



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

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2012 Ends with Relief, Hope, and Caution

by UCLA IDEA

Most of 2012 was a desperate time for California's education systems. In January, Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal assumed a \$9.2 billion deficit, and students, parents and educators lived with the threat of drastic cuts to programs, staffing, and opportunities to learn (including doubts about keeping schools open for a full school year.) Only in November, with the passage of Proposition 30, were those fears allayed.

Every public school, district and institution of higher education had to devote scarce staffing and organizing resources to prepare for the worst-case budget scenario. These preparations had financial, programmatic, and human costs, draining energy better spent on improving existing programs and enthusiastically planning new ones. Instead, the months leading up to the elections were occupied with triage—making plans to save some viable education opportunities by cutting off others.

- California issued almost 20,000 pink slips to teachers.
- Los Angeles Unified, among other districts statewide, considered shortening the school year by three weeks.
- The University of California and California State University systems had some of the fastest-rising tuitions in the nation.
- California State University froze enrollment at some of its campuses.
- The hard-hit community colleges struggled to increase access to students, such as Santa Monica College, which floated a controversial two-tiered system that was ultimately suspended.

Fortunately, most of these extreme measures were averted with the passage of Brown's Proposition 30, a tax initiative that will raise about \$6 billion for k-12 and community colleges. School calendars remain intact. LAUSD reinstated furlough days. The UCs and Cal States froze tuition. And many community colleges added classes to their schedules.

So the picture looks better. The Legislative Analyst's Office is projecting smaller budgetary shortfalls, and perhaps a surplus by 2014. A Democratic supermajority in the Legislature is raising hopes for investment that will not only stop California's decades-long education slide, but reverse that trend and bring California back to the forefront of public education.

As we say goodbye to 2012, and start the new year on a stable—cautiously hopeful—note, it's important not to rest on these laurels. We're hopeful that 2013 will bring renewed conversations about how to bring in additional revenues, and how to allocate these new resources in equitable ways.

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