

## Education in spending

### Rendell's proposed budget boosts money for schools

By [Erica Erwin](#)  
[erica.erwin@timesnews.com](mailto:erica.erwin@timesnews.com)  
February 6, 2008

An additional \$291.3 million for the state's public schools.

A plan to help school districts meet academic progress targets by changing the way they're funded.

And millions of dollars in increased funding for college programs, early education and special education.

School superintendents in districts throughout the region on Tuesday applauded Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed 2008-09 education budget as a plan that would help boost student achievement and put more resources in classrooms.

"It's phenomenal, really fantastic," said Erie schools Superintendent Jim Barker, whose district stands to receive an additional \$2.69 million in basic education funding should the budget pass. "This will forever change the landscape for children in the commonwealth." Among the highlights of the proposal, released Tuesday:

- A \$2.6 billion, six-year plan to change the way school districts are funded. The new funding formula would help close the gap between the funding that schools receive now and the funding they actually need to meet state and federal achievement targets, Rendell said.

The proposed \$291.3 million increase in basic education funding for 2008-09 -- the largest such increase in more than two decades -- is the first step of that plan.

- Funding for Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, the state's pre-kindergarten program, would increase by \$12.6 million, or 17 percent, to \$87.6 million.
- The proposed budget maintains the \$90 million spent on Classrooms for the Future, the state's technology initiative that aims to put laptops in every English, math, science and social studies classroom, and \$20 million in teacher training.
- A \$2 million, or 20 percent increase, in funding for dual enrollment programs for students who want to earn college credits while still in high school.
- A \$6.9 million increase in funding for community colleges, a \$14.5 million increase in funding for the State System of Higher Education and a \$9.2 million increase to state-related universities.

Barker said he was most impressed by the new funding formula that aims to more adequately and equitably fund each district so students can meet academic targets.

A recent statewide "costing out" study commissioned by the State Board of Education found the 16 districts in Erie and Crawford counties collectively must spend nearly \$153 million more to meet those targets.

"It's a tremendous shift in commitment to all kids," Barker said. Girard schools Superintendent James Tracy said the new formula puts "schools and kids across Pennsylvania on a level playing field."

"It's going to allow places like Girard to add programs and new curriculum that we might not have been able to," Tracy said.

The district stands to receive an additional 6 percent in basic education funding, up to about \$7.8 million.

Millcreek schools Superintendent Dean Maynard said he was happy to see the state's Accountability Block Grant program continued. The program helps the district fund its full-day kindergarten program.

He said he was also impressed by the increase in dual enrollment dollars. "I think that's wonderful, because we have to have graduates who can be competitive in the global world," Maynard said.

Millcreek's basic education subsidy would increase by 4.45 percent over 2007-08, up to \$12.4 million, under the plan.

Crawford Central schools Superintendent Mike Dolecki has a different view than his colleagues.

Under Rendell's plan, Crawford Central's basic education subsidy would increase by 1.5 percent over 2006-07, up to about \$14.5 million. The increase is less than the 1.52 percent the district received in the 2007-08 budget.

It's not a large decrease, but it doesn't help when the district is facing a 10 percent increase in medical costs, Dolecki said.

ERICA ERWIN can be reached at 870-1846 or by e-mail.