



Week of Jan. 3-11, 2011

To the Brown Administration: Adequate, Equitable, Rational School Funding

By UCLA IDEA

California schools search for hopeful signs as the Jerry Brown administration settles into office. But the only thing that many districts can count on is that they will continue to balance budgets by closing schools, firing teachers, and raising class sizes—all while extending the school year.

Speculation is that Brown's budget cuts will spare K-12 education and community colleges *if* voters choose to continue supporting \$8 billion in temporary taxes. That's the hopeful news, but schools will still need to generate revenue—primarily, parcel taxes—to ward off deeper cuts.

As Brown begins his third term as governor with difficult choices about how to sustain the state's education system, he is addressing issues and talking with colleagues from his earlier stint in Sacramento. The governor has signaled he wants to take a look at Proposition 13 and find a way to give more control to local entities. Prop. 13, which voters approved in 1978 while Brown was first in office, curtailed property taxes and made schools more dependent on the state for funding. And, in one of his first acts as governor, Brown appointed Stanford Professor Mike Kirst to the State Board of Education—more than three decades after first naming Kirst to the post during his first term.

Brown's willingness to revisit the past in order to address our current problems strikes as a helpful sign. Many of the challenges facing California's educational system today were set in motion decades ago. As Brown and his advisors take a fresh look at this history, they would do well to consider a number of profound changes that have reshaped opportunities in the Golden State since 1980.

California has seen a dramatic rise in its prison population since Brown left office. In 1980, California incarcerated 23,264 people, or one in 1,017 residents. At the end of June 2010, the state's prison population was 165,919 inmates, roughly one in 225 residents.

California also has witnessed a steep rise in income inequality. In 1980, the top 1 percent of Californians took in about 8 percent of the state's earnings. That figure has more than tripled with the top 1 percent raking in about 25 percent of earnings. On the other side of the spectrum, the share of state income accruing to the bottom 20 percent of Californians was cut in half during this period.

Rising incarceration and income inequality over the last three decades has raised the stakes for California public education. Yet, school budgets have not done well in the post-Prop, 13 era. In 1980, California's per-pupil spending was about \$200 higher than the national average. Today, the state spends \$2,546 less per student than the national average. Among all states, California ranks 44th.

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THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of Jan. 3-7, 2011

Page 2

For three decades and longer California schools have been told to try harder, teach better, and be more efficient. Headlines trumpet reading and math instruction, bilingual education, testing and standards, teacher accountability, charters and more—much more. But these hot-button issues and schemes can't address the state's deep inequalities and California's schools can't afford to educate all students as they should.

California and the nation must address basic structures for funding schools as well as social supports for school-aged children. Then, watch them learn.

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