

How is education affected?

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Daily Record/Sunday News

Article Last Updated: 02/06/2008 06:29:23 AM EST

Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed education budget would increase the state's basic education budget more than \$291 million next year -- the largest one-year increase in nearly 20 years.

The spending plan changes the calculation used in previous years to divvy up state basic education subsidies and would increase spending dramatically at low-achieving, high poverty districts.

The York City School District would get a nearly 16 percent increase, one of the largest in the state.

"Certainly this is far greater than any of us would have anticipated," said Tom Foust, vice president of the school board.

The school district typically expects a 4 percent increase each year, Foust said, so the double-digit proposal would be much more than he could ever remember the district receiving in the past.

"This is really history, it is what we waited for," said state Sec. of Education Gerald L. Zahorchak. "We absolutely have to fund the education system as one of the top priorities in the state."

The budget must be approved by state legislators. It's not clear if a tax increase would be needed to sustain the proposal's \$2.6 billion commitment spread over the next six years.

The governor's education spending plan is based largely on a study by the General Assembly that determined how much each of the 501 school districts would need to adequately fund education. The study took into account factors such as poverty rates and local tax effort. Generally, areas with a higher concentration of poverty have lower property values and personal income to draw revenue from.

Rendell is also proposing the state have some control over some districts that would get the largest increases in funding. A district like York City School District, which has lower than average tests scores, would have to submit a plan for spending the money. The department of education would have to approve the plan.

For some local districts like Dallastown Area and York Suburban, the new funding calculation means they are looking at a significantly lower percentage increase than the state average of about 6 percent.

The state's costing-out study indicated that Dallastown and York Suburban were the closest to spending enough money per student. Each was less than \$1,000 away from the target spending, according to the report.

After looking over the spending plan, Supt. Stewart Weinberg called a proposed increase of a little more than 2 percent for his district "disappointing."

The change in the calculation of the basic education subsidy punishes districts that have invested local money to make sure the proper amount is spent on educating students, said Donna Devlin, business manager for Dallastown.

"Unfortunately, because we have done well in funding education for our students we are, in the end, being hurt," she said.

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