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EDITORIAL BOARD

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End deadlock in state budget negotiations

Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that doesn't have a complete budget, yet there are signs that the political wrangling in Harrisburg could continue.

This would be a mistake. Pennsylvania needs a budget and it needs to improve education, as student test scores indicate.

The state House of Representatives passed a package of bills early Tuesday that allocates more than **\$4.2 billion** in public education subsidies, including **\$256 million** for education initiatives that Gov. Ed Rendell is seeking. These include programs to reduce class sizes through third grade, provide full-day kindergarten and tutoring in the poorest districts,

Leaders in the state Senate, however, say they want to reduce the amount of spending on those programs.

Rendell, in response, said Wednesday that he has bargained down far enough — noting that he had originally asked for **\$560 million** for the initiatives.

Cutting Rendell's request by more than half should be enough for suddenly spending-conscious Republicans.

Rendell's reasons for wanting more funding for education go beyond politics.

In 20% of Pennsylvania schools, including some in Franklin County, fewer

Capsule view

Pennsylvania needs an education budget and it needs to make improvements in education.

A spending plan approved by the House of Representatives is a good start toward achieving both.

than 36% of the students are proficient in math and fewer than 45% are proficient in reading.

Rendell is on solid ground when he says the state will have to make a significant investment in education in the coming years to comply with federal No Child Left Behind Act mandates for student achievement. And he's right when he says Pennsylvania needs to begin investing in early childhood education sooner rather than later. (Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that does not fund pre-school or full-day kindergarten services.)

Rendell is far from getting what he wanted for education, but the bills passed by the House are at least a reasonable start.

The Senate should press on and finish the task of approving the budget. Pennsylvania doesn't need more deadlock — and local schools don't need more delay in receiving state money.

And above all, Pennsylvania doesn't need to accept the status quo in education.