acceptable for schools to be segregated because they were unequal in the education received. The *Brown II* ruling and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 continued to fight for equality especially in education. There have been many legal proceedings since then that have shifted the racial composition of students within schools in many districts across the country. Reber (2005) used data from the Unicon Research Corporation, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Common Core of Data (CCD), and the Public School Universe (PSU) to examine the effects of the court-ordered desegregation plans. She found although the schools did have desegregation, it was only a short term solution. She found that the more schools were desegregated, and whites were exposed to non-whites, the more white-flight occurred. It allows one to wonder, what is success in terms of desegregation, and can it ever be attained?

Thirty-five years after the *Brown v Board* ruling, Milo Sheff, the lead plaintiff, and 16 other students filed a law suit against the State of Connecticut; the case most known as *Sheff versus O'Neill*. They argued that Hartford Public Schools was segregated and not providing its students with an equal education that was promised in the State's Constitution. They said that the school districts contributed to the concentration of minorities students in Hartford. In 1995, Hartford Superior Court ruled in favor of the state, but the Connecticut State Supreme court overruled the Hartford Superior court's ruling. In 1996 the CT Supreme Court found that, "schools were racially, ethnically and economically isolated and that, as a result, Hartford public school students had not been provided a substantially equal educational opportunity under the

state Constitution.” The court also recognized that the school districts “unintentionally” contributed to racial segregation. The decision ordered desegregation, without out a time-table for when the city should meet the goals of desegregation, in Hartford Public Schools. Thus, inter-district magnet schools, and The Open Choice Program became the major mechanisms for desegregation in Hartford. The Open Choice program, which previously was called Project Concern then Project Choice, allows students to be bused out of Hartford to surrounding suburban towns like Avon, Canton, and West Hartford. The Magnet schools, which I will mainly focus on, is precisely defined by their name, Magnet. Their purpose is to draw and appeal to suburban parents who will decide to send their children to schools that are/were primary minority schools. An integrated school under Sheff standards is a school where the percentage of “minority” students (Black, Latino, Asian) does not exceed 30% of the regional average minority enrollment. Researchers such as Poetter and Knight-Abowitz (2001); Griffin, Allen, Kimura-Walsh, and Yamamura (2001-2002); Fowler (2002), and Doughetry (2009) have all examined some aspect of the pros and cons of school choice and Magnet Schools.

Poetter and Knight-Abowitz (2001) examined the possibilities and problems of school choice. They found that although magnet school does desegregate the schools, it leaves traditional public schools in a bad light. Some magnet schools are specialized so that you have to meet the criteria to apply to the school, while other magnet schools have the “lottery” where you are chosen randomly to attend the school after you apply. They also mention these magnet schools, which are usually located in urban districts, take away better performing students from the traditional public schools leaving the public school in crisis.

Griffin, Allen, Kimura-Walsh, and Yamamura (2001-2002) did a case study using the Opportunity to Learn and Bounded Rationality frames to study in Los Angeles of the high achieving Black and Latino students in a public school compared to a magnet school. They found that although both sets of students had high aspirations, the magnet schools students were provided with more resources as well as indirectly more capital from college recruitment offices. Similarly, Fowler (2002) found there to be increasing disparities amongst the schools choice and the vision of magnet schools.

Dougherty (2009) examined the disconnect between policy and practice in the Sheff v O'Neill case. 21 years later after the filing of Sheff v. O'Neill, Hartford has yet to meet the Sheff agreement in providing Hartford students with quality education.

Dr. William Daggett<sup>1</sup> is the CEO of the International Center for Leadership in Education and has assisted many states and school districts with their school improvement plans. In response to the NCLB act and the need to distinguish failing schools from successful schools, Dr. Daggett conducted this research on the most successful high schools in the country, "paying close attention to their feeder elementary and middle schools, to try to understand the characteristics that made them effective schools. This investigation provided nine central characteristics of high performance in high schools. The list of characteristics ranged from having rigorous curriculums to performing well on standardized tests.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/.../characteristicshighschools.doc](http://www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/.../characteristicshighschools.doc)

My research provides a lens for educational policy makers, researchers, and future Sheff school attendees to see how students, parents, and teachers in a Sheff school define success of a Sheff school. I hope this research will create more dialogue between the Sheff advocates and educational policy makers in defining what it means to be a successful school. I hope that this study will shed light on what it means to be a successful magnet school. Also, that the administrators will listen to the voice of these students, parents, and teachers to work on the improvements they suggested was needed to make this school successful. I hope to raise awareness for the students especially so they can understand how they were privileged to attend Sheff schools. Also, I hope to help administrators see where improvement can be made to better Sheff schools all across the city.

### **Methodology**

I conducted a qualitative study at the Unique Magnet school in Hartford, CT. I held three focus group interviews each with the parent, student, and teacher council. The teacher and parent participants were given informed consent forms. The students were given parental and assent informed consent forms. The interview question differed slightly between groups, but each began broadly with question regarding knowledge of Sheff vs. O'Neill case. Then questions were asked regarding benefits of attending/working at Sheff schools, how diversity effect the individual if noticeable. Questions were also asked about teacher diversity and whether that should be included in the Sheff agreement as well as parental involvement in their Sheff school. Next, the participants were asked how to rate their school on a scale of 1-10, where 10 was the highest measure of success. They were also asked if they would recommend this school to others and

what improvements could be made to the school, and finally what it meant to be a successful school. Eight students from the student council participated in the focus group interview. Four parents participated in the focus group interview, and Five teachers participated in the focus group interview.

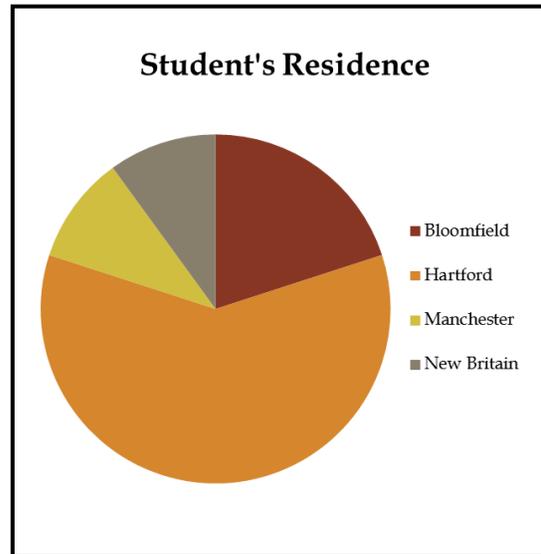
I also distributed parental consent forms and surveys to the one middle school English class, and one high school English class. The questions overlapped with the focus group interview questions. Similarly the survey questions began with broad asking about knowledge of Sheff vs. O'Neill; but students were asked about their race, grade and residence. They were also asked to compare their experience to the school they attended prior to Unique Magnet school. 12 middle school students of the 20 completed the survey. Three of the 20 high school students completed the survey.

### **Data and Analysis**

#### *Students*

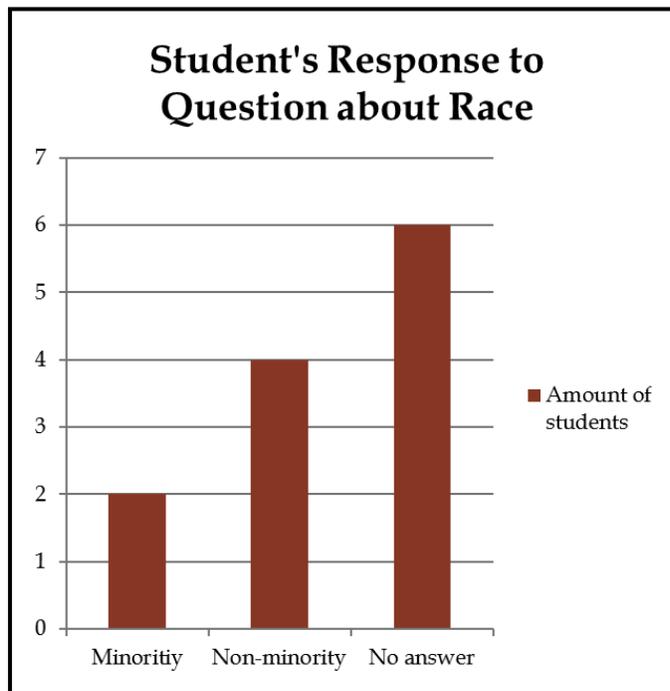
*Middle school students although very aware of diversity as a component of a Sheff school found success in a school to be attributed to citizenship, academic achievement, and preparation for a four year college.*

The 12 middle school students that completed the survey resided mostly in majority minority towns. The majority minority towns were Bloomfield (2 students) and Hartford (6 students). The predominantly white towns were Manchester (1student), New Britain (1student), Windsor (1 student), and East Hartford (1 student). (See Figure 1.)



*Figure 1.* Residence of Middle School Students Who Completed Surveys.

When the students were asked if they considered themselves a minority, two said *Yes*, four said *No*, and six declined answering this question. Of the four students that said they were not a minority, one specifically said white, and another wrote, "I think of myself as a smart-young talented student." (See Figure 2.) Mica Pollock talked about the "colormute" practices in schools. Although the school was diverse, students and faculty were apprehensive in talking about race. They were afraid to offend students and be considered a racist that they overlooked problems regarding students of color; sometimes even subtly being racist. Perhaps the students at Unique Magnet school were offended by the term minority, or they participate in these "colormute" practices. Five of the twelve students previously attended magnet schools, six attended regular public schools, and one was home schooled. Ten of the twelve students said their parents were involved in their education.



*Figure 2.* Student Responses to Question about Racial Identification.

There were eight students that participated in the focus group interview (separate from the information provided about), and for purposes of simplification I have compiled their responses together because there was not a significant difference between their responses and the responses on the student surveys. The grade level of the students did range from 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> and the racial composition was 4 Whites, 2 Black, 1 Puerto Rican, and 1 Malaysian. The student council interview provided depth for my surveys. The total number of students who participated in either the council or the surveys was 20.

There was a spectrum of answers regarding their transition to Unique Magnet; some students had a difficult social transition, a few had a difficult academic transition, but most had a good transition. The students noted that attending this school resulted in them having a diverse group of peers. All of the students said they had a diverse group of peers. 17 of the twenty

students said they noticed diversity, while three of them did not respond. Twelve said it affected them, four said it did not, and four did not respond. Star, a 7<sup>th</sup> grader said,

“When I first came to this school, I thought it was kind of weird how people who didn’t look like me and didn’t act like me, but now I think it’s just, I don’t look at it like that like Emily said, I look it like this is a really really nice person and they share a lot of things with me on the inside not on the outside.”

Harold, a 12<sup>th</sup> grader said,

“Once I came to Unique Magnet school, I actually became friends with a lot of people outside of my race. Growing up in Hartford you see lots of Hispanics everywhere and once I came here, I actually became friends with all types of races from African American to White to even a Jewish Malaysian Asian and like it really allowed me to expand my whole outlook on people and you realize not everyone fit the stereotypes set for them. Like some of my best friends are actually not rowdy as you would think of Hispanics and Africans but are actually pretty chill and just cool people. So it really lets you look differently at people you would normally hang out with.”

Amanda, a sixth grader said,

“Diversity prepares you for life because in life you won’t find people who are just like you, you will see and find a whole bunch of people that are very different from you and which kind of prepares- this school, this Sheff school

prepares you for diversity in your life because it's ummm a magnet school and it attracts people from everywhere and of course everywhere cannot always be the same."

The students agree with Amanda and believe diversity to be a great component of a Sheff school.

Interestingly, only three of the students were aware of the Sheff versus O'Neill case. However, when the students were asked if Sheff should include teacher diversity, seven of the students said yes it should. Since only three of the students knew what the Sheff case was about, when they were asked "What benefits do you gain from a Sheff school", they spoke about the benefits they gained only from their school, Unique Magnet as opposed to Sheff schools in general. The benefits they listed included: learning Latin, making new friends, meeting new people from new towns, having an opportunity to go to four year college, and an overall better education.

When asked to compare themselves to students in non-magnet schools, they said they have a greater diversity group of peers, they learn different things like Latin, they have enrichment programs, they gain a better work ethic because of the greater work load, and they have higher expectations. 15 of the students said that they are more focused and more eager to learn in a Sheff school as opposed to a non-Sheff school, two said no, and three did not answer. The students also expressed how the different there experiences with the teachers are at their Sheff school as opposed to a non-Sheff school. The teachers are more focused on the students and they actually care. Doris an eighth grader said,

“I agree because here, all the teachers want the best of their family, and they interpret it like their kids into some of the learning and its mostly about us and their focused on getting us ready for college, they’re not focused on our level of academics right now, they’re pushing us to our fullest and they’re e making working for our life to make us our best, and mostly preparing us for college.”

The students were asked to rate their school on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest level of success. The average ranking of success of Unique Magnet was 8.2; 6 was the lowest and 10 was the highest score recorded by these students. When asked if they would recommend this school to their friend nine of them said *Yes* because it is a good school, helps improve grades, has fun after school activities, and it prepares you for college. The remaining three students said *No* because it depends on the type of person they are, the school does not enforce many rules, and is an okay school. The students from the council talked about the “friendly completion” that motivates their peers to perform well. Anique, a 12<sup>th</sup> grader said, “You’re known for your grades”. Students in general really see the importance of performing well in this school, and the Unique Magnet schools environment promotes this friendly competition.

Then they were asked what improvements need to be made to the school. Again there was a spectrum of answers. The students said: Campus construction; new rules; shorter days; more enrichment choices; study hall; teacher attitudes towards students; better school lunches because school days are so long; less rules; less homework; recess; enforce rules; nicer students; and one students said no changed needed to be made.

The students were asked, “What does it mean to be a successful school?” The students said: schools should help students have Seriousness, Respect, and Loyalty; it should focus on education; it should produce lots of achievement-grades; teachers should care for students; the students try their hardest; the schools should be more than just grades-socializing is important; the student should be active-civic leadership; it should prepare all students for 4-year college; and should have a diverse student & teacher body. A successful school to these students is not just about scoring well on Connecticut academic tests or having a racially diverse school, but these students realize that the success of school is multi-faceted including citizenship.

Citizenship being one of the life skills needed to be successful and make a difference in others’ lives.

#### *Parent Council*

*The parents found success in a school to be attributed to an academically challenging curriculum; open and working communication between parents, students, and staff; high graduation rates; and preparing students for success in preferably prestigious schools.*

Nine parents completed the parent survey and four parents participated in the focus group interview. The parents that completed the survey were racially diverse including African Americans, Latino, and White parents. Of the four parents that participated in the interview two were White, one was African American, and one was West Indian. For simplification purposes I have compiled their answers together seeing that the same questions were asked in both the interview and survey.

All of the parents, thirteen in total, were knowledgeable about the Sheff v O'Neill case. When asked about the benefits of allowing their child to attend the school almost all parents mentioned the diversity in Sheff schools. They also said Sheff schools provide a less racist environment; it attracts students who are interested in learning; they get to meet and work with new people of diverse cultures and backgrounds; they strongly encourage application to 4 year colleges; provides an academically challenging curriculum; has more resources; and offers Latin, a language used in "professional careers such as doctors and lawyers." Not only did the parents notice the diversity in the schools to be a benefit, but they said that a Sheff school promotes equity and tolerance. Mrs. Kim said,

"My son ever since he was little has always been very uneasy if we go into a city no matter where it is...besides the fact that this is a phenomenal school education wise. I like the diversity aspect of it; I was a little concerned I wasn't sure how he would be just knowing how he's always been historically. First day he came and loved it. My experience is that I find personally much less racism here than I do in my hometown school. I just love this place; I can't tell you how much I love this place. I was blown away about how amazing everybody was and how equal everyone was and how we could joke around about things and it was all okay."

Similar to the students' response, the parents saw diversity to be a great component of a Sheff school.

The parents, like the students, believed that all Sheff schools are college preparatory and offer Latin. They associated Unique Magnet with all Sheff schools. This perhaps occurred because Sheff schools have a reputation of being superior to traditional Hartford public schools. This is one of the by-products of creating magnet school, parents and students feel magnet schools must be better than regular public schools.

When asked, “How does the diversity within the school effect you or your child socially and academically”, the parents had similar answers that focused mostly on social effects. They said: diversity allows their child to be more accepting; able to explore cultures; share best practices; and it is a positive experience. The parents realized that the world is not only White, and that it is good now for their child to be socially exposed to different types of people. During the focus group interview, a mother expressed how she is happy that her White son made friends with Black students, but when her son asks if he can go and hang out with the Black student outside of school it is rarely possible; they live far away from the school and the friend lives in Hartford. Mrs. Jones said,

“The distance of the school of the school has an effect on him socially, you know because we’re in Bristol, it took me 45 minutes to get here tonight with the traffic, you know I mean I’m not right down the street so you know if he does...two of his best friends live in East Hartford, yeah we don’t get together to often you know, but he has all his friends at home too...If the distance wasn’t as issue, maybe I would see something different. Academically, the

school is phenomenal academically; I don't see where the diversity is effecting that.”

So diversity does have social effects on the students as well. Providing a diverse environment in school but not being able to maintain those culturally diverse relationships outside of school remains a challenge for magnet schools. However, they point out that Unique magnet school makes tries to make it possible to foster socially relationships with creating numerous social events. Another parent, a father, wrote that it was good for his African American son to be in the academically challenging and diverse school because there are high standards for all-not just for White students- but here “it's cool to be smart.”

Most of the parents felt that Sheff should include teacher diversity, but with the stipulation that the teachers still must be held to high academic standards. One parent said that Sheff did not need to include teacher diversity; she said that teacher diversity is “important” but does not need to be mandated. Another parent wrote that “teacher excellence should be first and foremost.” Mrs. Carol said,

“I've always been an advocate of teachers being diverse I think it's especially important when you have diversity amongst the student body for each student to look at that faculty and see someone that looks like them because who knows you may be fostering wonderful teachers, you know, from 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade but because they don't see anyone who looks like them, they choose to go another way.”

After Mrs. Carol finished speaking, Mrs. Jones said, “As long as they are still the most highly qualified.” and all the parents in the room agreed. Parents encourage diversity, but are more interested in the qualifications of the teacher because their child needs to be academically challenged to compete in the real world. In essence when it comes to teacher diversity, qualifications trump diversity.

The parents were asked if they felt parents were actively involved in their child’s education and if they believed this involvement contributed to school success. Ten parents believed that parents are actively involved in their child’s education. One said no, and two said they are involved, but not sure if most parents are. Most of the parents believe that school success is dependent on parental involvement because parental involvement affects a child’s performance, which increases school success. Mrs. Kim said,

“If you have parents that are involved, I think it makes the schools more accountable. If nobody’s paying attention and parents don’t care. I mean it’s, whatever is measured increases. You do better on things that are measured. So it’s important to have parents involved for the school to be successful but also for the child. Because your saying to the child, I care about your education, education is important.”

The parents in the focus group interview believed that their involvement in the school and in the child’s education made the school more accountable to the parent; accountability was an important factor. Researchers like Carol Stack (1974) and Norma Gonzalez (2001) and Sophia

Villenas (1999) have studied how Black and Latino families actively involve their children's education.

When asked to rate Unique Magnet on the scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest marker of success, the average score was 9.2, with 7 as the lowest and 10 as the highest. All thirteen parents said they would recommend Unique to other parent. Parents even noted that they already had and will continue to recommend this school to other parents. They said Unique Magnet is a good school; has open communication; enrichment programs that boosts their child's resume; is academically challenging-prepares for college; and has great staff. The students also praised the staff at Unique Magnet. Perhaps because the school is relatively small, the school is able to foster this family-like environment with caring teachers. The parents were then asked what improvements, if any, could be made to Unique Magnet. Their responses ranged from more mundane suggestions to socially relevant suggestions. They replied: the school could have more forums for social action in the neighborhoods; it could increase its rigor in academic curriculum; provide more time between classes; offer AP courses; offer wider variety of courses; hire more qualified minority male teachers; make adjustments to governmental procedure; and add more microwaves to the cafeteria. A parent from the focus group interview wished the bus ride to school was not so long for her student, but recognized that this was not an improvement that Unique Magnet could make.

Finally, the parents were asked, "What does it mean to be a successful school?" The parents said: a successful school has committed teachers, students, and parents working together; it teaches student how to think critically and helps develop their passion for learning; it must be

academically challenging; it responds to dynamic changes; have a Paideia style of learning; it sends students to prestigious colleges; prepares for success in college; develops character; has available resources; has good organization; high graduation rate, and high student and parental involvement. Note again, that the parents did not mention scoring well on standardized tests. This is crucial because according to the Sheff advocates, lowering the achievement gap is a component of a successful Sheff school. Yet, the student and parents being effected by a Sheff school do not mention a high test scores to be a defining characteristic of a successful school.

#### *Teacher Council*

*The teachers found success in a school to be attributed to student engagement; passionate teachers, promoting success of a child in any way; differentiated instruction; supportive administration; funding; and parental involvement. Unlike the parents' and students', the teachers' definition of success is more relevant to things that effect them and their teaching styles.*

Five teachers participated in the focus group interview. Four teachers were White, and one was Asian American. Unique Magnet school teaching staff is predominately White. All of the teachers were aware of the Sheff v. O'Neill case and only one teacher previously worked a magnet school prior to Unique. Two worked in regular public schools, one worked at a charter schools, and one teacher Unique Magnet school is their first job.

The teachers, similar to the parents and students, found diversity and exposure to other cultures to be a benefit of the Sheff schools. They mentioned that in Unique Magnet, although

the classrooms are diverse, many times there are groupings by race or interest within the classrooms itself. Most teachers try to dispel the grouping and mix up the students. Ms. Mack said,

“For a white student to come into this school and have the opportunity to work with lots of other students is an amazing opportunity. For students of color it’s an amazing opportunity for some of them who might not have, I meant they would have access to white people wherever, but like in their small communities perhaps not. And so for kids to have those opportunities in this safe space whether it effects academics achievement I think or not, I think it effects other things that are important a life skill. Learning that people are just people and they’re wonderful and that it doesn’t matter what they look like, where they come from, and all of those things that come out of it. Does that necessarily impact achievement? Maybe, maybe not, but I think it’s equally as important.”

They noticed, as well, that even though there are these groupings within the classroom, the students still interact on some level with each other in the school despite race. The teachers see cultural diversity as well as racial diversity in their school. One teacher explained her frustration with the state. She said that originally the state was sued in order to provide equal education for Hartford students, but now the State is forcing schools to find a way to diversify their students and there are consequences if they fail to meet the States requirements. Ms. Brios,

“I feel that Sheff O’Neill, when the court case occurred and everything happened, it was supposed to be that okay Hartford parents are pissed that there are such disparities in our state. And somehow it got flipped upside down where now the state is coming down on Hartford for whether or not they’re being complaint. And the price that Hartford is paying and the things that are happening. I feel like in some way Hartford schools have become demeanized in some ways. When really, where’s the focus in West Hartford, where’s the focus on the fact that Glastonbury is choosing not to send kids to-racism and classism are alive and well-what about the towns like Portland like why is it coming down on us. We can’t maintain 25% they’re gonna shut us down because we don’t have 25% White kids. And it’s like well, who’s calling out the other districts, and what are they doing to help out, why aren’t they taking in Hartford kids, why aren’t they encouraging more parents to send their kids here. And the ones that they do send here, by the way, some of them, are the biggest problem kids we have in our school. Oh here’s a misfit in our little ol’ town and he’s acting up, oh we got a school for you, oh we’ve got a school for you. You should apply to a magnet school, they’ll help you. I think some towns are actually getting rid of some of their problem kids by sending them into Hartford. And the intent of Sheff O’Neill was not for us to take on the burden of other districts problem. The intent of Sheff O’Neill was not to come down on Hartford for not having enough White kids in some of our schools, and I

think it's been flipped on us. And I think its shame on the state for allowing that to happen, for encouraging it to happen, or whatever role they played.”

This is interesting because it shows that the teachers are critically aware of what is going on around them. They do not feel the recent years of how the state has been handling the Sheff v. O'Neill case has been fair to them or their students. Another teacher mentioned that she has a problem that the success of a school is based on how many white students it has because then it places the value on the white kids, and that would make the students of color feel less than. Teachers believe that diversity is a by-product, but should not be mandated for a school to be successful. After all the students' education comes first; a school with all diversity and no rigorous curriculum, is that a successful school? The teacher also spoke about the diversity of abilities when students come to this school. Ms. Brios said,

“As a sixth grade teacher, what Ms. Mack is talking about is glaring. I mean you have students who have had nothing but test preparation, direct reading instruction, all- they have had no social studies or science and t you have students coming from different towns, wealthier towns, where the students are scoring at a certain level so there's not as much emphasis on the test so their learning social studies and science skills, so they're coming in with a different skill set. It doesn't meant that one student is inherently smarter than another but looking at the preparation and what they come to the table with in the sixth grade, that's when we see huge difference. Again I think its cross economics,

what town you're from, what school you're coming from not necessarily by race, but by town.

When asked if teacher diversity should be included in the Sheff ruling, they agreed that it would be beneficial to the learning experience of the students as well as the professional growth of the teachers. Ms. Ford said,

“I think it could only help because it's just like anything else. If you have a uniform body of educators then they're going to come generally from the same perspective and you want the students to learn from different perspectives; that what's so great about having a diverse school. You're describing learning other people's perspectives. So if all of your educators are coming from the same place and they live all in the same towns and they have, well I guess we all have similar salary levels, um then they would just be teaching from the same place. That's why it's great to have as many you know, three teachers teaching the same discipline, you experience from all of them so that you're getting the same information from different people.

They informed me that during their staff meetings they have talked about the need to recruit a more diverse staff because their staff is not diverse. Another teacher, who served on the curriculum committee, explained that the reason why their school is not diverse is because their applicant pool for the last school year did not have many minority applicants. She said that the teacher certification programs need to do a better job at recruiting more students of color to their

program so that schools like Unique Magnet will be able to hire them. They desire a diverse staff, but the State needs to be more proactive in helping them out. They realize that sometimes there can be a disconnect between the students and the teachers because they are not of the same cultural background or race. They recognize they can learn from their students, but one teacher said, “How much cooler would it be to learn from your peers?” They have teacher diversity training for the professional development where they learn, talk, and interact with each other on issues such as racism, classism, and sexism.

When asked to rate Unique Magnet on the scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest marker of success, the average score was 8.2, 8 was the lowest and 9 was the highest. They would recommend the school to their peers as a good place to work. When asked about improvements that can be made, they believed that if they found no need to make improvements that would be a problem. They said they could raise the bar further academically, create more support for the struggling students, and find more ways to engage the parents into their student’s education, and create a study hall for students because the students have so much on their plate. It is interesting that all of the teachers’ improvement were student centered.

Then the teachers were asked “What does it mean to be a successful school?” The teachers said: diversity is key, student engagement; passionate teachers, promoting success of a child in any way; differentiated instruction; supportive administration; funding; and parental involvement. The teachers’ definition of success was more focused on issues that were directly effected to them.

## Conclusion

How do students', parents', and teachers' in a Sheff school define success of a Sheff school? The definition of a successful school is subjective. The next question would be whose definition is more valuable? There was overlap and differences between students', parents', and teachers' definition of success. However, their definition was in contrast to the Sheff's advocates' definition of success. Student's parent's and teacher's definition of success was had nothing to do with race, however complying with Sheff v. O'Neill is all race-centered. According to [sheffmovement.org](http://sheffmovement.org), a successful Sheff school is defined by a school that has a diverse environment, it teaches students basic skills to compete job market and contribute to society, it enhances critical thinking skills, and it lowers the achievement gap. The teachers, parents, nor students mentioned diversity as a major factor of success in a school. This is interesting because Sheff schools were made to do just that-diversify the school. One might think that because a school promotes racial diversity that it would also promote multicultural education to supplement the racial diversity. However there was no mention in either group of the multicultural component needed to create a successful school. Neither school mentioned scoring well on standardized test scores, but according to Sheff advocates lowering the achievement gap creates a successful school. Whose voice matters more, whose definition of success is more valuable? How do we provide quality education for our children in Hartford, is a diverse school the only way?

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