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### Shaping the Learning Corridor: Interdistrict Magnet Schools, 1990s to the Present

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**Shaping the Learning Corridor Interdistrict Magnet Schools,  
1990s to the Present**

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## **Introduction**

Since the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 school districts and communities have implemented a series of desegregation plans to increase racial balance and provide equal educational opportunities. Many of these early plans like forced busing received opposition for their involuntary measures. These plans often resulted in a greater racial division as white's avoided integration by fleeing to the suburbs and enrolling their children into private schools. Today in the year 2005 cities and suburbs are still racially and economically segregated. As a response to the major opposition of involuntary desegregation and in need of more acceptable integration plans, many cities have replaced mandatory busing with creative and voluntary choice programs like magnet schools. Since the 1970s magnet schools have gained in popularity as a more acceptable form of complying with court ordered desegregation. Magnet schools provide a greater racial balance than traditional neighborhood schools by attracting white suburbanites to inner city schools which offer innovative and specialized educational opportunities not found in traditional schools.

### Hartford, Connecticut:

In Connecticut's Greater Hartford region segregation is the unintentional consequence of the creation of local school districts. The Greater Hartford area is characterized by elite suburban towns surrounding the capital city of Hartford which is concentrated with a largely minority population and greater levels of poverty. The demographic differences between cities and suburbs in Connecticut are some of the most extreme in the nation. The City of Hartford ranks as the second-poorest in the U.S. (by percentage of families living in poverty among cities with populations greater than

100,000), and its public schools serve 96 percent students of color (of which more than half are Latino). By contrast, the surrounding suburbs comprise the fifth highest per capita income in the U.S., with public schools serving over 75 percent white students.

*Sheff v. O’Neill* and Magnet Schools in Hartford:

In the 1996 *Sheff v. O’Neill* school desegregation ruling, the plaintiffs and the state settled upon voluntary measures such as interdistrict magnet schools as the key remedy to reduce racial and socioeconomic isolation within the Hartford metropolitan region. The ruling favored the plaintiffs and found that “students in the Hartford public 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.”<sup>1</sup> In 2003, the *Sheff v. O’Neill* settlement affirmed the expansion of interdistrict magnet schools as the key remedy to reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. Incentives such as one hundred percent construction funds for magnet schools have provided the support and foundation for the metropolitan’s implementation of 19 magnet schools all which vary in size, themes, and participation.

The Learning Corridor- Concept, Mission, & Advocates:

This research focuses on the Learning Corridor, a \$110 million complex of four interdistrict magnet schools, located in the south side of Hartford, Connecticut. The Learning Corridor campus houses two magnet high schools, the Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science (GHAMAS) and the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts (GHAA), the Hartford Magnet Middle School (HMMS), and the elementary

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<sup>1</sup> Milo Sheff, “Sheff v. O’Neill- Memorandum of Decision,” (<http://www.state.ct.us/sde/sheff.htm>), (March 3, 1999).

Montessori Magnet School (MMS). Although all four schools are located in the Learning Corridor they each have their own unique history and vary in levels of participation by the suburbs and Hartford community. The Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science and the Hartford Magnet Middle School were both newly designed programs created for the Learning Corridor, while the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the Montessori Magnet School pre-existed prior to the Learning Corridor and were both housed in inadequate facilities.

#### History of the Learning Corridor:

The Learning Corridor opened in 2001 to national acclaim for its unique model of private and public sector collaboration from both the city and surrounding suburban districts. Like many magnet schools designed and implemented during this time, the Learning Corridor was a response to *Sheff v. O'Neill* and benefited from many of the financial incentives provided to newly constructed magnet schools. However, the purpose of the Learning Corridor, the goals of its original visionaries, and the overall design and implementation of the project reflect a much broader concept than the reduction of racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. Through the Learning Corridor many issues and concerns from various constituency groups within the Hartford community were addressed. The Learning Corridor is an example of groups within the private and public sector utilizing education as a common ground to gain support for a project that would address the problems within a disinvested crime ridden community and a means to achieve urban revitalization.

### The Learning Corridor Advocates:

Like many alternative education programs, the Learning Corridor began with a collective group of people interested in change within the community. These individuals sought varying degrees of change concerning urban renewal, crime and violence, educational inequity, and problems affecting the welfare of the community and its local businesses. This group of advocates—comprised of community activists, educators, state and government officials, and members of local businesses and non-profit organizations—was looking into the future. This group, whom I define as the Learning Corridor advocates, played a significant role in rallying support, designing, and implementing the Learning Corridor project. There are five main groups into which I have placed all of the Learning Corridor advocates: Hartford, Suburban, Trinity, Learning Corridor, and State and Regional Government officials. This research focuses on the varying degrees to which all of these groups achieved their differing goals through magnet schools as a result of their collaboration which yielded the Learning Corridor campus.

### **Research Question**

This qualitative study focuses on how the five different interest groups converged to shape the Learning Corridor. What were the original concerns and goals of the Learning Corridor advocates (and opponents), how did they gain support from various interest groups during the design phase (1990s-2000), and how are they addressing issues during the implementation (2000-present)? The research explores Hartford's political, educational, economic, and social climate during the 1990s which set the stage for the initial momentum and need for such a project like the Learning Corridor. As magnet

schools gain popularity, it is important that we understand how recent policies and practices shape the design, implementation, and overall effectiveness of magnet schools. In particular how certain policies and features of magnet school development utilized in the design and implementation of the Learning Corridor have also paved the way for issues such as suburban participation, management of magnet schools by entities within and outside the neighborhood school systems, and funding deficits.

## **Thesis**

This study found that the primary goal of the Learning Corridor was urban renewal, not necessarily education. The concerns and interests of each constituency group varied based on the group's own personal interests and needs during the development of the Learning Corridor. The Learning Corridor advocates targeted each group's concerns and interests to encourage the constituency groups to support the project. Support was gained by utilizing key political and community players as high profile representatives for the project. Additionally, the Learning Corridor would have happened regardless of the *Sheff* plaintiff victory, due to Trinity College plans prior to the 1996 ruling. But the *Sheff* victory clearly influenced the Learning Corridor. The *Sheff* decision served as a two-edged blade for the Learning Corridor by adding political and financial momentum and also diluted the impact on Hartford neighborhoods. Hartford Public School's unfamiliarity with running interdistrict magnet schools led them to contract the Hartford Magnet Middle School to CREC. The varying levels of financial support and participation by suburban districts have contributed to the lack of consistent funding for interdistrict magnet schools. While the state legislature's lack of support in updating the formula for funding magnet schools has further contributed to the magnet school

financial crises. State and Regional officials hope that implementation issues such as the funding and governing of magnet schools will be resolved with new legislation passed in June of 2005.

## **Literature Review**

Supporting literature for the research consists of several books and articles focusing on magnet school policy, magnet school development and planning, and community partnerships in urban renewal. Literature on magnet school policy and practice was necessary to gain a greater understanding of the role and history of magnet schools in response to court ordered desegregation. Research on magnet school development and planning was less available than that on the concept and policy of magnet schools. However, this literature was the most valuable in providing a framework for how magnet schools are designed and implemented. The literature available on the development and planning of magnet schools offered a back drop for successful practices in starting magnet school programs. The existing literature also draws attention to issues in magnet school development and practice- some of which resonate with those issues plaguing the Learning Corridor today. Additionally, because the Learning Corridor not only addresses education reform but the theme of urban renewal and the outreach of Trinity College and other community organizations to revitalize and sustain the immediate neighborhood it was necessary to review existing literature on community partnerships and university level engagement in urban renewal. Compiling literature on magnet school policy, magnet school development and planning, and community partnerships in urban renewal provides a framework for comparison, analysis, and interpretation of how the Learning Corridor was planned, designed, and



implemented under the policies of magnet schools in education reform and as an effort to revitalize Hartford's Frog Hollow neighborhood.

Magnet schools policy:

The first group of literature and articles focused on magnet schools and policy. This group provided an excellent foundation in understanding the general mission of magnet schools, their characteristics, and their historical role in desegregation. Claire Smrekar and Ellen Goldring's *School Choice in Urban America: Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Equity*<sup>2</sup> highlights the characteristics of magnet schools and their social, historical, and political context. Christine H. Rossell's *The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation: Magnet Schools or Forced Busing*<sup>3</sup> is also an excellent source for background information on the success of magnet schools as voluntary desegregation over the failures of forced busing. In this study, Rossell utilizes surveys to assess why parents are attracted to magnet schools and finds that magnet schools are a more effective form of reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. Aside from exploring the effectiveness of magnet schools these two books relate to this research by highlighting successful characteristics of magnet schools which I utilized to compare with the program characteristics designed and implemented in the Learning Corridor magnet schools.

Also supporting Rossell's claim that magnet schools are an effective means of desegregation is Connecticut State Department of Education Researcher Barbara Q. Beaudin. Beaudin's research examines the effectiveness of magnet schools in Connecticut and by focusing on Education Reference Groups -- (ERG) a categorization

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Smrekar, *School Choice in Urban America: Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Equity* (Teachers College Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Christine H. Rossell, *The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation: Magnet Schools or Forced Busing* (Temple University Press, 1992).

of public school districts with similar characteristics including economic status and district size-- she found greater racial integration noting "...students attending interdistrict magnet schools are enrolled in more racially balance schools than those found statewide."<sup>4</sup> Beaudin's study is particularly useful in this research because it one of the few evaluations of magnet schools in Connecticut.

The most valuable literature for understanding magnet school policy and design was Mary Haywood Metz's *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools*. In her book Metz offers examples of successful and problematic magnet school design characteristics and also explores many issues and criticisms challenging magnet schools today. Metz comments on the elitism of magnet schools and how those in charge of designing and implementing them create a two tier public school system by making magnets in practice and amenities more appealing than traditional neighborhood schools. Such elitism can lead to jealousy and resentment among those who are not given access to the magnet schools- a phenomenon which occurred in Hartford as some parents felt left out. Additionally, Metz's research also brings to attention issues of varying levels of participation based on demographics like race and class. Metz found that "There were longer waiting lists for blacks at magnet schools than there were for whites, and in some cases blacks were on waiting lists while there were open spaces for whites."<sup>5</sup> Her research also revealed that certain magnet school themes are more attractive to different demographic groups noting that "The middle class was especially drawn to a few schools, for example, at the elementary level, a Montessori school, a creative arts

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Q. Beaudin, "Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Magnet Programs in Connecticut: An Evaluation Report," [www.state.ct.us/sde/equity/magnet](http://www.state.ct.us/sde/equity/magnet) (March 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Haywood Metz, *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet School* (Teachers College Press, 2003), p. 21.

school, and a gifted and talented school.”<sup>6</sup> *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools* brings to attention the importance of understanding the design and implementation of magnet schools and raises awareness on how certain features and program characteristics can lead to challenges in recruitment and participation once the schools are developed. In order to better understand and prepare for these challenges policy makers and advocates of magnet schools need in depth analysis of magnet school development through research that focuses on case studies of specific programs.

#### Magnet School development and planning:

Literature on magnet school development and planning was also significant in analyzing the design and implementation of the Learning Corridor magnet school project. Parret and Barr’s *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* offers a detailed outline on effective planning and developing of alternative magnet schools. The book offers strategies in starting alternative schools. The authors note that alternative programs are the product of “...the energy and work of committed individuals and groups who are dedicated to providing educational choices and improving schools.”<sup>7</sup> The information is intended to guide the planning process for these groups like the Learning Corridor advocates, noting the importance of reviewing existing polices, mandates, and legislation on alternative schools. Parret and Barr suggest many important strategies that involve brainstorming the needs of the community where the school will be located and highly suggest the need for community consensus considering that “Alternative schools often will emerge as a rational response to a variety of community

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<sup>6</sup> Metz, *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet School* p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Barr, William Parrett, *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* (National Education Service, 1997), p. 83.

problems.”<sup>8</sup> Suggestions for designing and implementing schools include conducting surveys to assess the interest and support for such a project and holding school and community forums including educators, parents, and members of local business community. The authors warn that advocates of magnet schools must be aware of magnet school challenges like brain drain, a problem that threatens neighborhood schools when they lose their best and brightest students to alternative education programs. *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* is an excellent source for understanding how to create magnet programs. While this literature is helpful in understanding how to create magnet schools it lacks detailed information on how advocates of magnet schools can maintain the support of community constituencies once groups are interested in the project. The literature also lacks implementation examples of the strategies suggested.

Two additional articles in understanding the development of magnet schools are Rolf K. Blank and Paul Messier’s “Planning and Developing Magnet Schools: Experiences and Observations” and Chester E. Finn’s “Ten Steps to a successful magnet program”. The article “Planning and Developing Magnet Schools: Experiences and Observations” is a collection of research on magnet school planning and includes an article by Mary Haywood Metz “Issues in Designing Magnet Schools” and Blank’s own article “Comparative Analysis of Local Planning and Development of Magnet Schools”. These articles offer more design and implementation strategies that are similar to those offered in *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* once again emphasizing the need for including the community in the planning. The articles also note

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<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Barr, William Parrett, *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* p. 91.

challenges that advocates encounter. One of these greatest challenges is sustaining adequate funding; a problem that the Learning Corridor advocates are currently battling. Blank suggest that advocates involved in the design and implementation of these schools work diligently to make magnet schools a part of the regular school system. He notes that magnet schools should not be "...viewed as an experimental or temporary program or one that continues only with a special allocation of district or federal funds, or other outside funds".<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Finn suggest that the most effective strategies in designing magnet schools seek funds from multiple constituencies including, businesses foundations, and local, state, and federal government agencies. Like *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* these articles offer insightful suggestions and warnings on issues to come but lack descriptive cases that illustrate how model magnet schools have implemented these strategies and overcome many of the challenges indicated.

#### Community Partnerships in Urban Renewal:

The existing literature emphasizes successful planning of magnet schools through the inclusion of community. This strategy of community and campus exchanges was a major component of the Learning Corridor's design and implementation. The Hartford community including local business organizations like Hartford Hospital and neighborhood organizations like Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART) were heavily involved with Trinity College in the planning process. Urban renewal through community engagement by those involved in higher education is a recent practice that has gained national attention. The success of local universities and businesses is determined by the status of the neighborhood surrounding them. During the 1990s

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<sup>9</sup> Rolf K. Blank. "Planning and Developing Magnet Schools: Experiences and Observations" (ERIC, 1987).

Hartford, Connecticut witnessed an increase in crime, drug use, and prostitution which prostitution to be a detriment to many of its local businesses including Trinity College. Admission rates for the college were at an all time low and parents quickly drove by the deteriorating neighborhood and the former abandoned bus garage site which now houses the Learning Corridor campus. Because community partnerships played a major role in the development of the Learning Corridor a review of literature on community and campus partnerships in urban revitalization. David J. Maurrasse's *Beyond the campus: How colleges and universities form partnerships with their communities* provides several successful models of community and higher education partnerships. The model most relevant to my research is the University of Pennsylvania's revitalization of West Philadelphia which like Trinity's plan included education reform as a core focus for change in the community. Additionally Kevin B. Sullivan and James A. Trostle's article "Trinity College and The Learning Corridor: A small, urban liberal arts college launches a public magnet school campus" provides a historical framework on the Learning Corridor. The article focuses on the role Trinity played in urban renewal through the spearheading of the Learning Corridor and is also a vital source in understanding the Learning Corridor's political context and identifying people and institutions that shaped the project.

The existing literature and research on magnet school policy and development offers a significant framework for analyzing the role of magnet schools and community partnerships in urban renewal and educational reform. However, such literature fails to illustrate successful models through an in-depth analysis of effective magnet school planning in regard to magnet policies and under the development and guidance of

multiple constituency groups. With the continued use of magnet schools as a solution to racial, ethnic, and economic isolation and poor academic achievement in urban schools stems an increasing need for research emphasizing successful models and strategies of magnet school development through community partnerships. The existing literature on magnet schools neglects to focus on how community partnerships can play a role in urban education reform and fails to evaluate the role of court ordered desegregation like *Sheff v. O'Neill* in the design and implementation of magnet school programs. This research will focus on how the Learning Corridor advocates successfully designed and implemented the Learning Corridor while focusing on effective strategies that were implemented and decisions and policies that have lead to current challenges. These challenges include issues in recruitment, participation, sustainability, and funding of the magnet schools. The research expands upon the strategies and policies in developing magnet schools with detailed qualitative interviews from members of all constituency groups. It furthers our understanding of magnet school planning through a social, political, and historical framework highlight the interests, concerns, and roles of the constituency groups involved in creating the Learning Corridor.

## **Research methods**

The research for this project was divided into two parts; one focusing on the design and the second focusing on the implementation of the Learning Corridor. Since little had been written on the Learning Corridor it was necessary that I compiled data and information from qualitative, historical, and some quantitative methods. After meeting with individuals involved in the Learning Corridor project like Jackie Mandyck, Scott Reynolds, Jim Trostle, Jack Dougherty, and Marc O'Donnell (Division Director at CREC) I obtained a list of key individuals and groups that played a significant role in the

Learning Corridor design and implementation. This list helped me organize an interview roster and note groups that may have had archival information on the project.

Qualitative:

The qualitative research required interviewing members of five constituency groups: city, suburban, state, college, and magnet. Members of the groups were selected by reference from key individuals and through their significance in the project as noted by archival documents. Participants were asked during interviews to name which groups of individuals were most influential, their responses to this question contributed to the sampling of the participant roster. Once a roster was compiled participants were selected based on their importance and involvement with the development of the Learning Corridor. Participants that represented multiple groups were favored on the basis that they would provide insight from more than one perspective. During the design phase of the research nineteen interviews were completed with members of these five interest groups. Several of these members were interviewed again during the implementation phase research which consisted of eleven total interviews.

The interview guides for this research were designed to obtain information on the participant's history with the project, perceptions about the project, involvement and role in the project during, before, and after construction, perceptions on the involvement of other individuals and groups, and inquired about the Learning Corridor's fulfillment of its goals and missions. The design phase guide focused on initial goals and the fulfillment of those goals. The interview guide built on a larger more general framework from the history of the Learning Corridor to the present asking the participant to explain the current objectives, and the direction they believe the Learning Corridor should take in the



future. The implementation guide also focused on group roles during the implementation and addressed issues like funding, legislation, and zoning areas for participation which have shaped and challenged the development of the project. The interviews were analyzed through thematic content analysis and the use of Atlast ti coding software. All participants interviewed were asked to sign consent forms prior to the interview. The forms stated that the interviews were voluntary, the participant would receive a copy of the transcript, and that the tapes would be deposited into the Trinity College archives.

#### Historical research:

Historical research for this project included archival documentation of news, magnet legislation, and other informational sources on topics relating to the Learning Corridor from 1990 to the present. Archival documents were collected by conducting electronic searches in the Hartford Courant online data base, Yahoo search engine, and Connecticut General Assembly site with key words such as “magnet schools in Hartford, Connecticut” , “The Learning Corridor magnet schools”, “*Sheff v. O’Neill*”, “racial integration and magnet schools”, and “Hartford’s Learning Corridor”. Other electronic searches conducted included the CREC [Capitol Region Education Council] Trinity College, SINA, and The Learning Corridor official websites. Archival documents such as correspondence and meeting notes have also been collected through searches in storage files found in HART [Hartford Areas Rally Together] and CREC [Capitol Region Education Council]. Other documents such as Trinity College Board of Trustee notes, Learning Corridor publications, Trinity Reporters, and architectural design plans and presentations have also been provided by key persons knowledgeable of the Learning Corridor project such as Scott Reynolds Secretary of Trinity College, Jim Trostle

Director of Urban Initiatives at Trinity College, Jack Dougherty Director of the Educational Studies program at Trinity College, Jackie Mandyck Director of Community and Institutional Relations at Trinity College, and Aura Alverado Special Events Coordinator at the Learning Corridor. Two reports: *A Report on Racial/Ethnic Equity and Desegregation in Connecticut's Public Schools* and *Quality and Integrated Education: Options for Connecticut* were also obtained from the Connecticut State Library. In my analysis of these documents I have reviewed changes in goals, community reaction on the development of the project, and issues that were most importantly publicized and supported by particular groups.

During the implementation phase the historical research was continued by collecting more legislative documents on proposed bills, special acts, and public acts that have and have not passed from 2000 to the present. I also obtained Learning Corridor annual reports for each year since the school has opened. These reports include important information on the early operations of the schools and provide key individuals that were of interest for interviews.

Although the main methods for this project are qualitative and historical research I have also obtained some quantitative data. The quantitative research includes an analysis of application and enrollment data for the Learning Corridor schools and Learning Corridor annual reports on local revenue streams for each magnet school's budget. This information was analyzed with GIS mapping to portray participation from various districts and Excel tables and charts. Application, enrollment, and funding figures are integral to understanding the implementation process and provide greater

insight on participating districts and financial contributions made by various constituency groups.

The combination of interviews, archival documents, and quantitative information provide an understanding of the Learning Corridor's design and how various interest groups collaborated together to support the plan and ultimately implement the Learning Corridor.

## **Interpretation and Analysis**

### Goals and Concerns:

The primary goal of the Learning Corridor was urban renewal, not necessarily education. Providing greater educational opportunities was not the primary goal but one that served as the core of a broader set of interests as asserted by Tim Nee, Principal of the Montessori Magnet School. He noted that "The Learning Corridor wasn't a concept of just these four schools. It's a much broader concept than that. And, I don't think people always appreciate the broader concept".<sup>10</sup> These broader interests were highlighted in the Neighborhood Initiative plans for better housing, home ownership, jobs, streetscape, retail development, family services, and an initiative against crime. Former Trinity College President Evan Dobbelle explained the broader goals stating "when I went into the neighborhood and talked to them, they came up with the same concept that I had. They wanted education, they wanted safe streets, they wanted opportunities."<sup>11</sup> Other goals included appropriate sites for both the pre-existing Montessori and Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, clean-up of the former Broad Street bus garage site, and implementation of the *Sheff v O'Neill* remedies.

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Nee, interview with Nivia Nieves, July 20, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Evan Dobbelle, interview with Nivia Nieves, June 13, 2004.

Additionally, concerns and interests of each constituency group varied based on the group's own personal interests and needs during the design phase. Mayor Eddie Perez notes the diversity of interests among constituency groups as "(Different groups) acted a little bit from self-interest-but also from wanting to do the right thing."<sup>12</sup>

Based on interviews with members from each constituency group, the suburbs were primarily concerned with issues such as brain drain, innovative programs, and support of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* ruling. Former Southington, Connecticut Superintendent of Schools, Lou Saloom, commented on the *Sheff v O'Neill* pressure upon suburban interest groups, stating "Well, clearly the whole issue of racial isolation in Hartford was the prime focus in my mind of what was going on here, and the Learning Corridor to me was an incredibly exciting opportunity to try to bring about a sharing in working together between the suburbs and Hartford."<sup>13</sup>

Members from the Trinity constituency group displayed great concern in implementation of *Sheff v O'Neill* but more importantly in stabilization of a neighborhood in need of revitalization. As Trinity College encountered challenges in attracting students, it became increasingly concerned with stabilizing a neighborhood that Secretary of the College, Scott Reynolds, reported "...was proving to be a detriment to the college in a number of ways."<sup>14</sup> As expected, members of state and regional government groups became primarily concerned with finding ways to implement magnets schools in Hartford due to pressure from *Sheff* plaintiffs.

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<sup>12</sup> McLaughlin, A. "Signs of a comeback for once- Gilded Hartford: The city regains control of its schools" *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Lou Saloom, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 4, 2004

<sup>14</sup> Scott Reynolds, interview with Nivia Nieves, July 21, 2004

### Gaining Support for the Learning Corridor:

The Learning Corridor advocates targeted each group's concerns and interests to encourage the constituency groups to buy into the Learning Corridor. Support was maintained by implementing measures to address the concerns and interests of each group. An example of the Learning Corridor advocates catering to constituency-group interests are half-day programs at the Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science and Greater Hartford Academy of Arts. Former Superintendent of Manchester Public Schools, Alan Beitman, commented strongly on his concern of brain drain and student accountability stating "I am a firm believer it [the magnet schools]... has to stay as a half-day program, because of the accountability issue of test scores. I would not want to lose Manchester students to a...and their abilities to another school district that we were paying tuition for. I like the half-day program, and clearly our students made the adjustments to make it work."<sup>15</sup> The design of half-day programs in both academies is an effort to maintain suburban participation even though this meant greater difficulty in recruiting Hartford students to the programs. Hartford students as seen in the Appendix tables of participation are underrepresented in the GHAA and GHAMAS largely because Hartford parents are more attracted to full-day magnet programs as alternatives to Hartford neighborhood schools.

Learning Corridor advocates were also successful in gaining support for the project by allowing the Hartford community residents to participate in the planning process. Sociologist Willie and Greenblatt note the importance of community participation stating that "...allowing citizens to participate in the planning process will

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Beitman, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 2, 2004

result in greater commitment to the change that will take place.”<sup>16</sup>. *Sheff v O’Neill* plaintiff Elizabeth Horton Sheff also recognized the importance of the open communication with residents stating "...Eddie Perez who was then a part of the Learning Corridor through Trinity and worked a lot with the neighborhood to help the neighborhood understand, to help neighborhood folks understand exactly what was going on, what was being constructed, and what the intent of what the initiative was at that point."<sup>17</sup> This communication was extremely important particularly to neighborhood activists like Edie Lacey who had, in years prior to the Learning Corridor’s implementation, attempted to clean up the site and felt great ownership of the land.

Learning Corridor advocates also utilized key political and community players as high profile representatives for the project to gain support from various constituency groups. This unique collaboration was made successful by each key player’s ability to address his or her own constituency group’s interests and to address the needs of the Hartford community within one comprehensive plan. The collaboration of high profile players such as Joe Townsley, Trinity College, and Eddie Perez helped rally support to affirm that this was a project with promise. Joe Townsley, Former Simsbury Superintendent, represented many of the suburbs. Current Mayor Eddie Perez offered a familiar face for the Hartford neighborhood that eventually made him a respected political figure. The significance of key players in gaining support is best illustrated by Joe Townsley, when he commented on his recruitment to the project: "...he [a peer superintendent] kept saying to me, ‘Joe if Simsbury gets involved, it will bring other districts in’. So, I went to a meeting on the Trinity Campus and learned more about the

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<sup>16</sup> Wille, C.V., Greenblatt S. L. *Community politics and educational change: Ten school systems under court order*. (1981). Pg 17.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Horton Sheff, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 28, 2004

project which we were very excited by. ...I believe Simsbury's reputation as a school system of excellence played a role in convincing other districts that you got to get on board with the planning."<sup>18</sup> Farmington Superintendent Robert Villanova also asserted that Trinity's involvement gained his support: "I was trying to find many ways that would have allowed breakdown of racial, economic, and ethnic isolation for our suburban kids. Any way would have gotten my attention, but to have Trinity be one of the main players really got all of my attention."<sup>19</sup>

The Learning Corridor advocates were also successful in gaining support because the project fit with previous plans or a broader set of interests among different groups. Paula Russo, Trinity College's Vice President for Planning, Administration, and Affirmative Action, commented on how the Learning Corridor project fit with many interests, stating "You know, I don't think the Learning Corridor happened because people decided they needed to have four magnet schools and then looked for a place. I think it happened because people led by Evan [Dobelle (former Trinity College President)] and Trinity mainly wanted to do something in the community that was regarded... as I was saying that would make it more appealing, that would help the residents, that would be education related and this seemed to make sense. And it fit with *Sheff v. O'Neill* and desegregation and it fit with a lot of things and so it just made sense. I think, that's where it came from."<sup>20</sup> Previous school bonds for a language immersion magnet school, neighborhood efforts to get the site cleaned, former Trinity College President Tom Gerety's original plans for a magnet school on the Trinity College

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<sup>18</sup> Joe Townsley, interview with Nivia Nieves, June 23, 2004

<sup>19</sup> Robert Villanova, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 12, 2004

<sup>20</sup> Paula Russo, interview with Nivia Nieves, June 23, 2004

campus, and magnet school legislation for *Sheff v O'Neill* all provided a foundation for the Learning Corridor that made it much easier for the constituency groups to embrace the project.

Additionally, the Learning Corridor probably would have happened regardless of the Sheff plaintiff victory, due to Trinity College plans prior to the 1996 ruling. Plans for the Learning Corridor date back to Tom Gerety's term as President of Trinity College. Tom Gerety first envisioned a language immersion magnet school on the Trinity College campus, he plan was never implemented however the idea of a magnet school remained in the minds of those in charge of finding his successor. The Presidential search for the next Trinity College president was largely based on finding a President who would make Gerety's plan a reality. Although Gerety's plan was initially more simplistic than the Learning Corridor's final realization, it still sought revitalization through Trinity's engagement in the city. The idea of taking on such a project which later became the Learning Corridor was a pre-eminent concept even before financial support was made available for magnet schools through *Sheff vs. O'Neill*. Trinity College administrators and trustees agreed to financially support a magnet school complex months before the 1996 *Sheff* ruling "...Resolved that the Board authorizes the Treasurer in consultation with the President, Physical Plan Committee Chair, and Board Chairman to expend or commit an amount up to \$5.9 million for the purchase of strategic properties to support the plan to help stabilize our neighborhood and create a neighborhood learning initiative. The learning initiative would be the centerpiece of a multifaceted partnership between



public and private entities which seeks to revitalize the neighborhood proximate to Trinity College." <sup>21</sup>

Challenges facing the Learning Corridor:

Ever since the Hartford Magnet Middle School was designed, there have been tensions over who would govern it. Hartford Public School officials' unfamiliarity with running interdistrict magnet schools five years ago led them to contract the Hartford Magnet Middle School [HMMS] to CREC. HMMS carried initial problems with leadership and recruitment of suburban students too overwhelming for a district with its own educational crises. However, because HMMS was to be a Hartford Host Interdistrict Magnet School and not a CREC interdistrict school, like the other three Learning Corridor magnet schools, plans were made during the first operating year in the contract to return the school to Hartford Public School management after three years. Director of Grant divisions, Mark O'Donnell, explained the management change: "The Hartford Magnet Middle School had a really hard time because the first couple of principals were not as aggressive I think about recruiting kids in the suburbs. Tony Amato at the time was the superintendent and when he came in he recognized that CREC had a history of starting up successful magnet schools so he asked CREC to take over both the Montessori school and the Hartford Magnet Middle School for a period of at least three years, which we did." <sup>22</sup> In the future, the three Learning Corridor schools with the exception of HMMS will thereby be run by CREC. Greater funding is a consequence of a school managed as a Hartford Host magnet school under Hartford Public Schools. Mark

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<sup>21</sup> Trinity College Board of Trustee Minutes obtained from Scott Reynolds October 19, 1995

<sup>22</sup> Mark O'Donnell, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 9, 2005

O'Donnell explained the funding increase for HMMS as a Hartford Host rather than interdistrict magnet school, "Hartford has decided to go from an interdistrict magnet to what we call a host magnet system of magnet schools. So...Hartford Middle Magnet School, instead of being just an interdistrict magnet, they get the usual per school per student allotment from the City of Hartford but then they also get extra money from any incoming kids, they get extra state money but they get no sending district money. So, if we have three kids from Glastonbury that go to Hartford Middle Magnet School each of those kids would bring maybe eighty-two hundred dollars which is not as much as if it were an interdistrict magnet but still with the extra Hartford district money which kicks in for each of those kids they have a much easier time with their budget..."<sup>23</sup>. The funding increase in financial support for HMMS as a Host Magnet and the financial momentum from the *Sheff v O'Neill* litigation was also the driving force in changing the school from the Hartford community's much desired neighborhood school to a Hartford Host interdistrict magnet school.

Suburban districts' varying levels of financial support and participation largely contributed to the lack of consistent funding for interdistrict magnet schools. Although some districts may believe that their educational programs are as adequate as the interdistrict magnet school programs, most Superintendents and boards of education have difficulty gaining support for participation in the interdistrict programs due to each sending district's commitment of \$2000 per student. As Hartford Superintendent of Schools Robert Henry explained districts struggle with their own funding issues. He asserted "I think what has been missing probably is a formula that allows for someone

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<sup>23</sup> O'Donnell

either the state, the state department of ed, whatever the case might be, to provide funding for youngsters that are attending the magnet schools and such... districts become concerned about sending students ...and having to pay from their own funds for their youngsters to go on to, in this particular case to the Learning Corridor. Not only are they sending the student but now the dollars are following them, operating a district you obviously [need] what you have plus more. The fact that districts have to pay for youngsters to attend may be part of the reason why there is a reduction or less interest in supporting the youngsters that are attending.’<sup>24</sup> The state legislature’s inability to pass a bill mandating that the sending districts shall provide payment to magnet schools has also contributed greatly to the financial deficits the Learning Corridor and other city wide magnet schools are incurring.

The state legislature’s lack of support in updating the formula for funding interdistrict magnet schools has further contributed to the magnet school financial crises. The Learning Corridor now struggles to meet operational costs for their innovative educational programs and facilities. Mark O’Donnell explained the problem when he stated, "...back to the early [19]90s where they devised...the state legislature devised the funding formula for the magnets. That was based on average per student costs at that time, which was a long time ago... But, as costs have increased over the years and that funding formula has stayed the same.’<sup>25</sup> Joe Townsley also attributed the funding problem to the state formula, stating, "The biggest issue is getting a stream of consistent

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Henry, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 11, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> O’Donnell interview with Nivia Nieves, August 11, 2005

funding from the state. Previous to this year, we got \$5,300. This year it has gone up to \$6,250. The long term commitment from the state is still the real issue."<sup>26</sup>

State and Regional officials hope that implementation issues such as the funding and governing of magnet schools will be resolved with the new wave of legislative support passed on June 30, 2005 in Public Act 05-245 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION IMPLEMENTER PROVISIONS. The act asserts that "... (a) The Department of Education shall establish a task force to study interdistrict magnet schools... (b) The task force shall:

- examine interdistrict magnet school per pupil expenditures and compare such expenditures to the state-wide average local and regional school district per pupil expenditure
- evaluate the adequacy of state grants for the operation of interdistrict magnet schools and transportation grants
- study standard cost sharing by participating school districts
- examine interdistrict magnet school governance, including a comparison of school district-based and regional educational service center-based governance;
- consider projected enrollment commitment standards for state-aided construction and operation of new interdistrict magnet schools"<sup>27</sup>

Mark O'Donnell expressed his excitement for the bill, saying "... we are getting there and we think in the next session the state legislature is going to put some bill forward that provides full funding for magnet schools which will include extended days and an extended year."<sup>28</sup>. State and regional officials hope that this will lead to greater increase in financial support from the legislature.

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<sup>26</sup> Joe Townsley interview with Nivia Nieves, August 30, 2005

<sup>27</sup> An ACT Concerning Education Implementer Provisions. June 30, 2005 PA-05-256.  
<http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgab>

<sup>28</sup> Mark, O'Donnell, interview with Nivia Nieves August 11, 2005.

## Conclusion

Interest groups collectively succeeded in constructing the Learning Corridor and achieving better racial balance than city or suburban schools. The 2001-2002 Learning Corridor Annual Report notes this success, stating that "Magnet schools are diverse by design, drawing from many communities and family backgrounds. With students from over 40 different school districts in the Greater Hartford area...the degree of demographic diversity at the Learning Corridor is unmatched by any other Connecticut public school system."<sup>29</sup> This one, and other reports, base the success of the Learning Corridor upon the fulfillment of criteria for racial and economic integration. Other advocates consider the project a success based upon urban revitalization and note the increase in property value and lower crime rates as evidence of goals achieved. Trinity College also acknowledges that the Learning Corridor has revitalized the immediate neighborhood and has benefited the College's attractiveness, increasing prospective student applications. The Act Concerning Education Implementer Provisions passed on June 30, 2005 makes possible a solution to the funding issues faced by the Learning Corridor. The City of Hartford considers the Learning Corridor to be a success because it has given Hartford Public Schools a model for operating their current host program.

While the aforementioned groups have benefited from the Learning Corridor, Hartford's neighborhood organizations have criticized the project; the organizations are still concerned with the transition of HMMS to a magnet school and would like to see it returned to a neighborhood middle school. While the court order desegregation of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* trial provided the financial momentum for the magnet schools it diluted

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<sup>29</sup> Learning Corridor Annual Report 2001-2002

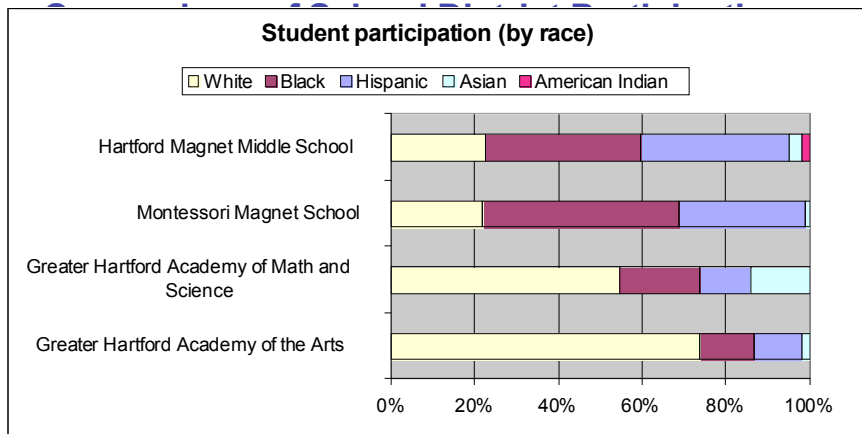
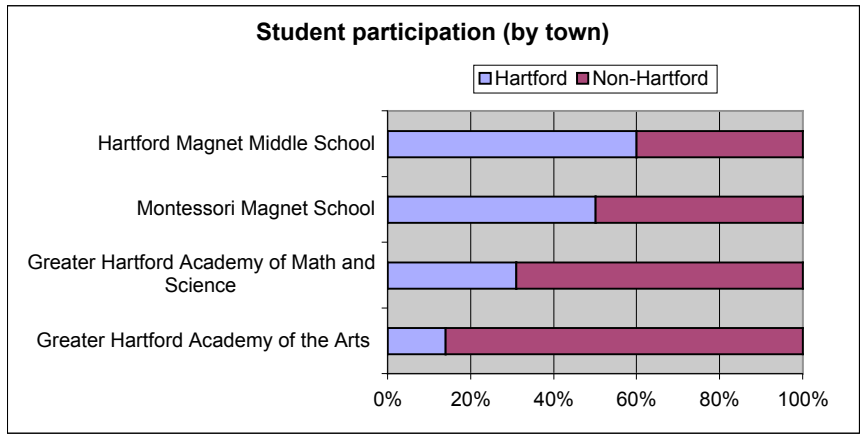
the neighborhood's mission to provide better educational opportunities for neighborhood children. The neighborhood organizations are also fighting to keep community facilities accessible for its residents, a challenge considering recent budget cuts in funds that once fostered community engagement programs. Jackie Mandyck comments on the Learning Corridor's shortcoming as she states, "...as far as being a community asset, I think the Learning Corridor is a community asset and I think it has fallen short because of funding issues to be able to be open more to community groups for its realization. So, I think that is where it has fallen...not falling down but it is just lagging behind."<sup>30</sup>

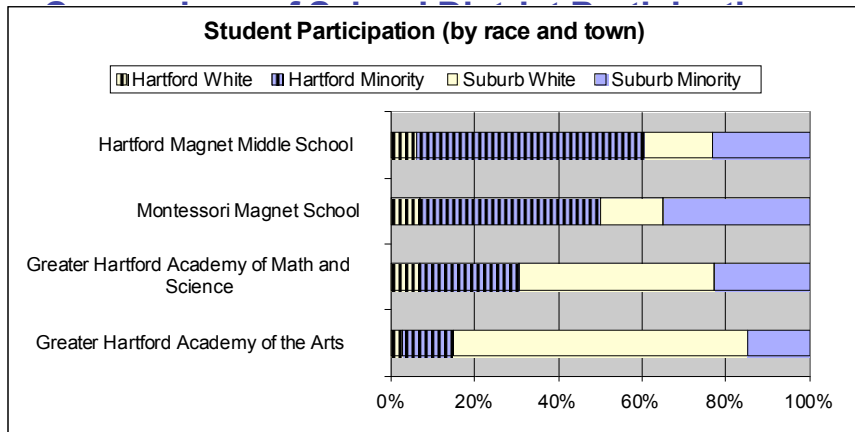
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<sup>30</sup> Jackie Mandyck, interview with Nivia Nieves, August 26, 2005.

Data based on CREC enrollment and application for 2004-2005 school year.

## Comparison of School District Participation in the Learning Corridor, 2005





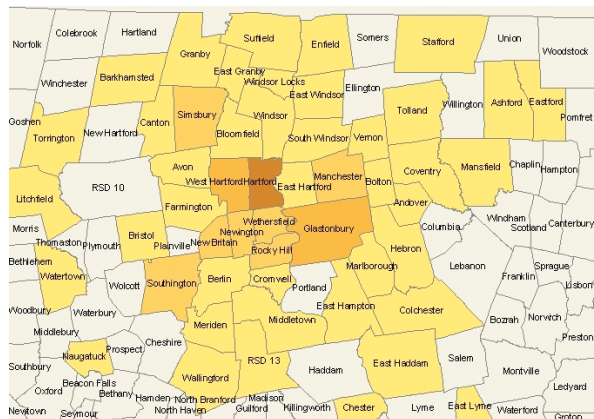
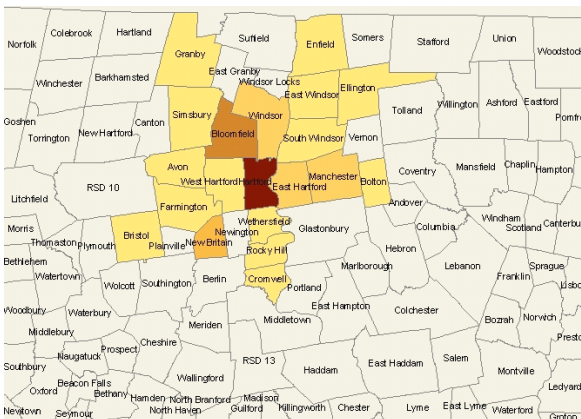
## Comparison of School District Participation in the Learning Corridor, 2005

Percentage of total  
school enrollment

Hartford Magnet Middle School

Greater Hartford

Academy of the Arts





## **Learning Corridor Oral History Project DESIGN Interview Guide July 21, 2004**

### **Before Interview:**

Call to arrange time and place for 45 minute interview

Bring tape/recorder/cassette, camera, guide, two consent forms, and metro Hartford map

### **Beginning the interview:**

The purpose of this interview is to document how different people became involved in the Learning Corridor from the 1990s to the present.

Explain consent form and ask participant to sign TWO copies

### **Origins of the LC**

- 1) To your knowledge, how did the concept of a Learning Corridor first arise? When and where did you first learn about it?
- 2) When and how did you first become involved with the Learning Corridor interdistrict magnet school project?
- 3) What concerns did you have about Hartford and the region in the mid-1990s?
- 4) Did this Learning Corridor idea address your concerns?
- 5) Did you consider any alternatives to the Learning Corridor model?

### **Group Roles**

- 6) What role, if any, did you play with the Learning Corridor during its early years?
- 7) What role, if any, have you played since it has been constructed?
- 8) Which groups or individuals were most influential in shaping the Learning Corridor?
- 9) Did any groups or individuals oppose, or have mixed feelings about, the Learning Corridor?
- 10) I'm going to list different groups of people -- to your knowledge, what actions did they take regarding the Learning Corridor -- and why?

State and regional officials

Southside Institutional Neighborhood Alliance (SINA)

Hartford city and school officials

Hartford neighborhood organizations

Suburban town and school officials

Trinity College

Hartford business groups

### **Objectives over Time**

- 11) We've talked about several aspects of the Learning Corridor. In essence, what were its original objectives?
- 12) Now that the Learning Corridor has been operating, what are its objectives now?
- 13) Has the Learning Corridor fulfilled these objectives?
- 14) Has the Learning Corridor affected you in any way?
- 15) In your opinion, what direction should the Learning Corridor take in the future?

### **Background questions (if needed)**

- 16) Please tell me about the work that you currently do. Have you changed jobs?
- 17) Where do you live? Have you moved since the 1990s?

### **After the Interview:**

Thank participant; Ask permission to take photo; Confirm mailing address

Transcribe tape and post in Docex/Educ folder; deliver tape and consent form to Jack

## **Learning Corridor Oral History Project IMPEM Interview Guide June 28, 2004**

### **Before Interview:**

Call to arrange time and place for 45 minute interview

Bring tape/recorder/cassette, camera, guide, two consent forms, and metro Hartford map

### **Beginning the interview:**

The purpose of this interview is to document how different people became involved in the Learning Corridor from the 1990s to the present.

Explain consent form and ask participant to sign TWO copies

### **START HERE with new interviews; start below with second-round interviews**

#### **Background**

- 1) To your knowledge, how did the concept of a Learning Corridor first arise? When and where did you first learn about it?
- 2) When and how did you first become involved with the Learning Corridor interdistrict magnet school project?

#### **Group Roles**

- 3) What role, if any, did you play with the Learning Corridor during its implementation 2000 to present?
- 4) Which groups or individuals were most influential in implementing the Learning Corridor?
- 5) Did any groups or individuals oppose, or have mixed feelings about, the Learning Corridor during the implementation?
- 6) I'm going to list different groups of people -- to your knowledge, what actions did they take regarding the implementation of the Learning Corridor -- and why?
  - a. State and regional officials
  - b. Southside Institutional Neighborhood Alliance (SINA)
  - c. Hartford city and school officials
  - d. Hartford neighborhood organizations
  - e. Suburban town and school officials
  - f. Trinity College
  - g. Hartford business groups

## **Implementation Guide Continued**

### **START HERE with second-round interviews**

Last summer my interview focused on the design phase of the LC from its origins to 2000, and now I'd like to focus on its implementation during the past five years.

- 1) **Funding** has been a continuing concern for the Learning Corridor magnet schools.
  - What are the underlying causes of the funding problem?
  - Has financial support from different sources changed over time?  
(State legislature? Suburbs? City? Businesses? Foundations?)
  - What are the consequences of these funding problems for the LC?
  
- 2) Another concern has been the degree of **suburban** student participation and suburban district funding in the Learning Corridor magnet schools.
  - Why have there been different levels of support among suburbs? (Examples?)
  
- 3) Since opening in 2000, how has the Learning Corridor **influenced the City** of Hartford? And the immediate neighborhood in particular?
  - Can you tell me more about the "neighborhood zone" lines around the LC, their purpose, and how they were determined?
  - Have the zone changed over time?
  
- 4) The **Hartford Magnet Middle School** has gone through many transitions since opening.
  - First, it shifted from a neighborhood school to an interdistrict magnet school -- how & why did this happen?
  - Second, it has altered between management by CREC and HPS -- how & why did this occur?
  - What have been the consequences of these changes for the neighborhood? and the LC?
  
- 5) Over the past five years, **two organizations** have taken responsibility for managing magnet schools in Hartford: HPS and CREC. Where does the LC stand between the two right now? And in the future?
  
- 6) How would you describe the **goals** of the Learning Corridor today in 2005?
  - To your knowledge, are these the same goals that people who designed the LC had in mind more than five years ago?
  - Of all of the goals that you've mentioned, which ones are being met? And not met?

### **Background questions (if needed)**

- 7) Please tell me about the work that you currently do. Have you changed jobs?
- 8) Where do you live? Have you moved since the 1990s?

### **After the Interview:**

Thank participant; Ask permission to take photo; Confirm mailing address

Transcribe tape and post in Docex/Educ folder; deliver tape and consent form to Jack

**Shaping the Learning Corridor Interdistrict Magnet Schools, 1990-Present  
Interview Consent Form**

Participant's Name :

Participant's Mailing Address:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this Learning Corridor Oral History Interview. In our attempt to fully capture the history of the LC and in consideration of the oral history program of the Trinity College Archives and its objective of documenting Trinity's history through recorded commentary, I hereby give, donate and convey to the Trinity College Archives for administration by the authorities thereof the materials described below.

The tape(s) and the transcript which will be prepared are the result of one or more recorded, voluntary interviews with me. The tape is the primary document, and the transcript is of my spoken word.

In accordance with its regulations and policies, the Trinity College Archives will make available for research purposes the tape or tapes and any accompanying transcript. It is further understood that no copies of the tape(s) or transcript may be made and nothing may be used from them in any published form without the written permission of the Trinity College Archivist.

My participation in this project is entirely voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw at any time before the interviews are deposited in the Trinity College Archives.

A free copy of the transcript will be mailed to the address listed above.

Brief description of interview:

Interview Date:

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Participant's Signature Date

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Interviewer's Signature Date

Accepted: \_\_\_\_\_  
College Archivist Date  
Peter J. Knapp