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Plan for Reading schools viewed as model

Gov. Ed Rendell is proposing \$115.4 million for the district over six years.

By Mary E. Young
Reading Eagle

The \$115.4 million Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed giving the Reading School District over the next six years would enable the district to become a model for other urban districts without having to increase local property taxes, the superintendent said Monday.

Rendell has included the first \$15.3 million payment in his proposed 2008-09 budget, Dr. Thomas R. Chapman said.

The money would be invested in new schools and new programs, he said.

"We'll make our schools smaller, safer and smarter," Chapman said. "We believe this is critical to the success of our city and the success of our children.

"Reading is being projected as the prototype of a district that can turn around. Our legislators acknowledge that our tax burden is maxed out. They also recognize if we're going to make this a turnaround district, we're going to need funding."

The governor's proposal would invest \$2.6 billion in education statewide over six years, Chapman said in a press conference in City Hall.

It was one of several held across the state Monday to show communitywide support for the governor's proposal and proposed legislation that proponents say would ensure adequate and equitable funding for the state's 501 school districts.

Mayor Tom McMahon said mayors statewide are working with superintendents to convince legislators to support Rendell's proposal.

"Unless you have success among students, we're not going to be able to accomplish the things we need to do as a city," McMahon said. "Unless we find a way to fund our schools, we're going to keep having the same kind of problems. We need legislative action. That's the key."

Ellen Horan, president and chief executive of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said Berks County business people support increased funding for schools and the revised distribution proposal because the money is tied to measurable standards.

"They see it as an investment not just in their companies, but their communities," she said. "Increasing the property tax is not the answer. It needs state-level action and increased funding from the state."

Added McMahon: "We're starting to recognize that we're all in this together. We have to do it for the kids."

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