



Week of Jan. 10-14, 2011

## Can Schools Be OK if Children Are Not?

By UCLA IDEA

Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed budget, released Monday, slashed most areas of state spending; however, K-12 schools avoided cuts this year because they had "borne the brunt of spending reductions" in recent years.

But there's a condition. The fate of K-12 funding hinges on citizens voting to extend about \$8 billion in temporary taxes. And according to one school board member, "We can't budget on the hopes and dreams that people are going to pass a tax increase."

Further, even if the tax passes and keeps school funding "no worse" than last year, there is more bad news for poor children. The proposed budget cuts Medi-Cal by \$1.7 billion. CalWORKS, which provides assistance to 1.1 million low-income children, loses \$1.5 billion; and 122,000 fewer families would receive assistance—down from the current 580,000 families. There were also deep cuts proposed for child care, development services and Healthy Families, which would result in increased premiums and copayments for some of the poorest and most vulnerable children.

Looking at the budget as a whole, poor children will receive less support from the state and will have fewer of their vital needs met. In this case it's foolhardy to separate *schools* from *children*—to imagine that schools can achieve their mission even if their students can't.

IDEA Director John Rogers said that the health and social service programs being cut shape how young people enter a classroom. "We need young people coming into schools healthy and ready to learn," he said.

We can't lower our expectations for students whose health and readiness are in jeopardy. We still expect them to learn their school subjects and make sense of their social environment. For example, as the nation mourns the Arizona shooting victims, teachers are helping students to understand how guns, violence, civil discourse, and perhaps mental illness interact with community responsibilities and participation. That's a hard lesson even for middle class children with family financial advantages and social supports.

The youngest shooting victim, 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, had opportunities—provided by her family and teachers—to learn democracy in action. Successful in school and newly elected to her school's student council, Christina embodied our aspirations for all of the nation's children. Fulfilling these educational and civic hopes rests on the public's determination that all children be well housed, fed, and cared for.

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