

VOTER

League of Women
Voters of Indiana
County, Pennsylvania



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

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“Hey” from your Public Education Study Committee

As outlined in last month’s Voter, LWVUS adopted a study of The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education at the 2010 convention. Now it is up to local Leagues to research the issue and weigh in with our opinions. A study committee was recently formed to do just that. Following is a message from Jane Lord, the chair of that committee.

The federal government’s role in public education is bound to be a continuing concern in Congress as well as a point of contention in the next presidential election. We can make our voices heard via our national League, once a position is established based on a consensus of local Leagues around the country. Please plan to participate in our discussion and consensus process on November 12. (See details on the Calendar of Upcoming Events, page 4.)

Our study committee will present background information for 15 questions addressing issues of common core standards, mandates, assessment, curriculum, equity, funding, and early childhood education. While discussion possibilities are endless, we are determined to keep focused on coming to agreement within a reasonable time frame on the pertinent policy questions. If you have time to read relevant articles beforehand, you can find an array of background materials on the LWVUS website: http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Education&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=167&ContentID=16957. (To get started, see the articles on pages 2 & 3.) **We hope you’ll join us on Nov. 12 to learn, discuss, and decide.**

We’re a small committee and welcome anyone interested in studying the issue to join us at our meeting on Thursday, October 13 at 10:30 am at my house (92 Valley Road, Brookwood Estates).



A visitor to the county fair listens to a Marcellus Shale Storybox, developed through the LWVPA’s Colcom Grant and aimed at citizens with questions about Marcellus Shale gas exploration. LWVIC Environmental Issues Committee member Cindy Rogers and husband Jim recorded information using technology developed by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. Storyboxes are currently on loan to several high school science classes and the Apollo Memorial Library.

Candidate's Night to be Held on October 25

The League of Women Voters of Indiana County will hold its annual Candidate's Night on Tuesday, October 25, 2011 from 7 to 8:30 pm at the Oak Place Community Center, 1055 Oak Street, Indiana.

District Attorney Thomas M. Bianco, Democrat, and Michael T. Clark, Republican, candidates for Judge of Common Pleas Court, have agreed to participate. Candidates for District Attorney Patrick Dougherty, Democrat, and Jesse Daniel, Republican will also participate. League members will moderate the forum, and written and signed questions will be submitted by persons in the audience. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend. **An on-line voters guide for the candidates can be found at www.palwv.org/indiana.**

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Common Core Standards

Common Core Standards

Currently, standards for student performance vary widely by state. The roots of current state-to-state inconsistencies lie in the fact that public education in the United States has traditionally been a local responsibility. Initial efforts to foster development of national standards and a related system of assessments in the core subject areas began in the early 1990's through awarding grants to a dozen national organizations.

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) launched the Common Core State Standards initiative in March 2009 after the nation's governors agreed in concept to adopt a uniform set of standards. The final report was issued on June 2, 2010 (NGA, 2010), and, by early 2011, 40 states have adopted the Standards.

Assessments

The implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has created a 50-state and 50-test environment in public education. As a result, state-to-state expectations and performances vary greatly. States publish annual reports of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which are required by federal law, but the meaning of "proficient" in those reports can vary widely from one state to another.

Larger testing companies market a variety of norm-referenced standardized tests. However, they are designed to rank students, rather than to determine how well students have mastered curricular objectives as criterion-referenced tests would do.

Two coalitions, together representing 44 states and the District of Columbia, won a U.S. Department of Education competition for \$330 million dollars of federal aid to design "comprehensive assessment systems" aligned to the Common Core and designed to measure whether students are on track for college and career success. The awards, announced in September 2010, were divided between the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), comprised of 26 states receiving \$170 million, and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium that comprises 31 states and received \$160 million. At least 12 states participated in both coalitions and are waiting to decide which assessment system will best meet their needs.

Why Not National Standards or Assessments?

The most common arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards for K-12 center on two issues: 1) the cost and difficulty of changing the existing curriculum and assessments and (2) the sovereignty of states in issues related to education and local control. Another concern is the potential to use scores from the student assessments as a major component of teacher evaluations and merit pay plans.

Does The United States Need a National Curriculum?

In March 2011, the Albert Shanker Institute issued a call for common curriculum guidelines (Albert Shanker Institute, 2011; Gewertz, C. 2011, March). This document voices the concern that common assessments are being developed from the common standards with no curriculum in between. In May 2011, another group published an article with a different view: "Closing the Door on Innovation: Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America" (2011), discussed by Gewertz, C. (2011, May).

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Equity and Funding

Public school funding comes from many sources – federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used.

Equity

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns.

Adequacy

Since, 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is providing local districts with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, “No Child Left Behind,” which was intended to close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts.

Race to the Top (RttT)

Race to the Top was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. This program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward reform planned in the winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT.

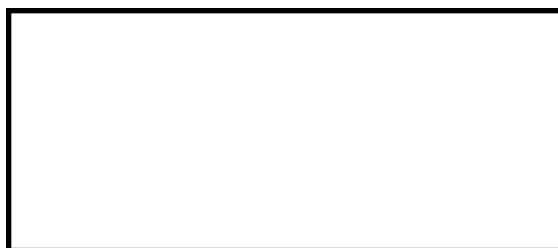
Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

The progress of the U.S. Department of Education’s Equity and Excellence commissions can be tracked through <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/index.html>.

To find comprehensive unbiased election information, visit **smart-voter.org**, your trusted source of information about voting and the candidates and issues on your ballot!

A newsletter of the
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CALENDAR of UPCOMING EVENTS

Know someone who may be interested in membership? Let President Sherene Hess know at 724-762-4162, and she will send a brochure & short letter describing LWVIC's activities.

Monday, October 10 2011, 7:00 pm—Board Meeting, All Members Welcome, Beth Marshall's home (46 Jewel Road, Homer City)

Thursday, October 13, 2011, 10:30 am—Study Committee Meeting: The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education, Jane Lord's home (92 Valley Road, Brookwood Estates)

Tuesday, October 25, 2011, 7:00-8:30 pm—Candidate's Night, Oak Place Community Center (1055 Oak Street, Indiana)

Saturday, November 12, 2011, 8:30 (breakfast, individual purchase), 8:45 (Program)—Consensus Meeting: The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education, Fire Mountain Restaurant

Our Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

