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## Kendzior: No increase for schools

By George Moore  
Record-Journal staff

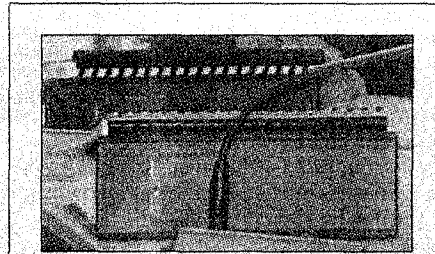
3-2-2010

**MERIDEN** — City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior is proposing a \$171 million city budget for 2010-11 that would raise the outer district tax rate by 2.36 percent and take the unusual step of flat-funding the Board of Education.

Faced with shrinking revenues for a third year in a row, Kendzior is proposing an outer district tax increase of 0.68 mills, to 29.53. The budget would raise the inner district rate by 0.07 mills, to 1.81, due to an increase in trash-disposal costs.

Kendzior submitted his 2010-11 spending plan to the City Council Monday night and will provide an overview at tonight's Finance Committee meeting. The council will adopt a final budget May 3.

The proposal includes little new spending, with an increase of about 0.45 percent. Unlike Kendzior's controversial 2009-10 plan, the new plan does not slash city positions or cut aid to local social service agencies. It does, however, rebuff the



### At a glance

Last year's approved city budget:	\$170.3 million.
Kendzior's request:	\$171 million.
Proposed outer district tax increase:	0.68 mills, to 29.53 mills.

Board of Education's request for a \$2.9 million, or 3 percent, increase.

Kendzior recommends providing the school district \$91.9 million, the same amount allocated for 2009-10. Kendzior argues that the school district has nearly \$2.1 million in cash left over from the current

fiscal year that it could apply to cost increases in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

He added that the school district could find another \$527,000 through projected savings on heating oil and bus transportation.

School officials will probably lobby the City Council to toss out Kendzior's school funding proposal. Even a 3 percent increase is inadequate to meet the needs of the school district, most education officials say.

"It was determined that, in order to maintain everything at the current levels, we needed a 6 percent increase," Board of Education President Mark Hughes said Monday afternoon.

At the end of January, the school board voted for a 3 percent increase, recognizing the city's financial constraints. At that time, education officials estimated that 30 teaching positions would have to be eliminated to balance a budget with a 3 percent increase.

Kendzior said the city has been feeling the effects of a bad economy for at least three years. "It's the third year in a row that revenues are less than what they were the year before," he said.

Total revenue loss this year was \$1.8 million. On top of that, the city is facing the cost of contractual wage increases, such as a \$398,000 increase in police wages. While the school district may face downsizing, the budget proposal adds some positions to the non-education side of local government. Last year's budget eliminated several non-

education positions.

The new budget proposal would add one parks maintenance worker, three part-time police service technicians, an assistant for the dog warden, an additional dispatcher and a slight addition of hours for library employees.

The budget would also restore the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which was suspended in the last budget.

Council Minority Leader Walter Shamock, of the We the People Party, said he is concerned about the proposed tax increase, especially because the

city is going ahead with a plan to upgrade the high schools.

Democratic Majority Leader Keith Gordon said Kendzior's budget, especially the education proposal, is sure to generate a lot of discussion.

The Finance Committee will hold several meetings on the budget. In the first, tonight at 6 in City Hall council chambers, the committee will look at the general budget overview, the revenues, police and development and enforcement budgets.

gmoore@record-journal.com  
(203) 317-2275

# Talk of cuts can't be avoided at 'How Schools Work' event

By Andrew Perlot  
Record-Journal staff

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**MERIDEN** — The topic of the night was the workings of the city's school system, but teachers and parents in attendance seemed to have their minds on the elephant in the room — budget cuts.

The third and final meeting on "How Schools Work," Wednesday's presentation at Hanover School, laid out how the levels of government work together to fund and manage the school system. The meeting was hosted by the non-profit Meriden Children First Initiative and featured speakers from the Board of Education, City Council, and board and city departments.

Bob Angeli, Meriden's associate school superintendent, explained that despite budget cuts resulting in the loss of staff and programs over the last several years, the school district was making progress on several fronts. He cited improving standardized test scores and the success of Thomas Hooker School, which received a U.S. Department of Education award for excellence.

City Councilor George McGoldrick told the audience of several dozen that it wasn't easy to walk the line between what the Board of Education says it needs and what the city can afford. The City Council receives a budget request from the school board, allocates money, and then the school board can use those funds as it sees fit.

"Our decision has to be based on what we think the city can afford ..." McGoldrick said of the process.

This year, that process is likely to be contentious. The school board has asked for a 3 percent increase in funding, while City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior has suggested the City Council keep school spending the same, at \$99.6 million.

The school board estimates that flat-funding would be the financial equivalent of eliminating 55 teacher positions, and will cause a large rise in class sizes.

Hanover reading teacher Mary Kennedy asked Kendzior how he could flat-fund the district if devastating cuts would be the result.

The board's warning that class sizes could rise above 30 was "alarmist," Kendzior said, noting that the school board would have \$1 million left over from this year's budget to help cover next year's costs. He said the board has routinely overestimated expenses.

Board members Robert E. Kosienski Jr. and Michael P. Cardona did not dispute that there would be a surplus in this year's budget, but they did not feel the increase in class sizes was an exaggeration.

Cardona regularly tours schools, he told a parent, and he's seen firsthand how large kindergarten classes left teachers swamped earlier this year before the board voted to restore funding for paraprofes-

sionals. Several other classes in the city have 29 or 30 students each, although most are below that level.

Kennedy said she doesn't like the implications of budget cuts, but she doesn't have a solution, either.

"The community needs to come together and work something out," she said.