

Brown expected to boost school spending

By Associated Press

Lawmakers expect Gov. Jerry Brown to suggest spending more tax dollars on public schools and community colleges while asking for more money to be set aside for a rainy day when he releases his updated budget this week.

But with a growing \$3 billion surplus, Democrats who control the Legislature will jockey to increase funding for child care, higher education and other social programs.

Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins said those areas have suffered spending cuts over the last decade and while lawmakers “know we’re not going to get everything we want,” she and other Democratic leaders “expect good news.”

Brown already has proposed a record \$113 billion general fund spending plan, but he’s revising that upward as the state has collected more revenue.

California’s budget has benefited from the recovering economy and temporary tax increases. It’s not clear if that boost will continue, since much of it has come from taxes on capital gains and large corporate bonuses.

And as the state takes drastic steps to conserve water amid the ongoing drought, Brown could propose higher spending to expand water supplies and fight wildfires.

Already this year, the Democratic governor has signed emergency legislation authorizing \$1 billion for water infrastructure, including flood control and water recycling, and other programs.

Senate Democrats now are pushing Brown to spend more on water

delivery upgrades and wastewater reuse. Republicans want to speed dam construction.

In addition to water spending, Atkins anticipates about \$1 billion in extra discretionary spending that could go toward social programs.

Brown, however, is skeptical. "I'd like them to show it to me, that'd be very interesting," he said last week.

The governor, early in his final term, has been determined to maintain some of California's surplus. That restraint has created an odd dynamic that has generally left Republicans pleased and members of his own party disappointed.

By voter-approved law, the state must spend the lion's share of the surplus on public schools and filling California's savings fund.

But Democrats, who control both houses of California's Legislature and don't need Republican support to pass the budget, are reiterating their desire for child care and higher education spending.

Advocates, meanwhile, have been pushing to restore pay cut during the recession for providers who treat Medi-Cal patients. Senate Democrats want health care for immigrants in the country illegally. And Atkins, a San Diego Democrat, has proposed an income tax credit for low-income, working families.

Sen. Mark Leno, a San Francisco Democrat who chairs the Senate's budget committee, said the majority party is hoping for more discretionary spending, but he also wants to tame expectations. During the last budget cycle, the state increased funding for free preschool and daycare for low-income families, but not as much as Democrats wanted.

"I don't want to promise you things that I can't deliver," he

told a crowd of mothers and childcare providers who rallied at the Capitol for increased state subsidies last week.

Bernadette Yabadi, 45, who emigrated from Congo to Santa Rosa with her family five years ago, was among hundreds of parents advocating for more funding. Yabadi, who was a public defender in her home country, said she would love to have childcare for her 2-year-old son, Peter.

“I need to work,” Yabadi said, “and help out my family.”

Both Democrats and Republicans are pleased to be able to increase public school funding, though GOP members and some Democrats want tenure reforms in light of a court ruling that struck down teacher job protections.

In January, Brown proposed increasing per pupil spending by 3 percent, from \$9,300 this year to \$9,600 next year, and he proposed increasing community college funding by more than \$500 per student, an 8 percent increase.

Those figures are expected to go even higher when he releases his budget Thursday.