

Get behind budget plan to close school 'gap' ...

By Karen S. Angello and Ed Pawlowski

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Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed an education budget that includes a six-year plan with a formula that will close the funding gap among [Pennsylvania's](#) public schools. Under it, districts such as Allentown's would receive an adequate and equitable funding stream to prepare students for the rigorous standards of the 21st century. If his plan is approved by the General Assembly, the district will receive a \$90 million investment in academic progress over the next six years.

Pennsylvania has perpetuated a school funding system that is largely dependent on local taxes, and therefore, educational opportunity is unequal throughout the commonwealth. The tax effort of the citizens of Allentown has not generated enough funds to meet the expectations of the 21st century. For years, there have been insufficient textbooks and technology. There are large classes and aging infrastructures while enrollment is rising. The increased needs of our students at risk, as well as those needing to master English proficiency, have compounded the problems.

Thanks to the leadership of the school board, Education 2010! the local legislative delegation and the joint efforts of the city and district, we have served as the catalyst for the costing-out study, which clearly demonstrates the state funding gaps of the public school districts. We are working with other mayors and superintendents from urban settings throughout the commonwealth to support the governor's intent to close those gaps through his six-year plan.

[ASD](#) has had to rely heavily upon local tax effort, grants and private funding, until the recent past two years in which our business leaders and legislative delegation were able to gain historical increases in funding for us. We now are incrementally rebuilding the district, but still have a revenue gap of more than \$5,625 in spending for each student. We must have an infusion of funds each year if we are going to give the support to our students and staff to fully address our achievement gaps.

Allentown is proposed to receive \$12,312,741, a 19.7 percent increase in basic education funding. The district submitted an accountability plan to the state Department of Education that will demonstrate how these funds will be focused on proven practices to advance student achievement. The district has been committed to use its funds in a prudent and judicious manner as confirmed by the study commissioned by Education 2010!

A high-quality, district-wide learning environment requires qualified teachers and administrators, a curriculum designed to meet the academic standards, instructional interventions to meet the broad needs of students and enough up-to-date books, computers and teaching materials to serve all of its students. It also requires safe facilities, appropriate class sizes, and early childhood education and other resources available for families that may be at risk due to poverty or other disadvantages. [Allentown School District](#) has focused its resources to ensure these components but adequate funding is necessary to accelerate our progress.

An effective system of public education is vital not only to our young people, but to ensuring healthy communities and a healthy region. An effective system of public education prepares young people to become successful citizens, life-long learners and productive, taxpaying workers. An effective system of public education draws employers to Pennsylvania to take advantage of a well-prepared labor force.

The costing out study shows that the missing piece has been a solid and equitable state funding formula. Only Gov. Rendell and the General Assembly have the authority and responsibility to close the funding gap. They must seize this moment and demonstrate commitment to Pennsylvania's constitutional obligation to "provide a thorough and efficient public education to meet the needs of the Commonwealth." We ask that you work with us to make better schools for our students and a brighter economic future for our commonwealth. Contact your legislators and ask them to support the governor's educational plan.

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