

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing, March 3, 2015

Good Evening Co Chairs, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Theresa Velendzas and I am here today to urge you to integrate a formula in our budget that will provide the necessary annual 1.9% increase in funding to our school. We need this funding. It's not a luxury. It's a necessity for our school community serving 450 students from Glastonbury, East Hartford, Hartford, Lebanon, Colchester, Ellington, Vernon and other towns.

As you probably have already heard by now, our school has not received a basic cost of living increase in the past 5 years. This has caused a financial hardship to our school that could lead to its inability to function. It is not possible to sustain the basic day-to-day operations of our school on insufficient funding.

As a parent I am here today to provide perspective on what our school does for us. Both my husband and I come from schools with high levels of diversity. Both of us had the opportunity to meet people from cultures around the world simply by showing up for school. We looked for a Magnet School because we believe that this real world exposure is an invaluable teaching tool. We are grateful for the Sheff vs. O'Neill* case that created this opportunity, and urge you to continue to fund this mandate just as other schools are currently funded statewide.

We believe in our school's hands-on approach to learning with its emphasis on Science. On any given day, upon entering our school, our students are greeted by our science teacher Mrs. Rand encouraging them to make scientific predictions, providing updates about the International Space Station, and urging students to "Go ask good questions!".

Our technology teacher Mrs. Vestergaard offers assistance in afterschool coding projects. Our Chinese teacher Mrs. Chang is organizing teams to join the Hartford Dragon Boat Race in August, for team building and cultural awareness; this, after she and her team coordinated a school wide Saturday event to celebrate the Chinese New Year with authentic samples of Chinese culture.

Our school collects electronic equipment to allow classes to partake in Take Apart Lab where students then incorporate their observations into classroom coursework. Our gym teacher Mr. Grochowski offers daily fitness opportunities for children that arrive to school early. This is not part of his teaching time. It's extra. Our students monitor weather patterns, care for trout and other animals in the science lab and recycle paper. Classes are routinely taken outdoors for field observation.

We have a lot of school-sponsored extras, as well, such as science night, invention night, an art show, and boat regatta. And when children come in with extra science observations or projects during the year, they get to be "Scientist of the Week"*, and

their picture along with a description of their findings are put on display to encourage others to do the same. My children get up on Sunday mornings asking if they “can do an experiment”, or invent something, for fun, on their day off.

I must also mention the longevity of some of our teachers who have mentored teachers in training, as well as the fact that many of our staff have chosen to have their own children attend our school.

We also have a strong PTO, for which I have the pleasure of serving as a co Vice President. We host workshops for parents, and conduct fundraisers to support our school. We host a craft fair, book fairs, pasta dinners, Fun Family Fitness nights, among others and we also coordinate a month long after-school enrichment program in the spring, we call Magnetic Attractions - just to name a few.

I’m at the school a lot so it is with this first hand knowledge that I tell you that the staff are also there, for all the extras. There is not a single event, above and beyond the school managed events where you will not see our principal Mr. Donlon and assistant principal Mr. Stanco, along with several staff from various departments, tirelessly giving of their free time, at the end of a long day, or on a weekend. Our staff are dedicated and committed to our community.

Let me be clear. None of the funding I am asking you for today will cover any of this. But without the funding to cover the day-to-day operations of our school, we stand to lose all of it. All of this will dissipate. Every child inspired by this school will lose.

We have a very dedicated and generous community that volunteers all of the extras. What I am here to ask you for is your commitment to cover the basics. An annual cost of living increase will do just that – cover the basics. We have run short for the past 5 years and it’s making the financial security of our school unstable. In your upcoming deliberations I ask that you see our community as a living entity that needs basic funding to survive. The extras, we will all happily continue to cover. By continuing to fund this mandate you are ensuring our community’s survival.

I usually try to keep my comments brief. But I would be shortchanging this issue if I didn’t come in cheering about the greatness of our school. It’s a wonderful community with lots of donated extras. But we can do none of it without covering the basics. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,

Theresa Velendzas, Glastonbury CT
Parent and co Vice President of PTO at the GEHMS

Attached pp. 3-5: Appendix 1 (Sheff vs O’Neill case, Wikipedia 3/1/2015)
 Appendix 2 Scientists of the Week

Appendix 1

Theresa Velenzas to Appropriations Committee

Sheff v. O'Neill

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 3/1/2015

Sheff v. O'Neill refers to a 1989 lawsuit and the subsequent 1996 [Connecticut Supreme Court](#) case (*Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1, 678 A.2d 1267) that resulted in a landmark decision regarding [civil rights](#) and the right to [education](#).^{[1][2][3]}

Timeline[[edit](#)]

On April 27, 1989, eighteen school aged children from the metropolitan [Hartford, Connecticut](#) area, acting through their parents, commenced a civil action in the Hartford Superior Court. The lead plaintiff was fourth-grader Milo Sheff. The suit named the [State of Connecticut](#), constitutionally elected officials, including Gov. [William A. O'Neill](#), and others from various state commissions and agencies as defendants. The plaintiffs alleged significant constitutional violations under applicable sections of the State constitution which they believe constituted a denial of their fundamental rights to an education and rights to equal protection under the law. The reason for the case was that the resources the state spent on schools in areas with majority black/latino populations were lower than those spent on schools in areas mainly inhabited by white people.

In 1995, Judge Harry Hammer ruled in favor of the State in the case. His decision rejected claims that officials are obligated to correct educational inequities, no matter how they came to be. Further, he ruled that without proof that government action helped foster racial isolation, courts cannot require steps that would change the composition of the city and suburban school enrollments.^{[2] [3]}

This decision was appealed to the [Connecticut Supreme Court](#). On July 9, 1996, the court overturned Hammer's ruling, in a split 4-3 decision authored by Chief Justice [Ellen Ash Peters](#) (*Sheff v. O'Neill*, 678 A.2d 1267 (1996), 678 A.2d 1267). Peters was joined in the majority opinion by Justices Robert Berdon, [Flemming L. Norcott, Jr.](#), and [Joette Katz](#). Justice David Borden authored the dissent, with Justices Robert Callahan and [Richard Palmer](#) concurring with the dissent. The court ruled that the state had an affirmative obligation to provide Connecticut's school children with a substantially equal educational opportunity and that this constitutionally guaranteed right encompasses the access to a public education which is not substantially and materially impaired by racial and ethnic isolation. The Court further concluded that school districting, based upon town and city boundary lines, is unconstitutional, and cited a statute that bounds school districts by town lines as a key factor in the high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities in Hartford. ^[4]

As a result of the Connecticut Supreme Court decision, in 1997 the [Connecticut State Legislature](#) passed legislation titled "*An Act Enhancing Educational Choices and Opportunities*", which encourages voluntary actions toward racial

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integration. The act also included a number of other measures related to magnet and regional charter schools and included a requirement for the [Connecticut State Department of Education](#) to come up with a five-year plan to assess and eliminate inequalities between school districts. [5]

In 1998, the Sheff plaintiffs filed a motion for a court order to require the state to adhere to the Supreme Court ruling.[6]. On March 3, 1999 Superior Court Judge Julia L. Aurigemma ruled that the state of Connecticut had complied with the decision of the Connecticut Supreme Court. [7]

In 2002, Judge Aurigemma held a hearing on the progress of the case and negotiations began on a settlement which was approved in 2003 [8]. It included a goal of having 30 percent of Hartford minority students in reduced-isolation school settings by 2007. || In 2007, the 2003 settlement expired short of its goal. An independent [Trinity College](#) report found that only 9 percent of Hartford's minority students attended less racially isolated schools. [9] The plaintiffs brought the issue back to court in 2007 and the two sides began talks on a second settlement.

In June 2008, a second settlement was negotiated[10], calling for building more magnet schools in the Hartford suburbs and expanding the number of openings for Hartford children in suburban public schools. The new settlement also included state-run technical and agricultural high schools. [11]

In Dec 2008, the state and the plaintiffs issued a 50-page document that outlined exactly how the new goals would be met. The plan called for a mix of existing programs, creating new magnet and charter schools, increasing support for the programs and collecting data on progress. [12]

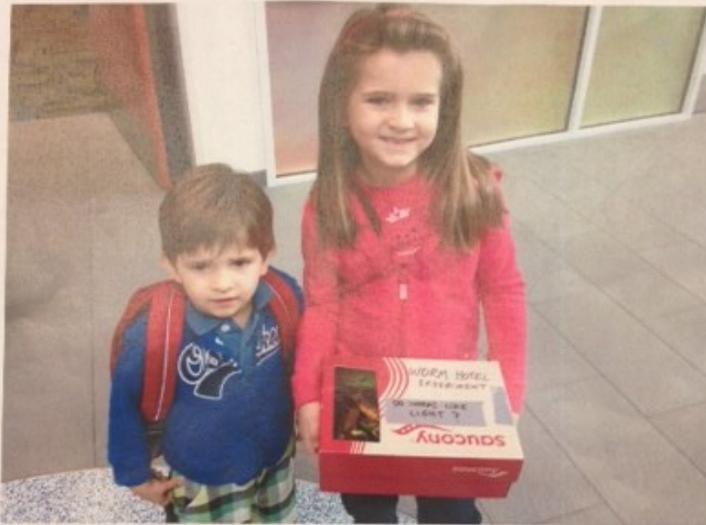
References[edit]

- 1 **Jump up** ^ Stephen Brecker Delaney, "Sheff vs. O'Neill, Connecticut's landmark desegregation case" (January 1, 2000). Electronic Doctoral Dissertations for UMass Amherst. Paper AAI3000304 [1]
- 2 **Jump up** ^ Justin A. Long, Enforcing affirmative state constitutional obligations and Sheff V. O'Neill. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 151, No. 1 (Nov. 2002), pp. 277-310.
- 3 **Jump up** ^ Sondra Astor Stave. *Achieving racial balance: case studies of contemporary school desegregation*. Praeger, 1995

Appendix 2

Theresa Velendzas to Appropriations Committee

Scientists of the Week!
Glastonbury-E. Hartford Magnet School



Scientists, Philip and Melina

Scientists, Philip and Melina set up their own worm experiment! Their question was "Do worms like the dark or the light?"

"First, they built a worm house with a dark side and a lighted side." They found that "the worms moved to the dark side!"

Nice teamwork and great thinking, Philip and Melina!