



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 2012

Prop 30 is "Tantalizingly Close"

By UCLA IDEA

Remember when advocates for public schools debated school "improvement" and "reform" and argued over making sure that teachers were well qualified? Those were the good-old days of "curriculum wars" and fighting to use standardized tests appropriately and fairly. But for the next few days schools and communities are less concerned with how they conduct school than with keeping the doors open.

One seriously considered consequence of not passing Proposition 30 is to cut weeks off the school year. California students could be in school for as little as 160 days, or 10 percent less than their peers nationwide. The last time the national average of instructional days was that low was in 1920.¹ "A 160-day school calendar is unheard of. ... This is subpar to what Third World countries are offering their students when it comes to an instructional day," said Jaime Aquino, deputy superintendent of instruction at Los Angeles Unified School District. The state's largest district has a contingency plan should Proposition 30 fail. The 2012-13 school year would end on May 10.

A shorter school year would have significant impact on student learning and academic progress, as research has shown. This negative impact would be immediate and greater than the benefits of any ongoing or proposed school reforms now under consideration. In fact, failure to fund schools simply makes reform and improvement insignificant and unlikely.

Though recent polls have support for Proposition 30 falling below the needed 50-percent mark, all hope's not lost. With four days to go, a Field Poll measured support at 48 percent, with 14 percent undecided. "I would say it's tantalizingly close to passage. It only needs two to three more points to get across the finish line," said Mark DiCamillo, Field Poll director.

Districts across the state are planning cuts similar to LAUSD's. Furthermore, our public schools are about far more than lessons in the classroom. Students in Advanced Placement classes would be hard pressed to take tests after the school year ends. Sports and extracurricular activities would be disrupted. Parents and families would have to juggle work and supervision. Youth who make use of free and reduced-price lunches and breakfasts would go without meals.

There is a very long list of consequences. With a great deal at stake on Tuesday, it's time to vote.

####

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2010-11 v.1a.