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Hartford School Board Postpones Vote On Great Path Contract With MCC

February 21, 2012 | By VANESSA DE LA TORRE, vdelatorre@courant.com, The Hartford Courant

HARTFORD — —

Against the urging of Superintendent Christina Kishimoto, the school board tabled a decision Tuesday on whether to approve a five-year contract to run the Great Path Academy magnet high school at Manchester Community College.

Michael Meotti, the executive vice president for the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education, was among eight public speakers in favor of the agreement that would begin in July. Kishimoto told the school board that tabling the vote would send a bad message to MCC and cited Meotti as proof the contract has support "at the highest levels."

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"We have to be bold and aggressive," Kishimoto said. "This is not the time to slow down."

But several board members cited concerns that include a dispute between the college and Great Path's current manager, the Capitol Region Education Council.

CREC has controlled day-to-day operations at the grade 10-12 magnet school since 2004, although its relationship with MCC and college President Gena Glickman has turned hostile. The education agency has a pending Freedom of Information complaint against Glickman over the decision to pick Hartford instead of CREC for the new management contract.

On Tuesday night, board member Robert Cotto Jr. suggested that Hartford was "encroaching." Mayor Pedro Segarra mentioned the city's relationship with CREC but said he supported the contract.

Three of Segarra's five new board appointees — Richard Wareing, Jose Colon-Rivas and Cherita McIntye — joined Cotto and Luis Rodriguez-Davila in voting to postpone the decision to next month. Segarra, Chairman Matthew Poland and Lori Hudson opposed tabling. Elizabeth Brad Noel abstained because she sits on Great Path's governing board.

The board authorized Kishimoto in January to begin negotiations with MCC, but that was under a different majority. Glickman declined to comment late Tuesday.

The "middle college" high school enrolls 247 magnet students — about 30 percent from Hartford — who can apply to take MCC courses. CREC has not met its target enrollment of 325 students, Glickman has said.

CREC's budget is about \$3.4 million to run the Sheff school, which aims to enroll up to 50 percent Hartford students to address desegregation. Annual funding comes from a \$10,443 state grant for each student and an extra \$3,300 in per-student tuition from school districts that send teenagers to Great Path.

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Hartford hopes to enroll 300 students to receive \$4.1 million in funds; MCC would get 12 percent of the revenue. The proposed contract also calls for the possibility of adding ninth grade to the school and a "shared vision" for dealing with student discipline. CREC clashed with MCC over student arrests.

The academy wouldn't be the first magnet school outside city limits that Hartford is responsible for operating. Pathways To Technology Magnet High School is temporarily in Windsor until a permanent school building is constructed at Goodwin College in East Hartford by the 2013-14 year.

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