

The League of Women Voters US is conducting a consensus study on the Role of the Federal Government in Education. Fifteen questions have been posed to address this issue. The consensus response from Leagues across the country for each question will form the basis of the LWVUS's position on this topic.

“The Role of Federal Government in Public Education” ~ Consensus questions

Questions 1-9 will be discussed at the 10/4 or 10/24 consensus meetings. Questions 10-15 will be discussed at the 10/26 or 10/27 consensus meetings. These meetings are listed under the 'News / Upcoming Events' section of this site. Each meeting is repeated to provide an option for dates.

General Questions

1. The current role of the federal government in public education is
 Much too small too small about right too large much too large
2. What should be the role of the federal government in public education? (Rank)
 a. To ensure that all students pre-K-12 receive a quality education.
 b. To develop accountability measures that will study the progress of all students so that they achieve adequate yearly progress.
 c. To mandate Common Core Standards for all students K-12.
 d. To monitor state efforts for funding
 e. To measure teacher effectiveness through test data.
3. A quality public education is important to perpetuate a strong and viable democracy.
 Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Common Core Standards

4. Currently the governors and state education officers have developed Common Core Standards that are national but not federal. Should the standards be mandated of the states in order to obtain federal funding? (Choose one)
 a. Special grant programs such as Race to the Top
 b. All programs under Elementary and Secondary Education Act where the needs qualify for funding.
 c. All programs receiving federal funding from any source
 d. All of the above
 e. None of the above
5. Should there be a national assessment aligned with the common cores standards?
 Yes No
If Yes, Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated? (choose one)
 a. Voluntary b. Mandated c. Mandated, if fully funded
If No, what other accountability measures might you suggest? (choose one)
 a. Continue to allow the states to develop their own assessments.
 b. Suggest that the local education districts use their own assessments or adopt one that is a nationally norm-referenced assessment such as the *Stanford Achievement Test* or *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*.
 c. Suggest that districts use a portfolio type of assessment where student projects and activities would be scored holistically
6. National standards should lead to: (choose one)
 a. A nationally mandated curriculum to be aligned to the national standards and assessments.
 b. A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated.
 c. A suggested structure for states and local education agencies to develop their own curriculum.
 d. No national curriculum.
7. What role should the national assessment consortia play in student evaluation? (Rank order)
 a. Provide an assessment system that is aligned to the Common Core Standards.
 b. Provide comparison data showing progress toward reaching Common Core Standards.
 c. Provide criteria for determining readiness for college and careers.
 d. Provide information to students, parents, teachers and school districts about student achievement.

_____e. Provide diagnostic information on each child.

8. Data from the national assessments are often difficult for parents, teachers and others to understand. If we have a national assessment, what information is most important to be reported to parents, teachers, students and the community? (choose one)

- _____a. Data should be "norm referenced" (where students are ranked) for district comparison only.
- _____b. Data should be "criterion referenced" and clearly informative so that teachers, parents, and students know how individual students have mastered criteria established at a national level.
- _____c. Data should be used to determine "cut" scores knowing if students have mastered requirements for special grade levels.

9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to (Choose one):

- _____a. Sanction schools not measuring up to the specific levels
- _____b. Reward schools that achieve high scores
- _____c. Rank teachers based on student test score data
- _____d. Reward teachers who have exemplary scores
- _____e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs.

Funding and Equity

10. In the past most of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding has been non-competitive based on need. All/Any Schools that prove they fall under the federal guidelines for funding receive those funds. However, competitive grants are now being proposed to states/districts who meet certain federal requirements, such as Race to the Top. Which would be appropriate: (choose one)

- _____a. Non-competitive funding for all applicants meeting requirements
- _____b. A combination of non-competitive and competitive grants
- _____c. Competitive grants only
- _____d. No federal funding

11. If the federal government's role is the concern of the "common good" then: (choose one)

- _____a. Mandates only should be sanctioned.
- _____b. Mandates and funding should both be provided.
- _____c. Funding should be provided through grants only.
- _____d. A combination of funded mandates and grants should apply.
- _____e. No mandates should be required and limited grants for innovation available.

12. Equity in public education means equitable access to: (Rank order)

- _____a. high quality teaching/learning
- _____b. adequate and current learning materials
- _____c. clean and well maintained physical facilities
- _____d. food and health care
- _____e. safe and secure neighborhoods
- _____f. secure housing

13. Currently Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding is considered "categorical" rather than for general use. This means that it can only be used with special populations for special purposes. ESEA should remain targeted toward poverty and special needs.

_____Strongly agree _____Agree _____No consensus _____Disagree _____Strongly disagree

14. The federal government has a role in supporting early childhood education, birth to 5, for all children?

_____Strongly agree _____Agree _____No consensus _____Disagree _____Strongly disagree

15. Federal support for early childhood education programs (e.g.Head Start, Title I, Special Education, Early Start) should include funding for parent education and support regarding child development, child health and nutrition, and access to other supportive services, such as mental health as needed.

a. _____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____No consensus _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

b. This funding should be extended to: _____All children _____only those with special needs _____special needs first

The following summaries have been prepared for LWVJoCo's members to provide background about each consensus question. After reading the summaries, you are encouraged to comment on LWVJoCo@yahoo.com.

Summary #1

“The History Of Federal Government In Public Education: Where Have We Been And How Did We Get Here?”

For over 300 years, national leaders sought to create an educated citizenry. Starting with the Land Ordinance of 1785, public education has been financially supported by the federal government

Constitutional amendments. Two constitutional amendments played an important role in public education. In 1791, the 10th Amendment stated, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Public education, not mentioned as one of those federal powers, historically has been delegated to the local and state governments

In 1868, the 14th Amendment guaranteed rights to all citizens including, “... No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law.”

Major steps. During our first 100 years, over 77 million federal public domain acres were ceded to states as endowments to support public schools. More recent key actions included:

- 1944 – GI Bill provided post-secondary education to WW2 GIs
- 1965 -- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) whose Title I included federal aid to the disadvantaged
- 1989-92 – several bills including first work on national standards
- 2001-08 – ESEA-No Child Left Behind reauthorized
- 2009 – More ESEA reauthorization; states that accept Common Core Standards can compete in Race to the Top

Today’s major issues include the purpose and role of the federal government in public education and funding. Other issues include school choice, accountability, teacher quality, goals and standards.

For more information, see the “The History Of Federal Government In Public Education: Where Have We Been And How Did We Get Here?” at

<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=17613&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm>

Also see “The Role of Federal Government in Public Education: Historical Perspectives” by Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins and Margaret Hawkins Hill at

<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17610>

Please share your comments with us at LWVJoCo@yahoo.com.

Education Study Committee, Ellen Miller

Summary #2

“Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Where Are We Now and the Impact upon Early Childhood Education”

Realizing that poverty is the key issue that differentiates children coming to our schools in kindergarten, Head Start began to provide free access to early education in 1965. (FYI: Head Start benefits only the poorest children and serves only half of those who are eligible.)

Other programs like Even Start and Early Head Start (which provide training for families), Title I, No Child Left Behind, Early Reading First, Child Care Development Fund, and Special Education grants have been added to serve poor and low income children.

Today, one in five children in the U.S. lives in poverty. Various studies have cited “the importance and impact of quality early childhood education for all children” because the achievement gap begins as early as 18

months as illustrated by the fact that 60% of low income children and 33% middle income children entering kindergarten do not know the alphabet.

Several studies enumerate the many social and economic benefits of high quality prekindergarten and kindergarten for all:

- Alleviates grade repetition, dropouts and special education placements reducing the need for retentions and remediation
- Reduces poverty, raises earnings and increases tax revenues in the long run
- Assists in preventing the achievement gap
- Reduces special education needs
- Increases the likelihood of healthier lifestyles
- Lowers the crime rate and overall social costs.

“Every dollar invested in early childhood education returns ten cents on the dollar annually for the life of the child, a 10 percent per year return on investments.” However, some legislators maintain that funding early childhood education is too expensive and some private pre-school educators are concerned about the impact on their business.

Key events include:

- 1988 – Even Start – includes family literacy programs
- 1995 – Early Head Start – supports mothers and infants/toddlers
- 1965 – Title I of ESEA – local districts apply for state funding reimbursed by federal funds
- 2001 – No Child Left Behind – funds pre-school programs
- 2002 -- Early Reading First – NCLB goals included
- 2002 – Special Education preschool grants ages 3 – 5
- 2007 – Special Education grants for infants and toddlers
- 1990 – Child Care Development Fund – provides child care to low-income families attend training and education

For more information, see the “Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Where Are We Now and the Impact upon Early Childhood Education” at

http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Education&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17612

See also “Early childhood education, equity and funding” by Pat Aaron at

<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17607>

Please share your comments with us at LWVJoCo@yahoo.com.

Education Study Committee, Candy Birch

Summary #3

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

The Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI, 2010) stated: “We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students.”

U.S. public education has traditionally been a local responsibility, despite the fact that curriculum is often determined by national textbook publishers that defer to the demands of the largest states. Even the No Child Left Behind Act allows each state to set its own standards for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress.

After collaborating with educators and experts and considering over 10,000 public comments, the CCSI issued its final report on June 2, 2010. 40 states are now aligning them to their own state standards.

The Fordham Institute has reported that the Common Core standards received high marks when compared to state standards across the country and suggested that Common Core Standards represent an opportunity for creating consistency and raising standards in all states.

Assessments. The United States does not have a consistent set of academic assessments for grades K-12. Norm-referenced standardized tests, like the ACT, are designed to rank students rather than determine how well students have mastered curricular objectives.

Two coalitions (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium) together represent 44 states and the District of Columbia. They won a U.S. Department of Education competition for \$330 million dollars to design “comprehensive assessment systems” aligned to the Common Core and designed to measure whether students are on track for college and career success. Implementation might be possible by the 2014-2015 school year.

Why not national standards or assessments? The three most common arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards for K-12 center are:

- 1) the cost and difficulty of changing the existing curriculum and assessments. In order to have a positive impact, the Common Core standards must be translated into action in classrooms, assessed appropriately via new standardized criterion-referenced tests, and reflected in published results from accountability systems;
- 2) the sovereignty of states in issues related to education and local control; and
- 3) the individual state standards might be more rigorous (Common Core states are permitted to add 15 percent in content.)

Another concern is the potential to use scores from the student assessments as a major component of teacher evaluations and merit pay plans. The idea has popular appeal. However, ten of the nation’s premier educational researchers have cautioned against relying on student test scores as a major indicator for evaluating teachers, citing such variables as parent education levels, poverty, potential for pitting teacher against fellow teachers. There are also technical problems associated with using scores from standardized student assessments in value-added statistical models.

A national curriculum? In March 2011, the Albert Shanker Institute issued a call for common curriculum guidelines but voiced 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,” which also refers to the 1965 ESEA’s prohibition against a federal curriculum.

For more information, see the “Common Core Standards” at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Education&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17611

See also “Common Core Standards and Assessments” by Janelle L. Rivers, PhD, at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Education&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17606

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Education Study Committee, Candy Birch

Summary #4

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

“Equity of funding: *An attempt to equalize educational opportunities by sharing resources with equal access across schools.*” -- LWVUS Leaders’ Guide for the Education Study Consensus, p. 17.

Equity vs. Equality: *Equity connotes fairness, rather than equal funding because there is a growing awareness that some students are more expensive to educate than others. Some educators talk about “equity of opportunity” and “opportunity to learn,” ideas that deal with access to what is deemed necessary to have an equal opportunity, opportunities that are often denied children of poverty.*” -- LWVUS Leaders’ Guide for the Education Study Consensus, p. 17.

Prior to the 1950s, the federal government had little to do with public education. But since Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) and the Elementary and Secondary School Act (1965), much federal legislation has sought to reduce or eliminate inequities in access to, funding of, and providing public education. The inequities included illegal segregation and differences in wealth.

What’s the current impact of federal actions?

- **National investment.** The US invests 5% of annual GDP in K-12 public education.
- **Sample costs.** In 2011, ESEA’s Title I (low-income) was \$14.6 billion. In 2010, its old Title VI (now Individual with Disabilities Education Act) was \$11.5 billion.

- Carrots/sticks. Federal money adds less than 10% to local education budgets, but has many rules on how to use it
- Segregation returns. Today, ¾ of Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.
- Racial gap grows. 1988 saw the smallest reading score racial differences so far.
- Evaluating teachers. So far, no valid method has emerged to assess teacher effectiveness based on student performance.

No Child Left Behind. NCLB seeks to close gaps in achievement, especially for minority kids. By 2014, 95% of students must meet state reading and math standards. Interestingly, 4th-grade math and 8th-grade reading scores had a higher rate of increase *before* NCLB. Its vouchers let parents remove their child from a non-performing school, then enroll him/her in either a private or public school.

Charter schools. Considered public schools, they get public funding. While some have been very successful, a 2009 study of 2,403 showed that only 17% had significantly more growth in test scores than public schools. 37% had less.

Research-based recommendations. One researcher, Linda Darling-Hammond, proposes a more equitable public education system including:

- Food and health care, so that children can come to school ready to learn each day
- Equitably funded schools which provide equitable access to high-quality teaching
- Well-prepared and well-supported teachers and leaders
- Standards, curriculum and assessments that focus on 21st-century goals

Want more information? See “The role of the federal government in public education: Equity and funding at <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfmSection=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17614>.

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Education Study Committee, Ellen Miller

Summary #5

“The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Legislation and Funding For The Education of Children With Special Needs”

Special attention to the educational needs of children with disabilities began in 1965 as a part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty with an amendment to the newly passed Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Ten years later, a separate law (Education for All Handicapped Children or EAHCA) required free appropriate public education for all handicapped students.

Over the next 35 years the EAHCA law was periodically reauthorized with important changes (equal rights for the disabled, protection from discrimination, right to school records) and became the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

IDEA and ESEA continue to be revised every ten years. Additions to IDEA in the 1990s were:

- the inclusion of special education students in state and national assessments,
- placement in the least restrictive environment, and
- making the regular classroom teacher part of the individual education plan.

In the latest revisions, ESEA became No Child Left Behind (2001) and IDEA became the Individuals with Education Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004). In these revisions, school districts were required to provide more instruction and interventions to help prevent enrollment in special education and students with disabilities became subject to the same rules as the rest of the students.

Federal Funding to States Brings Mandates. When states accept federal funding, they also accept federal mandates. The zero-reject policy, under which no child is turned away from educational services, has been the most important mandate. The mandate of “free and appropriate education” now covers 6.6 million children age 0 to 21 who are classified with one or more of 13 disabilities.

Their education must be accomplished through state appropriation. Local distribution of monies is based on needs determined by an individual education plan (IEP) and placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Current Funding Challenges:

- **Federal Underfunding:** The federal government has never fully funded its promised 40% of special education costs. In 2001, federal funds covered 8 to 10% of state costs; in 2012, 17%.

- Increasing Enrollment: Special education enrollment has grown from 3.8 million in 1973 to 6.6 million in 2011.
- Maintenance of Effort Requirements: States are required to maintain the current level of services (Maintenance of Effort). Many states have applied for permission to waive this requirement because of the current economic downturn. Waivers were given to three states last year and three more are pending. Kansas received a waiver.
- Inclusion and Training Needs: Most special needs children are included in regular classrooms (95%). Inclusion is a strong alternative for fund-strapped districts and makes quality in-service training for teachers more critical.

For more information, see “The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Legislation and Funding For the Education of Children With Special Needs at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Education&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17615

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