

\$2.1B HIKE IN SCHOOL AID REQUESTED

Majority would be for most needy

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ALBANY — State education officials Monday called for a \$2.1 billion hike in statewide school aid for the 2019-20 academic year — a proposal of about \$500 million more than those authorities requested at this time in 2017.

Most of the extra money sought would be in the form of “foundation aid,” which is the biggest form of school financial assistance in New York and focuses in particular on districts with large numbers of students considered economically disadvantaged.

The aid plan won unanimous consent Monday from an eight-member committee of the policymaking Board of Regents, virtually assuring passage by the full board on Tuesday.

“The Board of Regents and I believe that all children should have access to a high-quality education regardless of their race, where they live or where they go to school,” Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa of the Bronx said in a prepared statement.

The Regents’ proposals for aid, which are issued annually, sometimes serve as signals of the state’s direction, though they are not always adopted by lawmakers who have the final say on money matters. In April, the State Legislature approved a statewide aid increase of nearly \$1 billion, including about \$100 million for districts on Long Island.

This year, some educators hope that the Democratic takeover of the state Senate, stemming from the Nov. 6 elections, will translate into greater

legislative support for school funding, especially in districts that are struggling economically. The electoral shift was stunning, with an eight-seat gain that included four in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

“I am cautiously optimistic that the folks elected and re-elected know what the needs are in districts like mine, and how desperately we need the funding,” said Howard Koenig, superintendent of Central Islip schools.

Eighty percent of Central Islip’s approximately 7,200 students are deemed economically disadvantaged.

The Regents’ plan envisions a \$1.66 billion expansion of foundation aid, with additional money to cover prekindergarten classes, career and technical education and reimbursable expenses such as student busing. The entire package would boost total statewide assistance, now \$26.7 billion, by about 7.8 percent.

Morris Peters, a spokesman for the governor’s budget division, said he could not provide details of the executive branch’s education-aid outlook, because planning still is underway. Peters added that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo intends to stick with his long-term policy of holding over-all state budget increases to approximately 2 percent annually.

This year’s state budget followed that general guideline, while raising school aid about 4 percent.

The Regents’ proposal comes close to a recommendation issued last week by the New York State Educational Conference Board, which represents major school groups including superin-



Roger Tilles of Great Neck, Long Island’s representative on the Board of Regents, with Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia during the panel’s meeting in Albany on Monday.

tendents, teachers, PTAs and teacher unions. The umbrella group called for a \$2.2 billion aid hike.

Jolene DiBrango, executive vice president of New York State United Teachers, a statewide union umbrella group, said the conference board’s request was based in part on the fact that the state has experienced an influx of students from other countries who need extra help developing their English skills.

“The population is changing,” DiBrango said.

Monday’s Regents meeting also dealt with the politically sensitive issue of teachers’ job evaluations and whether those ratings should be based largely on student test scores. The state has imposed a temporary moratorium on using scores in this manner, and it expires at the end of June.

State education officials Monday confirmed earlier statements that they would seek a one-year extension of the moratorium. They added that the Regents board is expected to approve the extension in early April, after a 60-day period set aside for public comment.

April 1 is the state’s official deadline for budget adoption, as well as a time when the governor and legislators work out deals on major legislation. Some lawmakers already have announced that they hope to repeal the section of state law that links test scores and evaluations by that time, if not earlier.

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