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*From The Morning Call*

## Rendell: Schools report is 'red flag'

### Governor says poor ratings make his case for education reform.

By John M.R. Bull  
Of The Morning Call

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**HARRISBURG** | Gov. Ed Rendell says a new federally mandated report showing that only half of all Pennsylvania schools make the grade is proof his stalled education reform programs should be approved by lawmakers.

"If show the need to pass my education initiatives, I don't know what will," he said Wednesday at a news conference. "This scorecard is a huge red flag."

The report showed only 48 percent of all public schools in the state are meeting math and reading standards, as well as graduation and attendance requirements.

In fact, 250 schools rated so poorly that parents will be given the option of moving their children to better schools. Seven of those bottom-rung schools are in the Lehigh Valley.

That schools are not performing as well as they should is not new. Repeated studies and student testing over the years have shown that is the case. But the new report, created by the state under the new federal No Child Left Behind law, comprehensively identified the problems, and did so on a school-by-school basis.

Rendell pounced on the results.

"The time for us to act for Pennsylvania schoolchildren is now," he said. "The red flags should be up and as big and bold as possible."

What changes he proposes, however, will have little immediate impact on school shortcomings as identified for improvement in the latest report. Rendell insisted those school evaluations, which will be done annually, will show long-term gains if his programs are enacted.

Rendell wants to spend \$400 million, funded in part through a 17 percent increase in the state personal income tax, on several initiatives, but is being blocked by Republicans who control the state House and Senate.

"We agree with the governor's overall agenda of improving education, but we still need to work out

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specific solutions, without a tax increase," said Steve Miskin, spokesman for the House Republicans.

Rendell has been pushing for the Legislature to pass his education reforms since March, without much to show for it.

He wants to spend roughly half the \$400 million to tutor students who need it in every school, reduce class sizes and better train teachers.

Studies say those initiatives should show relatively quick results on standardized tests, the results of which caused so many schools to fall short of required improvements, according to Donna Cooper, Rendell's education policy guru.

The rest of the money in Rendell's proposal would go to paying for schools to open all-day kindergarten and establish preschools, and that, he says, will pay off down the road.

He claimed that Philadelphia school test results showed improvement because all-day kindergarten was established in 1996, using federal money that is scheduled to soon run out. The state Department of Education, however, hasn't studied whether the new standardized test results — taken by students in fifth, eighth, and 11th grades — improved as a result of those Philadelphia students being enrolled in kindergarten, said Education Secretary Vicki Phillips.

Many other studies show students do better in school if they attend preschool and full-day kindergarten.

None of Rendell's initiatives would improve graduation rates or attendance, two other factors that resulted in schools being listed as needing improvement on the new school-by-school evaluation.

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