

## Rendell's education plan on mark

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The state Legislature owes the Erie School District millions more per year, and Gov. Ed Rendell has a plan to start getting that money here. Unfortunately, it won't happen until lawmakers finally accept that our children can't afford another year of being denied equitable, quality education.

Rendell's plan should be embraced by the state's legislative leaders.

In 2007, the Legislature received the results of the first-ever Costing-Out Study. The study reported that it takes \$12,057 to adequately educate each public school student for a year. The statewide average is \$9,512 per pupil. In the end, the state is underfunding public education by an incredible \$4.4 billion a year.

The first installment in Rendell's plan to plug that funding gap is passing a \$291 million education-budget increase for the coming year.

Rendell's plan could generate \$34 million for the Erie School District by 2014 and give Erie schools Superintendent Jim Barker and the Erie School Board a fighting chance to keep property-tax rates stable for Erie homeowners.

If the Legislature takes the easy way out and calls for more study, it means only more delays. Right now, the Erie district is spending \$2,887 less per student than necessary to meet the standards of the No Child Left Behind law.

Barker wants it understood that "if the Legislature chooses not to do that, we are making a conscious decision to leave students behind." Rendell's proposal would allocate about \$2.6 billion to public schools over the next six years to bring them up to the unfunded, federally mandated NCLB standards.

In a joint statement signed by Barker, Erie Mayor Joe Sinnott, Erie School Board President James Herdzyk and Edison Elementary School Parent Teacher Association President Donna Bish, the stakes are spelled out:

"Failure to act has real economic costs," it reads. "If the state refuses to live up to its responsibility, the burden falls to local taxpayers, which in turn hinders our city's economic growth. The best strategy for long-term property-tax relief is for the state to increase funding for our schools. It would take a 90 percent increase in local property taxes to generate the same revenue that will come from the governor's funding plan over the next six years."

Inaction will ultimately cost more than doing what is best for our children. Rendell wants the Legislature to take the first step toward properly educating our children. We agree.