

Rendell outlines more state aid to schools

Plan has \$15.7 million for Easton Area, \$7.2 million for Bangor Area.



In Allentown, Governor Ed Rendell gives an autograph Washington Elementary School fifth-grader Quanisha Hollman, 11 of Allentown (left) before entering the school Wednesday for a roundtable discussion on public education needs in urban schools. (Kathleen X. Cook, Allentown Morning Call / May 21, 2008)

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Gov. Ed Rendell held a roundtable discussion at an Allentown elementary school Wednesday -- one of five forums he's conducting throughout the state -- to tout his plan to invest \$2.6 billion in public education over the next six years.

Under Rendell's plan, [Allentown School District](#) stands to gain \$90 million in new funding by 2014, a goal essential to closing the resource gap identified in a study the state authorized last year to find out what it will cost to achieve a quality education in public schools.

"This is key to contributing to the growth of our economy in the coming years," Rendell said to a full gymnasium at Washington Elementary School. "We still pay only 37 percent of the bill for public education, one of the lowest state shares. It's time for the state to pay its fair share in moving every district toward adequate school funding,"

Statewide, the plan would be phased in over the next six years unless there is a budget deficit, which would postpone the increases until there is a budget surplus, Rendell said.

"So it might take eight years instead of six."

Allentown School Board President Andrew Weiss was among a number of school and city officials, parents and students who lauded Rendell and other state legislators for their efforts to improve education, particularly in urban districts where the needs are greatest.

"It was only four years ago we were asking, How do we buy textbooks?" Weiss said. "Now we're making progress," he said, urging support of the governor's plan.

Superintendent Karen Angello call it "an unprecedented increase in our funding."

Lee Butz, chairman of the leadership team of Education 2010, the Lehigh Valley CEO group that played a key role in justifying a better distribution of state subsidies, hailed the long-term investment in education as something that should have full legislative support.

"The costing-out study, it really demonstrates how some kids get more or less depending on what their zip code is. That's simply unconscionable."

State Sen. Pat Browne, R-Lehigh; state Rep. Jennifer Mann, D-Lehigh; and Allentown Mayor [Ed Pawlowski](#) said there is no higher priority than to adequately fund Allentown schools and public education throughout the state. The declaration brought one teacher nearly to tears.

"We love our kids and this is what we need. So thank you," said Jacqueline Woodruff, a fifth-grade teacher at Washington.

Students were moved, too.

"I sometimes feel oppressed and somewhat labeled since my school is considered not in the best location. I hope that label will be removed," said Carlos Martinez, a senior at Allentown. He told Rendell he will be a pre-med student at Penn State in the fall. "What they don't realize is that we have some amazing students."

Rendell urged city residents to write their state legislators before the June 30 deadline for passage of the state budget.

"We need the votes. We need to reach consensus on this," he said.

In the Lehigh Valley, districts that would gain the most include:

Allentown -- \$90 million projected increase over the next six years.

Bethlehem Area -- \$23million projected increase over the next six years.

Easton Area -- \$15.7million projected increase over the next six years.

Northern Lehigh -- \$3.8 million projected increase over the next six years.

[Whitehall](#)- [Coplay](#) -- \$7.3million projected increase over the next six years

[Bangor](#) Area -- \$7.2million projected increase over the next six years.

[Nazareth](#) Area -- \$4.9 million projected increase over the next six years.

Northampton -- \$6.4million projected increase over the next six years.

[Pen Argyl](#) -- \$2.6 million projected increase over the next six years.

Wilson Area -- \$3.3 million projected increase over the next six years.