

## Brown's budget assessment could mean \$2 billion more cuts to schools By Allen Young, Schools Innovation & Advocacy Thursday, December 09, 2010

Although there were no proposals announced at a Wednesday budget forum hosted by Governor-elect Jerry Brown, representatives from his new administration said that the latest projections place Proposition 98 at \$47.8 billion in 2011-12.

That means that schools could be facing another cut over \$2 billion next year.

Ana Matosantos, incoming Finance Director for the Brown administration, sketched a bleak outlook for state finances in the coming year before an audience that included new and termed-out lawmakers as well as constitutional officers and unknown numbers following the event over the web.

Despite the potential for more cuts, Matosantos noted that schools have already endured cuts of more than 10 percent every year since 2007-08, and Proposition 98 has dropped about \$9 billion over that same time.

The new governor, who acted as moderator, did not speak directly to school financing and refrained from discussing any budget solutions beyond saying that California would not be able to borrow its way out of the fiscal mess.

But Brown did highlight the fact that California's student-teacher ratios were among the highest in the nation. He said the problem was "serious" but added that the budget deficit is "not going to make that any better."

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst reported Wednesday that the state's budget deficit could grow to \$28.1 billion, about \$2 billion higher than previous estimates because of potential losses if Congress adopts proposed changes to federal estate taxes.

Speaking of possible solutions, state Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, told reporters after the forum that ideally a tax package would be sent to voters in the first half of 2011.

Leno, who is expected to become the next chair of the Senate Budget Committee, said he wanted to raise revenues to protect schools and noted evidence that shows voters share that sentiment.

"If a tax increase or tax extension were specifically to invest in higher education or specifically for K-12 public education, polls indicate that voters are more likely to support that kind of tax," he said.

Although the new governor was silent about how he wanted to close the budget gap, education leaders said Wednesday they were pleased that Brown was given a comprehensive assessment on the large scale cuts that schools have endured in recent years.

"It's heartening to see a dialogue start off on such a positive basis on such a negative subject," said State Superintendent-elect Tom Torlakson. "I'm hopeful and I believe we can work closely together to set education as a high priority and do the most we can possibly do."

Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, said she wanted the Legislature to delve into the details of school funding next year so that the impact of things like payment deferrals are fully understood by the people voting for them.

"I think we've really got to look more closely and kind of get down into the weeds of what the real financial impacts are, not to mention what the impacts are to schools up and down the state," said Brownley, who last year chaired the Assembly Education Committee.