

California schools: Billions more in cuts

David Brown
1 September 2011

With state revenues coming in below projections, huge cuts in public education loom in the US state of California, on top of billions already slashed last year.

The California state budget passed by a Democrat majority at the end of June and approved by the administration of Governor Jerry Brown cut billions of dollars from social spending, including \$1.8 billion from higher education.

The budget created two tiers of additional cuts that would be triggered if estimated state revenues for the budgetary year are revised down in December. The first tier consists of \$600 million in cuts to higher education and various social services. It will come into effect if revenues fall over \$1 billion short. The second tier is up to \$1.9 billion in cuts, with \$1.5 billion from K-12 education, and is triggered if the budget is over \$2 billion short.

The state's revenues for July, the first month of the budgetary year, came in \$539 million short. As a new economic downturn looms, it appears likely that both tiers of cuts will be triggered at the end of the year.

Spending for the community college system could be cut by \$102 million, on top of the \$400 million initially cut in this year's budget and \$129 million in delayed funding. The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems each received \$650 million in cuts from the budget and will each lose \$100 million more in the first tier of cuts.

The cuts implemented so far have been widely felt by teachers and students in the form of tuition hikes, program reductions, and furlough days. Over the past six years, the fees and tuition for the UC and CSU systems have risen dramatically. The precise amounts vary between different campuses, but at UC Davis, 2010 annual in-state tuition for undergraduates increased by over 25 percent, almost \$3,000.

At the same time the UC system has seen an increase in the number of highly paid employees. The number of

employees making over \$218,000 per year increased by 12 percent in 2010, with 14 employees making over \$1 million, up from 10 in 2009.

UC officials defended these raises, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, by pointing out that most of the large salaries come from private funding. However, this only highlights the declining role of public funding in the UC system and the close relations between university management and corporate executives.

Of the \$22 billion annual UC budget, only 11 percent is paid by the state, with the rest coming from tuition and private funding sources. The "public" character of these institutions is now largely a fiction.

A similar phenomenon is occurring at the K-12 level. There is a two-pronged push to replace California's public education system with charter schools. The first prong is the use of test-based measures to evaluate teachers and schools to ensure "accountability." Any school that doesn't perform can then be turned into a charter school. The second prong is the budget cuts, which make it impossible for schools to meet the new standards, let alone provide decent education.

The Obama administration has spearheaded such policies nation-wide: its Race to the Top Program caused a bidding war among states competing in a race to the bottom. California, having been one of the losing states in the competition, has developed variants of the same principle, like the "Parent Trigger" law, lobbied for by billionaire financier Eli Broad and other wealthy opponents of public education. The law allows a majority vote of parents with kids at a school to convert it into a charter school, a significant step on the path to privatization.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, 30,000 teachers and 10,000 support staff have lost their jobs in California's public schools. Class sizes have increased sharply, the school year has been shortened, "superfluous" programs like art and music have been

cut, and teacher pay, benefits, and development opportunities have been slashed.

Schools that can't find outside funding, either through serving a wealthy community or gaining corporate funding, are effectively doomed to failure and conversion into charter schools. Charter schools are not bound by the local school districts' employment practices and are being used as a tool against teachers' pay, benefits, and pensions.

According to charter school teachers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site*—who wish to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation—long, unpaid hours outside of the classroom are regularly required. There is simply no significant support for new teachers. If they have trouble managing their classrooms they are given more work and written up if the situation doesn't improve, eventually losing their jobs.

This stressful environment combined with lower pay explains the results of a recent study by UC Berkeley, which showed higher turnover rates in charter schools. Teachers in the Los Angeles area were three times more likely to leave their job each year if they worked at a charter school than if they worked in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

In spite of the generally poor working conditions, teachers' unions like the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and the California Teachers Association (CTA) have come out in support of charter schools to encourage "the use of different and innovative teaching methods."

This anti-teacher stance flows from the unions' reactionary role in state politics. They are completely opposed to any struggle against Governor Brown and the Democratic Party. In the last round of budget negotiations the unions supported a reactionary campaign by Brown to increase taxes largely on the poor, claiming that this was the only alternative to huge cuts.

In a flier released August 19, UTLA boasts that numerous teachers could be rehired "because of the furlough day agreement and financial sacrifice accepted by LAUSD employees." The only reference to a struggle is the assurance that UTLA will "fight for the lowest possible number of furlough days." In other words, they completely accept that their members will have to take effective pay cuts.

The CTA takes the same stance in practice but has

learned to speak out of both sides of its mouth. Over the past year the CTA has maintained a section of their website entitled "Restore Tax Fairness" where they document the fact that poor Californians pay 11 percent of their household income in state taxes while the rich pay 7.8 percent.

The notable omission from this section is any mention that the CTA endorsed Brown's proposed tax increases on the poor and significant new corporate tax breaks. Neither does the section include any program to "restore tax fairness." When it comes down to action, the CTA stands firmly on the side of the corporations and the Democratic Party.

Students, teachers, and workers must oppose these attacks and wage a struggle against all their supporters, including the trade unions and the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of big business in California and nationally. A free, quality, education at all levels is one of many basic social rights that workers must fight for, on the basis of an independent socialist perspective.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact