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Spring 2017

### Community Perceptions of Resource Inequities in Hartford's District and Magnet Schools

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# Community Perceptions of Resource Inequities in Hartford's District and Magnet Schools

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December 2016

## Introduction

There is a long history of school segregation in metropolitan Hartford region and for years most children in the city have been attending schools that are inferior to the schools attended by children in the wealthier suburbs. However, in 1989 this practice was challenged by a group of parents who sought to ensure that all children have the chance to attend racially integrated public schools. *Sheff v. O'Neill* is known as the landmark Connecticut Supreme Court case that ruled that segregation based on race and ethnicity in Hartford schools was a violation of the Connecticut constitutional rights of Hartford schoolchildren.<sup>1</sup> However, even armed with this ruling, many Hartford children who are not enrolled in interdistrict magnet schools or open choice schools still receive an unequal education compared to their suburban peers.

Fast forward many years, the public schools that Hartford children currently attend look very different than they did when this ruling came out. Today, about 12,500 students attend district schools around the city and about 8,900 students attend magnet schools.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a small percentage of students attend schools in suburban districts as part of the “Open Choice” process. However, that does not mean that all students in the city are attending equal schools. In fact, new data has shown that 54% of Hartford students are still attending segregated schools.<sup>3</sup> This is where my research project comes in. As an educational studies student in Hartford with an interest in school desegregation, I wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Sheff, Elizabeth Horton. Oral history interview on *Sheff v. O'Neill* (with video) by Candace Simpson for the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools Project, July 28, 2011. Available from the Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford Connecticut (<http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp/>).

<sup>2</sup> Hartford Schools Data. Compiled (with type manually inserted) by Jack Dougherty on 7 Dec 2016 from CSDE <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Jacqueline Rabe. "New Data: Majority of Hartford Schools Still Segregated; Some Progress made." <http://ctmirror.org/2016/12/01/new-data-majority-of-hartford-schools-still-segregated-some-progress-made/>. *The CT Mirror*, 1 Dec. 2016, Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

to investigate how this case has affected students on a local level, specifically in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood in Hartford. Therefore, the research presented in this project address two overarching questions: Do Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) members and neighborhood residents perceive the resource inequities in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks district and magnet schools in similar ways? How do NRZ members perceive policy created to address these differences?

When specifically examining the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood in Hartford, perceptions of the resources inequities in the district and magnet schools differed between NRZ members and neighborhood residents. In fact, randomly-selected neighborhood residents tended to believe that the schools closest to where they lived were generally the best schools in the neighborhood. By contrast, NRZ members tended to view the resource differences from more comprehensive viewpoints and believed that magnet schools are the most resourced and able to provide students with better educational experiences. As a result of these different views, there are contradictory perceptions about equity within the schools in the neighborhood, which leads to frustration for neighborhood residents with the Hartford public school district. Although neighborhood residents were unsure about what caused resource differences between district and magnet schools, NRZ members had a more sophisticated understanding of the underlying policies. Furthermore, NRZ members believe that policy initiatives like the *Sheff v. O'Neill* remedies and Equity 2020, which were originally created to make education more equitable for Hartford students, now contribute to inequities between Hartford students.

## How Hartford Got Here: A Look at Sheff v. O'Neill

Hartford schools are made up of a mix of district, magnet, charter, technical and private schools, which serve over 24,600 students. While about 16,500 students attend Hartford Public Schools, another 8,000 students attend other public and private schools not run by Hartford Public Schools.<sup>4</sup> The district schools are what were once called “neighborhood schools” and are what most would consider typical elementary, middle, and high schools, while the magnet schools serve a mix of Hartford and suburban students and typically have a special theme and approach to coursework. This mixture of schools is due to the Connecticut Supreme Court case, *Sheff v. O'Neill* that called for court-ordered school desegregation in the state. This case was filed on the basis that Hartford children, who were overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic, were receiving an unfair public education because of the racial and socioeconomic segregation that separates the city from the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> The suit looked to desegregate the Hartford public school system and lead plaintiff, Elizabeth Horton Sheff worked tirelessly along with a team of lawyers to ensure that children in Connecticut would have access to equal schooling. While the case was filed in April of 1989, after a long and arduous journey in court, in July of 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that segregation based on race and ethnicity in Hartford schools was a violation of the Connecticut constitutional rights of Hartford schoolchildren.<sup>6</sup> Along with this ruling, the court ordered the executive branch of the Connecticut General Assembly to execute its

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<sup>4</sup> "Equity 2020 News" *Hartford Public Schools*, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/equity-2020-news-2/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> *Sheff v. O'Neill* complaint (Connecticut Superior Court 1989). Available from the Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, Connecticut (<http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu>).

<sup>6</sup> Sheff, Elizabeth Horton. Oral history interview on *Sheff v. O'Neill* (with video) by Candace Simpson for the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools Project, July 28, 2011. Available from the Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford Connecticut (<http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp/>).

findings. However, the fight did not end there for the plaintiffs who continuously worked towards ensuring equal education for Connecticut kids.

The process towards ensuring equal schools for Hartford schoolchildren has been long and challenging. After the initial 1996 ruling, there have been many subsequent court hearings to set provisions to desegregate the Hartford schools. In 2003, Superior Court Judge Julia Aurigemma approved a settlement that included a goal of having 30 percent of Hartford minority students in reduced-isolation schools, schools that were determined to be between 25 to 75 percent minority, by 2007. In 2007 this settlement expired without meeting its goal.<sup>7</sup> The plaintiffs brought this case back to court and again negotiations began for a second settlement, which ended in June of 2008 and called for the building of more magnet schools in the Hartford suburbs and expanding the number of openings for Hartford children in suburban public schools. The idea to build magnet schools in the city came about as a way to attract suburban students to the city schools. These schools are typically located in newly built buildings and have specialized coursework and themes. Throughout the city, they are regarded as high quality schools for students, both from the cities and suburbs. However, recently, the state of Connecticut has refused to build any additional magnet schools, the primary method for desegregating schools, even though less than 50% of Hartford students have been given a seat in one of these schools. In fact, Connecticut Governor Daniel Malloy has recently said that the state is under no obligation to move past the current level of integration in the schools even though more than half of Hartford students still suffer “from the devastating effects that racial and ethnic isolation,

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<sup>7</sup> Eaton, Susan. *The children in room E4: American education on trial*. Algonquin Books, 2009.

as well as poverty, have on their education.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to this, over 6,000 Hartford families applied to leave their district schools this past year and thousands of those families were not offered a seat in a magnet school. Hartford Public Schools Board of Education Member Robert Cotto Jr. says that he sees “frustration with why their children can’t attend schools like the magnet schools, which are relatively better-resourced and racially and economically diverse schools. This frustration is, in part, the result of troubled state implementation of this desegregation program.”<sup>9</sup> This leaves open the question of how the state proposes to uphold every Connecticut child’s constitutional right of having access to a quality education when racial and socioeconomic isolation still occurs in Hartford and there are no additional resources from the city or state being provided anytime in the future.

### **The School Choice System**

Currently, there are several different types of school options for families in Hartford. These include magnet schools, district schools, charter schools, and open choice schools. Families take part in the optional school choice lottery, which allows them to have the choice for what schools their children attend. There are two lotteries that parents take part in: the Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) lottery for city-suburban magnet schools and city-suburban “open Choice” transfers, and the Hartford Public Schools (HPS) district choice lottery for non-magnet, or what many call “neighborhood schools. It is important to understand that Hartford Public Schools plays a role in both lotteries as Hartford manages

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, Jacqueline Rabe. "New Data: Majority of Hartford Schools Still Segregated; Some Progress made." <http://ctmirror.org/2016/12/01/new-data-majority-of-hartford-schools-still-segregated-some-progress-made/>. *The CT Mirror*, 1 Dec. 2016, Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Cotto, Robert, Jr. "Hartford-Area Parents Get Results of School Choice Lotteries: Joy and Frustration." *Cities, Suburbs & Schools Project at Trinity College*, 23 May 2016, <http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp/2016/05/23/hartford-area-parents-get-results/>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

about half of the city-suburban magnet schools in the RSCO lottery, yet it also runs a separate, lower-stakes district-choice lottery for most of the other schools. While this process can be very confusing and overwhelming for parents, this is part of the way that the city has worked to meet the reduced-isolation goals for Hartford schools. The Hartford Region Open Choice Program (Open Choice) offers students in Hartford the opportunity to attend non-magnet district schools in suburban communities and suburban students the opportunity to attend non-magnet district schools in Hartford. Currently, there are about 2,300 Open Choice students who attend schools in suburban schools around Hartford.<sup>10</sup> However, this process has become very competitive and there are many students who are not granted seats into these schools year after year. Equally as competitive is the lottery for magnet schools, which offers limited seats to students from Hartford and suburban communities. If students do not receive seats in either open choice schools or a magnet school inside the city, they will then attend a district school. Even though all students will be guaranteed a seat in a school in the city, this does not necessarily mean that students will receive spots in their first choice schools or any of the schools in which they chose to apply. Because of this, the school choice lottery has created a lot of anxiety for many families as competition to get into schools has grown.

### **Approaching Equity: Understanding Equity 2020**

Unequal schools have long been a problem in the city of Hartford and in an attempt to remedy this problem and create equitable schools, a new initiative was proposed in 2016 called Equity 2020. Hartford Public Schools superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez appointed the Equity 2020 Advisory Committee and charged them with the task of helping

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<sup>10</sup> "Explore." *Hartford Public Schools*, [www.hartfordschools.education/enroll/explore](http://www.hartfordschools.education/enroll/explore). Accessed 16 Oct. 2016.



the district reach educational equity for all students in the district with the primary focus on the district's strategic operating plan.<sup>11</sup> The Equity 2020 Advisory Committee is composed of parents, teachers, principals, and community leaders in consultation with independent consultants. The group has been working together to help the district develop a plan that connects facilities, geography, academic alignment and school choice to maximize resources and opportunities for students. Once the plan is developed, the group will deliver recommendations to the Board of Education. The overall goal of this initiative is to ensure that every child is educated in a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment, however, there has been a lot of debate as to whether this goal will actually be met.<sup>12</sup> First off, shortly after Superintendent Narvaez developed this plan, she announced her resignation and a search for a new superintendent has since begun. In addition, after months of meetings with consultants, proposals have been made public which include plans for consolidations and closures of schools in the city, many of which have created frustrations amongst teachers, administrators and parents.<sup>13</sup> To add to this frustration, these plans did not include input from schools or community members. However, since the plans were released all Equity 2020 Advisory Committee Meetings have been cancelled and the process has been suspended until the Board of Education decides the next steps, meaning that the community will continue to speculate about what is going to happen to the schools in the district, especially those up for consolidation or closure.<sup>14</sup>

### **How Essential are School Resources to Student Success?**

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<sup>11</sup> "Equity 2020 News" *Hartford Public Schools*, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/equity-2020-news-2/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2016.

<sup>12</sup> *Ib. Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ib. Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ib. Id.*

The intersection of school funding, desegregation and student achievement is complex, especially in the case of Hartford. Yet even so, school funding plays a large part in the resources available to students, many of which have been proven to improve achievement in school. For example, Greenwald et al. (1996) looked at the effect of school resources on student achievement by performing a meta-analysis of sixty primary research studies from various school districts. This larger study found that school resources are systematically related to student achievement and that these relationships are large enough to be educationally important.<sup>15</sup> Smaller schools and smaller classes are positively related to student achievement and in addition, resource variables that attempt to describe the quality of teachers (teacher ability, teacher education, and teacher experience) show a very strong relationship with student achievement (Greenwald et al. 1996). While several quantitative researchers, including Greenwald et al., have examined the causal relationship between school resources and student achievement, my study concentrates primarily on community perceptions about these resources. My project complements the work of Greenwald et al. because it seeks to understand how these different levels of resources are affecting students and looks at structure of the schools as a way to understand why these different types of schools in the same neighborhood have different levels of achievement and resources, even though they are a part of the same school district. However, my project differs from the work of Greenwald et al. because I have used an interview and field note based methodology instead of using other research studies as the basis for my project and looks past their work to incorporate perceptions from different groups on the importance of these resources.

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<sup>15</sup> Greenwald, Rob, Larry V. Hedges, and Richard D. Laine. "The effect of school resources on student achievement." *Review of educational research* 66.3 (1996): 361-396.

As evident in the study above, resources are important for student achievement, yet in order to have adequate amounts of resources for students, there must be sufficient funding for the schools. Researchers Posner and Vandell (1999) examine the beneficial effects of after-school programs for low-income children. Their study looks at 216 low-income children and determines whether formal after-school programs were associated with low income children's social and academic functioning. These were students from the Milwaukee Public School District and selected questionnaires and surveys were used to measure family environment and parenting styles and interviews were performed with the parents and children to learn about their overall feelings of their after-school programs. In addition, parents participated in a self-care checklist that measured their perceptions of their children's readiness for self-care and neighborhood safety. Although Posner and Vandell used simple surveys to measure parent perceptions of schooling, my study included in-depth interviewing to understand how both neighborhood residents and NRZ members perceived resource differences in ways that could not be captured on a checklist. Lastly, student achievement was measured using report card grades, teacher ratings of child behavior and standardized tests for reading performance. Posner and Vandell's study found that formal after-school programs are one way to alleviate some of the negative effects of urban poverty on children.<sup>16</sup> These after-school programs provide students with experiences and activities that enhanced their development and school achievement. This research is extremely important for my study since the close examination of students in one school district is similar to the work I will be doing for my project, yet I will be narrowing my focus even further by looking at one specific group of neighborhoods in

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<sup>16</sup> Posner, Jill K., and Deborah Lowe Vandell. "Low-Income Children's After-School Care: Are There Beneficial Effects of After-School Programs?." *Child development* 65.2 (1994): 440-456.

Hartford. In addition to this, after-school programs are an important part of school resources, especially for urban communities, where parents often rely on these programs not only for the academic benefits they can bring their children. Access to quality afterschool programs has proved to be an important issue in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood and community members are often concerned that there are not enough afterschool programs for their students to participate in. While there is a broad range of types of after school programs, which can range from child care programs to sports to academic enrichment programs, the benefits of these programs have been proven and they are something that parents in the neighborhood feel are important for their children to participate in. In addition to this, the methodology of Posner and Vandall's study is especially important for my project because they too sought to examine parent perceptions in order to fully understand these programs, which is something that is not part of many research studies on this topic and something I will be looking into in depth for my project.

In addition to having adequate resources in all schools, having access to resources before children enter the public school system is a good indicator of how well they will be able to perform when entering Kindergarten and how essential resources will be for these children in the public school system. Katie Martin's study on neighborhoods in Hartford provides a direct compliment to my research for this reason. Her study on how neighborhoods in which children live influence their ability to learn, thrive and succeed uses the 2009 needs assessment conducted in Hartford to identify neighborhoods with

high risk factors for children.<sup>17</sup> These risk factors can include high poverty rates and low graduation rates from high school, but also community assets that can foster child development. While the goal of this report was to identify neighborhoods that would benefit from increased services and programs that schools, community agencies, and local officials can work together to implement, it will be useful for my project to understand exactly how the Southwest and Behind the Rocks neighborhoods are performing compared to other areas of the city and how this neighborhood can improve. Based on the research in this assessment, both the Southwest and Behind the Rocks neighborhoods educational achievement has improved since the 2009 risk assessment was conducted in part due to the percentage of students scoring proficient on the CMT exams.<sup>18</sup> However, when using the 2016 Educational Development Index (EDI) published by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, between 25 to 38 percent of children living in the Southwest and Behind the Rocks neighborhoods were categorized as vulnerable by their kindergarten teachers when looking at factors such as communication skills, emotional maturity, language and cognition, physical health, and social competence.<sup>19</sup> This statistic shows that when entering Kindergarten a significant percentage of students in the neighborhood were categorized as vulnerable and would benefit from resources in their schools for many of the reasons mentioned in the above research in addition to helping solve some of the issues that these children are facing in the neighborhood as reported in the EDI and Needs Assessment report. These results also show that there may be a relationship between neighborhood

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<sup>17</sup> Martin, Katie S., Ph.D. "Hartford Neighborhood Assessment: Factors Impacting Student & Family Success." *Hartford Public Schools*, Mar. 2013, [https://www.hartfordschools.org/files/Hartford\\_Neighborhood\\_Assessment\\_v\\_3\\_041813.pdf](https://www.hartfordschools.org/files/Hartford_Neighborhood_Assessment_v_3_041813.pdf) Accessed 16 Oct. 2016.

<sup>18</sup> *Ib. Id.*

<sup>19</sup> "Hartford Foundation for Public Giving: Investing in Early Childhood." *Hartford Foundation for Public Giving*, Jan. 2015, [www.hfpg.org/files/9814/3645/2152/EDI-report2015-final.pdf](http://www.hfpg.org/files/9814/3645/2152/EDI-report2015-final.pdf). Accessed 16 Oct. 2016.

resources and vulnerability in schools which furthers the point that schools need to have adequate levels of resources in order to combat neighborhood vulnerability. While many of the resources described in the EDI are developed outside of classrooms and schools, when dealing with students who can be classified as vulnerable, there is a need to provide resources that will help develop these skills in schools as well, something that is important to examine in my research. Both of these reports are unique because they examine Hartford and the specific neighborhoods that I will be researching in my project. While it is rare to find previous research done on these neighborhoods, these reports can help to inform my research because they provide background on the general standings of the neighborhood and the children attending the schools.

While there is very little research done specifically about Hartford and the Behind the Rocks/Southwest neighborhoods, there is a plethora of research that shows the relationship between resources and school achievement. My project is different and important because instead of looking at the specific relationship between these two traits, I look at how resources play out in two different types of schools in the city and what this means for the community. The community perceptions of the differences in resources in these two types of schools is the most important piece of this project because it shows how the complex intersection of desegregation and school funding has left students these Hartford neighborhoods in a difficult place. In addition, an in-depth look at the policy created to address these inequalities and perceptions surrounding these policy initiatives provides a unique view that, to my knowledge, has not been included in past research on this topic.

## **Methodology**

As a researcher interested in gaining access to local groups of people, I knew it was important to form relationships with my community partner, the Southwest/Behind the Rocks NRZ. Before beginning my project, I knew that these relationships were going to be key to gaining access to the residents in the neighborhood and learning about the different resources in the neighborhood schools. As a city, Hartford is home to a complicated public school system and I wanted to understand community perceptions to get a more robust picture of the resource inequities in the schools. However, hearing these perceptions solely from the NRZ members would not be representative of the entire neighborhood, which is why I chose to include two different groups of residents. In addition, I chose to focus on one specific neighborhood in Hartford, Southwest/Behind the Rocks, because I believed that I would be able to collect the richest data by narrowing my focus and devoting all my resources to one specific neighborhood. To begin this project, I attended NRZ Education Committee meetings in April 2016 and met with committee members to learn about how I could make this project as useful for the group as possible. With their input, I designed a project that involves multiple methodologies.

To complete this project, I primarily did qualitative research in the form of interviews and field notes. I chose this method because my research involves community perceptions and learning from members of the community was most effective for getting the data needed for my project. My first set of data came from my field notes taken at monthly Education Committee and general community NRZ meetings, dating back to April 2016. These notes were analyzed and coded for common themes and make up a large portion of the NRZ and neighborhood perceptions data. In addition, I interviewed NRZ

Education Committee members and neighborhood residents to find out in detail about their perceptions of the resource inequities between the schools in their neighborhood.

In order to learn about the neighborhood perceptions, I chose select streets in the SW/Behind the Rocks neighborhood and performed door-to-door interviews in Fall 2016 that asked people questions about their feelings on the schools in the neighborhood. To get a random selection of streets to interview residents, I made a list of all streets in the Southwest and Behind the Rocks neighborhoods, which totaled 93 streets. I then removed all non-residential streets and highways, which brought the total number of streets down to 64. From there, I numbered each street and used a random number generator to determine which streets I would go to in order to interview residents. I will not be using street names since I need to maintain anonymity. While not everyone on each street was willing to be interviewed, able to participate in interviews because of language skills, or home, I compensated for this by simply going to the next resident or neighborhood. Once I finished collecting data on a street, I used the random number generator again to select a street. In the end, I held twenty-five interviews with neighborhood residents on seven different streets in SW/Behind the Rocks. The interviews ranged in length from three to ten minutes and were conducted outside of people's homes. These twenty-five participants ranged in age and all had or currently have children or grandchildren who attend a Hartford Public School. Over half had also attended a Hartford Public School themselves.

Interviews with both NRZ Education Committee members and neighborhood residents were similar as all participants were asked the same questions in order to maintain some consistency in answers. Participants were asked about the differences in resources in the schools in the neighborhoods and their perceptions of the best and worst



schools. I structured all questions to be purposely open-ended in order to not sway participant's definitions of resources or their perceptions of the best and worst schools. I also realize that many of the NRZ members have various roles in the neighborhood (ex. parents, teachers, residents) and many of the people whom I identify as simply just neighborhood residents could hold these roles as well, which is why it is best to keep consistent with the types of questions I am asking. I have included my interview guide in the appendix for reference.

The last part of my data collection analyzes primary source documents, which include court cases, specifically the *Sheff v. O'Neill* complaint and Equity 2020 public documents. In addition, I analyzed public school documents, such as the school strategic profiles of the specific schools in the SW/Behind the Rocks neighborhood, and looked at data and thematic patterns. Not only did these primary source documents provide context and background information for my project, but they were also be important for providing statistical information that can be used to backup claims made about the schools by both neighborhood residents and NRZ residents. It is my goal for this project to report that most accurate and updated information possible and ensuring that I have documents to back up claims made in interviews is essential to the success of this report.

### ***Ensuring Ethical Research***

In order to maintain anonymity and protect people's privacy, I have chosen to only use verbal consents for my project so that people's names will not need to be documented. In addition, I submitted an IRB application and was approved by the institutional review board that insures that I am protecting people's personal information and not putting them at risk. I have also completed the CITI ethics training and will be sure to follow all

confidentiality guidelines in my application to maintain people’s privacy. While I have not promised anonymity to the NRZ, I will not be using members’ names as some members have expressed concerns about their identities being public. My application also does not require me to omit the names of the schools in my project.

**Southwest/Behind the Rocks Neighborhood**

The Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood is located in the southwestern corner of the city. It is home to about 16,000 residents and has one of the larger school aged populations in the city.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the neighborhood has eight schools, four district,

three magnet and one technical high school, which serves students ranging from pre-school age to high school. The district schools in the neighborhood are: Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan School, McDonough Expeditionary Learning School, L.W. Batchelder Elementary and E.B. Kennelly School. The magnet schools are: Environmental Sciences at Mary Hooker, Breakthrough Magnet School and Montessori Magnet School. The technical high school is A.I Prince



Tech, however, this school was not a part of this study. The Southwest/Behind the Rocks NRZ is a group of neighborhood residents that have the ultimate goal of making the neighborhood the best it can be for all residents. It is made up of an executive committee of

<sup>20</sup> "Southwest/Behind the Rocks." *Hartfordinfo.org*, www.hartfordinfo.org. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

leaders as well as sub-committees that focus on topics like education. The NRZ helps keep neighborhood residents informed of important issues affecting the neighborhood and is also a voice for the neighborhood when dealing with the city of Hartford. Working with the NRZ on this project was very informative and provided a lot of insight on important issues that neighborhoods in Hartford deal with and the challenges of dealing with the bureaucracy of the city.

### **Emergence of Themes: School Programming**

In the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood, the availability of quality programming/programs in all schools has been a contentious issue. It has become increasingly apparent that there are not equal opportunities and availability of programs in both district and magnet in the neighborhood and when attending meetings with the Southwest/Behind the Rocks NRZ, there have been many conversations revolving around this issue with parents, teachers, and neighborhood residents. One of the starkest contrasts in school programming/programs are the various themes and programs that take place at the magnet schools. For example, Montessori Magnet School has a specialized theme and curriculum that students engage in and Environmental Science at Mary Hooker (Mary Hooker) students are consistently immersed in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) studies. To carry out these curriculums and themes in their classrooms, these two magnet schools have used their funds to provide additional resources for their students. For example, ESMH has resident scientists who work in the school in order to assist teachers with lessons and provide hands on experiences for the students. The Montessori curriculum largely focuses on student learning as a process and allows students to learn at their own pace. In order to facilitate this type of learning, this school has

multiple teachers in a classroom in order to assist students. While this type of support might be essential to properly facilitate the Montessori curriculum, this is an additional salary in each classroom that the school supports, something that not all other schools have the luxury of doing. In addition, supporting resident scientists and other experts specific to one school is a luxury that most other schools in the neighborhood cannot afford and therefore do not have access to.

It is important to note that district schools in the neighborhood also have specific curricular themes, but not the additional resources that interdistrict magnet schools receive. For example, the Moylan School is formally known as Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan School (ELAMS), and the sole middle school in the neighborhood, McDonough, is formally known as McDonough Expeditionary Learning School (McDonough). However, it has become increasingly apparent that these formal labels do not have as much of an emphasis on the curriculum when it comes to district schools. While attending NRZ meetings where neighborhood residents and teachers often came together to discuss their schools, there have been at least a dozen occasions where phrases like “our curriculum does not provide us many resources” or “even though we have a theme, we do not get any additional resources which means we don’t do much with expeditionary learning” have come up in conversation. Teachers and neighborhood residents often claimed that the themes in the district schools were ways to make the schools more marketable, yet failed to successfully enrich the curriculum for students.

Because Hartford Public Schools is made up of a mix of district and magnet schools and families are able to choose which schools they would like to attend, marketing themed curriculums has become very popular as a way to attract students to schools. While most

magnet schools in the city are often accompanied by themed curriculums and the additional resources to support these themes, district schools have seen this phenomenon play out quite differently. In fact, both Moylan (ELAMS) and McDonough are marketed by Hartford Public Schools as having specific expeditionary learning curriculums that allow students to use their city and the world around them as their classroom. When exploring the ELAMS marketing blurb on Hartford Public Schools website, readers are told that this is a “school where students engage in a rigorous curriculum and participate in learning expeditions, case studies, conversations with community experts, fieldwork, service learning, and exhibitions of student work.”<sup>21</sup> The same is true for McDonough, which is portrayed as a school where “students engage in in-depth learning through interdisciplinary, project-based units of study.”<sup>22</sup> While these themes sound impressive to an outsider, when listening to teachers and community residents, time and again they stressed that while these may be the goals of the schools, the focus on preparing for standardized tests has forced these schools to move away from some of these principles and focus more on basic curriculum that will prepare students for the spring testing season. By contrast, at magnet schools, parents often stress how their children’s curriculum is enriched with additional programs, like the resident science program or a character building program, that allow teachers in these schools to supplement traditional learning and students to gain a more robust education because of the diverse learning opportunities provided.

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<sup>21</sup> "Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan School (ELAMS)" *Hartford Public Schools*, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/enroll/school-directory-2/expeditionary-learning-academy-at-moylan-school-elams/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> "McDonough Expeditionary Learning School (MELS)" *Hartford Public Schools*, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/enroll/school-directory-2/mcdonough-expeditionary-learning-school-mels/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2016.

Even though Hartford Public Schools have implemented robust marketing plans to attract families to both magnet and district schools, it is impossible to overlook the fact that even though both types of schools are marketed as having impressive themed curriculums, there are still vast achievement differences between district and magnet schools. In fact, when examining the school strategic profiles and standardized test results for the schools in the neighborhood, of the schools with results available, the district school Batchelder were categorized as one of the lowest performing schools in the city and McDonough and Kennelly were considered two of the worst performing schools in the city. However, when looking at the standardized test score categories for the magnet schools, Mary Hooker was categorized as progressing, the second best category for schools and Breakthrough was considered transitioning which means their scores have steadily been increasing. To complement these categorizations of the schools in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood, below are two charts that break down the most recent Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) results from the 2015 school year. These charts are separated by English Language Arts (ELA) and Math and percentages depict the percentage of students meeting or exceeding achievement level. Montessori Magnet School is not included in these charts as they did not have students who took the exam and the yellow blocks are for schools that did not have students in those grades.

	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 5 ELA	Grade 6 ELA	Grade 7 ELA	Grade 8 ELA
Environmental Sciences at Mary Hooker	48.33%	51.67%	54.10%	36.21%	46.55%	27.73%
Breakthrough Magnet School	40.63%	59.38%	54.76%	46.88%	20.00%	40.00%
Batchelder	20%	13.95%	10.81%	8.89%	6.00%	14.29%
Kennelley	23.60%	16.46%	21.21%	32.61%	11.11%	NO DATA
Moylan	25.56%	14.29%	21.74%			
McDonough				9.76%	15.52%	14.77%

	Grade 3 Math	Grade 4 Math	Grade 5 Math	Grade 6 Math	Grade 7 Math	Grade 8 Math
Environmental Sciences at Mary Hooker	43.33%	43.33%	34.43%	29.31%	48.28%	27.12%
Breakthrough Magnet School	31.25%	40.63%	19.05%	28.13%	16.67%	33.33%
Batchelder	8.00%	6.98%	5.41%	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
Kennelley	20.22%	NO DATA	5.97%	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
Moylan	12.22%	6.98%	NO DATA			
McDonough				7.32%	NO DATA	NO DATA

SBAC Achievement Levels Comparison 2015. Source: Hartford Courant<sup>23</sup>

When comparing the schools in the neighborhood academically, it is clear that there is a wide discrepancy in the achievement levels of students on standardized tests. On both the ELA and Math tests, students in magnet schools, which are denoted in green, performed better than district school students in every grade. In some cases, percentages of students meeting or exceeding the achievement level set by the state was almost double that of district schools. While it was harder to make conclusions on the math data because many of the district schools did not have score information readily available, it is still possible to see that many Connecticut residents believe that magnet school resources automatically raise student achievement and therefore strive to be admitted into these higher-status schools. However, there is no clear evidence in Hartford that magnet schools themselves dramatically boost test scores. That being said, when looking at the school performance data it is obvious, even to an outsider, that the schools that have more resources for students are the schools that are performing better on their exams, which makes it

<sup>23</sup> Busemeyer, Stephen, and Matthew Kauffman. "How Did Your School Do On The Connecticut SBAC?" *Hartford Courant*, 27 Aug. 2015, [www.courant.com/education/hc-how-did-your-school-do-on-the-sbac-20150827-htmlstory.html](http://www.courant.com/education/hc-how-did-your-school-do-on-the-sbac-20150827-htmlstory.html). Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

understandable that CT residents would therefore believe that these schools provide better academic opportunities for students.

### **School Facilities**

One of the biggest areas of inequity that has become increasingly evident throughout this project is the differences in school facilities and the types of resources that each facility has. Overwhelmingly, magnet schools have dramatically better facilities than the district schools. While much of this is attributed to the date that most of these schools were built, it also has to do with the fact that the magnet schools are a product of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* remedy which called for an increased number of these schools in order to provide more opportunities for quality integrated learning environments for students. When speaking with NRZ members, specifically members of the Education Committee, when asked if certain schools in the neighborhood had better facilities than others, all members were unanimous when they responded that magnet schools, specifically Mary Hooker, had by far the most “beautiful facilities.” Members commented on the amazing facility resources, such as the butterfly vivarium, planetarium, aquatics lab, nature trail, and how these are able to contribute substantially to a positive school atmosphere for the children. When talking to one NRZ member, throughout the span of a forty-five minute interview, we talked about school facilities five times and how this leads to a positive atmosphere in the school. In one excerpt from her interview, she said

When a school looks nice and has nice facilities people want to be there. Parents want to come to the school and see their children working hard. Students are excited to walk in the door each morning and learn. Teachers are excited to come to work each day and see their students learn and grow. When all this happens, the school has an overall positive atmosphere and becomes a happy place in the community. When schools don't have nice facilities the opposite happens and it is like pulling teeth to get parents to come to the schools. Teachers don't want to work in schools that don't have nice facilities.



It is clear from this excerpt that school culture is greatly improved when schools have better facilities and are able to provide students with more resources that enrich their learning.

The physical appearance of school buildings plays a huge role in perceptions of schools in the neighborhood as well. Throughout the city of Hartford, most of the district school buildings were built many decades ago, and in some cases, over a century ago, while the magnet schools were built much later.<sup>24</sup> In fact, besides Montessori Magnet, which currently is split between two campuses, the other two magnet school facilities in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood pose no comparison to the district schools. However, much of this has to do with money. When the *Sheff v. O'Neill* ruling was amended and called for the creation of these magnet schools in the city in order to help desegregate the schools, the court forced the state to allocate significant funds towards the building and renovation of these schools. However, most of the district schools did not see any additional funds to improve their school facilities which has left a wide discrepancy in the quality of buildings available. While the initial intent of the Sheff plaintiffs was to provide 100 percent of Hartford children the ability to enroll in interdistrict schools, the state has not agreed and recently has announced that there will be no additional magnet schools built in the city. As a result, currently the city of Hartford has two types of schools: the haves and the have-nots. Additionally, since magnet schools were the primary method of desegregation for the city schools, right now there is no foreseeable solution that will provide all Hartford schoolchildren the opportunity to attend a quality, integrated school.

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<sup>24</sup> Faude, Wilson. *The Names of Hartford's Public Schools and other historical notes*. Hartford, Hartford Public Library, Jan. 2011.

One factor related to school facilities that was made evident many times throughout my interviews with NRZ members was the idea that school facilities and how schools look to the outside play a large part in developing a positive school culture. In one interview, one member gave an example of how

At Breakthrough and Mary Hooker, parents want to be involved. They want to come into classrooms and be part of the parent groups. They want to be engaged in their child's educational experience. However, at Batchelder and Kennelly [two district schools in the neighborhood], parents are much more hesitant to be involved. When you don't have as welcoming a school environment, how can you expect parents and families to want to spend time in the schools?

Many times throughout NRZ meetings this issue of school culture and climate has come up. Parents often state that they cannot be as involved during the school days because they need to work or are too busy to be in their child's classes often. However, other residents have stressed that they do not go to their children's schools often because they do not feel as welcome, but really would like to find ways to be involved with the schools, even if they cannot be present all the time, proving that if the school climate was more welcoming for the parents, school climate could be different. While there are of course multiple factors that play a large role in creating positive school climates, some of which we will explore later in this project, it is extremely important to note that school culture and climate is affected by the school facilities and the resources that these facilities can provide to the students.

In addition to school culture being improved when schools have better facilities, again the concept of marketing is important to understand in order to examine the discrepancies between district and magnet school facilities. NRZ members noted that these schools have facilities that were designed for one specific reason: to appeal to the suburban parents that they try and attract as part of the Sheff remedy. In fact, *This American Life*, the

popular NPR podcast, describes in detail how marketing schools to suburban districts happens and talked to Hartford's chief marketing strategist Enid Rey for inside details. Because "Hartford's integration plan hinges on getting white kids to come and integrate Hartford schools," Enid Rey has made it her mission to sell schools to families any time of the year, including Christmas.<sup>25</sup> When Rey looks at suburban participation rates in Hartford schools, she looks to towns with low percentages of participating families in order to send her recruiters to places like suburban baseball games, suburban libraries, Girl Scout troop meetings, YMCAs and more in order to familiarize suburban parents with the vast opportunities that schools in Hartford can provide their students.<sup>26</sup> Everyday she works towards the goal of getting Hartford schools to the integration rates of 25% white and Asian students that meets the reduced isolation quota set by *Sheff v. O'Neill* agreements.<sup>27</sup> However, it is not lost on Hartford residents that the reason the influx of magnet schools exists in the city is to better entice suburban parents to send their children into Hartford instead of to their suburban neighborhood schools. For this reason, in order to better market these schools, renovations were done and schools were built with themes and facilities that were especially attractive to this group of parents. However, in doing this, the district schools in the city were left behind since many are operating out of older buildings that cannot compete with the newer, impressive buildings that typically house the magnet schools. While NRZ members stated that the students who attend these magnet schools greatly benefit from these impressive facilities, they also noted that their peers attending

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<sup>25</sup> "The Problem We All Live With- Part Two." *This American Life*, NPR, 7 Aug. 2015, [www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/563/transcript](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/563/transcript). Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

<sup>26</sup> *Ib. Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ib. Id.*

district schools “suffered because of the conditions of their schools and the resources their schools can provide them.”

When choosing schools, neighborhood residents often judged schools based on their physical appearance and the quality of the facilities and often had very definitive answers when it came to identifying the school with the best facilities. Again, Mary Hooker was often identified as the school with the nicest facilities and members commented on how their nature trail was a great resource for the students. These perceptions held true when interviewing neighborhood residents as part of the door-to-door interview process. Out of the twenty-five door-to-door interviews collected, almost all the neighbors described a magnet school as the school with the nicest facilities--often choosing Breakthrough or Mary Hooker. However, they typically followed up their answers with remarks like “that isn’t the best school in the neighborhood though” and “the school my [child/grandchild] is attending is the school I like best.” When looking at these remarks, it is clear that while there is some confirmation from the neighborhood residents that while they know that these two magnet schools have the nicest facilities in the neighborhood, that does not mean that they feel they are the best schools, typically pointing to the fact that they have family members attending district schools.

Surprisingly, one quarter of the neighborhood residents interviewed described the best school in the neighborhood as a district school they attended when they were young children. Even though these residents are now in adulthood, this shows a strong correlation between the perceived most resourced school in the neighborhood, in this case regarding facilities, and attachment to the schools. This theme of “neighborhood pride” was very important to residents and many expressed that having good schools in their

neighborhood where they could send their children or grandchildren was very important. However, when pressed on their definition of “good schools” most expressed that they thought schools that looked aesthetically pleasing from the outside would be good schools for their children, stressing again that they judged schools on the physical appearance of the facilities. In addition, almost all residents stated that they relied on their social networks to inform them on what makes a good school. However, time and again, the conversation would return to neighborhoods and locations for the best schools. These residents often stressed that they wanted their children to attend a school that was close to home and perhaps even the school that they once attended. One resident even said, “Kennelly was good back when I went, so why shouldn’t [my granddaughter] go there now?” It was clear from these interactions that neighborhood residents used the appearances of schools in the neighborhood to gauge how good the schools would be for their children or grandchildren to attend while also holding stake in their personal attachment and connections to their “neighborhood schools.”

## **Funding**

Funding is one of the most misunderstood issues when it comes to creating equal schools. Since the creation of magnet schools in Hartford, funding has become even more of a contentious issue because there have been widespread perceptions that magnet schools receive more funding than district schools, even though the evidence that shows the spending breakdown per student in each school is currently unavailable. Overall, the Hartford Public School District experienced very difficult budget cuts that have severely affected funding for schools. In total, the cuts affected the per-pupil expenditure for

students by about \$1,000 for all schools.<sup>28</sup> Even still, there is the perception that magnet schools have more money and funding. However, interviews with NRZ members tended to focus on the fact that “[magnet schools] don’t necessarily have more money... it’s just about how they allocate the money.” This is a very important point that was repeated in all of the NRZ interviews, yet was missing from discussions with community members. In this excerpt below, this fact becomes even more explicit by this NRZ members explanation of how funding affects the different types of schools.

At a neighborhood [district] school they might have a lot more ELL students or students in poverty, so they need more resources and money, but they basically have the same amount that the other schools have. I know that in magnet schools, many of those schools have tried to get grants in order to try to get what they need. Sometimes neighborhood schools have done that too, but not as much.

The above quote provides an interesting explanation of how the funding in the schools works and what happens after each school receives its sum of money. In all NRZ interviews, I heard how allocation of the budget is key to ensuring that each school is properly resourced. However, it became increasingly evident that this allocation process plays out very differently in the different type of schools. For example, while magnet schools are believed to have the same amount of money provided from the school district, they tend to supplement this money with grants more often than the district schools. For example, Mary Hooker is fortunate enough to have their nature trail at their school, which was provided by a grant from Pratt & Whitney and is a great resource for their students. Other schools in the neighborhood, like Batchelder and Kennelly, however, have not been as successful in

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<sup>28</sup> Cotto, Robert, Jr. "Hartford Public Schools Budget Hearing and Resources 2016-17." *Cities, Suburbs & Schools Project at Trinity College*, 3 May 2016, <http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp/2016/05/03/hpsandctedbudget2016/>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

getting grants. Yet, this cannot only be attributed to their magnet status, but also the staff in the buildings.

Multiple times throughout the interviews with the NRZ members, school culture was brought up as an important issue that contributes to school success. One of the most important parts of developing a positive school culture was having a good leader for the school. The principal is an essential part of the school community and often times the person charged with making decisions when it comes to using the school budget. As evident in the excerpt below, certain district schools in the neighborhood which are often perceived as less resourced and having less money have to deal with high principal turnover as well. For example,

For Batchelder it's been difficult because they keep having principal turnover and a principal is really key to making sure you have teachers continue and that everyone is working together and that you're making your budget and making everything work. When the principal keeps changing it really hurts the school a lot.

This quote shows how the importance of a principal in a school, especially when it comes to dealing with the budget. When the principal is constantly changing in a school, there is nobody who can work towards securing additional resources through grants, make tough decisions about the budget, and work towards creating change in the school because they are constantly new to the staff and students. In addition to this, it is hard for a school to attract quality teachers when they can not provide those teachers with quality resources to use, especially when there are other schools in the neighborhood, such as the magnet schools, that are able to provide these resources for students and teachers to benefit from. Lastly, it is extremely hard for parents who are not educated on the inner-workings of the school budget to understand why there are different levels of resources available for students in different schools and different levels of money available to be used. Parents

often see this as certain schools being better or more financed than others, when in fact, it often has to deal with how the school budget is allocated at specific schools and if the staff chooses to apply for additional funds. This can create a disjoint in the neighborhood when perceptions differ from reality, something that has happened in the Behind the Rocks/Southwest neighborhood and part of the reason that there is an increased amount of frustration with Hartford Public Schools coming from neighborhood residents.

### **Perceptions**

Understanding perceptions is a critical component of this project and what sets it apart from other research in this field. My project looks at the perceptions of NRZ Education Committee members and neighborhood residents and seeks to understand if they perceive resource differences in the schools in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood similarly. Throughout this project, it has become evident that there are different perceptions of the resources in the neighborhood schools between the two groups. On the one hand, NRZ members unanimously found magnet schools to be the most resourced schools in the neighborhood. However, when asking neighborhood residents what schools they perceived to be the most resourced, almost all people interviewed chose the school closest to their home as the best school. This stark difference in perceptions was surprising, especially considering the factors that both NRZ members and neighborhood residents discussed in the sections above. NRZ members found magnet schools to be the most resourced and perceived “best schools” in the neighborhood because of their programming, facilities, and school culture and outlined how these schools produced higher achieving students. Most committee members pointed to test scores and stated “when looking at these students, it is clear that there has to be a correlation between



achievement and resources.” NRZ members hold many roles in the community and are very actively involved. In the instance of the Education Committee, members are particularly involved in the education in the neighborhood and perceive themselves as knowledgeable of the inner workings of the neighborhood schools. However, it became clear through attending community meetings and talking with these committee members that there was a stark contrast in the way they perceive the schools from the way neighborhood residents perceive the schools as most used their knowledge of the neighborhood and inner workings of the district to support their perception that magnet schools were the most resourced and best schools in the neighborhood.

By contrast, neighborhood residents had a very different perspective when asked what the most resourced and best school was in the neighborhood. Out of the twenty-five neighborhood interviews, almost all said that they knew that some of the magnet schools were good schools, but that they thought the schools closest to where they lived were the best schools. They also said that they would rather their children or grandchildren attend schools closest to their homes because they had a desire to keep their children close by. This theme of neighborhood pride was very strong in the neighborhood. Residents stated that they had lived there for a long time and some had even attended these schools themselves when they were kids. However, when asked why they found the schools closest to their homes to be the best schools, answers tended to vary. Some residents stated that they wanted their children or grandchildren to be close to home when attending school and others stated that they knew the neighborhood schools best so they wanted their children to attend those schools as opposed to other schools in the city. However, out of the twenty-five interviews about half stated that schools like Kennelly and Batchelder used to be some

of the best schools in the city so their kids should still be able to attend them. One resident even stated “I don’t get these magnet schools. Those schools [Kennelly and Batchelder] used to be the best so they must still be pretty good today.” As evident from this quote, this resident and many others point to the existing relationships with the schools in the neighborhood as a reason that they perceive them as being the best. Even though public school records rank these schools lower than magnet schools, neighborhood residents point to their history in the neighborhood and sense of neighborhood pride as a stronger reason to send their children to neighborhood schools.

### **How Policy Affects Equity**

Over the years, there have been many policy decisions that have attempted to address the issues of inequity in the city. However, time and again, these policy decisions have been unsuccessful in creating equitable schools for all students. Dating back to 1996, when the first *Sheff v. O’Neill* decision came out, the desegregation methods created failed to provide equitable schools for all Hartford students. Instead, magnet schools were created around the city in order to attract suburban students to Hartford schools. In addition, the Open Choice program was expanded to allow more Hartford students the opportunity to attend schools in suburban districts. However, this number of spots for Hartford students is still extremely low compared to the number of students in the district. In addition, there are not enough spots for Hartford students to attend magnet schools in the city which means that a large number of Hartford students have been left behind in the hyper-segregated district schools. To this day, this is a major problem Hartford students face.

In addition to the Sheff remedies that have failed to create 100 percent equitable schools for all Hartford students, new this year is the Equity 2020 initiative started by former Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez. While this initiative was intended to help make all schools in Hartford equitable by the year 2020 there is a high level of skepticism from people in the community who hold stake in the schools. For example, when talking with NRZ members about the proposed consolidations and closures for schools in the city, most of the members described how the majority of empty seats in schools are in the north end of the city. They also described in detail how some of the buildings in the north end “are falling apart. In some of the schools, you go there for a meeting and the ceiling is literally falling down on you. They have rats in the basements and it is practically unsafe for students to go to school there.” Based on the school facilities, one would think that it would be a done deal that these would be the schools to close especially when considering their low enrollment numbers. However, once again the theme of neighborhood pride becomes apparent and neighborhood residents immediately started voicing their opinions in hopes of saving their schools.

In addition, because most of the closures were proposed in the north end, in order to be equitable, NRZ members found that the one closure in the south end was mainly proposed to show that the committee was being politically correct and choosing schools in both ends of the city. Even though this proposed south end closure is not in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood, it was assumed that students from the closing schools would be split up and attend some of the schools in this NRZ neighborhood. This has created some frustration in the community and frustration with Hartford Public Schools since many community members feel that these consolidations and closures will

have negative ramifications on their students, given that they feel it is unnecessary to target any schools in this end of the city. One NRZ member even stated “they know they really don’t need to touch any schools in this end of the city. Even though that school is not the nicest school, it is by far not the worst, and they know they have to talk about closing that school only because people will start complaining that they are only targeting the north end of the city.” This quote shows the significance policy decisions like this can have on the city and the neighborhood and how these decisions can magnify frustrations within the neighborhood. While Equity 2020 is now in a holding pattern and all future meetings have been cancelled until the Board of Education makes decisions on the proposed consolidations and closures, until these decisions are released to the public, it is inevitable that these negative frustrations will persist.

## **Conclusion**

School segregation has long been in issue in the state of Connecticut, especially in Hartford. Despite this, there have been many attempts to desegregate city schools and provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Yet, the State of Connecticut’s constitutional obligation to provide a quality integrated education has been delivered to only half of Hartford’s students, namely those whose lottery results have allowed them to enroll in magnet and Open Choice schools. The other half of Hartford students have been left behind in unequal district schools. This project sought to understand the differences in resources in district and magnet schools in the city and confirmed that resource inequities exist between these two types of schools. However, when examining perceptions of these differences, it was especially interesting to find that neighborhood residents and NRZ members do not perceive these inequities in similar ways. In fact, NRZ members find

magnet schools to be most resourced and the best educational opportunities in the city, while neighborhood residents found schools closest to their homes to be the best, showing a common theme of neighborhood pride. In addition, there was a strong belief from NRZ members that policy decisions created to address equity has contributed to further inequity in the city. My experiences working with the Southwest/Behind the Rocks NRZ brought these themes to light and I believe that interviews with the neighborhood residents that provided the perceptions piece of this project was my most significant research finding. In addition, this research was significant on a broader scale because it shows how important neighborhood perceptions are when using one neighborhood group to examine the school system in the neighborhood and proved that this group is not necessarily representative of the feelings of the larger neighborhood population. Yet despite this, the struggle for equal schools continues and the neighborhood continues on in order to fight for equal educational opportunities for all students.

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## Appendix

### Interview Guide:

For NRZ Members: I am interviewing community members in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood to learn more about your perceptions of schools located in your neighborhood. This interview is voluntary, and you can stop at any time. I would like to record the interview, but I will not include your name or address or any personal details in my study at Trinity College. The entire process takes only 15-30 minutes. May I start recording this interview?

For Neighborhood Residents: I am interviewing community members in the SW/Behind the Rocks neighborhood to learn more about community perceptions of the resource inequities in the district and magnet schools in your neighborhood. The entire interview will take no more than 5-10 minutes and the entire process is voluntary. You can stop me at any time. I would like your permission to record the interview and I and I will NOT use your name or any identifying details when typing up the transcript for our seminar. May I start recording this interview?

Questions for both NRZ members and general neighborhood residents:

- 1) Do you live in the Southwest/Behind the Rocks neighborhood? If yes, how long have you lived in this neighborhood?
2. Are you familiar with any of the schools located in this neighborhood? If so, which ones?
  - a. Do you currently have or have you had children attend schools in the neighborhood?
  - b. If yes, which schools, and roughly when?
  - c. Have you been inside the schools in the neighborhood?
3. In your opinion, do schools in your neighborhood have different levels of resources? If yes, can you give me an example?

Possible Follow Ups:

  - a. Tell me more about what you mean.
  - b. What kind of resources are you thinking of?
  - c. Do you think some schools have better facilities than others?
  - d. Do you think some schools have better teachers than others?
  - e. Do you think some schools have more dollars to spend than others?
  - F. Do you think the schools provide all kids with the same educational experiences?



4. What is the most resourced school and least resourced school in your neighborhood?

5. Can you tell me more about how you know what you've told me about schools today?

Follow up demographic question for neighborhood residents only:

1. Do you ever attend events or meetings for the SW/Behind the rocks?