



September 8, 2015

The League of Women Voters of Michigan thanks the Board of Education and Superintendent Whiston for reaching out and providing an opportunity for diverse groups to share ideas on how best to promote educational excellence for Michigan.

The League's first position on public education was adopted in 1969. We held then and, nearly 50 years later, still maintain the position that a strong and fair public education is at the core of economic stability. Public education ensures the ability of people to contribute to society both as citizens and as an economic participants; it also promotes business development and provides a pool of individuals that can meet the workforce needs of Michigan's business community. We support "a publicly financed public education system in which there is equal opportunity for an excellent education available to all children in Michigan."

Legislative requirements, combined with dynamic social, physical, emotional and economic considerations, certainly create challenges to the ability of schools to meet the diverse needs of students. However, identifying ways to ensure all children have access to quality schools is the path that generates the best return on taxpayer investment. Having a population that is prepared for the global marketplace gives businesses a place to locate and thrive. Economists agree that economic stability is good for business and workers; it leads to improved standards of living, which includes educational achievement.

Structure:

The League of Women Voters of Michigan believes in a system that places a popularly elected school board as the body that establishes and monitors achievements of standards for all publicly funded schools. Just as our diverse population has varied needs, decisions of this board should be made after thoughtful consideration and input from a spectrum of interested parties which should include, but not be limited to: teachers, educational administrators, parents, businesses, related professionals (i.e. physical and mental health), and post-secondary institutions.

Education is more than reading, writing and arithmetic. It also includes learning and promoting good health, hygiene, social and physical growth. The League of Women Voters of Michigan supports the concept of educational choice so parents can determine, with their children, what is the best possible education fit. While there can be needs that are better met by schools with distinct delivery systems, ALL publicly funded schools should be accountable to the same standards of excellence and benchmarking techniques to ensure fair and appropriate oversight.

Financing of Public Education:

It is the belief of The League of Women Voters of Michigan that federal, state and local governments share responsibility for financing education. We oppose any effort to use public funds for nonpublic education, except what is required by law to provide auxiliary services. A voucher system is contrary to the concept of a public system that is responsive and supportive to society's need for a strong and educated citizenry.

We believe that state sales tax and local property taxes are good sources for education funding and it is the State's responsibility to ensure that funding is fairly dispersed throughout the state in a manner that takes certain *equalizing* factors into account, such as transportation or digital delivery needs in rural and remote areas or supply and intervention services in poor districts.

Very important to every public system is the need for transparency in funding, record keeping, and decision making. Whether it is an accounting professional or a parent, information should be readily available through a system that is transparent and open to review.

Educational Goals:

Common Core State Standards set a minimum goal for every institution to attain. These should be based on the skills and knowledge that every citizen should know before they reach adulthood. These are also fundamental to ensuring Michigan is prepared and competitive in the global marketplace.

Programming aimed at various populations ensures maximum success for all students. From remedial to gifted programs, schools (or regional educational agencies) should provide enough flexibility to ensure all students are appropriately challenged to achieve their potential. Interventions should be based on the districts' diverse populations and aimed at promoting success. Ultimately, knowledge of community demographics and needs should provide room for flexible programming aimed at overcoming structural deficits that often challenge children's ability to reach their full potential.

The federal requirement of "Highly Qualified" should be employed throughout the education system. In particular, academic demands and building blocks associated with middle and high school require that teachers hold certification in their area(s) of teaching responsibility. Teachers working directly with special needs children need to hold appropriate certification and/or have classroom support by a certified professional. Voids in any area, particularly in federally required program delivery, should be reported to the state in a timely manner. If necessary, the state should ensure that the void is met within a specified timeline: through state-assisted training, through recruitment of a certified professional, or through some other means. In no circumstance, should multi-category special needs classrooms be without appropriate education personnel.

Instructors and Administrators:

The state should have a system of ensuring professional standards of personnel working with students. This should include professional development opportunities that address updates to changes in curriculum, use of technological tools, classroom management and more. Districts should be cautioned not to add to the teaching workload without adequately supporting teachers, either through training or classroom support.

Additionally, the State should conduct audits to ensure postsecondary teaching institutions are adequately preparing teachers for their certifications and their teaching roles in public schools. The state board of education should work with postsecondary schools to help ensure that public postsecondary schools are training teachers at a rate to meet demand.

Assessments/Evaluations:

Assessments should be aimed at not only evaluating where students, teachers and institutions stand at a given moment, they should provide a historical perspective and a roadmap to improved performance. The League of Women Voters of Michigan supports assessments for students, teachers and institutions as a means to ensure benchmarks are met or continuous improvement toward achieving benchmarks is being made. Standardized testing programs bring stress to everyone in the institution and should be used only as necessary and appropriate.

Student assessments should take into account the diversity of student populations. Core curriculum should be a part of assessments, but they should also include cross comparisons of progress from previous benchmarks, statistical/demographic data related to economic and social measures, number of special needs students, supplemental classroom personnel, etc.

Teacher evaluations should be based on established observation tools and an understanding that student success is also influenced by more than a teacher's efforts. School and district assessments should follow a formula that includes student and teacher assessments, but should also include surveys that address whether staff (teachers, special education, office/administrative, food service, janitorial, etc.) feels the district is adequately supporting them to achieve educational excellence. In addition, local and intermediate school systems should have a voice in whether the state has adequately and appropriately supported them in meeting educational benchmarks.

Thank you for your interest. The LWV of Michigan is pleased to participate in advocacy for educational excellence to our state!

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President