



New funding plan ensures much-needed resources for schools

BY BARBARA PARKINS and TOM TRIGONA

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Improving the quality of our schools is the most important economic development strategy for the future of our city. Gov. Ed Rendell is proposing a plan to give our local schools the resources they need by investing \$2.6 billion statewide over the next six years; for the sake of Johnstown, we are calling on the General Assembly to enact the governor's school-funding plan before it recesses for the summer. (The House Education Committee is scheduled to vote today on HB 2449.)

For the Greater Johnstown School District, the governor's plan means a projected new state investment of \$7,936,638 by 2014, a 52 percent increase in state basic education funding.

Failure to act has real economic costs. 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 103 percent increase in local property taxes to generate the same revenue that would come to this city from the governor's funding plan over the next six years.

We need help in order to meet our shared challenge: Create economic growth here at home by offering businesses a world-class work force while giving our students – tomorrow's workers and entrepreneurs – the skills that they need to be successful in our high-skill world.

The good news is that our schools are making progress.

In fact, Greater Johnstown High School has achieved the most improved scores for any high school in the commonwealth. But we cannot do it alone, and this is our one opportunity to get a state law that provides the resources that our community needs to get the job done.

To accomplish this goal, Rendell has proposed a school funding formula that would be phased in over the next six years with \$2.6 billion in new state investment. Putting this framework into law is the only way to ensure that funding is predictable and adequate to meet our students' needs.

In addition, the new law must include provisions to ensure that the state's investment results in more services for students, as Rendell has proposed.

New school funding will only have an impact if it actually impacts the children in Pennsylvania's classrooms, which is why it is essential to ensure that the bulk of new funding is used for programs that are proven to work in increasing achievement.

The Legislature took an important first step by ordering Pennsylvania's first-ever Costing-Out Report – which reveals the level of resources needed in each school district for students to succeed and is the basis for the governor's funding plan. It has been more than 15 years since Pennsylvania had a real funding formula; nearly two years since the Costing-Out Report was commissioned by the General Assembly; and almost six months since the report was released.

The next step is for the Legislature to turn the governor's school funding plan into law as part of this year's budget – ensuring that we receive the resources our schools need to produce the citizens and workers of our city's future.

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