

Don't retreat on education

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Whether amid recession or growth, the state budget is a means to an end. The issue facing deadlocked state lawmakers, on the 66th day of the budget impasse, is whether that end is to drive progress, tread water or retreat.

Across the breadth of the budget the correct answer is not uniform. Some programs can withstand cuts or stagnant funding better than others. Lawmakers should not retreat in one vital area where their previous commitments have resulted in progress.

Results of No Child Left Behind testing strongly suggest that increased school funding over the last several years has helped to improve students' performance.

From the outset of the Rendell administration the state has emphasized early childhood education. That emphasis on laying a better foundation for subsequent learning appears to be reflected in improving test results.

And the state is just in the second year of a six-year commitment by the administration and the Legislature to substantially increase the state contribution to general school funding.

There is no way to definitively tie the improvement to increased funding. But surely it is much more than coincidence that the greatest improvement has been in school districts that have received the greatest increases in state aid.

The effort to boost state aid is crucial to mitigating vast disparities in resources among the state's 500 school districts and, therefore, to ensure that every Pennsylvania student receives an adequate public education regardless of his ZIP code.