



Week of Oct. 22-26, 2012

'YES, YES': It's a Mess, But Don't Punish the Kids

by UCLA IDEA

A majority of Californians support increased investment in public education, yet both statewide initiatives that would bring more money to public schools lag in the polls. How did California get in this mess? Earlier this year, at least three different political, ideological and educational "interests" were mobilizing for the ballot.

1. Gov. Brown supported a measure recognizing that schools alone can't address all the state's health, welfare, and other supports California students require. Thus, money from his proposed measure would not be limited to k-12 schools, but could also lessen the impact of the state's debt crisis on broad health, welfare and other education needs.
2. The California Federation of Teachers and grassroots groups in the Restoring California Coalition favored, in particular, a "millionaires tax" that Brown initially found unacceptable. This group and Brown were able to achieve a compromise that would benefit students and not compete on the ballot. That compromise became Proposition 30, which would raise \$6 billion annually for schools and other services.
3. Molly Munger and the California PTA preferred a more restrictive approach—pretty much insisting that all the new monies go to schools and classrooms, pre-kindergarten to 12th grade. Unable or unwilling to compromise, Munger supported efforts to place her proposition on the ballot. These ideas are now found in Proposition 38, which would raise approximately \$10 billion a year.

However, as Election Day approaches and television and radio advertisements ramp up, separate polls have pointed to a dispiriting likelihood—neither 30 nor 38 may pass.

Based on a telephone survey of 2,006 California adults, the Public Policy Institute of California found support for Proposition 30 dipping to 48 percent—a drop of 4 percentage points. Brown's Proposition 30 would raise income taxes on higher-earners, along with a quarter-cent sales tax increase. The money would go towards public k-12 schools and community colleges. More importantly, the state budget is tied to this initiative. Should it fail, schools would automatically lose \$5.4 billion, and the state's public universities would also be forced to cut \$250 million.

Support for Proposition 38, which would use a sliding scale to increase income taxes, fell even more by 6 percentage points to 39 percent.

A separate poll by USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times of 1,504 registered voters confirms those results. Forty-six percent of those surveyed support Proposition 30, while Proposition 38 has less than 30-percent approval.

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It's worth taking a closer look at those numbers and their breakdown. For Proposition 30, there are stark differences along party lines (65% of Democrats support, but only 19% of Republicans), and by race (54% of minorities support compared to 41% of whites). The youngest voters—those between 18 and 29 years old—were the most likely to indicate they would vote for Proposition 30.

There were geographic differences as well with Bay Area residents expressing overwhelming support (63%) compared to tepid approval in the Central Valley (35%) and Southern California regions outside of Los Angeles County (38%).

One of the curiosities was that there was no real difference between households with children under the age of 18 and those without. Neither displayed majority support for the measure.

Moving forward, one strategy both campaigns can employ is to focus on voter turnout and the groundswell of newly registered voters who are likely to come out during a presidential election. A second approach will be to target messages to sway voters on the margins. According to the USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll, 7 percent of likely voters expressed concerns (but not strong concerns) about Proposition 30—this group may well be open to persuasion. Many of these 7 percent are parents or grandparents of school-age children.

A third approach will be for the 30 and 38 campaigns to switch gears in the final 10 days of the election. Rather than drawing distinctions between two visions for protecting California's public schools, the campaigns can encourage all voters to check yes on both initiatives. Right now a quarter of Proposition 38 supporters indicate that they wouldn't vote for Proposition 30. A full-throated endorsement of "Yes, Yes" might be what makes a difference in this election.

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