

**THURSTON COUNTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
PUBLIC EDUCATION STUDY CONSENSUS MEETING
October 22, 2011**

MEETING NOTES

Participants:

Dawn Brooks Gibbs
Ruth Harms
Bob Jacobs
Eve Johnson
Mary Moore

Kathy Morris
Margie Reeves
Nancy Scott
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Article VI, Section 3 of the Thurston County League of Women Voters Bylaws states that 15 members shall constitute a quorum at all general membership meetings. Although only nine members attended, it was deemed by the group necessary to proceed with the consensus discussion. Another meeting would be difficult to schedule prior to the end of November, and since a great deal of work was done to try to get a quorum at this meeting, there was no assurance that another meeting would be more likely to generate a quorum of members. Following the meeting, it was determined that national League rules allow submittal of a consensus report with the approval of a local League Board. Therefore, these notes will be submitted to the national League via the Thurston County League Board, with the assumption that the Thurston League Board will approve the consensus of this group.

Consensus was defined as the position that a large majority of the group either agreed completely with or could “live with.” In several cases, there was a large majority on one response and one or two individuals on another response. It was agreed to report out the majority position as the consensus and to note the comments of those who disagreed for the record. In the past, minority views have been considered and have affected how final positions have been framed. Note that there was not discussion on every question.

Before proceeding to the discussion of consensus questions, there was considerable discussion of the inadequacy of the study materials, which were not well organized, redundant and incomplete, and the confusing and ambiguous nature of many of the consensus questions, which made accurate responses difficult. Among other issues, it was noted that the role of parents in educating their children was not addressed in the study materials, nor was the (uneven) quality of teacher education.

In the notes that follow, red bold font is used for the consensus positions.

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

Much too small	Too small	About right	Too large	Much too large
	7		1	1

Discussion:

- This question was very difficult to answer because there are so many dimensions of the federal government’s role; members would respond differently to separate parts of the question, if it were divided.
- Most felt that the federal government is not solving the problem; funding is not sufficient at 5% of the federal budget and about 10% of school district budgets. More is needed to assure adequate education for all.
- The federal government provides support for things that states can’t do (e.g., data bases, best practices, resources/consultant, and demanding accountability) and education for children with special needs/disabilities would not occur at all without federal funding.

- The No Child Left Behind law appears to have increased inequity.
- Federal funding and regulations do not adequately support teachers and allow parents to move their children out of schools they feel are inadequate, exacerbating problems for the remaining students.
- The federal government should set standards but not curriculum; it should not be involved in local operations or telling local school districts how to approach meeting the standards.

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

- a.** To ensure that all students preK-12 receive a quality education
- c.** To mandate Common Core Standards for all students K-12
- b.** To develop accountability measures that will study the progress of all students so that they achieve adequate yearly progress
- d.** To monitor state efforts for funding
- e.** To measure teacher effectiveness through test data

Discussion:

- One member felt that “none of the above” would have been a better response in each case. This individual believes that the question is biased.
- It is important to have a way to measure “a”. Core standards are necessary to develop the measure.
- The problem with “b” is how to develop a test that can be fair to all populations.
- The use of “mandate” in “c” is a problem.
- Competition is global but states are deciding what is important; this may leave students in some states behind in their ability to compete in the global economy.
- There is not a valid way at present to measure teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness is how a teacher relates to the child and is not related to student test results.

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

Strongly agree	Agree	No consensus	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8	1			

No significant discussion on this question.

4. Currently the governors and state education officers have developed Common Core Standards that are national but not federal. Should the standards be mandated of the states in order to obtain federal funding? (Choose one)

- a. Special grant programs such as Race to the Top
- b. All programs under Elementary and Secondary Education Act where the needs qualify for funding
- c. All programs receiving federal funding from any source**
- d. All of the above
- e. None of the above

Discussion:

- This question was considered unclear by most of the group. The difference between “national” and “federal” was not clear, nor was it clear if/how/when standards could be changed and by whom. Many people in the group felt there was no right answer, although a majority agreed to respond with “c.”
- Different mandates for different programs would be an administrative problem.
- Measurements are needed for accountability; in this case, it was interpreted that the mandated standards would mean those for the program for which an application was submitted.

- There are too many different sets of standards; this is too complex.

5. Should there be a national assessment aligned with the common core standards?

Yes	No
6	3

If Yes, Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated? (choose one)

a. Voluntary	b. Mandated	c. Mandated if fully funded
1	1	7

Discussion:

- This question was unclear. The majority of the group responded that if standards are mandated, then yes, there should be a national method of assessment, but it should be fully funded.

6. National standards should lead to: (choose one)

- A nationally mandated curriculum to be aligned to the national standards and assessments
- A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated
- A suggested structure for states and local education agencies to develop their own curriculum. (8)**
- No national curriculum

Discussion:

- It was noted that the curriculum says **how** to teach; standards should say **what** to teach; as noted previously, how to teach should be a local decision.

7. What role should the national assessment consortia play in student evaluation? (Rank order)

- Provide an assessment system that is aligned to the Common Core Standards (9)**
- Provide comparison data showing progress toward reaching Common Core Standards
- Provide criteria for determining readiness for college and careers
- Provide information to students, parents, teachers and school districts about student achievement
- Provide diagnostic information on each child

Discussion:

There was consensus that “a” should be ranked first and that “e” should be ranked last. After that, there was no consensus on “b”, “c” and “d”.

- The question was confusing, as “national assessment consortia” means multiple groups. Different ones were mentioned in the materials. There could be hundreds of groups.
- Only “a” and “c” are possible if providing information to the consortia is voluntary.
- “b” was confusing because it was not clear whose progress would be measured.
- “a” would help determine if the Common Core Standards are working.

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

- Data should be “norm referenced” (where students are ranked) for district comparison only
- Data should be “criterion referenced” and clearly informative so that teachers, parents, and students know how individual students have mastered criteria established at a national level. (6)**
- Data should be used to determine “cut” scores knowing if students have mastered requirements for special grade levels (2)

Discussion: (see next page)

- Criterion-referenced relates to outcomes.
- Those in the minority felt that knowing who did not “make the cut” should be the most important data for all involved.

9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to (Choose one):

- a. Sanction schools not measuring up to the specific levels
 - b. Reward schools that achieve high scores
 - c. Rank teachers based on student test score data
 - d. Reward teachers who have exemplary scores
 - e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs (9)**
- No significant discussion on this question.

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 to states/districts who meet certain federal requirements, such as Race to the Top. Which would be appropriate: (choose one)

- a. Non-competitive funding for all applicants meeting requirements (1)
- b. A combination of non-competitive and competitive grants (6)**
- c. Competitive grants only
- d. No federal funding (1)

Discussion:

- Competitive programs can engender experimentation and interesting outcomes and can encourage achievement.
- Don't want to use competition if there is a measured need.
- If funding is non-competitive, and one requirement is for local districts to provide matching funds but some districts can't do that, then the local district would get no funds; that seems unfair.
- When funding is competitive, the wealthier districts can hire grant-writers, making their districts even more advantaged than before, and the ones who can't do that are disadvantaged.
- There should not be competition unless all measured needs have been satisfied.

11.If the federal government's role is the concern of the “common good” then: (choose one)

- a. Mandates only should be sanctioned
 - b. Mandates and funding should both be provided (1)
 - c. Funding should be provided through grants only (1)
 - d. A combination of funded mandates and grants should apply (7)**
 - e. No mandates should be required and limited grants for innovation available
- No significant discussion on this question.

12.Equity in public education means equitable access to: (Rank order)

- a.** High quality teaching/learning
- b.** Adequate and current learning materials
- d.** Food and health care
- c.** Clean and well maintained physical facilities
- e.** Safe and secure neighborhoods
- f.** Secure housing

Discussion: (see next page)

- A majority of the group did not like this question, felt it was confusing and felt that “a” would include all the rest of the categories.
- “Equity” should mean equality.

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.

Strongly agree	Agree	No consensus	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7			2	

Discussion:

- Categories provide financial incentive to classify students. If all ESEA funding is for special needs only, schools might aggressively pursue student classifications to obtain maximum federal funding.
- Recall that in our other response, we felt funding should be a combination of categorical and competitive.
- Technology has allowed identification of real needs; in the past we did not know the extent of needs.
- This approach can create an “us vs. them” perspective.

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

Strongly agree	Agree	No consensus	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7			1	1

No significant discussion on this question.

15. Federal support for early childhood education programs (e.g. 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.

a.

Strongly agree	Agree	No consensus	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6	1			1

b. This funding should be extended to :

All Children	Only those with special needs	Special needs first
6	1	2

Discussion:

- Educating the parents is a big factor in success.
- Parent education “as needed” implies special needs first.

Following the consensus question discussion, there was a round-robin of comments about the meeting. The group was asked what they would like to have done differently and also what they are taking away from this meeting. Responses were as follows:

Would have done differently	“Take Away”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater clarity of the questions would have made a big difference. (This was noted by many participants.) Even the title was ambiguous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presentation at the last meeting was very helpful. • Learned a lot from the material. • Encouraged by the willingness to

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would have preferred a different site (This was noted by many participants.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the room was much too great. • The noise level in the room was obnoxious. • Unfortunate that more people were not involved; this issue will affect everyone. • Facilitation was helpful. • Did not like the material. 	<p>compromise and the degree of thoughtfulness in the discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is a very complex system; I didnt feel competent. • The inadequacy of education state by state. • Glad I participated; this was important, and I learned from it. • Not sure that government is the answer. • Appreciated the diversity of opinions. • It was a great conversation. • Education is so important. • Liked today's conversation better than the first meeting (where presentations were given).
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