



The budget deal: Governor and legislators ‘failed our students’

Analysis from CSBA’s Governmental Relations Department

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It’s like a rerun of a bad movie: Another budget agreement has been reached by the governor and legislative leaders, and schools have again been cut billions of dollars.

“Increased class sizes, cuts to key education programs, additional layoffs for teachers, librarians, counselors and administrators and a shorter school year are just a few of the overwhelming consequences our districts face with this budget plan,” CSBA President Paula S. Campbell said after the deed was done. “When schools re-open [this] month for the new school year, we will all see the profound impact of these draconian cuts.”

While Proposition 98’s minimum education funding guarantee was not suspended, lawmakers exploited an accounting maneuver to make a \$1.6 billion cut from Proposition 98 in the fiscal year that ended June 30, which in turn reduced the funding base for 2009-10. The 2009-10 budget package also includes the acknowledgement of an \$11.2 billion maintenance factor that would restore funding to schools in future years.

The total cut to Proposition 98 in 2008-09 and 2009-10 is \$5.7 billion—on top of the cuts already made in September and February. This includes \$1.6 billion in 2008-09 school funding for schools that was appropriated but never actually sent to districts and county offices; \$2.4 billion from 2009-10 general purpose spending for local educational agencies; and \$1.7 billion in revenues that are deferred from 2009-10 into 2010-11.

In addition, \$450 million in federal funds will be set aside to backfill a reduced appropriation for schools that receive funding under the Quality Education Investment Act; that amounts to an even deeper cut, since that money will not be available for its intended purpose of helping high-priority schools.

The package also authorizes school districts to reduce the school year from 180 days to 175. It’s left to each district to actually make the reduction, though, and any district that does would likely face significant challenges, such as having to negotiate the provision with employee unions.

In another cost-cutting move of dubious actual value to cash-strapped local boards and the education of all California's students, the agreement suspends the state's requirement that special education students pass the California High School Exit Exam in order to graduate from high school until the State Board of Education addresses the issue. At its July meeting, however, the SBE voted 8-0 to express its very strong and continued support for the high school exit exam and ask that the Legislature not send any legislation forward that would eliminate it.

More helpfully, the budget deal does include a four-year suspension of the requirement for school districts to purchase instructional materials within 24 months of adoption by the SBE. It's a sad day for schools, though, that delaying purchases of updated materials counts as any kind of good news.

"Once again, the governor and legislative leaders have failed our students," said Scott P. Plotkin, executive director of the California School Boards Association. "Our kids are paying the consequences for the state's unacceptable funding system. These cuts will cause lasting harm to our students and our state's ability to compete and succeed in the future."

Fight for funding continues

The fact remains that this spending plan is likely another stopgap measure. As state revenues continue to decline, the Legislature and the governor will have to reach future agreements on how to address any additional shortfalls. It's urgent that the public education community keep the pressure on. Proposition 98 typically accounts for about 40 percent of the general fund, but it absorbed 60 percent of the cuts this year. We need to reinforce our message: Education is an investment we can't afford to cut—certainly not any more than it already has been.

Related link:

Find details on the new state budget and additional resources by clicking on "Schools: An Investment We Can't Afford to Cut" under the Spotlight section at www.csba.org

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