

Consensus Questions – LWVUS study on the Federal Role in Public Education

SESSION ONE (Sept. 17, 2011)

Answers by LWV Los Altos-Mountain View (Recorded by Jean Meddaugh and Ellen Wheeler)

General Questions

1. The current role of the federal government in public education is: We chose "**About right.**"

Much too small too small **About right** too large much too large

Comment: There shouldn't be too much regulation by the federal government. In particular, NCLB has focused too much on penalties instead of rewarding progress by schools. We recommend a "growth" model" not an absolute score requirement.

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

[1] a [2] **Tie for 2nd place: b/c;** [4] d [5] e

Comment: b & c = "too close to call"

3. A quality public education is important to perpetuate a strong and viable democracy. We chose "**Strongly agree.**"

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Common Core Standards

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) 1. For special grant programs such as Race to the Top; 2. For all programs under Elementary and Secondary Act where the needs qualify for funding; 3. For all programs receiving federal funding from any source; **4. All of the above;** 5. None of the above.

We chose "**4. All of the above**"

Comment: We defined "mandated" as "required."

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

Yes

If Yes, Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated? (Choose one: 1. Voluntary; 2. Mandated; **3. Mandated, if fully funded**)

We chose "3. Mandated, if fully funded"

Comment: We recommend not doing national testing every year, but following an international model of testing in certain years. For example, test every student in the U.S. in 4th grade and in 8th grade, in order to gauge how students in different states compare to each other.

A potentially logical next step could be to develop a national curriculum that would meet the standards and be aligned with the assessment tools. Carefully consider this in light of answers to the two previous questions and strive for a consistent answer.

6. National standards should lead to: (choose one) a. A nationally mandated curriculum to be aligned to the national standards and assessments; **b. A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated;** c. A suggested structure for states and local education agencies to develop their own curriculum; No national curriculum.

We chose "b. A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated."

This question concerns the current two consortia who have won \$3.5 million to develop assessments that follow the Common Core State Standards by 2014.

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

[1] a [2] d [3] b [4] c [5] e

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

This goes to the much debated parts of NCLB, to value-added statistical models for evaluation of teachers, merit pay and similar topics often in the news.

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) **We chose "b."**

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

9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to (Choose one): **We chose "b."**

a. Sanction schools not measuring up to specific levels; **b. Reward schools that achieve high scores**; c. Rank teachers based on test score data; d. Reward teachers who have exemplary scores; e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs.

SESSION TWO (Oct. 15, 2011): Funding and Equity

This part of the study deals more with the traditional federal involvement in public education and how it has evolved.

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) **We chose "a."**

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

Comment: We had a strong minority group opinion that supported "b."

Mandates are not always a bad thing. Integration was a mandate, so was Title IX (gender equity). Most school administrators would emphasize the need for federal mandates to be federally funded. Some are. Some, like Head Start, are only expected to do what the funding allows. Others, such as Special Education, have never been fully funded. Think carefully about this one. What is the "common good"?

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

We chose "b."

- a. Mandates only should be sanctioned. (It's OK to have unfunded mandates.)
- b. **Mandates and funding should both be provided.**
- c. Funding should be provided through grants only.
- d. A combination of funded mandates and grants should apply.
- e. No mandates should be required and limited grants for innovation available.

12. Equity in public education means equitable access to: (Rank order) **We chose: a, b, c, d, e, f**

- a. high quality teaching/learning
- b. adequate and current learning materials
- c. clean and well maintained physical facilities
- d. food and health care
- e. safe and secure neighborhoods
- f. secure housing

Comment: "E" and "F" are strongly related to each other. They're bigger than education.

Traditionally all federal funding has been aimed at special groups, those that were deemed underserved by Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizers. These may be minorities – those with disabilities, living in poverty, not speaking English as a primary language or with other identifying characteristics. Many of these numbers are growing nationwide, and funding does not always keep up with the growth. The question is, should this funding still be targeted to individual groups? Or should it be either block granted, where it can be used for multiple purposes, and/or blended into the general fund?

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. **We chose "Strongly agree."**

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Much current educational research emphasizes the role of early childhood education in giving all children an even start when entering kindergarten. The question here is the role of the federal government: Should it play a role in extending this to all children?

14. The federal government has a role in supporting early childhood education, birth to 5, for all children? **We chose "Strongly agree."**

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Comment: The proper role is "support," not necessarily "paid for by the federal government."

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.

We chose "Strongly agree"

Strongly Agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly Disagree

b. This funding should be extended to :

All children only those with special needs **special needs first**

We chose "special needs first."

Comment: It's good policy to offer funding for all, but to special needs first.

THANK YOU to all of you who came to our consensus meetings!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! A good time was had by all. And, as is often the way, the work of the group was better than the work by one. This is the wisdom of the League.