

Social Policy: Primary and Secondary Education

Education State Board and Department of Education (Adopted January 1983)

1. The League of Women Voters of Ohio supports the continuation of a State Board of Education which should be elected rather than appointed.
2. The primary responsibility of the State Board of Education should be policy making/planning.
3. The primary responsibilities of the State Department of Education should be administrative and regulatory.
4. The LWVO identifies two main areas of State Board of Education operations that need improvement: communications and management of responsibilities.
 - a. Improved direct communication is needed between the State Board of Education and the public, educators, and the legislature to increase public awareness and State Board of Education visibility.
 - b. State Board of Education responsibilities should be reduced and priorities set so that the Board can function effectively and efficiently as a policy making/planning body.

State Education Standards (Adopted January 1984; updated May 1995)

LWVO supports:

1. The use of state education standards as a method of “requiring a general education of high quality.”
2. Compliance with the same state standards by all chartered schools.
3. The establishment of guidelines for granting any exceptions to the state education standards by the State Board of Education for “good and sufficient reason.”
4. The development of a timely, open process for the evaluation and improvement of the state education standards. Standards should include appropriate multiple forms of assessment.

Education Finance

LWVO supports the following principles as the role of the state in funding elementary and secondary education in Ohio:

- A. LWVO supports a funding system for public elementary and secondary education that is accountable and responsive to the taxpayers. LWVO believes that public funds should be used only for public schools. (Adopted May 1994)
- B. LWVO supports a guarantee by the state of a realistic level of per pupil expenditure in all school districts, including compensatory education programs where needed. (Adopted March 1969)
- C. The equalizing function for Foundation Basic Aid should be enhanced by decreasing the use of Basic Aid Guarantees. (Adopted January 1985)
- D. Additional state education funding to school districts should be allocated primarily through Foundation Basic Aid, as these moneys are unrestricted in use. (Adopted January 1985)
- E. State aid should be distributed to compensate for variations among school districts in their ability to raise local revenue to fund education. (Adopted May 1991)

- F. The state aid formula should be calculated to reflect the effects of the tax reduction factor on the amount of revenue school districts can raise through property taxes. (Adopted May 1991)
- G. The state aid formula should be calculated to reflect income wealth of school districts. (Adopted May 1991)
- H. The state aid formula should be calculated to reflect:
 - a. the actual costs to school districts for state-mandated programs;
 - b. meeting the educational needs of the children within the district;
 - c. consideration of the economic/geographic characteristics of school districts statewide. (Adopted May 1991)
- I. The state should be able to assist school districts in capital improvements and building construction to comply with appropriate codes in order to ensure health and safety. (Adopted May 1991)
- J. Tax revenue from commercial/ industrial/ mining/ public utility property should be distributed to compensate for variations in taxable wealth among school districts. (Adopted May 1991)
- K. The General Assembly should establish a method to minimize fluctuations in state funding for elementary and secondary education programs. (Adopted May 1991)
- L. The state share of the cost of pupil transportation should be separated into two budget line items: public and nonpublic. (Adopted January 1985)
- M. The functions and operations of the county school system should be evaluated for possible action by the State Board of Education and/or the legislature. (Adopted January 1985)

LWVO supports the following principles for the role of the local community in financing elementary and secondary education in Ohio:

1. Individual school districts should be required to assume a reasonable share of the financial burden and should retain the option of increasing per pupil expenditure beyond this level through local taxes. (Adopted March 1969)
2. School districts should be participants in the decision-making process when tax abatements are being considered. (Adopted May 1991)

Charter Schools (Adopted May 2017)

LWVO Concurrence with LWV Florida Consensus of School Choice

This position was adopted at the LWVO Convention in May 2017 through the concurrence process. It was developed from a Florida study conducted in 2013 by the League of Women Voters of Florida and is based on the constitutional construct of charter schools and their role in a uniform, high quality school system of free public schools as stated in the Florida Constitution. The LWVO recognizes first and foremost that it is a paramount duty of the state to provide for education and that charter schools are established as public schools and funded by the public and accountable to the public.

Ohio provides for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality school system as the paramount duty of the state. The Ohio League of Women Voters supports the following principles to help ensure that public education can fulfill its duty to Ohio's children.

Charter Schools

The locally elected school board is constitutionally established to provide oversight and direction to the educational system in each district. The school board should have the authority and the responsibility to require fiscal, management and procedural accountability and enforcement of charter terms and conditions. The requirement of local school districts to authorize and oversee a parallel educational organization may require more funding than currently provided in legislation and a clarification of authority regarding enforcement of charter provisions.

Purpose:

The purpose of charter schools is to serve unmet needs and to offer innovative instructional methods. Local needs are best identified by the local school district as part of its strategic plan. To avoid inefficiency through duplicative programs or to have insufficient funding for either program to be successful, charter schools should serve as a complement to not a competitor of traditional public schools.

Management:

Charter schools operate under a contract with an authorized sponsoring entity and are expected to produce certain results that are set forth in each school's charter. Since they are public schools, management structures and requirements should be similar. Both traditional and charter public schools need to have flexibility to develop schedules and curricula. The community is best served if the compensation for instructional personnel is within a maximum and minimum guideline within the district to assure quality of personnel and retention in the classroom.

A public charter school should have local representation on the governing board, at least one community resident answerable to school parents and community and not be governed by an entity with no ties or accountability to the community it serves. Charter schools should be supervised by district staff with enforcement powers to ensure that they conform to state regulations. These regulations should include fiscal responsibilities and adherence to building code as well as school admissions and dismissal policies and procedures. This supervision may require additional funds for oversight. Public charter schools must have appropriately certified full or part time instructors on staff before applying for funding.

Transparency and Accountability:

Both traditional and charter public schools must report teacher turnover and student mobility rates, in addition to end of year student grade retention. Charter public schools must report financial information in a format that is adequate for comparison with other public schools,

particularly regarding facilities ownership and management contracts. Teachers and administrators of ALL public schools, including charters, should meet certification and qualification levels commensurate with their duties and roles. All schools, regardless of size, should report state student assessment test scores and other accepted indicators of student achievement levels.

Conflict of Interest:

Administrators and governing board members of all public schools, including charter, must not directly supervise or determine compensation for family members. Members of the charter schools' governing board MUST NOT have any financial interest in the charter school. Legislators serving on education or appropriation committees must recuse themselves on votes related to charter school finance if they have any financial interest in one or more charter schools.

Facilities and Funding:

As a recipient of public education funds charter schools should meet the procurement standards applicable to other public institutions as stated in statute and rule regarding competitive bids, purchasing of services, equipment, supplies and sites. Records of all transaction and procedures should meet all public records laws for full disclosure. Charter schools that acquire their facilities using public funds must assure that the facility reverts to public ownership at termination of the charter. If the facility is subject to a mortgage, the mortgage must disclose and protect the public's interest in the facility. A conversion of an existing public school to a public charter school should only be authorized by the local governing school board retaining full public ownership of the facility and the assets associated with the school. A public charter school may be housed in a religious institution so long as secular identity is maintained and the student body reflects broad racial/ethnic/religious and economic diversity.

Background: Primary and Secondary Education

LWVO interest in and advocacy on education issues date back to the 1930s when LWVO supported the first state foundation program to fund schools. In 1967-69 LWVO studied education in a series on state financing of major services. Positions were reached on education standards, resource centers, district boundaries, and financing. These positions were reviewed in 1977 at Convention, and only the funding positions were retained.

The roles of the State Board of Education and the Department of Education were the focus of LWVO studies during the 1980s. At the 1983 Convention LWVO approved a study of state minimum standards and school finance. As a result of these studies LWVO adopted positions on an elected State Board of Education, state minimum standards, and school finance. The high number of local Leagues participating in these studies and three consensus efforts demonstrated strong member interest.

Delegates to the 1989 Convention voted to study the roles of state and local government in financing primary and secondary education. The two-year study produced *Financing*

Education in Ohio, a highly acclaimed comprehensive book, which was used by League members and faculty at colleges and universities to educate citizens and policy makers on this subject. Member interest and participation were high, and in 1991 several new positions on school finance were adopted.

Starting in the mid 1990s to the present the LWVO advocated for an elected State Board of Education; constitutional system for funding preK-12 education; opposed public funding for private schools; and supported efforts to hold community and traditional schools accountable and responsive to the public. During this same time the Ohio General Assembly made several changes Ohio's state aid formula through the biennial budget bill; approved additional voucher programs, and the number of community schools has expanded, although in lawmakers approved changes in community school law to strengthen accountability requirements

In 1994 local Leagues concurred with an emergency program measure to update a position stating that public funds should be used only for public schools that are accountable to the public. At the 1995 Convention LWVO positions on education standards were revised as a result of a two-year update. A statement that supports including multiple forms of assessment in state standards was added.

At State Convention in 2009 delegates approved a study of Education Finance. A statewide committee was formed to identify information for Leagues to use to update members about local and state school funding issues, and several Leagues created observer corps to cover boards of education meetings.

Delegates to the May 2017 State Convention adopted new positions on charter schools through the concurrence process (details above). The Hudson League of Women Voters led this effort to review positions on charter schools adopted by the League of Women Voters of Florida, and proposed, with some changes, that the LWVO concur with the more specific positions.

Outlook: Primary and Secondary Education

Ohio lawmakers are currently reassessing some of the nationally advocated education reform policies Ohio adopted over the past years, and working to identify Ohio-based policies that are leading to improved student achievement and successful transition to adulthood.

In response to public pressure and newly formed coalitions of school districts, such as the Ohio Public School Advocacy Network, lawmakers have recently enacted legislation to reduce the number of state tests; reduce the impact of test score results in Ohio's Teacher Evaluation System (OTES); establish alternative pathways for students to earn a diploma; and have proposed changes in Ohio's accountability system for schools that would simplify state report cards on schools and school districts.

House and Senate committees during the first half of the 132nd General Assembly examined the impact of student attendance, truancy, poverty, and the impact of trauma on student achievement with the intent to develop legislative recommendations to help educators address these issues.

Another bipartisan legislative and stakeholder committee is reviewing Ohio's school funding formula and state tax policies that impact school district revenue, such as the changes in the Tangible Personal Property Tax (TPPT) and Current Agricultural Use Value Tax (CAUV), to identify more efficient and effective ways to fund schools. While no progress has been made to identify and cost-out the components of a "thorough and efficient" system of schools, the work of the bipartisan committee could start these conversations, which could lead to a more realistic per pupil amount and formula to determine state aid.

Unfortunately the Ohio General Assembly and Kasich Administration have prioritized tax cuts for the wealthy, corporations, and small businesses over the past seven years as a way to create jobs and expand Ohio's economy, with limited results. While national job growth has increased 9.2 percent since 2005, job growth in Ohio increased by 2.4 percent.

The tax cuts and failure to close tax loopholes and modernize taxes on oil and gas production mean that recent state budgets have been tight, and fewer resources are available to reform Ohio's unconstitutional K-12 school funding system or meet other state needs, such as addressing the opioid crisis.

Lawmakers also continue to expand the number of eligible students who can participate in voucher programs, and increased state funding for nonpublic schools with little accountability or responsiveness about the use of the public funds. According to Policy Matters Ohio, funding for voucher programs has increased by 352 percent, while funding for traditional public schools, which serve the majority of students in Ohio, will decrease 7.6 percent between 2010 and 2019, when adjusted for inflation.

Recent state and national studies of voucher programs are undermining one of the major reasons proponents of vouchers use to advocate for the program. A 2016 evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice voucher program published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a proponent of school choice, found that test scores in math and English language arts have not improved for voucher students in Ohio. (See "Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects," by David Figlio, and Krzysztof Karbownik. Thomas B. Fordham Institute, July 2016 at <https://edexcellence.net/publications/evaluation-of-ohio's-edchoice-scholarship-program-selection-competition-and-performance>)

While some Ohio lawmakers continue to advocate for legislation to expand student access to private schools through state supported voucher programs, the good news is that recently approved laws are strengthening accountability standards for Ohio's charter schools, especially online charter schools (e-schools), and charter school sponsors.

Based on our positions on primary and secondary education, including the new position on charter schools, the LWVO will continue to advocate for a constitutional school funding system; oppose public funding for private schools; support efforts to hold community and traditional public schools accountable and responsive to the public, and revise Ohio law so that charter schools and voucher programs are not funded through a deduction from state aid allocated to school districts.

The complexity of these issues provides local Leagues with opportunities to inform and engage members, stakeholders, and the public in discussions and decision-making about the role of public education and public schools in our state and nation's future.