

Tax plans would boost schools but leave social safety net vulnerable

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

As education groups battle over which California tax initiative would give the biggest boost to schools, advocates for low-income residents fear safety-net programs remain vulnerable no matter what happens on the ballot in November.

Proponents for three competing tax measures are focusing heavily on schools because voters prioritize education funding most. But it remains an open question how other programs will fare.

Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal raises several billion dollars for the state's general fund that he says would help protect schools from severe reductions. But he has proposed deep cuts in welfare-to-work and child care in the first year even if his taxes pass.

Two rival plans largely bypass the state to send money directly to schools and counties. They leave unanswered how the state would close an estimated \$9.2 billion deficit through June 2013.

"If tax revenues aren't available to help balance the budget ... it puts pressure on higher education, on health and social service programs, on parks," said Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project, which advocates for low-income residents. "It puts pressure on everything that isn't constitutionally protected."

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