

MAGNET SCHOOL TUITION SCENARIO

PROBLEM: Since 2008, the state has required suburban school districts to pay tuition to interdistrict magnet schools when parents from their towns choose to send their children to preschool programs at those schools. But a group of these "sending" towns formally protested to the State Board of Education (SBE) saying that they should not be required to help pay for preschool when they don't offer it in their own districts and the state does not require districts to offer preschool. Magnet schools help the state meet the desegregation goals of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* court settlement by attracting white students to schools attended by minority students from Hartford. An SBE hearing officer ruled that state law did not give the SBE the authority to require the towns to pay preschool tuition and the practice should be immediately stopped. After considering this, SBE agreed and the state will pay the tuition for the current year (2012-13) only. The long-term answer is up to the legislature.

Going forward, the legislature could:

1. continue to appropriate funds so the state picks up the tab and take towns off the hook;
2. amend the law to explicitly require sending towns to pay tuition even though preschool is not a required school offering;
3. means test parents and require them to share the tuition cost with the state on a sliding scale; or
4. some combination of the above.

Suburban boards of education say that since they are not required to provide full-day preschool, they should not have to pay tuition for students of parents who choose to enroll their children in these schools. Some may want to offer more preschool, but feel if it is a state priority, the state should offer more aid for this purpose.

Hartford-area magnet schools point out that attracting suburban students to Hartford area magnet schools help the state meet the *Sheff* settlement desegregation goals. They worry that requiring parents to pay tuition will decrease participation and possibly make it more difficult for the state to satisfy the court order.

Magnet schools outside the Hartford region argue that they should be given funding equal to that of *Sheff* magnet schools. They don't want the state to give funding preference to some over others.

The State is caught in the middle. As for the *Sheff* settlement, the state is worried that a failure to meet the desegregation goals could result in a court-mandated solution that could be even more costly. As for fairness to the sending towns, if the state picks up the tab for the Hartford preschool situation, suburban towns can still complain that not all their students or parents benefit from this and the state should fund preschool for all.

PLAYERS: The state (the legislature and SBE), suburban boards of education, preschool magnet schools (especially Hartford area preschool magnets)

QUESTIONS: Which proposal do you support?