



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of Nov. 5-9, 2012

Election Results: Whew!

By UCLA IDEA

Millions of educators, families and students sighed with relief as election results became clear earlier this week. Among the measures California voters passed was Proposition 30, Gov. Jerry Brown's tax initiative that will raise about \$6 billion annually for schools. K-12 schools were able to set aside contingency plans to cut 15 days from the school year. Community college students will have fewer worries about canceled classes. California State University students will receive a \$250 tuition refund. And University of California students won't see their tuition increase this year.

Leading up to the election, support for Proposition 30 had been dropping but last-minute pushes by unions and grassroots organizations put it over the mark. "The core reason it brought people together was a belief in schools and universities and the capacity of governments to make wise investments that benefit all of us," Brown said on election night.

The defeat of Proposition 32 was another win for educators because passage would have severely curtailed the organizing and political power of the state's public employee unions, including, of course, California teachers.

Lastly, voters soundly rejected Proposition 38, a tax initiative bankrolled by Molly Munger that would have raised \$10 billion for schools and early education. It was supported by only 27 percent of the electorate—exactly half the percentage that voted yes on Proposition 30.

A staggeringly large amount of money (\$363 million) was spent on campaigns for and against these and eight other propositions. Proposition 30 got big support from the California Teachers Association, the state's largest union (\$11.6 million), SEIU (\$11.3 million), and the American Federation of Teachers (\$4.4 million). Similarly, CTA gave more than \$21 million and SEIU gave \$13.6 million to fight Proposition 32. Munger spent \$44.1 million of her own money on Proposition 38. Her brother, Charles Munger Jr., also donated \$36 million to fight 30 and to support 32.

However, Proposition 30 supporters had more going for them than television and radio ads. Unions galvanized support among their large membership base and used their communications and organizing infrastructure to reach out to hundreds of thousands more. Their election work not only kept classrooms open, but also kept the state from the brink of insolvency and assured that "working people can continue to speak out on issues that matter to the middle class." According to SEIU, " ... we prevented devastating cuts to schools, and have put the state's budget on a strong path."

California Calls, a statewide alliance of grassroots community groups, also played a pivotal role in the passage of Proposition 30. In South Los Angeles, staff and hundreds of volunteers at the Community

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Page 2

Coalition talked with more than 20,000 neighbors about Proposition 30. InnerCity Struggle reached a similar number of voters in East Los Angeles, through phone banking, door knocking, and a rally featuring Brown.

In all, the community groups around the state working with California Calls contacted over 400,000 voters. These contacts likely yielded close to 200,000 additional yes votes on Proposition 30—or almost half the final margin of victory.

There is a social and political theme that emerges from the fates of Propositions 30, 32 and 38. In particular, we can see that the people who were closest to the problems and aspirations of their communities prevailed over a well-funded few who, regardless of intentions, were not deeply connected to the everyday knowledge and experiences of schools and neighborhoods.

Passing Proposition 30 required the power of well-organized coalitions that mobilized many thousands of people, including community groups and labor unions, whose own communities' futures depended on the outcome. As Brown stated last weekend during rallies for volunteers from SEIU and InnerCity Struggle: "This is a coming together of individual people to counteract the millions and millions of dollars of billionaires and others who evidently don't care as much as you do about the schools in California."

Proposition 32, if passed, would have diminished the power of these same parents, teachers, and other workers to affect the well-being of their own children and their communities. The hard work of labor unions and California Calls not only protected people's power, but expanded it at the same time. Their efforts contributed to a more inclusive electorate in California—exit polls point to a substantial increase in the percentage of voters who earn less than \$50,000 a year, are 18-29 years old, and are Latino, African American, or Asian/Pacific Islander. Such an electorate has provided both a very welcome moment of relief and the promise of bigger things to come.

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