

Local schools win 12 percent increase in state funding, among state's top 40

Even with gain of \$163k, Trenton aid is less than total received in 2009

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The Metuchen school district will receive an 11.89 percent increase in state funding according to the governor's budget proposals, an amount school administrators said will be put to good use, although the district remains underfunded.

The local increase, which translates to a gain of \$162,909, puts Metuchen in the top 40 of New Jersey's 578 school districts in the percentage of increase proposed.

The news came as Gov. Phil Murphy announced a record \$15.4 billion in school funding for state public schools.

Metuchen Board of Education President Justin Manley said school trustees are grateful for the funding increase. "For many years the taxpayers of Metuchen have had to shoulder a greater burden of education costs than the

state aid formula said we should. We're grateful Governor Murphy is trying to make it right."

The state aid formula, which allocates funds for K-12 education, draws on monies from local property taxes and state and federal aid.

"A very small portion of our budget comes from state aid," said Michael Harvier, business administrator and school board secretary. "So it's a \$160,000 increase on a \$39 million budget," which increases the district budget by only 0.4 percent.

Still, Harvier said Metuchen is doing relatively well largely because of growing school enrollment and the local construction boom, which has increased the number of ratable properties providing tax income to the borough.

"So the tax burden has been spread out among more taxpayers. For example, last year there was a decrease in taxes of \$20 for the average house because of the increase in ratables," said Harvier.

The district has come a long way since 2010-11, when state aid was slashed to almost zero, he said. Back

then, the board had to cut services and rely on higher local taxes.

"In 2009-10, it was \$1.7 million. In 2010-11, it dropped down to \$150,000. Since then it's gone up. So we're still not where we were in 2009-10. But again, we appreciate what the governor is trying to do."

While Murphy promises his budget will raise K-12 aid by \$206 million across the state, the impact will register differently in each district based on budget scale and costs.

"Our overall state aid is about \$1.5 million," said Manley. "This means the Metuchen taxpayer pays, through their local taxes, over 95 percent of the education costs for our students. This is a much higher rate than many other districts in New Jersey."

Metuchen and other school districts that want tax relief and additional government assistance will have to wait a while longer: The passage of S2, a 2018 law that revised standards to promote fairness and equality in the financing of school districts, is helping, but the phase-in to fully fund schools will take about seven years.