

Although 65 percent of those voting in the June 1978 elections supported Proposition 13, the vote was not an anti-education vote, but an expression of concern about "big government spending." This was borne out by major opinion surveys following the enactment of Proposition 13 in which people indicated that education was a high priority exceeded only by tax support for police and fire services.

Ronald Chilcote asserts that "school improvement projects" coupled with decreased educational dollars offer positive prospects for public education including more public participation in the schools, opportunity for local districts to set educational priorities, more opportunities for in-service training of staff, private foundation support of academic programs, and "decentralization of decision making."

Although Chilcote's theories are commendable, practical experience of California school districts nearly a year later indicates that few if any of Chilcote's projected possibilities are occurring.

First, the fact that property tax support for public schools was reduced by nearly 50 percent necessitated state legislative "bail-out" measures that called for state assumption of 70 percent of the cost of local school operations. (The bail-out action still resulted in an average 10 percent decrease in the revenue entitlements of public school districts.)

The most dramatic impact of Proposition 13 on local educational programs, though, was that with increased state assumption of the financial burden came considerably increased state controls. Despite earlier AB 65 school improvement legislation, which called for more citizen involvement through school site councils (SSCs), the state in Proposition 13 follow-up actions reduced the number of matters that could be decided locally.

In making decisions that summer school must be offered only for "substantially handicapped pupils" and for high school pupils needing graduation credits and that all state categorical programs (adult education, driver training, child care, vocational education) must be supported at the level of at least 90 percent of expenditures in 1977-78, the legislature effectively ruled out any

opportunity for local boards of education to set priorities in the choice or level of support for particular school programs.

More hurtful and certainly *prima facie* evidence that California is in a new era of state control was a provision in the "bail-out" finance legislation that prohibited school districts from granting salary improvements to employees or even honoring previously negotiated salary increases provided in multiyear collective bargaining contracts. In brief, such action centralized the control of public education in Sacramento and took decision making out of the hands of the locally elected board of education members and citizen members of school councils.

Chilcote also says he hopes that business, industry, or private foundations will be willing to provide support for academic programs. Even the proponents of Proposition 13 predicted that the beneficiaries of reduced property taxes would contribute the savings to public service projects. Unfortunately, local government and the public schools have seen little evidence of such contributions.

If I were asked to identify the one lesson of Proposition 13, it is that people in public service leadership positions should be attuned to the frustrations and desires of today's citizens. Undoubtedly those of us in public education are closest to the feelings of people, particularly when we welcome citizen input through PTAs, citizens' advisory councils, school site councils, and taxpayers' groups. Unfortunately, though, we do not have the authority to make decisions regarding tax reform measures—though we can do a better job of informing and influencing our state and federal representatives. If there is one hope that can be expressed, it is that educators and legislators in other states will learn from the California experience. It's not too late!



*Thomas L. Goodman is Superintendent, San Diego City Schools, San Diego, California.*

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