

School board OKs budget

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MERIDEN — Although Board of Education meetings were canceled in Wallingford and Cheshire due to the weather, as was a City Council meeting, across the street the Board of Education met only because of the importance of the issue at hand, School Superintendent Mark D. Benigni said.

The school board Tuesday unanimously approved an education budget for 2011-12, asking for a 2.93 percent increase over the current year's spending, or an additional \$3 million. The \$102,531,215 spending plan now heads to the City Council for consideration.

The initial recommendation by the board's finance subcommittee called for the same increase, but the school board as a whole received positive news of some unexpected savings.

Between 14 teachers retiring, new con-

tracts with the custodial and paraprofessional staffs and significantly lower-than-expected health insurance rates, there will be a savings of nearly \$730,000 compared to what was first budgeted. The school board agreed to reinvest the money to keep six more teachers than expected, one custodian, two clerical workers and two teachers who were at risk of being eliminated due to expired grants that paid for their contracts.

Grants amounting to about \$2.7 million have expired and would have resulted in several lost positions. Even with the savings, the budget approved Tuesday would result in a loss of 19 certified staff members and seven classified staff members.

At the Board of Education finance subcommittee two weeks ago, board Secretary Robert Kosienski Jr. vowed to suggest a higher percentage proposal, though he said

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Tuesday he was satisfied with the 2.93 percent increase.

"I was only going to ask for a higher percentage because of the position cuts," Kosienski said. "I'm glad they could find a way to save those positions."

There would also be \$24,000 added to the instructional items budget, which Assistant Superintendent Michael Grove described as "very minimal" based on current standards. The request is for almost \$450,000, a large increase over last year's \$80,000 budget, but still less than the 2009-10 fiscal year.

The request for textbooks would represent a similar increase over last year, about \$150,000 more, but still \$30,000 less than two years ago.

A significant increase will come in both pupil transportation and tuition for students

outside of the Meriden public schools. They will come with percentage increases of 9.7 and 5.7 respectively, or a total of more than \$1.2 million.

The recommendation comes after the school board

received no budget increase last year and 1.5- and 1.4-percent increases the two years before.

The budget now heads to the city finance committee and eventually city council before

coming back to the board with what the city has changed or kept the proposed percentage increase at.

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