



# Educators want budget passed without cuts

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MEDIA COURTHOUSE ô Education advocates and a handful of county superintendents rallied outside the courthouse Friday, calling for a budget free of cuts to public-education funding.

The afternoon rally also served another purpose: To publicly lambaste Senate Bill 850, the \$27.3 billion Senate Republican budget proposal that passed in May along a 30-20 party-line vote and includes deep spending cuts.

õIf we fail, a child fails, and that is not an option. We cannot allow our future to fail,ö said Linda Cook, a Penn-Delco School District teacher and president of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, Southeastern Region.

õPennsylvania public schools are not government waste to cut during a time of financial stress,ö she said.

Senate Republican leadership has defended the admittedly drastic cuts because the bill includes no tax increase or new taxes. Detractors maintain the bill would pass the buck to local entities, however, which would have to raise local taxes if the state doesn't provide enough operating revenue.

õOur local taxpayers cannot handle the burden of additional property taxes to keep these programs going. The state must live up to its promise to maintain our funding,ö said Louis DeVlieger, superintendent of the Upper Darby School District.

DeVlieger said his district's success in reaching adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind mandates was directly related to a boost in state funding last year.

õTake away the funding, and the program falls apart, the test scores take a dive, and AYP becomes a hopeless challenge,ö said DeVlieger. õIf you are going to take away the funding, take away the mandates and penalties of NCLB and PSSA as well as the hopes

and dreams for a better future for our children.”

Stephen Butz, acting superintendent of the Southeast Delco School District, said cuts to the budget would inevitably cause his district to slash programs and eliminate staff.

“If we do not take steps forward, we will continue to struggle academically and students will not achieve at the level they can,” Butz said.

Rendell has proposed a mixture of spending cuts and tax increases, including a three-year, 16 percent increase in the personal-income tax to raise \$1.5 billion annually.

State Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, R-9, of Chester, has criticized Rendell for past assertions that education spending would be cut under SB 850, saying spending would actually increase when all federal stimulus funding was included. Rendell has pointed out much of that funding would be mandated for special education and Title I funding, however.

“My message and the message of our caucus is simple: We cannot move this budget forward with misrepresentations and exaggerations, or by omitting important information,” said Pileggi at a press conference in Harrisburg in late June.

“Spending within our means is the best choice for Pennsylvania’s long-term economic health,” he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.