

EdSource

Extra!

What's happening at EdSource

As the State Budget Deficit Grows, Citizens Take the Initiative

By Julian Leichtry

As California enters yet another year of budget woes—facing a projected \$20.7 billion shortfall—advocates of a wide array of reforms are turning once again to the ballot box. Although initiatives have been a hallmark of California's direct democracy, they have also required spending in some areas and limited taxes in others, prompting some to say that voters have boxed in the Legislature. However, during the past 20 years, legislators have generated the vast majority of ballot measures that require additional funding.

Some proposed measures relate directly to education, while others aim for more sweeping reforms that could ultimately affect public schools. Currently, more than 60 measures have been cleared for circulation. It is likely that most will not end up on voters' ballots because typically it takes well-funded groups who can hire paid signature gatherers to get the necessary hundreds of thousands of signatures. But pundits say the flurry of activity is indicative of the state's mood and voter frustration.

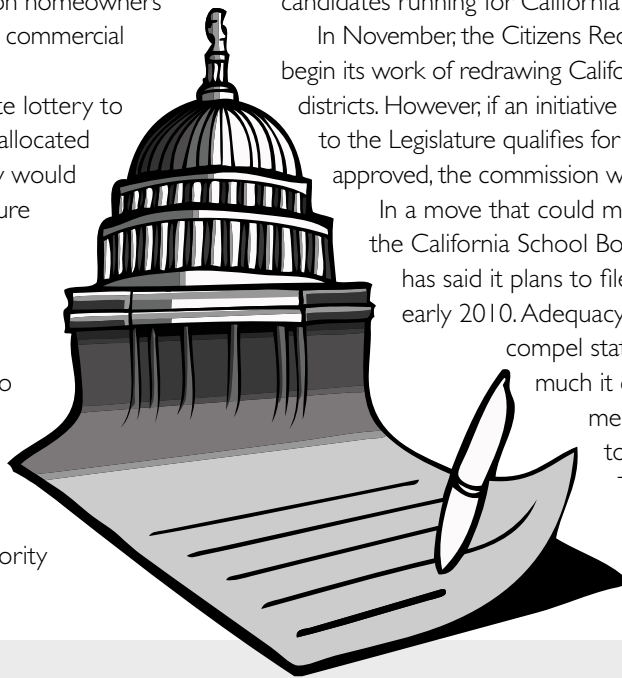
Below are a few examples of initiatives being proposed for the November ballot.

Education-related measures:

- Californians for Improved School Funding wants to allow local school districts to pass parcel taxes of up to \$250 per parcel with 55% voter approval. Currently such taxes require a two-thirds vote.
- The California Teachers Association is deciding whether to pursue measures that reduce taxes on homeowners and small businesses while increasing commercial property taxes.
- A measure would authorize the state lottery to increase the share of sales revenue allocated to prizes in hopes that more money would be generated for schools. The measure would be repealed automatically if lottery revenues for schools do not increase.

Governmental reform measures:

- California Forward has put forth two measures. One requires a two-year spending plan that would include a program review and oversight requirement and would allow lawmakers to pass a budget with a majority



vote (but would leave unchanged the two-thirds vote requirement to raise taxes). The other contains a provision that would allow voters in counties that adopted a "Countywide Strategic Action Plan" to approve up to a 1% sales tax increase with a majority vote. Counties that enact such a tax would have to distribute half of the increase to school districts in the county, based on average daily attendance.

- Repair California has also put forth two measures. One would allow voters to call a constitutional convention through the initiative process. The other would call a convention to propose changes to the state constitution related to government, state spending and budgeting, elections, and lobbying. But it would forbid the convention from addressing taxes or fees, marriage, abortion, gambling, affirmative action, freedom of the press or religion, immigration rights, and the death penalty. For the second measure to be enacted, both measures have to pass.

While these measures are still a long way from being placed on the November ballot, other potential reforms that could affect the makeup of state government—and ultimately public education—are further along.

In June, voters will decide whether they want to select candidates in open primaries and if they want to approve a pilot program that will provide public campaign financing for candidates running for California Secretary of State.

In November, the Citizens Redistricting Commission will begin its work of redrawing California Assembly and Senate districts. However, if an initiative that would return that power to the Legislature qualifies for the November ballot and is approved, the commission will become defunct.

In a move that could more directly affect education, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) has said it plans to file an "adequacy" lawsuit in early 2010. Adequacy lawsuits have been used to compel states to first determine how much it costs to educate students to meet certain standards, and then to fund schools at that level. Typically, such lawsuits take many years to get through the courts.

33rd Annual EdSource Forum on California Education Policy
California at a Crossroads: Crisis & Opportunity
 A statewide event

When and Where

Friday, March 19, 2010
 Santa Clara Marriott in Santa Clara, California
 Program: 8:30 a.m. –3 p.m.

Cost

\$80 for EdSource Annual Information Service subscribers
 \$95 for nonsubscribers

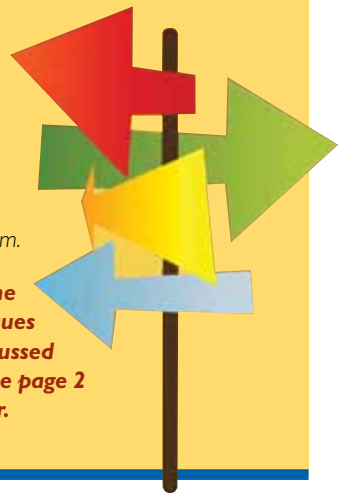
Early Bird Special for All: Register by Feb. 26 and take \$20 off the registration fee!

Go to www.edsource.org to register or call 650-917-9481.

Davis Campbell—

president of the EdSource Board of Directors and president of CSBA Governance Institute—will moderate the Forum.

For details on the speakers and issues that will be discussed at the Forum, see page 2 of this newsletter.



Watch for EdSource Publications in the Pipeline!

Each year between September and June, EdSource publishes six to eight reports on California education policy and issues. Here's what to watch for between now and June.

A Study of California Middle Grades Practices and Student Outcomes

This report will summarize a groundbreaking EdSource study that addresses an important research question: What middle grades school practices and policies are working best to keep more students "on track" academically through these early adolescent years? Scheduled for February.

2010 Resource Cards on California Schools

This spiral-bound collection of at-a-glance facts on California schools, organized by category, is a favorite desktop reference. This year's expanded edition features an enhanced section on community colleges. Scheduled for March.



The Common Core Standards Movement: Implications for California

Through the Race to the Top grant program, the federal government is encouraging states to adopt common academic content standards in English and math. This report will explore what is at stake for California. Scheduled for May.

Also watch in April for highlights from the March 19 Forum and a special website section on the June 2010 statewide election.

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California at a Crossroads: Crisis & Opportunity

33rd Annual EdSource Forum on California Education Policy

With almost 6.3 million K–12 students and 2.9 million community college students, California's K–14 budget, policy, and reform issues are ALWAYS important—and certainly this year is no different. This year's EdSource Forum has a state K–14 budget update and projection, the release of a groundbreaking study of middle grades in California, three candidates running for the important office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and two high-level community college leaders in their first joint moderated discussion. A can't miss event—we look forward to seeing you on March 19!

Session I California's Fiscal Crisis and its Impact on K–12 Education and Community Colleges.



"The next two years will be brutal. We do expect relief after that. Our task—at the state and local level—is to hang on until then."

Legislative Analyst **Mac Taylor** did not mince words when discussing California's economic predicament in a recent presentation.

The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) plays a unique role in state government by providing an impartial analysis of bills before the Legislature, including the state budget. When California's Legislature created the office in 1941, it was the first of its kind in the nation. Legislators expect the LAO to serve as a fiscal watchdog and ensure cost-effective implementation of programs it has established. As Taylor's predecessor, Elizabeth Hill, put it: "The office is charged to call it as we see it" and has a mandate "to speak truth to power."

And considering that about 40% of General Fund expenditures went to K–12 schools and community colleges in 2009–10, Taylor and his staff need to have considerable knowledge of school finance.

Taylor also spoke at last year's Forum to rave reviews by attendees. "He laid it on the line about how serious the situation is," responded one attendee. "He was terrific." Taylor will once again lay it on the line, helping the audience to make sense of the difficult situation faced by the state—and in particular by the education community—as well as offering ideas for solving budget imbalances now and in the future.

Session II Middle Grades Practices and Student Achievement: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?



Results of a new EdSource study on middle grades address an important research question: What middle grades school practices and policies are working best to keep more students "on track" academically through these early adolescent years?

Initial findings of this study will be released in late February and will be presented in Session II by EdSource Executive Director **Trish Williams** and Principal Investigator **Michael Kirst**.



Using sophisticated analyses, the study team—which included researchers from EdSource and Stanford University—identified school practices that differentiated schools that had higher-than-predicted California Standards Test scores (based on student background) from those that did not.

The power of this groundbreaking study is in the nuance and the details, according to those attending a November stakeholders advisory meeting for superintendents and education and state policy experts to review the study's findings. "It puts meat on the bones" of general practices, such as using standards-based curriculum, one expert said, showing how these practices actually work within a school. "These practices are reproducible."

The findings also show a culture shift, one educator noted. "Conversations in districts and schools are more about learning and less about teaching—more driven by outcomes and how our actions relate to outcomes."

The study is groundbreaking for a number of reasons:

- It is one of the largest studies of middle grades education ever undertaken.
- It is based on input from three levels of educators: 3,752 English and math teachers, 303 principals, and 157 district superintendents.
- The surveys asked about concrete, actionable practices and policies in place at the district and school.
- The study's sample included three middle grade configurations: K–8, 6–8, and 7–8.
- It looked at two sets of schools: those that served low-income students and those that served middle-income students.

Session III Who Will Be California's Next Superintendent of Public Instruction?

Larry Aceves, Gloria Romero, and Tom Torlakson all hope to become California's next state superintendent of public instruction (SPI). The three candidates will discuss their ideas about the future of K–12 education in a session moderated by political writer and satirist **Greg Lucas**. Lucas worked in the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Sacramento bureau for 19 years and now writes a news and commentary blog called California's Capitol.



The candidates come from varying backgrounds, but all have experience with public education:



■ Aceves, a former teacher, principal, and school district superintendent, is past president of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).



■ Romero, a former professor at Cal State-Los Angeles, is a California state senator, chair of the Senate Education Committee and of the Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee on Education.

■ Torlakson, a former teacher and state senator, is a California assemblymember, chair of the Assembly's Select Committee on Schools and Community, and a member of the Education and Appropriations committees.

The SPI is not only the official spokesperson and advocate for California public schools, but is also responsible for the day-to-day operations of the California Department of Education. The SPI sets the tone for the department and determines its priorities. Under the leadership of current Superintendent Jack O'Connell, the department focused on improving student achievement and, in particular, on closing student achievement gaps based on income, ethnicity, or home language.

The election for SPI will be on June 8. If one candidate does not receive more than 50% of the votes, then the top two vote getters will face off in November. The new SPI will serve a four-year term beginning in January 2011.

Session IV The Community College System: Higher Expectations, Greater Challenges, New Approaches.



As high school guidance counselors and educators know, most California high school graduates who go on to public higher education enroll at a community college. In fall 2008, 61% of first-time freshmen enrolled in community college. Through the full 2008–09 school year, the state's 110 community colleges served nearly 2.9 million students.



And community college students make up the majority of the bachelor's degrees awarded by California State University (CSU). In 2007–08, 55% of bachelor's degree graduates had attended a community college. At the University of California (UC), former community college students made up 29% of their graduates that year. In addition, the colleges train

nurses, electricians, computer technicians, child care providers, mechanics, graphic artists, and a myriad of other professionals through two-year degree or certificate programs.

These colleges serve their communities at a number of levels and, as the recession drags on, the public is relying on them more than ever. In addition, because of budget shortfalls, CSU and UC have reduced the number of students they accept. Those who have been rejected by the four-year institutions turn to community colleges.

At the same time that the need for the colleges is growing, the state is reducing funding. The colleges have responded by increasing fees and reducing classes. In a moderated discussion, **Martha Kanter** and **Jack Scott** focus on these challenges.

- Kanter became undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Education in April 2009, where she oversees policies, programs, and activities related to postsecondary, vocational, and adult education and federal student aid. Former chancellor of Foothill-DeAnza Community College District—one of the largest such districts in the nation—Kanter is the first community college leader to hold that post.
- Scott assumed the position of chancellor of the California Community Colleges in January 2009 after serving as a member of the state Legislature for 12 years. He is charged with providing leadership, advocacy, and support of the colleges, representing the system before the Legislature and governor. He has also been engaged in recent policy efforts emanating from Washington, D.C.



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