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Nutter, Ackerman to join Rendell in school-funding rally today

By MENSAH M. DEAN
Philadelphia Daily News

deanm@phillynews.com 215-854-5949

Gov. Rendell this morning is scheduled to rally with education and elected officials from across the state in an attempt to convince the General Assembly to adopt the school-funding formula contained in his 2009 budget proposal.

Mayor Nutter, Philadelphia School District Superintendent Arlene Ackerman and dozens of other mayors, school superintendents and parents from urban, rural and suburban communities are expected to join Rendell in the Capitol building in Harrisburg at 11 a.m.

The proposed funding formula would send schools an additional \$2.6 billion over the next six years. Philadelphia would receive \$85 million in the first year and \$638 million through 2014, said Sheila Ballen, director of press and communications for the state Department of Education.

"Right now the first step is to secure this money, not just for Philadelphia but for students throughout the state," Cecilia Cummings, spokeswoman for Philadelphia schools, said when asked about how the city district would use the extra funds.

But receiving the money is far from certain.

"This is Harrisburg," said Chuck Ardo, spokesman for Rendell. "There is always opposition to something, no matter how much sense it makes.

"With the partisan atmosphere in this building, there would be those who oppose motherhood and apple pie if it were introduced by somebody from the other party," Ardo added.

Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, a Republican representing parts of Delaware and Chester counties, did not return a *Daily News* telephone call seeking comment yesterday.

Ardo noted that Rendell's funding proposal is in response to the General Assembly's "Costing-Out" study, released in November. It found that 471 of the state's 501 school districts are underfunded by a combined \$4.6 billion annually.

"Municipal leaders, mayors and school leaders coming together is quite a message to the General Assembly," Ballen said. "It's not just about education funding. This budget and proposed school-funding formula law is key to ensuring that our cities and towns survive, and the well-being of our economic future is based on the availability of a quality public education."

June 30 is the deadline for the General Assembly to adopt Rendell's \$28.3 billion budget.