



City school officials back Rendell education funding plan

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School District of Lancaster is behind a bill proposed by Gov. Ed Rendell that would steer more than \$48 million to its schools over the next six years.

SDL interim Superintendent Steve Iovino, school board President Patrick Snyder and Mayor Rick Gray on Tuesday praised Rendell's education funding proposal at Fulton Elementary School.

Rendell is proposing that the state invest \$2.6 billion in public schools over the next six years, with a first installment of \$291 million in the 2008-09 state budget.

That's an increase of 6 percent over last year's allocation.

According to the proposal, the money would be directed primarily to urban schools with economically disadvantaged students.

For School District of Lancaster, that would mean a projected investment of \$48,036,736 by 2014, or a 125 percent increase in state basic education funding.

Iovino said that the money would help SDL build programs important to students' success in the classroom.

"These funds will help make sure that our students are competitive so they are prepared for jobs in Lancaster," Iovino said.

If the bill passes, SDL will receive \$6.5 million more for the 2008-09 school year than it did this year, an increase of 17 percent.

It would raise the money spent on instruction per pupil from about \$9,000 to \$15,000 by 2015, Iovino said.

The state House will vote on the proposal today.

The money would be earmarked for specific SDL programs including pre-kindergarten programs, high school reform, dropout initiatives and class size reduction.

The plan was born out of the General Assembly's 2007 costing-out study, which showed that public schools are greatly underfunded by the state.

Gray said the proposal is a step in the right direction regarding property tax relief.

"We cannot rely on property taxes to fund public schools," Gray said. "It's as simple as that. Nothing else can be said."

Because the state's contribution to public education has declined steadily over the years, Gray said, local municipalities have had to pick up the slack.

State contributions make up roughly 37 percent of public school district budgets, according to the state Department of Education.

"(Rising taxes) especially have a burden on elderly people who think, 'At least I have my own home,' " Gray said.

It would take a 94 percent increase in local taxes to generate enough revenue to match the state's contribution, Gray said. "That could never happen."

This kind of plan is essential to boost education, Gray said, because property tax relief from gambling money "is a patch on cancer."

"It doesn't work," Gray said. "It's a regressive form of taxation."

Snyder said the additional funds are imperative to expanding the district programs.

"It's critical in moving the district forward," Snyder said.

On May 21, the school board adopted a preliminary budget that includes a 4.9 percent tax increase.

The hike, from 21.42 mills to 22.47 mills, would boost the tax bill on a home assessed at \$118,614 by \$125.

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