



# Voter

League of  
Women Voters of  
Bellingham/  
Whatcom County

October 2011

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## Walk & Then Talk at the Colophon

We continue to meet at the top of Taylor Street Dock, at 2 p.m., on Fridays, where we decide what route to take for walking .

We end up at 3:00 p.m. at the Colophon Café (in Fairhaven) for refreshments and further chit chat.. So if you can't make the walking portion, please feel free to join us at the Colophon.

## Make an Informed Choice

### Ballot Issues Forum

**October 15<sup>th</sup>. 9:30 am –noon**  
**Bellingham City Council Chambers**

210 Lottie Street

*(Note: This is a change of venue)*

Co-Sponsored by the AAUW and the League of Women Voters of Bellingham/Whatcom County

Speakers will address the pros and cons of **Initiatives 1125, 1163, 1183, SRJ 8025, 8206 and the Whatcom County Charter Amendment #1**

Candidates for the Bellingham School Board have been invited

This event will be recorded and broadcast on BTV10

**Kudos** Kudos to our very own **Jo Morgan** who has celebrated 50 years of service to the League of Women Voters both here in Bellingham and around the country in whatever community she found herself. Thank you Jo for the leadership and mentoring you have given our league.

Special thanks to a good friend and partner of the League in serving our community. **Julie Foster** is retiring after 18 years as director of the YWCA of Bellingham. Julie has presided over the renovation of the venerable YWCA building and the successful transitional housing program as well as the back to work boutique.

## From Co-President Kay Ingram



### Getting Educated on Education

During the last three months I have had the opportunity to participate in our study committee on The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education. I am not an educator, so I brought more curiosity than knowledge to the discussion. Frankly, I wondered if it was appropriate that I participate. At first I thought, I'll just listen. Well, that didn't last too long. The group was comprised of mostly educators. They were open, engaging and encouraging. The discussion has been rich and challenging and I come away each time with a greater appreciation of the complexities of this topic.

I mention all of this because we have two more studies this year - a national study on Privatization and one initiated by the State League on Conservations Districts. At first blush you may

think, "I don't know anything about those topics. What can I offer?"

Please ignore that inner voice. Consider participating. As you know, you will meet other interesting, smart, curious Leaguers. Some will share their knowledge and experience. Others will want to learn more and have more questions than opinions (in the beginning). The richness of these discussions is the result of having all those perspectives shared and considered.

In addition you will have fun - exploring the topic and helping shape how the discussion will be brought to the membership as we consider the consensus questions.

In future issues of the *Voter* we will provide more information about these studies. I hope you will participate. We will all benefit if you are involved.

## Puget Sound Action Agenda

The League of Women Voters of Washington has participated in the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) since it was established three years ago. During that time The Partnership set recovery targets ( i.e. number of acres of eelgrass beds) that are needed for a healthy Sound.

The League of Women Voters of Washington and other groups in the broad based Environmental Caucus have participated in the early review of the current draft Action Agenda and believe it needs to be strengthened to show the full game plan for recovery. There are good ongoing programs and regulations, but many of them need significant improvements.

A comprehensive strategy, that clearly identifies specific actions including the HOW / WHO and by WHEN are needed over the next two years, is the goal in order to achieve recovery by 2020.

If you are interested in learning more about this, there will be a meeting in **Mount Vernon on Monday October 10**, from 4:30-7:00 pm (4:30-5:30 social) at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, 10441 Bayview-Edison Road, Mount Vernon.

The Partnership will discuss their progress as well as their vision for the next decade.

## Quick Updates

**CEAC (Citizens Election Advisory Council) is looking for League members to train to observe the vote count for the upcoming election Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>.** Training will be held in early October at a date TBA. The league is the only organization outside of the political parties who is invited to join in monitoring the count. Please contact Co-Pres2@LWVbellinghamwhatcom.org if you are interested.

**Lunch with League** once more hosted over 70 people to learn about the league and our topic Citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century. Speakers Floyd McKay and Joan Connell spoke on the new and old media's role and our responsibility as citizens to consider the source as we wade through the various sources and form our opinions.

**Forums 2011** Voter Service Chair Angela Murray could still use some more volunteers to help with the upcoming forums in October. Contact Co-Pres2@LWVbellinghamwhatcom.org

**LWVWA** has taken a yes position on SJR 8025,

a no position on Initiatives 1125 and 1183 and has taken no position on SJR 8206 and Initiative 1163.

### **Role of Federal Government in Education:**

On Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>, **Superintendent Dr. Greg Baker** gave us an update on the challenges facing the Bellingham School District in a time of low budgets and federally mandated testing. Afterwards we broke into focus groups to discuss equity in funding and common core standards.

See our website <http://www.lwvbellinghamwhatcom.org/EducationStudy.html> for an overview of the Federal Government's Role in K-12 education and background information for the study.

Copied on the following pages are two of the reports from LWVUS that will be the basis for our **consensus meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>** which will give the national league lobby positions for legislation that will impact our schools and students.

## Meeting Notices

**October 12th. Coal: Is it a threat to our boating community?** 6:30—8:30 pm Dome Room, Bellingham Cruise Terminal, 355 Harris Avenue.  
Panelists: Matt Krogh, M.S., a North Sound Baykeeper at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities; Frank James, Md., public health officer for San Juan County  
Fred Felleman, M.S., environmental consultant.  
**R.S.V.P Thelma Follett 360-671-0434 or thelmafollett@yahoo.com**

**October 13<sup>th</sup> Washington State House of Representatives Higher Education Committee**  
9:00 am-3:00 pm Skagit Valley College  
Participation includes regional higher education institutions with panel discussions and presentations on ways to meet the higher education needs of the state. League members are invited.  
RSVP [tamara.carlson@skagit.edu](mailto:tamara.carlson@skagit.edu)

**November 19<sup>th</sup> Action Workshop** 10:00 am-3:00 pm  
Bellevue WA, St. Andrews Luthera Church  
For all League members: learn how to find your legislators, research and read a bill and download action items  
\$25.00 ea. lunch provided  
Register: [LWVWA@LWVWA.org](mailto:LWVWA@LWVWA.org)

## The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education—Equity and Funding

Public school funding comes from many sources – federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used. Additionally, the United States invests 5 percent of the GDP in public education. Nearly half of the k-12 education funding in the United States is intended to come from the states, drawn from a combination of income taxes, fees and other taxes. However, some states resemble Illinois, where the state’s share is only 27 percent. The remainder usually comes from local property taxes.

### EQUITY

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Hurst (2007) noted that inequities in wealth stem from the fact that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and/or inherited funds, while the poor earn all of their income from jobs and they spend it on food, shelter, transportation, etc. In the United States, the wealthiest 20 percent own 84 percent of the total wealth.

Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns. During the past 50 years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, schools have become re-segregated (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Currently, three-fourths of the Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.

### ADEQUACY

Since, 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is providing local districts

with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education. Odden and Picus (2008) developed a model calculating the cost of an adequate education. They defined an adequate education as one that includes factors such as a full-day kindergarten, core class sizes of 15 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6 and specialist teachers. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

### FUNDING PRIORITIES

When schools are not funded adequately, this has a long-lasting impact. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that dropouts cost the country at least \$200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services and crime. Since the 1980s, national investments have spent three times more on the prison system than on education. Data show that the national average for educating a child is \$9500, while it costs \$43,000 per year to keep a person incarcerated. With 5 percent of the world’s population in the United States, we house 25 percent of the world criminals (Kang & Hong, 2008).

### NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB)

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, “No Child Left Behind,” which was intended to close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB. One provision of NCLB permitted parents to remove a student from a low-performing school and transfer to

## The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education . . . ,cont'd

another, better performing school. They would receive a voucher which would pay some of the cost of attending another school – public or private. Additionally, courts and education agencies stepped in to “remediate.” The sanctions imposed by NCLB had the effect of punishing or threatening punishment to low-performing schools and teachers, sending them the message that they were incompetent and that they should not have the right to make decisions about how to educate students. Studies (Reeve, 2009) showed that threatening public schools and teachers with punishment had harmful effects on students who remained in the public schools.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts. One goal of NCLB has been to offer choice to parents whose children attend poorly performing schools. However, large-scale studies of voucher school students have revealed little difference in their performance compared to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the most needy students (Rouse & Barrows, 2009). Furthermore, many (Holland, 2011) argue that the NCLB goal of 95 percent of students meeting state standards in reading and math by 2014 is unrealistic.

### **RACE TO THE TOP (RTTT)**

Race to the Top was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. This

program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward reform planned in the winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT.

Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

While both these funding requirements can be effective, neither is foolproof, and each addresses only one part of the problems schools face. For instance, research studies show that promising increased pay based on teacher effectiveness is not an effective incentive. Furthermore, research showed there is a problem when teacher performance evaluation is based only on student scores in standardized tests (Springer et. al. 2010).

Although there is no question that some charter schools are effective, they have not been the panacea many expected. They were originally proposed as an opportunity for educators to test research-supported methods for reaching hard-to-educate children, and some have done quite well. However, a large-scale research study funded by pro-charter advocates revealed that only 17 percent of the 2403 charter schools had significantly more growth in test scores compared to traditional public schools, and, in fact, 37 percent showed significantly less growth (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). Furthermore, many charter schools do not admit and/or retain students who need increased support, e.g.,

## The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education . . . , cont'd

students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

The progress of the U.S. Department of Education's Equity and Excellence commissions can be tracked through <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/index.html>.

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**A Hearty Welcome**

to New Members:

**Esther Golde**

**Kelly Lewis**

**Anna Marie and Edward Ross**

**Ann Katherine Walton**

**Randy Weschler**

## Common Core Standards

Students who move from one part of the United States to another during their K-12 school careers are likely to encounter substantial variations in requirements for graduation. 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."

Currently, standards for student performance vary widely by state. The roots of current state-to-state inconsistencies lie in the fact that public education in the United States has traditionally been a local responsibility. However, textbook publishers have created something of a "de facto" national curriculum, based on market needs. Consequently, many textbooks from major publishers have reflected the curricular choices that were made by educational groups in the largest states. Some publishers do create textbooks and other curricula for smaller markets.

Rothman (2009) summarized the efforts of various groups to create common standards across the United States. Initial efforts to foster development of national standards and a related system of assessments in the core subject areas began in the early 1990's through awarding grants to a dozen national organizations.

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School

Officers (CCSSO) launched the Common Core State Standards initiative in March 2009 after the nation's governors agreed in concept to adopt a uniform set of standards. The final report was issued on June 2, 2010 (NGA, 2010), and, by early 2011, 40 states have adopted the Standards. The adopting states are currently aligning them to their own state standards.

The Fordham Institute (Carmichael, et al. 2010) reported that the Common Core standards received high marks when compared to state standards across the country. The Institute suggests that Common Core Standards represent an opportunity for creating consistency and raising standards in all states.

### ASSESSMENTS

The implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has created a 50-state and 50-test environment in public education. As a result state-to-state expectations and performances vary greatly. States publish annual reports of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which are required by federal law, but the meaning of "proficient" in those reports can vary widely from one state to another (Cronin, et al. 2007).

Larger testing companies market a variety of norm-referenced standardized tests. However, they are designed to rank students, rather than to determine how well students have mastered curricular objectives as criterion-referenced tests would do. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) publishes results that are technically adequate for state-to-state (and international) comparisons, but that assessment is not designed to produce individual student scores. NAEP requires a

## Common Core Standards, cont'd

large sample of students to produce results. Most school systems are too small to qualify for testing that would produce local NAEP results. The tradition of local governance has led to inconsistent requirements and standards for student performance across the country. Thus, in 2010, the United States does not have a consistent set of academic assessments for grades K-12.

Two coalitions, together representing 44 states and the District of Columbia, won a U.S. Department of Education competition for \$330 million dollars federal aid to design “comprehensive assessment systems” aligned to the Common Core and designed to measure whether students are on track for college and career success. The awards, announced in September 2010, were divided between the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), comprised of 26 states receiving \$170 million, and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium that comprises 31 states and received \$160 million. At least 12 states participated in both coalitions and are waiting to decide which assessment system will best meet their needs. An advantage of having assessments that are used in more than one state is that results from all participating states could be compared.

### WHY NOT NATIONAL STANDARDS OR ASSESSMENTS?

The most common arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards for K-12 center on two issues: 1) the cost and difficulty of changing the existing curriculum and assessments and (2) the sovereignty of states in issues related to education and local control. Governor Rick Perry of Texas stated that the Race to the Top funding would only generate a one-time amount of \$75 per student, yet cost Texas taxpayers an additional \$3 million. A third argument is that the individual state standards

might be more rigorous. However, states that adopt the Common Core are permitted to add 15 percent more 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, an idea that has popular appeal. (TIME, 2010). In August 2010, ten of the nation’s premier educational researchers (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravtich, Rothstein, Shavelson & Shepard, 2010) co-authored a report that cautioned against relying on student test scores as a major indicator for evaluating teachers, citing the technical problems associated with using scores from standardized student assessments in value-added statistical models.

### DOES THE UNITED STATES NEED A NATIONAL CURRICULUM?

The U.S. Department of Education presents the view that, since the developers of the Common Core Standards and the proposed assessments have been groups with state representation rather than the federal government, neither program is a federal initiative. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March 13). In March 2011, the Albert Shanker Institute issued a call for common curriculum guidelines (Albert Shanker Institute, 2011; Gewertz, C. 2011, March). This document voices 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” (2011), discussed by Gewertz, C. (2011, May). The article also cites the prohibition against a federal curriculum contained in the 1965 ESEA.

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**Note:** The September 29, 2011 issue of the Seattle Times stated the newspaper's view about **Common Core Standards**. The editorial discusses how the standards will be used in the classroom and outlines our state's timeline for implementing the standards and assessments based on them. [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/editorials/2016348376\\_edit29common.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/editorials/2016348376_edit29common.html)



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