

**SCHOOL FUNDS**

# State will use new formula based on cost to educate each student

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A 2007 study requested by the Legislature found that Pennsylvania is underfunding public education by \$4 billion.

On Tuesday, Gov. Ed Rendell signed legislation that provides a \$275 million increase in funding for basic education, the largest increase in many years, as a down payment toward reaching a goal of full funding for every student in the commonwealth by fiscal 2013-2014.

Many in the education community view this legislation as historic, a breakthrough in ensuring that sufficient dollars are made available to ensure that every student receives a quality education.

But the proof will be in the outcomes. This newspaper supported this legislation not because it buys the argument that a good education can be equated with dollars signs. It supported it because it is clear that educationally disadvantaged children need intense additional help if they are to break through the barriers to success in school and life. That means more trained personnel, and thus more money, on a large scale.

Largely based on the 2007 "costing-out study," the new school funding formula will be tied to the actual number of students enrolled in the district, plus the numbers of students in poverty and English-language learners. Differences in geographic costs, school district size and enrollment trends also will be taken into account.

The new law holds school districts accountable for using the additional resources wisely and producing improved academic performance. Schools receiving the most money and having the largest student-achievement gaps will be required to document their plans for achieving better results with the new funds.

To be sure, this is an important milestone in education in Pennsylvania, which for too long has maintained an inherent promise to provide state funding for half the bill for education, but has long provided barely above one-third of school funding. This has created disparities between wealthy suburban districts and poor urban and rural districts that have not been addressed despite a funding formula that attempts to even the balance.

This is going to be an important five years in the history of education in Pennsylvania -- that's presuming that future administrations and the state Legislature deliver on the promise of full funding by 2013. This effort will determine if, in fact, a state can buy its way to broad-based educational success.

However it turns out -- and we make no prediction but do wish this important initiative well -- the state will be the better and wiser for doing what it must to find the answer.