

# The Patriot-News

STATE BUDGET

## Schools to get huge increase in funding

**Despite the biggest single-year increase in basic subsidies in two decades, some districts still find themselves in economic straits.**

Tuesday, September 29, 2009

BY JAN MURPHY [jmurphy@patriot-news.com](mailto:jmurphy@patriot-news.com)

When state dollars start flowing, Pennsylvania's public schools will find themselves showered in more money for basic education than ever before.

The 32 midstate school districts can expect to receive nearly \$276 million of the more than \$5.5 billion investment in basic education, according to school funding information from the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The \$300 million increase in education spending statewide represents the largest single-year increase in two decades.

An increase of that size is virtually unheard of in the U.S. this year because tax revenues are in a free fall because of the recession, said Daniel Thatcher, an education finance research analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Rendell had proposed a \$300 million boost for basic education in his February budget proposal. He later raised that to \$418 million when federal stimulus money became available. Republican senators were proposing no increase in basic-education aid for this year.

These wide swings left school districts in a conundrum as they built their own budgets, which had to be finalized by June 30.

Despite an overall increase in state education funding, some districts find themselves in financial trouble because they overestimated what they would receive.

East Pennsboro Area School District comes up \$165,000 short on its estimate for state basic-education aid that was factored into its \$34 million budget for this year, business administrator Robert Burgett said.

Depending on the state funding the district receives from the accountability block-grant program, which helps fund its full-day kindergarten program, the shortfall could grow even larger.

"We are going to be looking at cuts within the budget to accommodate any deficiencies from the state," Burgett said. "It's going to be across the budget. Everyone will feel some pain."

State funding for special education will remain at last year's level, but the addition of \$361 million in federal stimulus money targeted to this use will help offset increases districts face in serving special-needs students.