

For Immediate Release

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## **Governor Rendell's Education Plan Stays on Course**

Good Schools Pennsylvania acknowledged Governor Rendell for keeping Pennsylvania on course toward establishing a sound system of education finance.

In introducing his Fiscal Year 2009-10 state budget yesterday, the governor proposed appropriating an additional \$300 million to close the state's school funding gap. Should the federal stimulus package deliver significant aid to public schools, the state appropriation would be held in escrow for future budget years to ensure school districts won't be left in a bind when federal stimulus dollars expire.

"We are gratified to see that Gov. Rendell has not allowed these difficult economic times to be an excuse for halting progress," said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania. "When Pennsylvania responded to the fiscal crisis of 1990 by abandoning its school funding formula, the result was decline in both our schools and communities. Only with last year's enactment of a new school funding formula did we begin to reverse the damage."

The [2009-10 state education budget proposal](#) builds on the progress made last year when the governor and General Assembly enacted a school funding formula based on a costing-out study of what is required to prepare all of the commonwealth's student to be successful in career or college. The costing-out study identified that some school districts are underfunded by as much as \$4,000 to \$6,000 per student, and that the state's most financially deteriorated communities are tapped out in local property taxes in an effort to keep their schools solvent. Excessive property tax effort squeezes the schools and blights the communities by driving down the local economy.

The formula enacted in 2008 sets a target budget for each district based on such factors as student enrollment, and number of students living in poverty or who are learning English. The formula then calculates the state share of school budgets based on the degree of funding gap and the local tax effort. In enacting the legislation last year, the General Assembly committed to meeting state funding targets by 2013, and Gov. Rendell anticipated allocating \$418 million this year to keep the state on track to meeting that target.

"The constituency that has emerged in support of quality public education may accept a slower pace of reform, but it will not accept a wholesale abandonment of a school funding formula that is adequate and equitable, predictable and accountable," said Risch.

Advocates are also encouraged that Gov. Rendell's proposal keeps its focus on student achievement. Maintaining the accountability measures as part of the [Pennsylvania Accountability to Commonwealth Taxpayers Plan](#) (PA-ACT) will ensure that school districts continue to target funding to curriculum and programs that close achievement gaps.

Good Schools Pennsylvania now calls upon the General Assembly to follow Gov. Rendell's lead. "Every time the state doesn't follow through on meeting funding targets, the opportunity recedes for students to meet achievement standards," Risch said. "Every time the state doesn't follow through on meeting funding targets, school districts have little recourse but to rely on [local property taxes](#) to take up the slack. Supporting Gov. Rendell's plan can help avert a crisis for students, schools and communities."