What makes a school successful?  
A Case Study at the  
George Jackson Unique Magnet School in Hartford, CT

Cyemone Wolliston
Educ 400: Senior Research Project  
Educational Studies Program  
Trinity College, Hartford, CT  
Fall 2010: December 15, 2010
Significance

- Increasing popularity of school choice within Hartford
- Sheff vs. O’Neill
Significance

Increasing popularity of school choice within Hartford

Sheff vs. O’Neill

An integrated school:

- The percentage of "minority" students (Black, Latino, Asian) does not exceed 30% of the regional average minority enrollment.

- Schools meeting the integration standard currently have at least 25% white enrollment or more.

- By product: socioeconomic integration
Increasing popularity of school choice within Hartford

Sheff vs. O’Neill

An integrated school:
- The percentage of "minority" students (Black, Latino, Asian) does not exceed 30% of the regional average minority enrollment.
- Schools meeting the integration standard currently have at least 25% white enrollment or more.
- By product: socioeconomic integration

Currently there are 21 regional magnet (Sheff) schools

www.sheffmovemen.org
School Context

The George Jackson Unique Magnet School
Prides itself in having a private school curriculum at a public school price
To prepare students for acceptance into competitive colleges and universities.
We participate in a rigorous curriculum
All students continue to develop their talents through an extended day enrichment program.
We are committed to developing and maintaining a racially and ethnically diverse student body.
Mandatory Enrichment

ATHLETICS
- Indoor and Outdoor Track
- Golf
- Dance: Ballet, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Modern
- Fencing

INTELLECTUAL
- Chess Club
- Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program (CPEP)
- Chinese
- Peer Mediation

ART
- Puppetry
- Exotic Art
- Orchestra
- African Drumming

*all pictures are generic
Research Question

How do students’, parents’, and teachers’ in a Sheff school define success of a Sheff school?
Research Question

How do students’, parents’, and teachers’ in a Sheff school define success of a Sheff school?

There was both overlap and differences between students’, parents, and teachers’ definition of success; their definition was in contrast to Sheff’s definition of success.
Literature Review

Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D.
President, International Center for Leadership in Education
“Successful Schools: From Research to Action Plans”

- Focus instruction around students
- Commitment to excellence
- Commitment of resources-9th graders
- Rigorous-12th graders
Literature Review

Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D.
President, International Center for Leadership in Education
“Successful Schools: From Research to Action Plans”

- Focus instruction around students
- Commitment to excellence
- Commitment of resources- 9th graders
- Rigorous- 12th graders

- Laser-like focus on data
- High-quality curriculum
- Develop personal relationships
- High-impact initiatives
- Leadership
Literature Review

Schools are successful if they...

- have high academic performance in core areas as measured on state and national tests.
- have programs that stretch students well beyond the core academic skills measured by state and national tests.
- are involved in community.
- and aid in social and personal development of the child.
Methods

- Qualitative study
  - Focus group interviews
    - Student council - 8 participants
    - Parent council – 4 participants
    - Teacher council – 5 participants
  - Open-ended Surveys given to one Middle school and one High school English class
    - Homogenous classrooms in terms of grade level
    - Males and Females
    - Racially mixed classroom
    - Responses from surveys
      - 12 middle school students
      - 4 high school students
Students

“\(\text{I think of myself as a smart-young talented woman.}\)”

**Student's Residence**

- Bloomfield
- Hartford
- Manchester
- New Britain

**Student's Response to Question about Race**

- Minority
- Non-minority
- No answer

- Amount of students
Students

School success is defined by:

- Academic achievement
- Preparation for a 4-year college
- Development of citizenship
  - Seriousness, Respect, and Loyalty

Average Rating of school:

- 8.2; 6-lowest, 10-highest

“Here, it’s cool to be smart.”
-Latino male student
4 parents participated in focus group interview
- 1 Black
- 1 West Indian
- 2 White

12 parents completed surveys
- Race not indicated
School success is defined by:

- An academically challenging curriculum
- Open and working communication between parents, students, and staff
- High graduation rates
- Preparing students for success in prestigious schools

Average Rating of school:

- 9.2; 7-lowest, 10-highest
Teachers

5 teachers participated in focus group interview

4 White
1 Asian
School success is defined by:

- Student engagement
- Passionate teachers
- Promote success of child in any way
- Differentiated instruction
- Supported administration
- Funding
- Parental involvement

Average Rating of school:

8.2; 8-lowest, 10-highest
## Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o Promote success of students in any way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Academic achievement</td>
<td>o Challenging curriculum</td>
<td>o Student engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Citizenship</td>
<td>o Communication between parents, teachers, and students</td>
<td>o Passionate teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o High graduation rates</td>
<td>o Differentiated instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Supportive administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Parental involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-year college prep</td>
<td>4-year college prep</td>
<td>Promote success of students in any way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>Challenging curriculum</td>
<td>Student engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Communication between parents, teachers, and students</td>
<td>Passionate teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High graduation rates</td>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| o 4-year college prep  
  o Academic achievement  
  o Citizenship | o 4-year college prep  
  o Challenging curriculum  
  o Communication between parents, teachers, and students  
  o High graduation rates | o Promote success of students in any way  
  o Student engagement  
  o **Passionate teachers**  
  o **Differentiated instruction**  
  o **Supportive administration**  
  o Funding  
  o Parental involvement |
# Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sheff Advocates’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| o 4-year college prep  
  o Academic achievement  
  o Citizenship | o 4-year college prep  
  o Challenging curriculum  
  o Communication between parents, teachers, and students  
  o High graduation rates | o Promote success of students in any way  
  o Student engagement  
  o Passionate teachers  
  o Differentiated instruction  
  o Supportive administration  
  o Funding  
  o Parental involvement | o Has a diverse environment |
# Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sheff Advocates’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o Promote success of students in any way</td>
<td>o Has a diverse environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Academic achievement</td>
<td>o Challenging curriculum</td>
<td>o Student engagement</td>
<td>o Teaches students basic skills to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Citizenship</td>
<td>o Communication between parents, teachers, and</td>
<td>o Passionate teachers</td>
<td>compete job market and contribute to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>o Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o High graduation rates</td>
<td>o Supportive administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sheff Advocates’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| o 4-year college prep  
o Academic achievement  
o Citizenship | o 4-year college prep  
o Challenging curriculum  
o Communication between parents, teachers, and students  
| o Promote success of students in any way  
| o Student engagement  
| o Passionate teachers  
| o Differentiated instruction  
| o Supportive administration  
| o Funding  
| o Parental involvement | o Has a diverse environment  
| o Teaches students basic skills to compete job market and contribute to society  
| o Enhances critical thinking skills |
## Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sheff Advocates’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o 4-year college prep</td>
<td>o Promote success of students in any way</td>
<td>o Has a diverse environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Academic achievement</td>
<td>o Challenging curriculum</td>
<td>o Student engagement</td>
<td>o Teaches students basic skills to compete job market and contribute to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Citizenship</td>
<td>o Communication between parents, teachers, and students</td>
<td>o Passionate teachers</td>
<td>o Enhances critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o High graduation rates</td>
<td>o Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>o Lowers the achievement gap—measured by TEST scores!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Supportive administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- *No* group mentioned diversity as a component of a successful school.
- *No* group mentioned having a multicultural curriculum as a component of a successful school.
- *No* group directly mentioned scoring well on CAPT, CMT, SAT, or ACT’s.
Conclusion

All groups indicated a positive experience and said they would recommend George Jackson Unique Magnet School to their peers and colleagues.
Further Research/Limitations of Study

- Find how to create space for dialogue concerning Sheff versus O’Neill
- Follow up study on the success of alumni
- Increase sample size of participants
Acknowledgements

- Mr. Jones, Principal
- Parent, Student, and Teacher Participants
- Nicole Wolliston