

Report from LWV Bellingham/Whatcom County's Consensus Meeting

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education

November 19, 2011

40 League members participated in the consensus discussion.

General Consensus Questions

1. The Current role of the federal government in public education is

Our League's Response: Too small

2. What should be the role of the federal government in public education?

Our League's Response: Strong consensus that the most important role for the federal government is (a) to ensure that all students pre K-12 receive a quality education. We also felt that it was important that the federal government (b) develop accountability measures that will study the progress of all students so that they achieve adequate yearly progress and (c) mandate Common Core standards for all students K-12

3. A quality public education is important to perpetuate a strong and viable democracy.

Our League's Response: Strongly agree

Common Core Standards

4. Currently the governors and state education officers have developed Common Core State Standards that are national but not federal. How should the standards be mandated of the states in order to obtain federal funding?

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

5. Should there be a national assessment aligned with the Common Core State Standards?

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

- a. (If the answer to 5 is Yes). Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated?

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

- b. (If the answer to 5 is No) What other accountability measures might you suggest?

Our League's Response: -No Consensus

6. National Standards should lead to:

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

7. What role should the national assessment consortiums play in student evaluation?

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

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

Our League's Response: - No Consensus

9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to

Our League's Response: e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs.

Our League's Comments:

Most participants thought these questions were confusing and the choices were too similar to make it easy to rank or pick a single choice. The word mandate continued to be problematic as most strongly supported federal dollars for education, but wanted local control and felt you were being asked to give up one for the other. Members strongly believe that mandates should be funded.

We had strong consensus that common core standards should be mandated and the majority of our members supported a national assessment. However, discussion groups differed in how the mandates should occur and so we could not report a positive consensus for #4 & #5.

Question #7 was asking too much. We strongly supported (a) Provide an assessment system that is aligned to the Common Core Standards.

Question #8 Favor (b) but not a clear consensus.

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 for states/districts who meet certain federal requirements such as Race to the Top. Which would be appropriate?

Our League's Response: b. A combination of non-competitive and competitive grants

11. If the federal governments role is the concern of the "common good" then:

Our League's Response: b. Mandates and funding should both be provided.

12. Equity in public education means equitable access to:

Our League's Response: Rank order by importance:

1. high quality teaching & learning
2. adequate and current learning materials
3. clean and well maintained physical facilities
4. food and health care
5. safe and secure neighborhoods
6. 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.

Our League's Response: Strongly Agree

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

Our League's Response: Strongly Agree

15. Federal support for early childhood education programs (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.

Our League's Response: Strongly Agree

This funding should be extended to:

Our League's Response: special needs first

Our League's Comments:

We would have liked to see some new options for federal investment/involvement considered including more emphasis on improving teacher training and implementing some of the recommendations from Darling-Hammond.

So long as ESEA funds are protected and targeted towards poverty and special needs students, we support additional federal funding for education to all students, particularly to establish Common Core standards and fund innovative ideas.