

Hartford Superintendent Proposes \$414.6M Budget

By VANESSA DE LA TORRE, vdelatorre@courant.com

The Hartford Courant

10:33 p.m. EDT, April 9, 2013

HARTFORD —

Superintendent Christina Kishimoto proposed a \$414.6 million education budget to the school board Tuesday night that funds 3,292 full-time staff positions and adds several teaching jobs.

The 2013-14 plan asks for an extra \$1.57 million compared to the city schools' current budget — a 0.4 percent increase that Kishimoto described as a small bump "in light of the escalating costs and the work ahead of us."

While trimming spending in areas such as equipment and contracts, the budget requests \$2.5 million in new funding to improve services for students whose native language is not English, which represents about 18 percent of Hartford's enrollment.

Under a recent agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which investigated a 2007 complaint that city schools failed to adequately teach English language learners, the district said it will hire more ELL tutors to support students in the classroom.

The proposed budget adds the equivalent of 38.6 staff positions overall, including three ELL coaches and three ELL facilitators. "We have very low capacity in this area," Kishimoto said. "It's a needed increase."

Also among the new positions: 14 child development assistants, three portfolio directors, two social workers, 2.40 guidance counselors, a security supervisor and a half-dozen teachers, most of whom will be assigned to new special education programs, Kishimoto told the board.

Hartford administrators are trying to control special education costs and said the new programs and other factors, such as students aging out of the system, could result in \$530,456 savings in out-of-district tuition. Special education transportation, however, is expected to increase by \$1.3 million next fiscal year.

Last April, administrators projected \$1.86 million in tuition and transportation savings for the current budget if 20 fewer city students were placed in costly out-of-district programs for the severely disabled. Whether those students could transition back to Hartford schools depends on their individualized education plans, and board member Richard Wareing noted that major savings did not materialize.

Overall, the school system predicts that student enrollment will rise to 26,935 next academic year, a gain of 1,029 students that is largely attributed to the city's magnet schools. Last year, though, the district estimated an enrollment of 26,980 students for 2012-13, and that fell short.

Kishimoto's plan asks for city taxpayers to contribute \$96 million to the education budget, a \$1.66 million increase. The proposal also assumes level funding from the state's Education Cost Sharing grant for Hartford, which is \$188 million.

A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. April 16 at the Kinsella Magnet School of the Performing Arts. The board is set to adopt a spending plan May 1.

Also on Tuesday, the board approved converting Hartford's Journalism and Media Academy into a Sheff magnet school for the 2013-14 year. Currently at Weaver High School, the program for high school students will move to a renovated Tower Avenue building in August, where up to 180 magnet seats will be offered to incoming ninth-graders. Ninety seats will be reserved for suburban students.