Latino Politicians, Activists, & Parents: The Challenge of Implementing City-Suburban Magnet Schools

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Literature on politics of magnet schools:

- Magnets often used as incremental voluntary remedy to defuse white resistance to desegregation (Hochschild 1984)

- Magnets sometimes used as public relations tools to bolster faith in school system and disguise inequities (Eaton & Crutcher, 1996)

- Magnets serve multiple (and contradictory) goals: social equity vs. individual family advantage (Metz 1986/2003)

Most of this literature was written in a Black-White context. To what extent does Latino participation make a difference?
Research Questions:

1) Compared to other interest groups, how did Latinos activists & politicians perceive their goals during the design of a magnet school project?

2) How did Latinos and other groups address conflicts that arose during its implementation?
Context:

Hartford, Connecticut: the 2nd poorest major US city, located in the 5th richest metropolitan area

City of Hartford, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White (one race)</td>
<td>33,705</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (one race)</td>
<td>46,264</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (any race)</td>
<td>49,260</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121,578</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does not equal 100%
Source: American FactFinder, US Census

Hartford Public Schools, 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,174</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9,016</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11,877</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22,296</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Strategic School Profile, CT Dept of Ed
The Learning Corridor:

$126 million complex of four inter-district magnets

- Montessori (preK-5)
- Middle School (6-8)
- Math & Sci Acad (9-12)
- Arts Academy (9-12)
- Trinity College
Sources & Methods:

- Archival documents
  from Learning Corridor design phase (1990s-2000)
  and implementation phase (2000-present)

- Interviews with 29 participants from 5 interest groups in the Learning Corridor political process
  - City of Hartford
  - Suburban towns
  - Trinity College
  - State Government
  - Learning Corridor administrators
Theme 1: Building the Magnet School Coalition: 
A Story of Converging Interests

State officials
- promoted voluntary magnet plan to comply with 
vague desegregation mandate of 1996 Sheff ruling

Trinity College
- sought urban renewal project to counter 
effects of inner-city decline on admissions

Southside neighborhood activists
- lobbied for better educational 
resources and “hope” for local youth
Initially, the coalition agreed that one of the four schools would be a neighborhood middle school.

But continuing *Sheff* litigation pressured the State, which responded by creating more financial incentives for interdistrict magnet schools.

Months before opening, Supt Amato transformed the neighborhood school into Hartford Magnet Middle School and local activists felt “betrayed.”
Learning Corridor administrators sought to resolve dispute with neighborhood activists by creating special magnet school privileges: a neighborhood attendance zone and weighted lottery.
Theme 4: Measuring “Success” for Magnet Schools
Depends on How Goals are Defined

State officials
- magnet schools more integrated than city or suburban schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student enrollment by Race, 2004-05</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Hartford Academy of Arts (GHAA)</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Hartford Academy of Math &amp; Sci (GHAMAS)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montessori Magnet School (MMS)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford Magnet Middle School (HMMS)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trinity College
- successful urban renewal project reversed admissions decline

Southside neighborhood activists
- fewer seats than expected in new schools for local youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LCorridor enrollment, by Residency, 2004-05</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Hartford</th>
<th>Pct Hartford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Hartford Academy of Arts (GHAA)</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Hartford Academy of Math &amp; Sci (GHAMAS)</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montessori Magnet School (MMS)</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford Magnet Middle School (HMMS)</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>1447</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Only 2.5% of total Hartford enrollment
- Perhaps less than half of these from Southside
Conclusion: Trapped by *Sheff*

*S Heather* became a two-edged blade:

– Initially created political and financial incentives for Learning Corridor coalition to come together

– But State pressure to create voluntary magnets diluted educational resources for Hartford youth, particularly in the Southside Latino neighborhood that many thought the Learning Corridor was intended to serve

“This is where the Learning Corridor has not worked well. . . That piece of it sort of got trapped by *Sheff*. . . We indeed do less education for the community around us than we wanted to do initially.”

-- Kevin Sullivan, State Legislator & Trinity Vice-President
Comparison of School District Participation in the Learning Corridor, 2005

Hartford Magnet Middle School

Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

Percentage of total school enrollment:
- 0
- 0.1 - 2.5
- 2.5 - 5
- 5 - 10
- 10 - 20
- 20 - 40
- 40 - 65