

**League of Women Voters of California Education Fund
Education Update Study 2003-2005**

**PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE**

Public schools in California serve more than six million students in 300,000 separate classrooms in 9,000 schools in 982 school districts ranging in size from nine students to over 746,000. (EdSource report, May 2004) Every school-age child is constitutionally guaranteed access to a free public education and is entitled to a quality educational experience without regard to his or her individual educational objectives.

(Excerpt from "No More Tinkering: Remake the Schools", by John Merrow, latimes.com, 2/4/04)

Where are the people who, 15 years from now, will be maintaining the planes we fly, processing our tax returns, distributing medications and changing our IV drips in hospitals, assembling our cars and teaching our children and grandchildren?

In all probability, they're attending public school. And that should be of grave concern to Californians because the once-impressive public school system here has declined precipitously since the late 1950s and early 1960s. California hit bottom on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests in 1994, and today, despite several years of serious reform efforts, California students test ninth from the bottom among the 50 states in math, reading and science.

Many California schools do not have adequate art, music or physical education classes; nor do they offer foreign languages, counseling or well-stocked libraries with full-time librarians. Many California schools are deteriorating, overcrowded and understaffed. California teachers have about 25% more students per class than the national average, while the typical California guidance counselor is responsible for a mind-boggling 960 students.

For years, California has been doing education on the cheap. Although it is one of the richest states in the union, it spends only about \$6,000 per child, putting it 44th in per-pupil spending.

Members of the League of Women Voters of California know and understand that a system of quality public education is fundamental to a sustainable democratic society, is fundamental to our well-being as a society and as a people. For that reason, delegates to the LWVC 2003 state convention overwhelmingly adopted the update of our Education position as a statewide issue for emphasis. The current position was adopted in 1985, prior to the passage of Proposition 98, and has not been updated in 20 years.

A study committee of seven members was appointed by the LWVCEF board of directors and has been working with the LWVC/EF program director for education to review the Education position and research current thinking in specified areas. They have interviewed leaders in the field of education (both academic and political) and have prepared this study guide for use by local Leagues in preparing for local discussion and consensus sessions.

Scope of Study

The scope of the study as approved by the LWVCEF board of directors in September 2003 is as follows:

- (1) a review of the existing LWVC Education position, supporting consensus reports, and study materials to identify areas that need to be revisited and updated
- (2) a study of issues in the areas of finance, governance, school district organization, accountability, teaching, and curriculum that have emerged since the 1983-85 LWVCEF Education in California study
- (3) an updated assessment and analysis of ongoing fundamental questions regarding the separation of finance and program control, the role of the state relative to districts and school sites, articulation among levels of education, and the role of early childhood education (readiness to learn)
- (4) a review of the federal No Child Left Behind Act as it impacts education in California

As a delineation of the scope of study, the following are issues for consideration:
<u>Finance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Developments since the 1983-85 study. The impact of ballot measures■ Current state structure: roles/responsibility/accountability■ Impact of categorical programs/funding■ Question of stable source(s) of funding that would allow for long-term planning? Year-to-year consistency in planning, including the impact of Prop 98■ Ability to seek out additional sources of local revenue■ Master Plan recommendations, including the Adequacy Model
<u>Governance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Current state governance structure (roles, responsibilities, accountability within the structure, including state, county, district, and school site structures and their relationship to each other)■ Recommendations for reform of the state governance structure (Master Plan, Constitution Revision Commission, Legislative Analyst)■ The role/responsibility/accountability of key players, including certificated and classified administrators, teachers and classified staff, bargaining units, parent organizations, community■ Questions and issues related to the charter school movement
<u>School District Organization</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Current school district organization■ Questions related to readiness to learn as defined in the Master Plan (what should be the role of the public schools in providing pre-K education?)■ School district organization and its impact on articulation among pre-K, elementary, secondary, and post secondary education■ Services beyond the basic K-12 school day■ Impact of district size on such areas as student achievement, accountability, governance, finance. (Is there an ideal size for a school district?)■ Current structures and recommended reforms related to academic calendars in overcrowded school districts■ Questions and issues related to the charter school movement

Accountability

- Developments since the 1983-85 study
- Examination of the current accountability structure
- Recommendations for structural reform: Master Plan, Constitution Revision Commission, Legislative Analyst, other
- Implications of issues raised in the *Williams* case (State/local responsibility and accountability for student success relative to state accountability requirements/standards)
- Questions:
 1. How should the state hold districts responsible for meeting standards and accountability goals?
 2. Would districts be held more accountable by the community around them if there was more local control over funding?
 3. Who is responsible for student readiness to enter postsecondary education (i.e., should postsecondary institutions be required to offer remedial courses to high school graduates)?

Teaching

- Definition of a highly qualified teacher
- Teacher distribution/hiring/retention
- The role of Professional Development
- Teacher training/preparation (the role of teacher training institutions)

Curriculum/Programs

- Current—state standards
- State versus local authority over curricular and program decision-making. (The state has reserved the right to set standards that all schools should strive to reach, but should it also dictate how to reach these standards or should each district be able to use its own processes as long as it makes steady progress toward meeting the standards?)
- Articulation pre-K through university, including across and among districts (issues of transfer within the state)

The study has been divided into four parts:

Part 1 entails committee research and preparation of both a Study Guide and a Leader's Guide. The Leader's Guide, which accompanies the Study Guide, is designed to help local League facilitators in preparing for and facilitating workshops and consensus sessions.

Part 2. During Phase II, local Leagues are encouraged to convene one or more community education/public forums to obtain information from their communities and from education experts. Such forums will also serve as vehicles for educating their communities about fundamental issues challenging public education in California. The LWVCEF, as part of a grant received from the William T. and Flora Hewlett Foundation, has received \$11,000 to be used as mini-grants to support local League efforts in convening forums around issues included in the scope of the study. Completion of Phase II requires local Leagues to bring their members together in discussion and consensus sessions. Following these sessions, each participating local League will submit its consensus results by January 15, 2005, to the state update/study committee.

Part 3. The state committee will review all local League reports in detail, determine the points of consensus and craft a draft update of the current LWVC education position for submission to the LWVC board of directors for consideration and adoption. The board-adopted position will be submitted by the board of directors to delegates at the LWVC state convention in 2005 for member adoption.

Part 4. Once the study is over, the consensus report submitted, and a position adopted, the study committee will write an expanded final report and publish it as a special edition of the California VOTER. The *Study Kit* will provide a basis for that report.

Timeliness of the Study

When delegates to the LWVC convention in May of 2003 decided to update the education position, they knew that it had not been updated in twenty years and predated Proposition 98. Few probably realized that recent events would bring to a head many of the fundamental issues which had been gaining momentum during these twenty years. The following have happened since the position was updated in 1985.

- **A constitutional guarantee of a minimum level of funding** for K-12 education and the community college system was mandated by Proposition 98 (1988). (Page 32)
- **A Secretary for Education**, appointed by the governor, was added to the state structure in 1991, although it is not authorized by law or in the constitution. (Pages 2-5)
- **The 1992 court ruling in *Butt v. State of California*** found that the state has ultimate responsibility to provide a public education that is both free and equal. (Page 33)
- **Class Size Reduction legislation** was adopted in July 1996. (Pages 56, 58)
- **State standards** were adopted; a **statewide testing and accountability system** was established in 1999; and the **Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** brought the federal government into local districts and state legislatures in an unprecedented way. (Pages 73, 91)
- **A California Master Plan for Education—Kindergarten through University** was completed in 2002 and its recommendations were submitted to the legislature. (Pages 4-6)
- **“Adequacy” in funding** became a key component in discussions of school finance reform, largely due to the new testing and accountability systems. (Pages 33, 35, 69)
- **Centering education on the local school site** with the principal in charge and minimal roles for the school district or state government became an important concept as set forth in the work of William Ouchi and subscribed to by Secretary for Education Richard Riordan. (Page 72)
- **Equal educational opportunities** and the **state’s constitutional responsibility for public education** are being further defined as *Williams v. State of California* is settled. (Pages 35, 41)
- **The California Performance Review** (August 2004), the governor’s plan for restructuring California government, proposed a new agenda for many aspects of public education.

Current LWVC Education Position

The current LWVC Education position was adopted in 1985. The position, while clearly needing updating, has served the League well. The study committee of the early 1980s did a thorough and, indeed, praiseworthy job.

The following quote was posted in a League-member online discussion in August 2004. It reflects the age-old consistency of organizational response to changing circumstances and also underlines the reasons why League positions are framed as they are.

"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up in teams we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing. And a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization." — Gaius Petronius Arbiter, 210 BC

League position language includes both general concepts (policy statements) and specifics (operational, implementing), always based on study and member consensus. League positions, when constructed well, are both current and forward looking. There is a degree of specificity which allows for action and advocacy in a variety of program areas, as well as sufficient flexibility for League positions to apply over time as conditions change. At the point where that flexibility is not sufficient for the League's voice to be effective, a position would need to be updated.

The current LWVC Education position is included on the following pages for your convenience of reference. Please review it and keep it in mind as you move through the study and consensus process.

CURRENT EDUCATION POSITION

Adopted 1973; Updated 1985; Last Readopted May 2003

POSITION IN BRIEF: Support a comprehensive kindergarten through twelfth grade public education system which meets the needs of each individual student; challenges all students to reach their highest potential; develops patterns of lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.

Support a system of funding which is adequate, flexible, equitable, reliable; derived from a combination of revenue sources; distributed fairly to ensure equal access to public education for all students.

Support formulating broad general guidelines at the state level and developing and implementing program at the local level.

Curriculum

1. Joint responsibility for coordinated curriculum planning in which the state develops broad guidelines for a common core curriculum and the local district develops a comprehensive challenging curriculum which:

- a. includes the state minimum requirements;
- b. meets the needs and challenges the abilities of all students in the district;
- c. reflects priorities set in the local community.

c. exposure to broad common body of knowledge;

d. appreciation and respect for one's own cultural heritage and that of others;

e. preparation for leading productive lives;

f. sufficient instruction to develop competence in speaking, reading, and writing English;

g. services needed to ensure a school environment conducive to learning;

h. a process to identify special needs and provide appropriate services to meet those needs;

i. a variety of challenging learning opportunities.

d. allocating sufficient funds to provide adequate and appropriate salaries for teachers and administrators;

e. maintaining a financially sound teacher retirement system;

f. regulations governing tenure which permit a fair, rigorous, and frequent evaluation system.

Personnel-Local Level

5. Responsibility at the local level for:

a. maintaining high performance standards for teachers and administrators;

b. implementing a fair, rigorous, frequent evaluation system;

c. providing opportunities for retraining and professional growth for teachers;

d. ensuring adequate and appropriate salaries and benefits;

e. providing a work environment which is conducive to good teaching;

f. providing incentives for excellence in teaching;

g. sustaining community support and recognition for educators and education;

h. providing the appropriate notice and access for the community to the collective bargaining process;

Guidelines

2. State policies, guidelines, and standards for curriculum should encourage the local districts to:

- a. develop a broad curriculum;
- b. provide for an appropriate range of student abilities and interests;
- c. evaluate feasibility of proposals and effectiveness of curriculum.

Personnel-State Level

4. Responsibility at the state level for:

a. developing guidelines for recruiting, training, certifying, and retraining teachers which maintain high standards;

b. including early and extensive experience in the classroom in the teacher training system;

c. developing guidelines for evaluation which are fair, rigorous, and frequent with high standards for retraining teachers and with effective procedures for removing ineffective teachers;

Program

3. Educational programs should have sufficient resources to provide all students with:

- a. command of basic skills;
- b. competence in complex skills;

i. utilizing, when possible, collaborative approaches to collective bargaining.

Finance

6. Responsibility at the state level for:

- a. primary funding of public education, with provision for as much local control as possible over local schools;
- b. a flexible, equitable system of adequate and reliable funding derived from a combination of tax sources that includes a portion of the property tax;
- c. developing a school finance system that incorporates a multi-year mechanism and enables orderly, timely, effective budgeting and negotiating processes at the local level;
- d. developing a process for forward funding of the educational budget with decisions made in the year before implementation;
- e. equitable distribution of general purpose funds based on student population;
- f. general purpose funding which is sufficient to provide a comprehensive and challenging program for all students;
- g. separate and appropriate funding of programs for students with special needs;

- h. an equitable funding system that encourages local control;
- i. full funding of mandated programs and procedures to avoid encroachment upon the general educational program;
- j. periodic review of state mandated programs;
- k. permitting districts access to supplementary funds for meeting locally determined needs with due regard to equity;
- l. a uniform system of budgeting and accounting;
- m. opposition to expenditures by the state for vouchers to non-public schools.

Governance

7. Implementation of a system of educational accountability for both finances and student progress in which:

- a. the local district is accountable to its community and state;
- b. the state is accountable to its citizens.

State Level

8. Responsibility at the state level for:
- a. setting broad education goals and policies;

- b. formulating long range plans for the statewide system;
- c. determining minimum standards and guidelines for evaluating student progress;
- d. a state educational code which defines state responsibilities and allows local decision making;
- e. developing broad guidelines for instructional materials selection;
- f. school building safety standards.

Local Level

9. Responsibility at the local level for:

- a. setting long range community goals and interim objectives;
- b. long range planning for the district;
- c. formulation, implementation, and evaluation of programs;
- d. effective implementation of mandated programs;
- e. involvement of the community in the assessment of local educational needs and goals.

10. State and local responsibility for providing public access to decision making in public education.