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Area districts mull recent state spending study

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If the state implements a recent study determining how much schools should spend per student, Charleroi Area School District will get an additional \$3,064 for each child.

"It's kind of like 'What do you want for Christmas?'" said Charleroi Superintendent Brad Ferko.

The yearlong study, released Wednesday, details how much schools need to spend for all students to be proficient in math and reading by 2014. The average is \$12,057 per student, though it varies per district based on several factors, including regional cost of living, enrollment trends and the amount of students with special needs.

Statewide, almost \$5 billion more would need to be spent on education. The study doesn't include any recommendations about how the additional money should be raised.

Ferko said Charleroi has been aggressive in seeking out grants, which are used to help pay for technology. If the district gets the additional money, he said he will step up new textbook adoptions, look at staffing and consider capital projects.

"We would look at enhancing our educational program," Ferko said.

If Central Greene School District receives the extra \$2,622 per student that the report recommends, the district would be able to incorporate additional 21st century skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, communication skills and computer skills into the curriculum, said Superintendent Jerome Bartley.

"We would be able to update the district's technology so that integration of technology in all classrooms could be enhanced," he said.

The district could hire additional staff to provide tutorials to students that score low on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment and offer before- and after-school programs, he said.

"We would also be able to update books, improve facilities and curricular offerings could be expanded for our students," Bartley said.

Bentworth Superintendent Charles Baker would revamp the curriculum and buy new textbooks with the additional \$2,794 per child the report suggests the district should spend.

"We are in dire need of replacing instructional materials," he said.

He would also upgrade technology and provide additional services to students.

"For us, the list would be endless," Baker said.

An additional \$3,311 per student for Fort Cherry would make it easier to pay for state mandates, said business manager Paul Sroka.

"It would make life more pleasant. It wouldn't be such a juggling act," said Sroka, adding that districts with a rural tax base are limited in the money they collect and spend. "I could think of a lot of things we could do with \$3,960,000. It opens the door for a lot of things."

It's not clear whether the recommendations in the study will be approved by the state Legislature and Gov. Ed Rendell. The House and Senate education committees will review the study and hearings will be held throughout the state to get public input.