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Prince George's Thornton Funding Nears \$750 Million; To Climb by \$188 Million Next Year, Alliance Reports

The Prince George's County Public Schools will receive almost \$750 million in state education aid in the current fiscal year, a figure that will climb to more than \$936 million in fiscal year 2008, says a report by the Prince George's Business-Education Alliance. The 2007 allocation represents an increase of more than \$66 million, or 9.7 percent, from fiscal 2006.

The \$748.3 million the system will receive this year constitutes the fifth installment of a planned six-year major boost in funding under the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002, commonly known as the Thornton plan. The Alliance report is based on updated figures from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) reflecting final enrollment data from the previous school year, which are used in several funding formulas, as well as the department's estimates for fiscal 2008.

The Alliance is a nonprofit research and policy analysis organization whose membership includes leading county companies and business associations.

Overall, the budget adopted at the end of the 2006 session of the General Assembly in April increased funding for public primary and secondary education statewide by \$458 million, or more than 11 percent. Total state spending for public education in fiscal 2007 will be approximately \$4.5 billion.

For the second straight year, Prince George's will be the top recipient of state education funds. Baltimore City will receive \$707.1 million, Baltimore County \$416.9 million, and Montgomery County \$323 million.

Efforts to fund the "geographic cost-of-education index," a provision of the Bridge to Excellence Act designed to compensate school systems in areas with higher operating expenses, failed again in the 2006 session, costing Prince George's about \$21 million it otherwise might have received.

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As in previous years, Governor Ehrlich did not request GCEI funding in his proposed budget, and legislation to make the index mandatory did not make it out of the General Assembly.

In addition to the \$3.822 billion allotted for Thornton programs, the state will spend another \$657 million on its contribution to the teachers' retirement program, non-public special education, and other programs, bringing overall education spending in fiscal 2007 to \$4.4795 billion.

Prince George's will benefit from another substantial increase in public school construction spending. The General Assembly added \$43.4 million to Governor Ehrlich's proposed school construction budget, bringing the statewide total to \$322.7 million. Prince George's will receive \$37.425 million of this amount.

The Prince George's figure represents 37.4 percent of the county's fiscal 2007 request for \$99.956 million for school construction and renovation and 43 percent of the \$88 million worth of those projects categorized by the state as either currently funded or ready to go. The county received a greater share of its request than Montgomery County received (34 percent) but less than the shares received by Baltimore City (46 percent) and its other neighboring jurisdictions, Anne Arundel County (69 percent), Charles County (58 percent), and Howard County (51 percent).

Prince George's also will receive almost \$2.8 million in matching grants under the state's Aging Schools Program.

MSDE estimates that Prince George's schools would receive \$936.221 million in state aid in fiscal 2008, the sixth and final year of implementation of the Thornton plan, an increase of almost \$188 million. The final allocation will be adjusted based on enrollment data and other factors. The estimate does not include money from the GCEI. Under the law, future allocations to local jurisdictions would be adjusted annually according to inflation and enrollment.

A copy of the full report is available on the Alliance's website, www.pgbea.org.