

## Erie officials support Rendell spending plan

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The Erie School District and the city of Erie are united in their support of Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed school-funding formula.

Rendell's plan could bring about \$34 million to the district by 2014 while possibly keeping tax rates stable for Erie homeowners. The Legislature would have to approve the plan.

Erie schools Superintendent Jim Barker, Mayor Joe Sinnott and other school and city officials Monday called for action to pass the proposal.

"Today is about making sure you have a great future," Barker told students during a news conference at Edison Elementary School.

Barker said the money would bridge the gap between how much the district should spend and how much it does spend on each student.

"If the Legislature chooses not to do that, we are making a conscious decision to leave students behind," he said.

The proposal would allocate about \$2.6 billion to public schools over the next six years to bring them up to the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The Erie School District is spending \$2,887 less per student than necessary to meet NCLB standards, according to a 2006 state "costing-out" report.

Barker said the gap comes from a lack of funding for the district's higher number of special needs, English as a Second Language and adult students, while the district draws from a shrinking tax base.

The district plans to use the extra funds in Rendell's proposed budget to promote reading, math, science, technology, full-day kindergarten, preschool and after-school care.

Money would come from a \$300 million to \$350 million budget surplus, said Chuck Ardo, Rendell's press secretary.

Barker said property taxes would have to be raised to match that amount without the state funds.

He said he opposes raising taxes and that the school district has been using state funds to offset raising property taxes.

"It has been tax relief for every homeowner in the city of Erie," he said.

"We want to continue that tax relief while improving education. That's a rare combination."

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