

## Local News

# Stimulus funds Limited by 'only new' stipulation

## Board of Education could cut dozens of teachers as millions of federal dollars can't be used to save jobs

By Andrew Perlot  
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — The Board of Education may find itself in the odd position of making deep cuts as millions of dollars it doesn't know how to spend comes in from the federal government.

City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior suggested to the City Council Monday that the Board of Education's budget be increased by \$969,000, which was the amount the board requested to cover the increase

in their insurance costs.

At this funding level, School Superintendent Mary N. Cortright said the board may have to cut 50 to 70 teachers.

At the same time, a total of \$4.9 million may reach the board as part of the federal stimulus package, but this money is riddled with limitations, board members said.

A stipulation attached to the money is that it can only be used for new programs and positions, said Assistant School Superintendent Glen Lamontagne, so the board may

find itself creating new programs and positions as it fires its veteran teachers and closes successful programs.

Additional stipulations restrict how the money can be used as well.

Board member Robert E. Kosienski, Jr. called the city manager's recommendation "irresponsible."

"We're talking catastrophic cuts," he said. "It's the equivalent of closing two schools," he said. "We talk about the future of Meriden, but if there is no education system, there is no

city, there is no future."

Board Chairman Mark Hughes said the \$4.9 million sounds great on paper, but the funding can't be used to prevent position cuts in the district.

Uncertain of how useful the federal money will be, board members must continue to look for innovative ways to cut costs, he said.

U.S. Rep. Christopher S. Murphy, D-5th District, is working with local school districts to try to free up the funds to save positions and

programs, Cortright said, and she along with all the other superintendents waiting for more information will be speaking to Mark K. McQuillan, commissioner of the Connecticut Board of Education, this month.

If Kendzior's recommendations are approved by the City Council, the board will also be saddled with the expense of providing the city's parochial schools with special education services, said Tom E. Bruenn, chairman of the board's Finance Subcommittee.

The city previously provided those services to the parochial schools, Bruenn said, but the city manager has recommended that the \$301,000 line item be cut from the budget. The city must provide these services by law, so the board would have to find a way to provide the services with no additional money to do it, he said.

The City Council can choose to change the suggested allocation to the board when it finalizes its budget in May.