

## **This School Is Failing To Help The Neediest Students**

By Helen Ubinas  
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For 20 minutes, the kid roamed the halls of 2550 Main Street Academy as one adult after another unsuccessfully tried to wrangle him back to class.

Bored, he'd wander off, pop his head into a room where parents were discussing the failing transitional school, toss out a few f-bombs and then disappear.

Curious to see what was going on, I walked into the hallway to get a look for myself, fully expecting an embarrassed teacher or security guard to send the nosy reporter away.

"He went that way," one of the adults said with a shrug.

That shrug; it said it all. I didn't know for whom I felt worse as I walked back into the room where parents talked Monday about the latest complaint filed against the special education program for students with emotional problems and learning disabilities.

The desperate and exasperated parents who'd come to start a parents' group to fight a school system everyone in that room knew had long given up on some of the district's neediest students.

Or the students, who didn't have to be told they were the school district's throwaways to know it.

The mothers and grandmothers of some of the 70 middle- and high-school-aged students told story after shameful story of a school where chaos ruled, where students were more tolerated than taught, where students feared for their safety.

To listen to their stories, to read the damning complaint filed by the Center for Children's Advocacy and Greater Hartford Legal Aid, you'd think that administrators could be shamed into action.

But then that's just it — there's no shame when it comes to the mis-education of Hartford students.

If the city or the state really cared that generations of Hartford students were being educationally neglected, this wouldn't keep happening.

Because this is far from the first time — or the first complaint. There was one filed against the program in 2005 and another just last year.

The parents kept talking about the school's new location — it was near a housing project, the setup wasn't conducive to needed programs and safe rooms.

"I want my son out of here," said Tanieka Adams.

But it's not the location of the school that's the problem. This school was a failure when it was on Washington Street and it's a failure again on Main Street. Back in 2005, a report by the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities found that the Washington Street program was more "chaotic than therapeutic." Sounds familiar.

Truth is, they could move it 10 more times and nothing would change because the people in charge of making things right don't care enough to do it and no one is really forcing them to do so. Instead, they just shove these kids into another dysfunctional setting and wait for the next complaint.

And, in the meantime, another generation of kids loses out. And so what, right? Because let's be painfully blunt here, this is just a holding cell until either the kids give up or age out of a broken school system and into a broken correctional system, where instead of \$27,000, we get to spend \$33,000 a year on them.

As the women in the cafeteria talked about what to do next — they'd start a parent group, they'd protest — everyone tried to ignore the ruckus coming from a room upstairs.

At times, it sounded as if something, or someone, was going to come crashing through the ceiling.

Whatever was going on up there, it certainly wasn't learning.

And that's something that everyone needs to stop ignoring.

Helen Ubinas' column appears on Thursdays and Sundays. Read her blog at [courant.com/helen](http://courant.com/helen).

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