

Charter school costs continue to rise

Albany taxpayers once again will support two separate school systems in 2008-09: the traditional public school system serving about 8,500 students in 18 schools, and the expanding charter school system with nine schools and about 1,800 students.

The City School District of Albany's proposed budget includes \$24.6 million for charter school payments, an increase of nearly \$2.5 million, or about 11.2 percent. Charter payments represent nearly 12 percent of the total proposed budget, the fourth-largest expenditure.

State law mandates that the district pay a per-pupil amount for each in-district student attending a charter school, as well as provide services such as special education, transportation and health services.

The district can achieve some cost efficiencies due to charter schools. However, fixed costs such as operating buildings cannot be eliminated, and staff costs cannot be reduced proportionately with the enrollment changes.

A budget defeat does not impact the amount the district must pay to charter schools.