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SIGH OF RELIEF

NEPA school districts celebrate end of the state budget impasse



Students dismiss from Chester Street Elementary School in Kingston on Thursday. JASON ARDAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

By Christopher Doyle
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School districts across Northeastern Pennsylvania are breathing a sigh of relief now that the state-budget impasse has ended.

After 135 days of deadlock and an estimated \$5.3 billion in lost funding strained local districts, putting some on the verge of drastic austerity or even total shut-down, state funding crucial to schools and students can begin to flow again.

Scranton Superintendent Erin Keating said in an email Thursday she was thankful for the end of the budget impasse and noted that the adopted budget contained significant increases to education funding. According to state budget figures, Scranton received a 1.9% increase in Basic Education funding to around \$75 million, along with a 4.6% increase in Special Education funding, and a \$9.22 million Ready to Learn grant. During the impasse, Keating ordered a “complete spending freeze” out of fear that the district would be unable to make payroll by the end of 2025.

“We are very pleased to see the state budget impasse come to an end. In addition, we are grateful for the increased level of state funding allocated to the Scranton School District,” Keating said. “This additional investment will have a meaningful impact on our students and represents another important step toward achieving fair funding for historically underfunded districts like Scranton.”

The finalized budget ensures that Hazleton Area can continue focusing on its mission to provide a safe, clean learning environment with diverse educational opportunities for all students.

— BRIAN UPLINGER, Hazleton Area School District superintendent

Superintendent Brian Uplinger said Hazleton Area School District had been able to mitigate the effects of the stalemate while “ensuring that students continued to receive high-quality education and essential services without disruption,” but said he was grateful that an even lengthier delay had been averted. Hazleton Area received a 2.5% Basic Education funding increase to around \$71.09 million, along with a 6.8% increase in Special Education funding, and a \$12.36 million Ready to Learn grant.

“The finalized budget ensures that Hazleton Area can continue focusing on its mission to provide a safe, clean learning environment with diverse educational opportunities for all students,” Uplinger said in an email Wednesday.

Wyoming Valley West Superintendent Charles Suppon Jr. also reflected on the end of the state budget impasse Wednesday night. Robert Kachurak, the district finance manager, said Valley West was set to receive an approximately \$6.7 million

increase in total state funding, slightly more than the district had projected and bringing total state funding to just over \$55 million in total state aid.

“This decision brings much needed stability and relief and we’re incredibly grateful for our legislators coming together to make education a priority,” Suppon said.

The General Assembly voted Wednesday to adopt a \$50.09 billion, amounting to a 4.7% increase over last year’s \$47.8 billion in total appropriations. The state House of Representatives passed the budget 156-47 and the Senate, 40-9, with most of the votes against the budget in both chambers coming from Republicans. Gov. Josh Shapiro signed the budget into law Wednesday evening.

The budget included \$18.46 billion in preschool, primary, and secondary education funding. This amounts to an annual increase of \$872.02 million, or 5.0%. It also contained a 1.3% increase in Basic Education funding to \$8.26 billion, a 2.7% increase in Special Education funding to \$1.53 billion, and 68.4% increase in Ready to Learn block grant funding to \$1.38 billion.

While total budget appropriations were slightly less than what Shapiro had laid out in his \$51.4 billion budget proposal in February, total pre-k-12 education funding increase in the adopted budget exceeded what the governor had proposed. The state House, which is controlled by Democrats, adopted various budgets around the size of

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HAZLE TWP.

Supers to meet today about data center

Had tabled vote on Project Hazelnut earlier this week

By Kent Jackson
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Supervisors in Hazle Twp. scheduled a special meeting on Friday at 7 p.m. to consider some approvals for a data center called Project Hazelnut, four days after they tabled a vote on the plan at a packed meeting.

A legal notice in Thursday’s Standard-Speaker said the supervisors will decide on “preliminary major land development plans,” on “final plans for Phase 1 of the development” and on “preliminary/final land development plans for Project Hazelnut-North Park Drive Extension and Grassy Path Road.”

NP Hazleton Holdings 1, a limited liability corporation of NorthPoint Development in Kansas City, Missouri, proposed constructing 15 data center buildings and four other buildings on 1,282 acres. The land is in Hazle Twp. south of Tomhicken Road in Sugarloaf Twp. and south of the Black Creek. Interstate 81 is east of the site. The property borders Eagle Rock resort on the west and Humboldt Industrial Park North on the south.

Plans for the site include extending North Park Drive, paving and extending Grassy Path Road as a limited access road and a proposed switching yard and substation that PPL Electric Utilities would build.

Gov. Josh Shapiro has put state permits for Project Hazelnut into the Fast Track program.

But during Monday’s hearing, residents asked the supervisors not to give preliminary and final approval for the major land devel-

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Trump signs funding bill, ending government shutdown

By Kevin Freking,
Joey Cappelletti
and Matt Brown
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a government funding bill Wednesday night, ending a record 43-day shutdown that caused financial stress for federal workers who went without paychecks, stranded scores of travelers at airports and generated long lines at some food banks.

The shutdown magnified partisan divisions in Washington as Trump took unprecedented unilateral actions — including canceling projects and trying to fire federal workers — to pressure Democrats into relenting on their demands.

The Republican president blamed the situation on Democrats and suggested voters shouldn’t reward the party during next year’s midterm elections.

“So I just want to tell the American people, you should not forget this,” Trump said. “When we come

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Amateur boxing show swings into city this weekend

By Gregory Adams
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Keman Jackson, founder and operator of Kingside Boxing in Hazleton, is no stranger to the world of boxing.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Jackson remembers the many boxing events of his youth.

That is why he was inspired to organize Ringside Rumble Redemption, an amateur boxing show, taking place Saturday in Hazleton.

“There was always something geared toward the community,” he says.

The show was meant to be put on last year but he says he and USA Boxing got their wires crossed and it never came to be, which is

IF YOU GO

What: Ringside Rumble Redemption
When: 1 p.m. Saturday
Where: Faith United Church of Christ in Hazleton
Tickets: General admission is \$35 and ringside tickets are \$45.
For more information on the event you can call 570-926-6477.

where the name Ringside Rumble Redemption comes from. He assures this will be the first of many shows.

After moving to Hazleton in 2010, Jackson quickly got involved in the local boxing scene by coaching youth boxing at the Hazleton Area Recreation Program (HARP)



John Henriquez, left, trains with Keman Jackson on Monday at Kingside Boxing and Fitness in Hazleton. JOHN HAEGER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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