

## **Official: Better scores justify more money**

**By: JOAN HELLYER**  
Bucks County Courier Times

**The governor and state lawmakers are battling it out over how to cover education funding in the next couple of years.**

Pennsylvania's 2009 standardized test results suggest the state should continue to increase its education funding levels, the state's secretary of education said Monday.

For the first time, increases were seen "across the board" for students in all grades that took the 2009 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests in mathematics and reading, Secretary Gerald L. Zahorchak said.

The proficiency averages represent the amount of students who performed at or above their grade level on their respective PSSA tests. The state uses the standardized tests to determine if students are achieving Adequate Yearly Progress, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

On the PSSA math tests, increases of the overall state averages between 2008 and 2009 ranged from a few tenths of a percent for fifth-graders statewide to about 5 percentage points for Pennsylvania seventh-graders, according to education department statistics.

In reading, increases ranged from three-tenths of a percent in the third-grade state average to almost a 3 percent gain in the results for fifth-graders statewide.

The department released the state averages for the 2009 PSSA results before it completed determining Adequate Yearly Progress status for each school and district. That analysis will not be complete until late August, after the appeals process for the tests is finished, education department officials said.

However representatives of some local schools and districts said they've already been notified that they have made AYP for 2009. Bristol Township, Centennial and Neshaminy school districts and School Lane Charter School in Bensalem have earned AYP status, officials with those school systems said Monday.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching other area schools and districts about their AYP status after requesting the information Monday.

Zahorchak, in a hastily called conference call Monday afternoon with education reporters across the state, said the improved PSSA scores are a direct result of recent state increases in education funding.

The secretary made the assertion as state lawmakers and Gov. Ed Rendell battle it out during the ongoing 2009-10 budget impasse over how much money should be put toward education.

The state government enacted a six-year formula last year to provide schools with more money to help all students demonstrate on the tests that they are performing at or above grade level.

Rendell is pushing to increase Pennsylvania's funding of the initiative using just state monies, but some Republican lawmakers want to use federal stimulus funds that will only be available for a couple of years. Taking the GOP approach would end up costing the state more a few years down the road as it tries to retain the funding levels after the federal monies go away, the secretary said.

"If we don't make the investments now, we'll pay later," Zahorchak said to the applause of an audience of educators at a special education conference in Bedford.

July 28, 2009 02:10 AM