



Our view: State school funding plan needs time to percolate

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Pennsylvania's system for distributing money to its 501 school districts has been broken for a long time, and a discussion among state officials and local taxpayers about how to fix it is far overdue.

In that respect, it's encouraging to see Gov. Ed Rendell offering us -- with his usual breathless urgency -- a debate on an idea designed to increase the amount of money the state spends on education.

Rendell wants to revamp the formula for distributing basic state aid to public school districts. He proposes spending an additional \$2.6 billion on education during the next six years with much of the increase targeted to specific programs aimed at boosting student achievement.

Rendell's proposal is based on the General Assembly's 2007 Costing-Out Study that determined a cost of \$8,300 per student next year to provide an adequate education.

The new formula would gradually increase funding to help school districts close the gap between what they spend now and the recommended \$8,300, adjusted for inflation. The proposal also calls for distributing money each year based on updated population figures.

The funding increase would have to be spent on specific programs to improve student performance. The possibilities include tutoring, more rigorous courses, teacher training, class-size reduction, pre-K and full-day kindergarten, recruitment of better teachers and principals, and performance contracts for superintendents and principals.

These are all good ideas, but we also think the plan should incorporate the Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign's recommendation that the state pay a higher share per pupil to districts with limited local wealth.

The only other suggestion we might offer centers on Rendell's insistence upon hurrying lawmakers into a decision. He recently called on them to begin working on the formula within the next week, to avoid conflicts with action on the next state budget.

Rendell deserves credit for launching the debate, but he's not leaving much of a window to kick the ideas around.

We'd rather see lawmakers take all the time they need to get it right.

-- By Matthew Major, on behalf of Public Opinion's editorial board