

STUDY: THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

This fall, Leagues across the nation are participating in the study and consensus process for a position on the Role of the Federal Government in Public Education.

You are likely aware that there are some big changes being discussed for our public schools across the nation. Since the LWVUS currently has no position on this issue, we will not be able to support or oppose, or even comment on the proposals.

Congress has been considering the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which includes the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While NCLB is credited with raising the awareness that some children were being left behind, the act is generally viewed as a failure. In fact, by 2014, the year that all schools in the US should be 100% compliant, it is anticipated that most, if not all, will not meet AYP (adequate yearly progress). NCLB does not recognize growth if it does not meet the benchmark, and the emphasis on standardized testing does not allow for a critical thinking curriculum or measure a child's progress beyond the test scores.

Is there a better way than ESEA to improve the learning skills and knowledge of our students? Does ESEA need to be changed? Without a consensus on this issue, we as League members will have our hands tied and will not be able to comment or encourage a change in the ESEA.

While Congress recognizes the flaws in the Act, they have not acted to change it, which leaves the current law in place. Will League members be satisfied to reduce themselves to bystanders if this act stands or new proposals are worse? We think it's time for us to do our homework so we can be advocates!

What Is a Consensus?

Consensus is not a vote. It is a mutual agreement of League members who have arrived at the agreement through discussion. During discussion, everyone has an opportunity to voice her or his viewpoint, and the issue is examined from all sides. Consensus questions provide structure for the meeting. Members discuss the pros and cons until it becomes clear that consensus has or has not been reached on each question.

Each local League will have a discussion leader to help keep the group focused on the task at hand. When consensus is reached, it must be approved by the local board before being posted on the LWVUS website.

The LWVUS Board of Directors will approve the official position on the Role of the Federal Government in Public Education by March of 2012.

Find the Materials

On the Web at www.lwv.org

- Click **For Members**
- Click **Programs & Projects**
- Under **Task Forces & Studies**, click **The Education Study**

You will find a description of the study, Leaders Guide, some Executive Summaries, background information, a webinar, and more.

Taking a Look at the History of Education in the US

The federal government began giving land grants to build schools back in the late 1700s. In the 1800s Congress granted surplus funds to states for public education. Into the 1900s colleges were receiving grants, and the GI Bill was a boon to soldiers returning from war.

Special education was mandated, and many handicapped children were in school for the first time. Programs like Head Start recognized the importance of getting children at risk into school early. As we headed into the 21st century, talk began on national standards and grants became more competitive. Reform was the new focus of our education system. Accountability looms large as laws like No Child Left Behind have high-stakes consequences for struggling schools.

The Research Has Already Been Done

League members have put together some very impressive research and it is available on the LWVUS website. We do not have to reinvent the wheel on this; all we have to do is read. **You might want to read the consensus questions (see attached) before reading the materials so you can keep in mind which information will factor into your consensus discussions.** This is a hot topic right now, and there is a lot of education news in our newspapers and on our local media. If we have children in public schools, or grandchildren, or if we live in a house in a neighborhood, we should be very interested in the quality of our local public schools. Nothing impacts the value of our homes or our comfort zone like the schools in our neighborhood. We need to be aware of the changes being proposed so we can speak up when our support is needed.

How You Can Help

Start viewing the research material on the LWVUS website (See “Find the Materials” on page 1). Talk to your friends and neighbors and invite them to join you in the study. Only League members can participate in the consensus, but the study will be very informative. The changes being proposed will likely have a big impact on our local public schools for some to come.

Attend and bring friends to our panel discussion on Wednesday, November 2 (7:00 - 9:00 pm at Highland Park Country Club, 1201 Park Avenue West, Highland Park). You’ll be able to hear the experts address our consensus topics and be better prepared for the consensus meeting. Then be sure to come to the consensus meeting on Monday, November 7, at 1:30 pm at the home of Cindy Morehead (14 Forest Hills Road, Lake Bluff) – and bring your opinions!

Let’s get informed so we can have a discussion with our Congressmen about what’s best for our next generation.

Important Meeting Dates

Wednesday, November 2
7:00 - 9:00 pm

Public Panel Discussion
Highland Park Country Club
1201 Park Avenue West,
Highland Park

Monday, November 7
1:30 pm

Members-Only Consensus Meeting
Home of Cindy Morehead
For details, email
contact@LWV-LFLB.org