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In Restructuring, Hartford Board OKs Five New Schools

The Hartford Board of Education Tuesday approved five new schools to open in August under the district's ongoing restructuring.

The unanimous approval came despite some concerns about how the struggling economy might affect the overall district budget and the new schools, which cost about \$500,000 each in start-up money.

Board member Elizabeth Brad Noel asked to postpone the vote until January, when the legislature will be in session and there might be a better idea of how much the state expects to reduce education cost-sharing grants. Noel said that having more schools pulling from a smaller district budget would create difficulties.

"That's going to hurt the current schools, but that's also going to hurt the new schools, as well," she said.

Facing state budget deficits, Gov. M. Jodi Rell has asked each state department to propose 10 percent reductions in their budgets.

The state Department of Education has reluctantly presented a plan that could cut \$280 million. The bulk of those cuts could come from the cost-sharing grants, which make up about two-thirds of Hartford's school budget.

But other board members and Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski said the momentum for new schools was strong and that pausing the reform would send the wrong message to parents.

"Now's not the time to put the brakes on," board member David MacDonald said. "If anything, we should go faster."

Christina Kishimoto, the assistant superintendent for school design, said the five design plans already have start-up money through federal and private grants.

Once the schools are open, they will get money based on how many students decide to attend, because the district has started a student-based budgeting plan.

The new schools are:

- The Young Men's Leadership Academy, an all-male school for grades 6 to 12, focusing on leadership skills and college preparation. The school will temporarily be at 875 Asylum Ave.
- The Journalism and Media High School, a school for grades 9 to 12, focusing on print and electronic media. It will open in Weaver High School, and move two years later to 150 Tower Ave.
- OPPortunity High School, a school for grades 9 to 12 that will partner with the nonprofit organization Our Piece of the Pie Inc. The school will focus on students who are over-aged and under-credited and who are at risk of dropping out of high school. A location is still being determined.
- High School Inc., a school for insurance and finance for grades 9 to 12. The school will include insurance, banking, investment, international business and financial management, and will be at 275 Asylum St.
- Bulkeley Upper School, an academy for grades 11 and 12 at Bulkeley High School to prepare students for college programs in teaching.

The district is also reviewing a plan for a sixth school to open in August at the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Elementary School.