

Measure J332

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please carefully read the following description of a ballot measure that was written by a disinterested expert. Feel free to take notes or outline passages as you read.

This should take approximately 10 minutes.

BALLOT MEASURE J332

BACKGROUND

Overview

This measure makes various changes to the state's education system (grades kindergarten through twelve--K-12). Specifically, it:

- Creates a state Office of the Chief Inspector of Public Schools.
- Increases the responsibilities of school site councils and principals.
- Alters the state qualifications that must be met by teachers in California.
- Requires teachers to keep lesson plans on the subjects they teach.
- Prevents the state from reducing funding for the existing kindergarten through grade three (K-3) class size reduction program.
- Mandates the expulsion of students possessing unlawful drugs at school.

Office of the Chief Inspector

Background. The State Department of Education (SDE) provides guidance and support to the state's 8,000 public schools. As part of its duties, SDE staff visit school sites every four to five years to see whether schools are using certain state and federal funds as required by law and to measure the success of these programs. The department also maintains data on school and student performance. The department spends about \$34 million in state funds annually on all of its operations.

Proposal. The measure creates the Office of the Chief Inspector of Public Schools, which would report each year on the quality of public K-12 schools. This office would operate independently from SDE. The Governor would select a Chief Inspector, who would serve a ten-year term managing the new office.

The measure requires the office to collect annual data on the quality of each school and inspect all public K-12 schools in the state at least once every two years. With this information, the office would issue an annual report ranking the quality of public schools, identifying strengths and weaknesses of each school, and providing data about student achievement.

School Site Governance

Background. Local school boards determine how school districts and school sites (that is, individual schools) operate. For instance, school boards establish school curricula, employee hiring and transfer policies, and how district funds are used. Principals are generally responsible for the day-to-day

operation of school sites. Most schools in the state have school site councils that assist school administrators in determining how to spend certain funds and improving the school's educational program. The specific responsibilities of principals and site councils vary significantly from school to school based on district policies.

Proposal. This measure changes the way decisions are made in many schools. First, the measure requires each school--as a condition for continued receipt of state funds for special programs (such as class size reduction)--to establish a school site governing council of parents and school site teachers. Since virtually all schools currently receive such funds, almost all schools would have to establish a school site governing council. Each of these councils, with support from its principal, would determine the curriculum used at the school and the use of funds made available to the school by the school board.

Second, the initiative grants principals the authority to hire or remove any school site employee (teachers and nonteachers). Employees that are released by a school site would become the responsibility of the district. Under current law, districts would have to find another job for many of these employees.

Teacher Credentialing and Assignment Requirements

Background. To become a teacher, individuals must demonstrate to the state that they have a thorough understanding of the subject areas they will teach. There are currently two ways a teacher can demonstrate competence: (1) pass specific courses approved by the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) or (2) pass a CTC subject-matter test. About half of the 240,000 existing teachers fulfilled this requirement through courses and half through a test. Under certain circumstances, teachers who are credentialed in one subject area may teach in another subject area where they are not credentialed.

Proposal. This measure eliminates the option for new teachers to take courses to fulfill subject matter requirements. Thus, all new teachers would have to pass a subject matter test to demonstrate competence. In addition, all existing teachers would be required to pass a subject matter test before they could be given an assignment to teach in a given subject area. The term "assignment" is not defined in the initiative or in current law.

Lesson Plan Requirement

Background. Teachers often create lesson plans to ensure that classes cover the important subject-matter content during the school year. While state law currently contains no requirement that teachers maintain these plans, some districts require teachers to maintain lesson plans for the classes they teach.

Proposal. The initiative requires teachers to have approved lesson plans before they can receive an "assignment" to a class. As discussed in the previous section, the number of teachers that are affected by this provision depends on how the state interprets "assignment." Standards for assessing lesson plans would be developed by CTC. The measure does not identify who would be responsible for reviewing lesson plans to determine whether the plans meet the new standards.

Class Size Reduction (CSR) Funding

Background. In 1997-98, the state provided \$1.5 billion for K-3 CSR. This funding level assumed that all K-3 students would participate in the program and that a small number of students would participate in smaller classes for only half of the school day (the state provides a lower funding level for these students). In fact, many schools (comprising about 15 percent of eligible students) did not participate in the program. Program savings, however, were redirected by the state to other educational purposes.

Proposal. The measure prevents the state from reducing funding for the existing K-3 CSR program. This would require the state to budget for the program as if all students participated in the CSR program for a full day. Every two years, the Department of Finance would review school district claims for the program and would transfer any unused funds to other educational programs.

Student Expulsion Policies

Background. Under current law, a school principal or district superintendent may expel a student for drug possession. Current law also requires the district to continue educating expelled students in a different setting. These alternative settings cost more than regular school programs. According to SDE estimates, approximately 17,000 students are caught each year possessing drugs at school or at a school activity off school grounds.

Proposal. The initiative mandates the expulsion of students who unlawfully possess drugs at school or at school activities off school grounds. The only exception to this requirement is if it is a student's first offense for the possession of a small amount of marijuana.



STOP!

Please go to the online survey, enter the 4-character code for this ballot measure (printed at the top and bottom of this page) and answer the survey questions.