



**Connecticut State Board of Education**

**Special Act 97-4**

**“An Act Concerning the Hartford Public Schools”**

**MARCH 2001**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The quarterly progress reports on the Hartford Public Schools provide information on both the *reforms* that the district, schools and community partners are engaged in to dramatically improve the achievement of students, and the *effects* of these changes at the school and classroom levels. Quantitative indicators of student success are examined and presented, as are the findings from observations made during visits to schools and programs. Progress made pertaining to Special Act 97-4 and the goals of the State Board of Trustees is described, and, as in prior reports, several areas of continuing need are examined.

This report summarizes (1) the improvements by the Hartford Public Schools to address the requirements of Special Act 97-4; (2) observations made during visits to Hartford schools and programs during fall 2000 and winter 2001; and (3) observations made during forums for and meetings with administrators, teachers, other district staff members and parents.

### **I. REQUIREMENTS OF SPECIAL ACT 97-4**

This section of the quarterly report provides information concerning the activities of the State Board of Trustees, the superintendent and his administration, and business and community partners to address the requirements of Special Act 97-4.

#### **State Board of Trustees**

After three years of dedicated service to the Hartford Public Schools, the first State Board of Trustees was succeeded by a new Board appointed by Governor Rowland and the leadership of the General Assembly, effective November 1, 2000. Six of the new Trustees are Hartford residents. The contributions of the former board included new board policies to govern the district and active involvement with the administration and municipal leaders in efforts to reform financial and operational structures. The current board has continued the practice of conducting two public meetings per month: a regular meeting to receive reports from Superintendent Amato and an informational meeting to discuss areas that may assist the trustees in their governing role. A portion of the regular meeting is used to receive public comments.

Members of the new State Board of Trustees serve on committees to address financial and facilities improvements, and members have conducted visits to the Hartford schools. Trustee members discuss with the Superintendent and his administration the reports presented at regular and informational board meetings. Items requiring action (e.g., contract approvals, requests to submit proposals for program funding), however, are usually approved and moved to the consent calendar without substantive discussion at public meetings. Overall, the new trustees have transitioned into their role with the seriousness of purpose exhibited by the former Board of Trustees.

### **Implementing the Hartford District Improvement Plan**

Special Act 97-4 requires the Hartford Public School System to implement the Hartford District Improvement Plan, also known as the Commissioner of Education's 48 recommendations for school improvement, issued in 1996. The district continues to align these recommendations with the annual goals and objectives of the State Board of Trustees. The 2000-01 annual goals were printed in the document *Actions to Improve The Hartford Public Schools 2000-01* (Appendix A) and are available at regular and informational board meetings. A chart aligning the current annual goals with the Commissioner of Education's recommendations, the requirements of Special Act 97-4 and the staff recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee is provided in Appendix A, pages A17-A26.

In December 2000, the State Board of Trustees received an annual report on the actions taken to address the 1999-2000 annual goals and objectives (Appendix B). The report format was similar to the district's 1999-2000 annual report on the Commissioner of Education's recommendations; it listed Hartford staff members assigned to each objective and provided information on the status of each objective, major tasks and activities accomplished, partners involved, and barriers or obstacles to completing the objectives. There are 10 goal areas: School and District Management and Accountability; Curriculum and Course Offerings; Instruction, Assessment and School Climate; Professional Development; Early Childhood; Technology; Student Support; Parent and Community Support; Fiscal Management; and Facilities Management.

The status summary of the 77 objectives related to the 10 goal areas shows that 21 objectives were "Completed" in the 1999-2000 school year, 52 objectives were "In Progress" and four were "Under Review." Since many of the 1999-2000 objectives were initiated in prior years, an additional category entitled "Standard Practice" was included to identify those objectives that have sustained improvement over time. The 21 completed objectives in 1999-2000 may possibly move into this category during the 2000-01 academic year if the district can document continued improvement in these areas.

Many of the completed objectives were in the areas of School and District Management and Accountability and Early Childhood, including hiring a chief fiscal officer, providing

principals with continuous professional development to serve as educational leaders, focusing collective bargaining efforts on removing barriers to student achievement, and providing additional preschool opportunities for Hartford children. The objectives under review included building capacity for site-based management and shared decision making at every school, ensuring a curriculum free of bias, and piloting new social studies and science programs in spring 2000.

Other improvements noted in the 1999-2000 annual report that extend into this academic year include the continuing focus on initiatives to improve student achievement: through reading programs that extend from prekindergarten classrooms into the middle and high school years (Curiosity Corner, Success for All and Direct Instruction), and numeracy programs, K-12. A new elementary and middle school science program has begun this year across schools, and an Elementary Social Studies Committee has been formed to evaluate the current program and make recommendations for the 2001-02 school year.

The State Department of Education continues to provide technical support to central office officials, principals and teachers related to the goals established each year. Of particular note this year are the assistance being provided to support the implementation of the new language arts curriculum, the development of a new teacher evaluation process, support for priority school principals and their school improvement teams, training to improve support systems for students with special needs, and coordination of early childhood initiatives with related State Department of Education frameworks. Other activities are described in Appendix C.

The State Board of Trustees has not received a report on current activities related to the Commissioner of Education's recommendations since the final report on 1999-2000 activities was presented in September 2000. At that time, the status of the recommendations were as follows (several had multiple designations): two were categorized as "Standard Practice;" 18 as "Completed;" 28 as "In Progress;" and 4 as "Under Review." The State Monitors requested that the district develop an action plan to begin to complete the remaining recommendations during the 2000-2001 academic year, and to *sustain improvement* (i.e., achieve the "Standard Practice" designation) on *all* recommendations by 2003. This action plan should include a list of major activities for each of the three academic years beginning 2000-01; expected outcomes with time frames for 2000-01; methods of assessing, evaluating and reporting progress; Hartford staff members assigned to coordinate activities; costs associated with implementation during 2000-01; partners involved; and a description of any resource or prioritization issues. A preliminary action plan was submitted; however, it did not provide sufficient information concerning activities, expected outcomes, assessment and reporting procedures, and resources committed to complete the recommendations. District officials have stated recently that a final action plan will be submitted to the

State Monitors and the State Board of Trustees in the coming weeks. District officials will also prioritize the remaining recommendations as part of this plan.

The Hartford administration has begun to address several of the identified needs to fully implement a number of the Commissioner of Education's recommendations as outlined in the *October 2000 Quarterly Progress Report*, including:

- time for school accreditation teams to complete the accreditation process during several of the district's professional development days;
- more attention to the coordination of activities to improve school climate at each school; and
- an external review of the high school scheduling process and coordinated implementation of recommended improvements to the scheduling process by principals, curriculum and program chairs, and information systems personnel.

Several of the areas identified in the last quarterly report continue to require attention:

- additional reading instructional support (e.g., Success For All tutors, volunteers to read to students), more student access to intervention programs (e.g., Early Success and Soar to Success), and support for students in special needs populations – English language learners, students in alternative programs, students in special education programs;
- ongoing professional development in instructional strategies for general education teachers accommodating special needs students;
- review and revision of the contract language for substitute teachers to include professional development in instructional programs, required experience needed to serve English language learners and students with special needs, and training in school improvement goals (when long-term assignments are necessary).
- support for school improvement teams to execute their role as prescribed by district policies;
- coordination of activities to enhance intradistrict and interdistrict school choice options for Hartford families; and
- a mechanism for reporting parent/teacher communication activities.

As stated in the State Monitors' last report, the focus on completing and sustaining improvement in each of the State Board of Trustees' goal areas and in each of the Commissioner of Education's 48 Recommendations "...will require written procedures, accountability frameworks, resource alignment, and regular communication of student success and operational improvements. The engagement and collaboration between Hartford administrators, teachers, parents and community partners to achieve the goals for each recommendation can result in a unified effort to complete activities for this academic year."

One of the recommendations made by the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee and the State Monitors in their reports concerns establishing a standardized reporting mechanism for the State Board of Trustees to determine the progress of implemented board policies and programs. A preliminary reporting schedule was developed by the Hartford administration with support from the audit steering committee and will be presented to the State Board of Trustees for approval. This schedule will include reports that provide information to the Trustees on district accountability efforts, financial and operational improvements, curricular areas, and other programs and initiatives. Developing this mechanism is important because it will assist the Trustees and the greater Hartford community to gauge the level of improvement in the Hartford Public Schools *over time*, and the resources used to sustain gains in student achievement and operational areas.

### **Mechanism for Parent, Teacher and Community Involvement**

Parents, teachers and community organizations continue to be engaged with the Hartford Public Schools in a variety of ways (see summary provided by the Hartford Public Schools in September 2000 in Appendix D). Success for All (SFA) facilitators, who are certified teachers, continue to organize activities related to the program in their respective schools and meet monthly with the district SFA coach, also a certified teacher. Early Success (ES) and Soar to Success (SS) teachers also meet regularly with the district ES/SS coach. Teachers who are numeracy team representatives from their schools also meet regularly with the district's numeracy coach. Similar meetings are held with teachers in the other academic content areas to develop curriculum and review options for instructional materials and programs. Members of the Hartford Federation of Teachers serve on the district's discipline and redistricting committees and are invited to monthly professional development meetings for administrators. As noted in prior quarterly reports, central office support is provided to assist school-based parent associations, school-based family resource aides, district-sponsored parent institutes and family resource centers. In addition, community organizations that provide services to Hartford youth meet monthly to discuss opportunities for collaboration with the Hartford Public Schools. Other collaborations with community partners include the district's technology advisory committee, the education committee of the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce, and the audit steering committee.

Although there are many avenues for parent, teacher and community involvement, several of the concerns described in the *October 2000 Quarterly Progress Report* continue to require the attention of the Hartford administration. Teachers, parents and community partners are receiving more information concerning districtwide initiatives; however, they still lack sufficient opportunities to work with the administration to resolve systemic issues concerning student achievement and the implementation of board policies. Several of the areas of concern, stated in the last quarterly report, include:

- shared decision making to improve schools;
- design of professional development offerings to address new programmatic reforms (e.g., Success for All, the numeracy program);
- instructional strategies and supports for students with special needs, English language learners, and students demonstrating high levels of academic success; and
- ensuring appropriate services for students with special needs and students in alternative programs.

Teachers and parents have had an opportunity to express their concerns through forums initiated by the Hartford Federation of Teachers and local parent organizations that support students with special needs, but direct involvement with these parents and teachers to consider systemic solutions to broad-based concerns has been limited. Several promising collaborations that have begun include discussions between bilingual teachers and the district's numeracy coach, and the proposed formation of an advisory council of teachers to assist the Hartford administration with improvements in the special education program. Special education administrators have also held a meeting with two local parent organizations to examine transportation, transition, communication and service delivery issues for students with special needs. Additional observations from these forums are examined in Section II of this report.

The State Monitors continue to report that the State Board of Trustees have not received a report on the implementation of the "student-centered" parent involvement policy adopted by the Trustees in 1997. The guidelines or standards for the implementation of this policy were established by a committee that included participation from the State Board of Trustees, the State Department of Education, community organizations and central office administrators (Appendix D, pages D11-D22). As recommended by the State Monitors and the staff of the Legislative Program and Investigations Committee, central office administrators should reconvene the "Student-Centered" Parent and Community Involvement Committee charged with implementing this policy. The purpose would be to develop and disseminate a report on current parent/family involvement programs and the extent to which the parent standards for communication, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision making and advocacy, and collaborating with the community are being used to determine the effectiveness of these initiatives.

## **Advisory Council**

Beginning in late September 2000, the Advisory Council, comprised of Hartford parents, teachers and principals, started monthly meetings with Superintendent Amato and his cabinet in addition to the regular monthly meetings with the State Board of Trustees. A process was established for central office officials to receive agenda items from Advisory Council members for the monthly meetings with the Superintendent. Minutes of meetings were also recorded and distributed. Advisory Council members requested and received information on a number of topics: scheduling of school open houses, high school scheduling, the CMT test sophistication program, expansion of the Classical Magnet program, the long-term facilities plan, staff vacancies, substitute teachers, the district's service learning requirement, redistricting plans and overcrowding at schools, school improvement teams, enrichment programs, magnet programs, dropout prevention programs, the Hartford priority schools, and district communication with the greater Hartford community. Advisory Council members proposed solutions to concerns in these areas at the meetings with the Superintendent, but opportunities to assist the administration with these strategies were limited. One exception is the redistricting committee, where several Advisory Council members are active participants. Advisory Council members also held community forums to discuss the long-term facilities plan.

The State Board of Trustees and Superintendent Amato have recommended that a new Advisory Council be formed in April 2001. At the March 2001 monthly meeting between the State Board of Trustees and the Advisory Council, the chair of the Trustees expressed his appreciation for the assistance and dedication of the current Advisory Council members. Council members expressed their interest in continuing to assist the Trustees and the administration with issues presented at prior meetings.

## **Accreditation**

The requirement in Special Act 97-4 that all elementary and middle schools in Hartford join the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) through the association's accreditation process is administered by a central office official, managed by a former principal in the Hartford schools and supported through technical assistance by the director of the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary Schools, the State Department of Education and other educational institutions. The written strategy to accredit Hartford schools has been updated by the Hartford administrators to include activities from November 2000 to March 2001; a revised list of schools by cohort; the accreditation timeline; budgets to support the development of the self study, accreditation site visit and membership dues; identified technical support for principals and accreditation teams; and the accreditation process checklist (Appendix E). The State Monitors received a list of current accreditation expenditures; however, the expenses were not disaggregated by school. The district will provide the expenditure information in this format for the next quarterly

report.

Elementary and middle school principals in cohorts one through three (19 schools altogether) are involved in the accreditation process at this time. Schools with preschool programs have also begun the process in cohorts. Two elementary schools, Kennelly and Simpson-Waverly, received initial institutional accreditation by the NEASC Board of Trustees on March 15, 2001 (see letters in Appendix E, pages E27- E29). These schools will receive commendations and recommendations based on the site visit to Kennelly and Simpson-Waverly; the NEASC site visits were conducted to validate the accreditation standards that were assessed in each school's self-study report. Central office officials have added a "follow-up" procedure to the accreditation process so that school and district resources can begin to address NEASC recommendations (see Appendix E, page E25). For the other 17 schools currently involved in the accreditation process, time has been designated during several of the professional development days to complete the self-study process. Principals and school accreditation teams continue to request additional time to complete this process. Barnard Brown and Mary Hooker elementary schools will have their site visits conducted in May 2001. The timeline for scheduled site visits by a NEASC visiting committee to the remaining elementary and middle schools extends until October 2003.

The State Board of Trustees received at an informational meeting in November 2000 a summary of the actions taken by the Hartford administration and Hartford Public High School staff members to prepare for the submission of the Five-Year Progress Report to NEASC in March 2001 (Appendix E, pages E31-E32). In June 2000, the Commission on Public Secondary Schools had continued the school's probationary status until concerns pertaining to several accreditation standards were resolved. A new leadership team was formed at Hartford Public this academic year to assist with accreditation efforts, including a new principal, Dr. Jose Colon-Rivas, and an accreditation coordinator. Several staff members who had served on school accreditation subcommittees were reassigned to other schools at the beginning of the school year. Central office officials and Dr. Colon-Rivas have improved communication with NEASC concerning the recommendations made in prior reports. The school's accreditation coordinator and staff members are currently piloting a framework to assess student work against the rubrics developed for the school's learning goals. The NEASC Commission on Public Secondary Schools will convene

in June 2001 to review Hartford Public's report and accreditation status. A copy of the school's bimonthly accreditation newsletter is provided in Appendix E, pages E33-E34.

Weaver High School submitted a Special Progress Report in November 2000 to resolve the "warning" designation received for the Standard on Curriculum and Instruction (Appendix E, pages E35-E36). The NEASC Commission on Public Secondary Schools reviewed the report at its January 2001 meeting and decided to continue the school's accreditation and the warning for the Standard on Curriculum and Instruction "until all concerns have been satisfactorily resolved" (Appendix E, page E35). Commendations concerning new instructional initiatives were listed in the letter of correspondence dated February 22, 2001; however, it is not clear which specific areas described in the Special Progress Report warrant additional attention. A NEASC visiting committee will conduct a decennial evaluation visit scheduled for March 2002. The Commission recommended a visit by a NEASC staff member to review the self-study process during this academic year. Additional communication with the Commission on Public Secondary Schools may assist the Hartford administration with areas of need. The State Board of Trustees should receive regular reports on improvements in Weaver High School and activities pertaining to accreditation efforts.

An additional Special Progress Report was also requested from Bulkeley High School's accreditation team by July 1, 2001 (Appendix E, pages E37-E38). This report should show how the school's mission and standards reflect the Commission's new accreditation standards, and how the standards were promoted to the school community.

Given the concern to fully accredit Hartford's high schools, the State Monitors continue to recommend that the State Board of Trustees and the Superintendent carefully examine the resources necessary to implement school improvement plans during this academic year and strongly consider school resource needs during the development of the 2001-02 budget.

### **Budget Development and Process**

The State Board of Trustees continues to receive monthly general fund financial reports and periodic reports on the use of special funds. Allocation changes are presented monthly to the Trustees as part of their regular meeting agenda. An informational meeting was held in late February 2001 to review the current budget on a variety of indicators and offer comparisons to prior years (Appendix F, pages F19-F34). This analysis conducted by the Hartford Public Schools will be examined in the next quarterly progress report.

According to the December 31, 2000 Financial Statement for general funds, 39.1 percent of the district's \$197,063,050 budget was expended; another 12.1 percent of the budget represented encumbrances and commitments. Year-end projections show deficits in several areas: instructional administrators, \$487,500; noncertified administrators,

\$229,810; paraprofessionals and security officers, \$364,904; and building improvements, \$45,000. It is anticipated that the Instructional Staff account will show a surplus of \$1,232,400 by year-end. The district explains major variance issues in its monthly budget narratives (Appendix F, pages F3-F6). As of December 31, 2000, the administration anticipates a favorable year-end balance of \$105,186.

According to the list of Hartford Public Schools staff vacancies provided by the district's human resources department (as of March 16, 2001), positions that have not been filled include:

- music teachers at 10 elementary schools – Batchelder, Betances, Dwight, Hooker, Kinsella, Moylan, Naylor, Parkville, Simpson-Waverly and West Middle;
- bilingual teachers and other teachers for English language learners at Bulkeley High, Betances and SAND;
- a reading teacher at Milner;
- special education teachers at Fox Middle, Quirk Middle, Hartford Transitional Learning Academy, Kinsella, Milner, Moylan, SAND and West Middle;
- library media specialists for Sanchez, Twain, Webster and Wish;
- other elementary, middle and high school teachers at Burr, Kennelly, King, McDonough, M.D. Fox, Rawson, Fox Middle, Quirk Middle, South Middle, Hartford Public and Weaver High;
- social workers at Betances, Kennelly and Sanchez; and
- seven alternative education positions, including four teachers, a case manager, a nurse, and an administrator

As of September 30, 2000, the Hartford Public Schools Special Funds budget for 2000-01 totals \$43,309,084.48. Actual expenditures total \$4,864,177.30 as of September 30, 2000, or 10.7 percent of the budget. Encumbrances total \$4,329,449.65 or 9.6 percent of the budget (Appendix F, pages F7-F15). Given the large number of federal and state grants received by the Hartford Public Schools, the State Board of Trustees' goal to report monthly on the status of *all* funds, with year-end projections, continues to be an important aim. In addition to more frequent reports on the status of special funds, the Trustees should consider, as stated in the *October 2000 Quarterly Progress Report*, developing general and special fund expenditure reports by Hartford Public Schools improvement initiative to determine program costs and consider additional financial resource needs.

Hartford principals have attended training sessions on how to manage their general and special funds allocations through the district's web-based financial reporting system. Ongoing training is still needed to monitor use of this system and to consider questions raised by principals regarding their accounts. The Hartford administration still has not developed a mechanism to engage and inform principals about decisions made by central office officials to use school cost center general and special funds for purchases allocated to schools. It is difficult for principals to determine the status of their funds without this information. This concern has been discussed with Hartford officials and stated in two prior quarterly reports.

The 2001-02 budget development process began in November 2000. The Trustees anticipate adoption of their budget and presentation to the Hartford City Council in April 2001. The proposed budget was presented to the Trustees on March 20, 2001, and a budget workshop and public hearing are scheduled for March 27, 2001. In prior years, the State Board of Trustees held several public meetings to review budget proposals by administrative area. Members of the State Board of Trustees have worked closely with the district's financial administrator and the audit steering committee to develop financial management reports (see February 2001 presentation in Appendix F).

### **Fiscal and Operations Audit**

The Operational Audit Steering Committee (OASC), co-chaired by the majority leader of the City Council and the chair of the State Board of Trustees, continues to meet monthly and review progress made on priority projects to address the 98 recommendations from the 1997 fiscal and operations audit. The audit addresses 10 functional areas: financial management, budget and planning, procurement, information technology, special funds, warehouse facilities, payroll, facilities, enrollment management and human resources. On a quarterly basis, the committee reviews that status of all the recommendations and a presentation is made to the State Board of Trustees.

As of January 2001, 50 of the recommendations were completed, 32 were in progress, 7 were under review and 2 had not been prioritized. Seven recommendations are no longer considered relevant. A description of the status of each recommendation by functional area is provided in Appendix G, pages G3-G14. In June 2000, 35 of the recommendations had been completed, 35 were in progress, 17 were under review and 4 had not been prioritized. Recommendations designated as "in progress" have resources assigned and a timetable for completion; recommendations "under review" have not had resources allocated; and recommendations that are "not prioritized" either have prerequisite recommendations before changes can begin, or are of low priority.

The status of priority projects, prepared by the OASC staff, is described in Appendix G, pages G15-G18. Current priority projects that continue to lack sufficient personnel and financial resources include the following: implementing the plan for a joint chart of accounts, installing SmartStream automated funds control and conversion to the

SmartStream human resources/payroll module. According to the OASC, “knowledgeable SmartStream resources remain limited and have been further reduced with the loss of key [municipal] personnel... Currently both City and School District are reliant on consultants for financial reporting warehouse and report development.” According to municipal and school district officials, internal staff members have recently been identified to receive training to manage SmartStream. The OASC has not received a formalized plan to address this issue. There is an audit recommendation related to the financial management system that is currently categorized as “under review”: “to clearly define and communicate roles and responsibilities for SmartStream support.”

The OASC approved a resolution endorsing an internal audit planning and operations policy and regulation for the Hartford Public Schools at its January 31, 2001, meeting. The Trustees approved the first reading of the policy at its March 6, 2001, meeting. The Trustees will consider the resolution for adoption at its April 3, 2001, meeting. This policy will extend the duties of the City of Hartford’s Internal Audit Department to the Hartford Public Schools. An internal audit function for the Hartford Public Schools will serve a very useful purpose, as the district establishes written procedures for all financial and operational areas, and improves financial controls.

As of March 23, 2001 the OASC had expended \$404,365 on 2000-01 priority projects; an additional allocation of \$110,000 will be provided through municipal and district resources to continue 2000-01 projects through June 2001 (Appendix G, page G19). The continued support provided by the Operational Audit Steering Committee is uncertain beyond June 2001, pending designated financial resources to support the completion of the audit recommendations. Three strategies that can improve the effectiveness of the technical assistance provided through the Operational Audit Steering Committee are (1) designating sufficient internal staff resources to manage priority projects and build internal capacity to maintain financial and operational systems; (2) clearly defining the roles and responsibilities for project team members; and (3) establishing more frequent communication between and within municipal and district departments to complete projects and report on progress.

Since the State Department of Education’s Office of Internal Audit issued its findings concerning the limited review of Hartford’s special education program expenditures in the *July 1998 Quarterly Progress Report*, periodic meetings have been held with the assistant superintendent of student support services, the assistant superintendent of finance and administration, and the chief of staff for the Operational Audit Steering Committee to discuss the actions taken to address the special education audit recommendations. A summary of actions taken to improve the budgeting and accounting of special education tuition costs has been provided in prior quarterly reports; Appendix H (pages H3-H11) provides a summary of the district’s activities since the 1998-99 academic year. Special education tuition budgets and expenditures are now managed and monitored by the district’s finance department in cooperation with the district’s special education department. Written “out-of-district” tuition procedures and facility contract procedures

have been established. Budgets are prepared and reviewed by facility name and student name, with monthly projections and monthly reconciliation of tuition estimates to actual expenditures. Detailed documentation was provided for 1999-2000 and 2000-01 costs and expenditures in the following areas:

- special education out-of-district tuition for public schools in Connecticut;
- special education out-of-district tuition for private facilities in Connecticut;
- special education out-of-district and out-of-state tuition;
- magnet school and vocational/agricultural program tuition;
- regular education tuition; and
- regular and special education transportation.

Tables summarizing the tuition and transportation expenditures for 1999-2000 and the year-end projections for 2000-01 are provided in Appendix H, pages H26-H35.

In 1999-2000, the district budgeted \$13,009,864 for special education tuition costs from general and special funds, and expended \$10,887,878. This year, the special education tuition budget is \$12,757,769 from general and special funds; year-end projections total \$11,104,688. The district's finance office has begun to establish more formal and regular communication with state agencies serving Hartford students in out-of-district placements to facilitate immediate budgeting and processing of tuition payments.

Regular education tuition costs in 1999-2000 were budgeted at \$844,550 from general funds; and expenditures totaled \$2,010,892; this includes \$311,194 from prior years. The 2000-01 regular education tuition budget (including magnet and vocational/agricultural programs) is \$1,336,968 from general funds. Year-end projections are estimated at \$2,174,723. The detailed tuition data now being collected by the finance department should result in more accurate budget forecasts, especially for 2001-02 regular education tuition costs.

Regular education transportation costs for 1999-2000 were budgeted at \$1,942,406 from general and special funds; actual expenditures totaled \$2,252,051. For 2000-01, regular education transportation costs are projected to be \$3,114,817; however, the budgeted allocation from general and special funds is \$2,763,911. Special education transportation costs have been fully budgeted with special funds in 1999-2000 and 2000-01: The 1999-2000 budget was \$5,312,550; \$5,142,842 was expended. In 2000-01, \$5,579,039 is budgeted, and year-end projections total \$5,304,600. Given the improved accounting of transportation costs, more accurate regular education transportation projections can now be included in the budget proposal for the 2001-02 academic year.

A new student data management system is under development to provide current, accurate information on students receiving special education services. It is unclear whether principals, teachers and related service personnel will have access to this system to review documentation concerning their students. Staff data management will be improved with the implementation of a new position control system that can provide more accurate salary adjustments and reclassifications for budgeting and reporting purposes throughout the year; this project has been delayed until the district transfers to

the SmartStream human resources/payroll module.

One of the audit report's recommendations concerns the development of an annual plan for Hartford's special education program, including:

“a yearly report indicating progress towards implementing that plan. The plan and the progress report should encompass both financial and operational goals and objectives. Significant projects, such as the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy should be planned and evaluated within this reporting structure.”

The special education department has established department goals this year; however, the continuous improvement plan to address these goals is currently being modified in response to the State Department of Education's special education compliance recommendations. The implementation, assessment and regular reporting on activities to address these goals will inform the Trustees, Hartford administration, teachers and parents of (1) improvements in student achievement, (2) improvements in the management and delivery of services to students with special needs, and (3) additional resource and programmatic needs.

### **Long-Term Facilities Plan**

In spring and summer 2000, the State Board of Trustees received and approved the long-range facilities plan prepared by Jeter, Cook and Jepson Architects and the Hartford administration. The School Building Committee (SBC) of municipal and district leaders also discussed the findings and recommendations from the report. The report presents a plan to relieve overcrowding in Hartford schools and to create a new grade structure: a PK through Grade 8 elementary school structure and the current Grade 9-12 secondary structure. The first four recommended construction projects are at Rawson, Naylor, Webster and Burr elementary schools.

In November 2000 the majority of Hartford residents voted in support of a \$75 million bond referendum for school construction projects. It was anticipated at community forums to discuss the long-range plan that these funds would support the design and construction of the first four recommended construction projects in the long-range facilities plan and that periodic bond referendums would be proposed to address the remaining Hartford school projects. However, due to financial constraints in the City of Hartford, the Hartford City Manager directed municipal and district officials at the February 2001 SBC meeting to consider this bond ordinance for school construction as the last referendum before voters until the next presidential election. This action was taken in order to better manage existing bond issues and municipal revenues. The SBC endorsed a recommendation to allocate a portion of the \$75 million bond ordinance for the following projects: (a) roof replacement projects at Betances, Kennelly and Naylor (estimated total, \$2.4 million); and (b) \$1.5 million to fund the shortfall in the 19 Schools code compliance project (authorized through a prior \$27 million bond issue). The State

Board of Trustees approved, at its March 20, 2001, special meeting, the educational specifications for the three roof projects, and authorized the administration to apply for State Department of Education school construction grants.

The Hartford City Manager recommended at the February 2001 SBC meeting that committee members reexamine the proposed renovation projects at Burr, Rawson, Naylor and Webster and determine if these or other projects warranted the most attention over the next five years. The March 2001 School Building Committee meeting was cancelled; therefore, projects for the remaining \$71 million in authorized bond funds will be considered in April 2001. The projects at Burr, Rawson, Naylor and Webster are currently before the General Assembly for approval; if these projects do not begin as planned, the timeline for the implementation of the long-range plan will be extended over several more years.

At the February 2001 SBC meeting, a status report on *current* construction projects was presented (Appendix I, pages I3-I7). According to the report:

- gym floor, locker and auditorium seat replacement projects at seven schools are substantially complete;
- boiler and chiller replacement projects at four schools are 85 percent complete;
- underground storage tank removal projects at eight schools were completed in January 2001; and

- projects to address code and life/safety issues at 10 schools are “approximately 15 to 25 percent in place.” Completion is not anticipated until fall 2001.

The status report included detail financial reports for roof projects, oil tank replacement projects, the 19 Schools project and Hartford Public High School. Although these reports do provide information on expenditures, it does not disaggregate grouped projects by school. A school facilities reporting mechanism was developed in collaboration with the chief of staff of the Operational Audit Steering Committee to provide information on individual school projects; however, it has not been in use since summer 2000. The SBC should receive monthly reports that, at a minimum, list grouped projects by school and include for each school the status of the project; completion dates; estimated and final costs; dates of SBC, State Board of Trustees and State Department of Education (SDE) approvals; a description of expenditures by category; and progress payments received by SDE.

A list of Hartford school construction projects that should be receiving estimated or progress payments was developed by the State Department of Education (SDE) and presented to the SBC at its February 2001 meeting (Appendix I, pages I9-I13). Several findings can be noted:

- Final costs have not been submitted for seven school projects receiving estimated payments that began between 1994 and 1996. Three of these projects are not fully funded; therefore, SDE is not paying on anticipated funding.
- Payment requests on nine school projects have not been submitted within the last six months.
- Payment requests on 19 school projects have not been submitted in six months or longer.
- Payment requests have not been submitted on 24 projects.

The acting finance director for the City of Hartford estimates that at least \$18.4 million dollars are due for the roof and oil tank replacement projects, the 19 Schools projects and the 13 Schools projects. Members of municipal and district finance and facilities departments have met on several occasions with the chief of staff of the Operational Audit Implementation Steering Committee to develop a new capital improvement process (CIP) that will provide the necessary structures to authorize and report on school facilities projects. The School Building Committee received recommendations from the CIP committee at its September 2000 meeting, but no action was taken on the recommendations. In October 2000 a job description was prepared for a special project assistant in the municipal finance office to organize existing financial information on school construction projects for SDE reimbursement and to develop a system to handle monthly requisitions for SDE payments. No action was taken to secure this position. On January 17, 2001 the City Manager met with municipal and district administrators to discuss a report that was presented on “best practices for school construction.” The January 23, 2001 SBC meeting was cancelled. In February 2001, the SBC agenda did not

include the facilities management topic, but the issue was raised at the meeting and the deputy chief of staff for the Hartford Public Schools distributed the recommendations gleaned from the January 17, 2001 discussion on best practices (Appendix I, pages I15-I17). The February 2001 SBC meeting was cancelled.

The recommendations distributed at the January 2001 SBC meeting included a request for the formation of a school construction steering committee to oversee school project work in schools; school construction committees at each school chaired by district facilities administrators; a new “quality-based selection process” for program estimators and managers; roles and responsibilities for program estimators, managers and municipal and district officials; and assurances that construction activities would be monitored daily as a result of implementing the recommendations. The State Board of Trustees, the SBC and the City Manager would also receive progress reports monthly.

The acting finance director for the City of Hartford also concurred at the January 2001 SBC meeting with the recommendations to consider hiring a project management firm to handle contractor payments and grant applications, similar to the process used for the Learning Corridor schools. In his correspondence to the State Board of Education at its October 4, 2000 meeting, to discuss the *September 2000 Quarterly Progress Report*, the Commissioner of Education stated the need for “executing a more effective management process for facilities projects.” The statutory requirement in Section 7 of Special Act 97-4 to develop a long-term building program and to expeditiously implement the program may be jeopardized if financial and operational management concerns are not addressed immediately. The State Monitors continue to report that officials need to agree on a new process to better manage the scope, costs and day-to-day operations of existing and future projects.

The following points summarize other actions taken and facilities improvements completed since October 2000:

- According to the chief of staff of the OASC, the new work order system is operational; feedback from vendor post-implementation assessment reports has been positive; the vendor has collected and input data on mechanical operating equipment at all schools for the development of preventive maintenance schedules; training on the use of the preventive maintenance component of the new work order system began in December 2000.
- State Department of Education general improvement grants to the Hartford Public Schools of approximately \$2.2 million each year (beginning in fiscal year 1999) were used for the following projects: fiscal year 1999 – ceiling and window replacements at Bulkeley and Weaver High Schools and carpet replacement at King elementary school; fiscal year 2000 – locker, boiler, chiller, ceiling, window, gymnasium floor and carpeting replacements in 18 schools (completion necessary by June 30, 2001); and fiscal year 2001 – carpet, boiler, seating, auditorium stage and window replacements at 17 schools (completion necessary by June 30, 2002). A project proposal summary for fiscal years 1999, 2000 and 2001 is provided in Appendix I, page I19. Because general improvement funds for fiscal year 1999 projects were not fully expended by June 30, 2000, the State

Department of Education requested, and received, a refund of \$141,703. Given the larger scope of fiscal year 2000 and 2001 projects, additional oversight of project activity and expenditures incurred may be warranted.

- After several attempts to resolve with the Hartford Public Schools an audit finding from a school construction project, it was necessary for the State Department of Education to take action to secure a refund of \$576,709 in February 2001 for ineligible costs identified in the audit (project number 064-108).
- At its March 20, 2001, special meeting, the State Board of Trustees rescinded its April 4, 2000, acceptance of 8 roof and 11 oil tank replacement projects as complete. According to Hartford administrators, phases of contracted work were not completed, changes were made that effected contract costs without prior approval by the SBC, and necessary approvals were not secured to authorize the Parkville school project.

The School Building Committee has been reviewing the status of the Hartford Public High School project at its monthly meetings (see project status as of February 27, 2001, in Appendix I, page I21). As of February 2001, Clarke Tamaccio Architects reported that the final cost estimate for Phases II and III of the Hartford Public project, after the value engineering effort by a professional estimator, is \$71,160,725: \$66,660,725 for Phase II construction and \$4,500,000 for Phase III furniture and computers. Total projected costs, which include Phase I site work construction (currently 90 percent complete), are still estimated at approximately \$82 million.

At the February 2001 School Building Committee meeting, the City of Hartford's finance department prepared and presented a financial report on the Hartford Public project with actual expenditures, encumbrances and commitments from July 1, 1997, to June 30, 2001. As of February 26, 2001, from the original \$82 million estimate for the project:

- \$4,985,095 was expended and \$2,236,046 was encumbered for architectural services;
- \$19,856 was expended for financial services;
- \$17,723 was expended for bond counsel services;
- \$789 was expended for advertising; and
- \$1,745,200 was expended and \$642,738 was encumbered for construction contracts.

The actual budgets for these categories were not provided, making it difficult to estimate remaining balances for services and other categories. Overall, \$6,768,662 or 8.25 percent of the original estimate was expended, and \$2,878,784 or 3.51 percent was encumbered. Partial occupancy of the new facility (approximately 600 students) is projected for February 2003; full occupancy of the new facility is projected for January 2006.

## **Collective Bargaining**

The current status of contracts with the 12 unions representing Hartford Public Schools personnel is outlined in Appendix J. The contracts for special police officers and substitute teachers expired in June 2000. According to the Hartford administration, negotiations and subsequent mediation was unsuccessful. Arbitration is the next step in the process. Five other contracts expire June 30, 2001 – contracts for paraprofessionals, educational support personnel, school health professionals, school secretaries and support supervisors. Much activity will have to take place over the next three months to establish new contracts. Four other contracts are current until June 2002. One union, the Hartford Federation of Technical Support Personnel – Local 3534, is in the process of disbanding, according to the Hartford administration.

### **Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee**

The staff of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee conducted a study between March and December 1999 to ascertain the progress made by the State Board of Trustees in three areas: (1) addressing the requirements of Special Act 97-4; (2) improvements in administrative operations; and (3) oversight of the Hartford Public School System. The recommendations from the staff report concurred with the observations recorded in the quarterly reports to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Efforts by the district and its partners to address the staff recommendations (see alignment of staff recommendations with district's annual goals in Appendix A, pages A17-A26) are reflected throughout this report. Accomplishments and other findings include the following:

- The development and implementation of a written, comprehensive strategy to accredit Hartford schools, with support provided by the Commission on Public Elementary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and other organizations. The Commissioner of Education, the State Monitors and Superintendent Amato continue to discuss progress at monthly meetings. Two elementary schools have received initial institutional accreditation from NEASC. Accreditation expenditures have been submitted to the State Monitors, who have requested an expenditure report by school. Although time to complete the accreditation process has been provided during some of the district's professional development days, schools continue to request additional time.
- The Trustees have received reports on the status of the Commissioner of Education's 48 Recommendations, the 1999-2000 goals and actions of the Trustees, Hartford's technology plan, and actions taken to address the operational audit recommendations. District officials are preparing reports to the Trustees and the Commissioner of Education on a plan to complete the 48 Recommendations, a new technology plan for the district (the current plan expires this year), and actions taken to address the 2000-01 annual goals.
- The Trustees have also adopted a long-range facilities plan to ensure students attend safe, adequate and properly sized facilities. Hartford residents approved a \$75 million dollar bond referendum in November 2000. Recommendations for an improved capital improvement process are still under review by the School Building Committee of district and municipal leaders.
- The Advisory Council began monthly meetings with Superintendent Amato and his cabinet in September 2000, in addition to the regular monthly meetings with Superintendent Amato and the State Board of Trustees. A protocol was established for submitting and reviewing agenda topics; minutes are prepared and distributed. Topics are raised and discussed at the monthly meetings; however, there is limited collaboration between the Hartford administration and the Advisory Council to develop and implement action plans to address areas of concern. Two projects did emerge that strengthened the Council's advisory capacity: organizing community forums to discuss the long-range facilities plan, and participating on Hartford's redistricting committee to relieve overcrowding in schools. Improving communication with parents and teachers continues to be an area that Council members would like to pursue with the Superintendent and the Trustees. The Trustees and the Superintendent plan to appoint a new Advisory Council in April 2001.

One of the recommendations made by the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee and the State Monitors in their reports concerns establishing a standardized reporting mechanism for the State Board of Trustees to determine the progress of implemented board policies and programs. The Trustees have not received and approved the preliminary reporting schedule that was developed by the administration with support from the chief of staff of the Operational Audit Steering Committee. This schedule will

include reports that provide information to the Trustees on district accountability efforts, financial and operational improvements, curricular areas and other programs and initiatives. Developing this mechanism continues to be of import because it will assist the Trustees and the greater Hartford community to gauge the level of improvement in the Hartford Public Schools *over time*, and the resources used to sustain gains in student achievement and operational areas.

District and municipal leaders and the Operational Audit Steering Committee have committed resources to develop written financial processes and procedures manuals, and to formulate an internal audit planning and operations policy and regulation for the Hartford Public Schools. The State Monitors have received from central office officials preliminary reports on 1999-2000 districtwide initiatives in preparation for the State Monitors' cumulative report on the 1999-2000 progress and needs of the district.

The remaining staff recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee are in progress.

- Hartford's City Manager is working with her administration and district officials to quickly implement a mechanism for building Hartford's internal capacity to manage the automated financial system. An update was provided to the Operational Audit Steering Committee at its March 2001 meeting.
- The State Department of Education (SDE) and the Hartford Federation of Teachers have been working with the district's teacher evaluation committee to develop a new evaluation process that is aligned with SDE frameworks. Hartford administrators should consider providing the Trustees with regular reports on new personnel evaluation instruments. The Hartford administration and the State Board of Trustees discussed their accountability systems at the November 2000 informational meeting.
- The State Board of Trustees still has not received a report describing how the district's various parent, teacher and community activities address the district's "student-centered" parent and community involvement policy, adopted in November 1997. Parent activities should be aligned with the parental involvement standards adopted by the committee charged with implementing this Board policy.

## **II. VISITS TO HARTFORD SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS**

The State Monitors and other staff members at the State Department of Education visited several Hartford schools and programs and attended various forums for parents and teachers to gauge some of the progress in services provided to students with special needs, English language learners and students in alternative programs. Observations were made and discussions were held with administrators and staff members at the

Hartford Transitional Learning Academy (HTLA) at 110 Washington Street and the HTLA Annex at 150 Tower Avenue; Hartford Public High School; South Middle School; Clark Elementary; Parkville Elementary; Dwight Elementary; SAND Elementary; the Hartford Alternative Learning Opportunities (HALO) program; Anchor, a juvenile detention center on Broad Street; and the Juvenile Supervision and Reporting Center on Washington Street. Several of the school visits were made in conjunction with the State Department of Education's special education compliance review in Hartford. The State Monitors also attended and recorded the proceedings at forums to discuss educational issues in Hartford. Three forums sponsored by the Hartford Federation of Teachers in partnership with the Hartford administration were held on the following topics: special education, bilingual education and elementary schools. Three special education forums sponsored by the Hartford Public Schools in partnership with local advocacy groups for families with children with special needs were held to hear parents' concerns.

Observations were summarized and presented to the Commissioner of Education and Superintendent Amato during monthly meetings. The summary of these findings and recommendations, with reference made to findings from prior quarterly reports, is as follows:

- *Literacy Programs.* The focus on student literacy continues to be well received by administrators, parents and teachers. The literacy programs Success For All and Direct Instruction are at various stages of implementation at the elementary and middle and high schools, including the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy. Hartford's alternative education and juvenile detention programs did not have these literacy programs in place (see program organizational charts in Appendix K, pages K3-K5). According to teachers and parents, although central office administrators have provided some training opportunities to begin to modify these literacy programs to better serve students with special needs and English language learners, more support is still needed to help these students reach achievement gains similar to those of their peers. Components of the Success for All (SFA) program, such as SFA tutors, are insufficient for the number of students who need additional instruction. It is not clear if SFA student achievement data is disaggregated for students with special needs and bilingual students to determine if achievement gains are comparable to those of general education students. Special education teachers may not necessarily have their special needs students assigned to his or her SFA group. These teachers continue to request additional planning time to discuss appropriate instructional and cooperative learning strategies with general education teachers serving special needs students and to review students' academic progress. Large class sizes for SFA groups were also a concern, especially for students making the transition from bilingual programs or students with special needs.

The complete Spanish version of the SFA program is not available to all bilingual students in schools with bilingual programs: the Spanish Roots component, primarily for Grades 1-3, is available; the Spanish Wings component is only

available at certain schools with bilingual programs. This continues to raise concerns about providing adequate native language instruction that will foster improved transition to instruction in English for students at schools with bilingual programs. At HTLA, it was not clear if bilingual students are identified to develop a bilingual program. It was reported, however, that if a student does not show language dominance in English, a bilingual paraprofessional is provided in accordance with placement team recommendations. HTLA administrators and teachers should examine students' cumulative records to determine if a bilingual resource teacher is needed to provide both language support services for students and training in language support strategies for HTLA special education teachers. HALO administrators should conduct a similar review.

- *Science, Social Studies and Library Instruction.* During the visits, HTLA and alternative education teachers discussed anticipated improvements in science instruction in Hartford and gaps that still need attention. Elementary HTLA teachers will receive training in a new kit-based science program. High school HTLA teachers do not have access to the Pittsco modular science program available at the local high schools, nor do they have a complete class set of science high school textbooks. Alternative education teachers need additional staff members to provide separate middle and high school science curricular offerings. The district has not revised the existing social studies program; teachers will be meeting with the district's social studies chair in spring 2001 to develop a new program. HTLA does not have a library at either site, thus limiting instruction in library research skills and access to books from a variety of genres to stimulate self-directed reading habits in students. Library media specialists continue to provide instruction in schoolwide literacy programs; this limits students' access to the library, especially in Grades 4-6 in elementary schools and Grades 4-8 in K-8 schools. Music and art instruction are provided

at HTLA; the HALO program does not offer instruction in these content areas, or in physical education.

- *Academic Intervention Programs.* Schools continue to lack sufficient literacy and numeracy intervention programs (e.g., Early Success and Soar to Success) to address the academic needs of students in special education programs and students not showing adequate progress in the Success for All program. There are particular concerns of equity of staff resources among schools, depending on the number of students who need to be served through intervention programs. Each school has one Early Success reading teacher regardless of the number of Grade 1-3 students who need support, and only 11 schools receive Soar to Success literacy support for Grade 4-6 students. The HTLA Annex, which services only elementary students with special needs, does not have an Early Success or Soar to Success teaching position allocated to the school. The HTLA Annex also lacks SFA tutors.

As a result of the Connecticut Mastery Test scores for fall 2000, an additional allocation of \$81 per Grade 4 student who scored at the intervention level was awarded to schools to develop additional extended-day learning opportunities for these students. It seems from the data depicting the allocation to schools that Grade 4 students who did not take the Grade 4 examination were not included in total allocation to schools. The State Monitors continue to report that with greater academic expectations for all students and more rigorous social promotion and retention policies in Hartford, it is critical that *all* students in need of literacy and numeracy intervention programs receive this support. For bilingual students not making sufficient progress, language support services should also be provided. Data should be collected identifying bilingual students in need of such services, the extent of support provided and its effectiveness.

- *Instructional Materials.* Most teachers reported that they received instructional materials and supplies on time. HTLA teachers at 110 Washington Street and teachers at alternative and juvenile detention centers do not have all of the curricular materials in all of the content areas that are available to teachers at Hartford high schools. More instructional materials, however, have been provided at these programs than in prior years. The school-to-career programs at HTLA have expanded.

Certain teachers continue to be concerned about the lack of additional instructional materials to supplement the superintendent's initiatives or to provide students with appropriate "grade-level" instruction, especially students at or above grade level according to the Connecticut Mastery Test and students in bilingual special education programs. During these visits, the district still lacked sufficient native-language teachers and sufficient appropriate instructional materials for students from Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia. Several special education teachers reported that they recently received an allocation of funds to purchase materials.

There did not seem to be, however, a coordinated effort to consider similar supplemental materials across schools.

- *Instructional Time.* Bilingual teachers, math teachers, special education teachers and teachers in schools piloting a new enrichment model all raised concerns about the lack of instructional time to effectively teach content in accordance with the pacing guides provided by the district. The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction is currently reviewing this concern in light of new efforts to establish a second literacy block of time during the instructional day at the elementary schools. The State Monitors requested a sample of the daily and weekly schedule for students across schools to examine when the academic initiatives are implemented throughout the day and week.

The district's elementary math coach has met with teachers to find ways to adjust the pacing guide so that teachers have more time to review lessons with students and more time to provide additional instruction when needed. Numeracy teams are also examining the fall 2000 CMT results so that the skills and competencies in state assessments can be incorporated into the numeracy curriculum. Teachers at HTLA at 110 Washington Street continue to wrestle with how to provide dynamic academic instruction and at the same time address the social needs of the students they serve. Several teachers at HTLA have developed incentive programs or partnerships with other schools tied to curricular goals. Central office curriculum chairs should meet regularly with HTLA teachers to explore research-based instructional programs and strategies that will help these students achieve high academic goals at all literacy levels, and prepare them to make the transition to the academic programs at their local high schools.

- *Related Services and Support Staff Members.* Sufficient time to provide related services (e.g., social work, speech and hearing services, psychological services) and special education and bilingual resource services continues to be a concern for staff members at local schools, HTLA and the HALO alternative program. Mandated testing requirements and mandated requirements to teach districtwide instructional programs do not permit, in some cases, sufficient time for support staff persons to meet with students regularly; or only permit time for small group sessions instead of individual sessions. It is not clear if all of these duties (i.e., direct service to students, testing requirements) are factored into the budget allocations to schools when designating full-time equivalent staff persons to schools. It is also not clear if there is a mechanism for resource teachers to record daily their sessions with students who require special education or bilingual services to confirm that services were actually rendered.

Therapeutic services at HTLA are not at the levels requested in the HTLA program plan: the program lacks a clinical coordinator and full psychiatric services to serve students who may be self injurious, may require constant hospitalization or have histories of extensive substance abuse (see HTLA organizational chart, recommendations for professional development and

improvements in Appendix K, pages K7-K17). The Anchor juvenile detention center has a full-time social worker this year.

Teachers and administrators requested that students in need of paraprofessional support receive these services. This issue is one that the State Department of Education considered a “systemic problem” that warranted immediate action (see correspondence in Appendix K, pages K19-K21). The district recently developed and implemented a plan to monitor paraprofessional support.

A position description for part-time special education monitors was developed, and special fund resources were used to offer these services to all schools. At HTLA, a special description was prepared for a 12-month program assistant to maintain student records and to coordinate team meetings with parents to discuss student progress (Appendix K, pages K23-K25). School guidance services are also provided at HTLA. The HTLA Annex has a family resource aide to improve parent involvement at the school.

- *Professional Development.* Bilingual and special education teachers and paraprofessionals continue to request joint school/district professional development planning sessions with general education teachers to achieve the following goals: to better transition students, to improve instruction, to modify new instructional programs, to learn behavior intervention strategies, to develop instructional and career programs, and to select appropriate instructional materials, including software applications. A “least restrictive environment” advisory committee was formed in March 2001 to develop an action plan to achieve these and other goals.

In prior quarterly reports it was stated that teachers wanted to have opportunities to meet with each other and with district officials to provide feedback for improvement. The forums provided by the Hartford Federation of Teachers, in addition to Hartford literacy team meetings and SFA facilitators’ meetings, assisted with this goal. The Hartford bilingual department has decided to form an advisory committee of administrators, teachers and parents that will meet regularly, beginning in May 2001, to develop and implement solutions to systemic issues. The Hartford Federation of Teachers and the assistant superintendent for student support services plan to develop a similar committee for special education concerns.

- *Substitute Teachers.* Administrators and teachers continue to be greatly concerned that substitute teachers have not received training to administer districtwide instructional programs, and are not sufficiently qualified to serve students with special needs. The lack of substitute teachers in the district also was a major concern for administrators and teachers, given the larger number of professional development offerings for staff members. Without sufficient substitute teachers, teachers reported that at several schools paraprofessionals and special education or bilingual education resource teachers were asked to cover

classes, limiting support they can provide to students in need of these services. Recommendations raised by administrators included hiring several teachers trained in the district's instructional programs to serve as substitute teachers across the system.

- *Special Education Referral Process and Student Assistance Teams.* During visits to schools, administrators and teachers raised concerns about students who were not demonstrating academic success, even after exhausting existing school intervention programs. When evaluations show that these students do not qualify for special education services, and there are no additional school funds to provide intensive academic and social support services, school staff members are unsure what actions they can take to help these students. There should be a mechanism in the district whereby students who have failed or shown poor progress in districtwide curricular or student support initiatives can be quickly identified and a combination of central office administrators, school staff members and community partners can meet to discuss proven strategies and programs that can assist these students. Funding sources should be examined to immediately implement the team's recommendations. The district should strongly consider a separate budgetary allocation for implementing innovative programs and services for students who require academic and social interventions.

During the visits to schools, staff members reported that there were several cases where new students to the district who were receiving multiple special education services in their former districts were required to stay in Hartford neighborhood schools that did not have the resources to provide similar supports.

Administrators and teachers sometimes requested that staff members from the district's special education office attend planning and placement meetings in these and other cases to provide technical support; but according to administrators and teachers, the large number of students that central office special education personnel have to manage, in addition to their professional development duties, does not always permit them to provide direct consultation at schools. The district has identified this concern as one that warrants attention (see division of special education goals in Appendix H, pages H23-H25). The special education department should establish a liaison for juvenile detention programs and alternative education programs so that staff members can have immediate access to student information for program planning. On-site access to the district's student information system is not available at the alternative programs or the juvenile detention centers.

Teachers requested a reduction in the amount of paperwork for special education compliance or referral and additional training in special education policies and procedures. At the bilingual forum, bilingual teachers requested training in new state statutes concerning bilingual education.

Local parent organizations that serve families with children with special needs

have partnered with the Hartford Public Schools to increase parent awareness of federal and state regulations; increase communication between parents, teachers and administrators as they plan educational programs for student success; and serve as advocates for high-quality support services and high-quality instruction. Parent leaders requested at forums that district leaders meet more frequently with them to address the areas mentioned and to resolve systemic issues related to student transportation services, transition to new programs, and delivery of services.

- *Transition.* Transitioning special education students to general education programs continues to require planning, professional development and additional staff resources. HTLA has identified two transition counselors who work primarily with the middle and high school HTLA student population. These counselors work with students, parents, teachers and counselors at receiving middle and high schools. They have identified 37 middle and high school students who are possible candidates. Since HTLA students are generally in an 8:1 student to teacher ratio, returning to a large comprehensive middle or high school with 24 students per class is sometimes difficult for HTLA students, who usually receive intensive services. The district should consider specialized programs at the middle and high schools that will help students have more instructional time with nondisabled peers in a smaller class with support services.

The plan to relocate the Work Readiness program at Fox Middle School to Weaver High School may serve as a model for broadening student access to strong academic and school-to-career opportunities for students with special needs once transition plans are realized. The State Department of Education and the Special Education Resource Center have assisted the district in this effort (see correspondence in Appendix K, pages K27-K34). It is important that all stakeholders – parents, students, general education and special education personnel and administrators, and central office officials – communicate frequently to design and implement transition program plans and their related professional development. Several state agencies have provided funding to assist in these efforts: One project is designed to transition students with special needs to general education settings; another focuses on students who are re-entering the Hartford public school system after having been incarcerated. Regular reports on the progress of these pilot projects should be presented to Superintendent Amato and the State Board of Trustees.

- *Extended-Day and Extended-Year Programs.* Access to extended-day and extended-year programs has improved at HTLA. Students participated in the Superintendent's Power School and summer learning programs. According to staff members, funding still is needed to offer the variety of extended-day programs for alternative education students and HTLA students that are available to students in other Hartford schools. Staff members at the alternative education programs reported limited access to Title I funds and SDE priority school district

funds.

- *Technology Initiatives.* Additional computers are still needed at both HTLA sites to offer all students regular opportunities to access the Compass Learning program. New computers were received for the HTLA woodworking program. Students at the juvenile detention centers do not have access to this computer program. Additional resources are needed to connect the alternate education sites to the Hartford Public Schools' network. Bilingual and general education teachers in the elementary schools that were visited also requested new computers for instructional use.

The State Department of Education's preliminary report on Hartford's special education program and services concurred with many of the findings found in this quarterly report (see summary in Appendix K, pages K35-K49). District strengths, promising practices and areas of noncompliance were identified. One of the strengths identified in the report pertained to the reorganization of the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy. The State Monitors also found that HTLA staff members welcomed the additional supervision and support available by having a principal administrator, plus a site administrator at each location. These administrators facilitated the development of the HTLA program plan, with support from a local community organization that specializes in serving students with therapeutic needs.

Several areas of noncompliance were described in the SDE report, and required corrective actions were outlined. Noncompliance issues and areas in need of improvement were identified in the broader categories of evaluation, special education and related services, student progress, least restrictive environment, addressing the behavioral needs of students and discipline, and parental involvement. Of the student folders reviewed, individual corrective actions were requested for 18 students due to noncompliance with federal and state laws. Hartford officials were asked to incorporate SDE's findings from the program review into the district's continuous improvement plan for special education. The State Department of Education will continue to provide technical support to address noncompliance issues and areas in need of improvement.

### **III. AREAS OF CONTINUING NEED**

In presenting findings and recommendation across the State Board of Trustees' 10 goal areas, this quarterly report can serve as a useful tool for the new Trustees and the Hartford administration to continue to advance both reform efforts to improve student achievement and improvements to the entire organization. Areas of continuing need are raised in each report to identify several of the broad categories where attention is still required.

- *Continuous Improvement and Regular Reporting on Initiatives to Improve the*

*Hartford Public Schools.* A standard reporting mechanism to the Trustees still is needed to inform the Trustees concerning the implementation of initiatives, financial and staff resources used to execute initiatives, the implementation of new board policies and related growth in student achievement.

- *Special Programs – The Hartford Special Education Program, Hartford Transitional Learning Academy (HTLA), the Alternative Education Program and Programs for English Language Learners.* Compliance with special education mandates continues to be a serious concern in the Hartford district. To improve the success of students with special needs will take no less than the complete involvement of all of the main divisions of the Hartford Public School System –the office of the Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Support Services, Finance and Operations and Human Resources. Improved services and achievement for English language learners, students in alternate programs and students with special needs can be achieved if the entire organization makes a concerted effort to include these students in all improvement initiatives. Regular communication with parents to increase parent awareness of federal and state regulations, to plan educational programs for student success, and to serve as advocates for high-quality support services and high-quality instruction is an important improvement strategy. Regular sessions with general, bilingual, alternative and special education teachers are needed to plan and provide feedback on strategies that offer greater access to the general curriculum and state assessments.
- *Financial and Facilities Management.* The development of an internal audit function for the Hartford Public Schools will serve to examine existing controls and offer recommendations to improve the operation of the school system as a whole. In addition, the resources available through the Operational Audit Steering Committee and the Citizens’ Committee for Effective Government should continue to provide the assistance necessary to complete the audit recommendations, build the internal capacity to manage financial systems, and implement a capital improvement process that will facilitate the development and completion of facilities projects.

The next report will include the cumulative summary of actions to implement board policies, school-level qualitative and quantitative data, and an update of the *Indicators of the Operation and Progress of the Hartford Public Schools* supplemental report, including customized Connecticut Mastery Test reports.