

Brown: School budget v. income taxes

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown will spare K-12 schools from further drastic cuts in his budget – so long as voters extend higher income taxes in a special election, according to sources familiar with his proposal.

The tradeoff wouldn't cure education ills, and many districts would still face another year of fewer school days and larger class sizes. But it could avert even deeper cuts after years of school rollbacks and help Brown galvanize powerful education support for tax hikes in a June special election.

"If something like that happens, I'm going to be looking for the feet to be kissed," said Kevin Gordon, a veteran education lobbyist, of the Brown education proposal. "The big question is, what will the voters do, and if voters don't come through, will we go through incredible anxiety all over again?"

Brown does not plan to suspend Proposition 98, the state's minimum guarantee for K-12 and community college funding, though he may seek to do so if the tax hike extensions don't pass.

Without any increase in state revenue, K-12 schools and community colleges stand to lose more than \$2 billion in funding in 2011-12 – roughly 4 percent – because tax rates are scheduled to decline this year, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office. Several school officials asked Brown at his Los Angeles forum on Dec. 10 to raise taxes to avoid further cuts to education.

Absent those taxes, the analyst's office projects 2011-12 to be the worst year for schools in the current slump.

Thereafter, schools stand to receive more money as the economy recovers.

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