

## LWV Greater Cleveland concurrence proposal to update LWV Ohio's positions on state education standards

### **Committee members:**

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### ***Why we need an update***

The committee came together this September to address what we feel is a void in the education positions of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO)—clear positions on high-stakes testing and accountability, which many education experts have deemed harmful to both children and education quality.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has long supported a universal public education system. Its League Principles state: “...every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all...” More specific positions supporting public education reside in state Leagues as educational systems, governance, and standards are largely set by state governments. LWVO has strong positions with respect to public school funding and governance, but its positions on state standards are inadequate to address serious issues arising from the use of high-stakes testing.

LWVO adopted its positions on standards in 1995, before outcome-based education (OBE) became a predominant movement in the United States and Ohio. Before 1995, assuring quality was based on what was provided to children, not on student performance (outcome) on a prescribed assessment. Goals 2000, Educate American Act, passed in 1994, introduced the concept of outcome-based standards, but in 2002, the law was supplanted by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which took the concept a few steps farther. NCLB mandated high-stakes testing but left the responsibility for execution and content requirements up to the states.

Subsequently, state policy makers fully embraced OBE and made accountability based on high-stakes testing the centerpiece for improving public education. The Ohio legislature enacted laws mandating use of standardized tests to assign grave consequences affecting students, teachers, and schools. These high-stakes uses can prevent a student from advancing to fourth grade or high school seniors from graduating. Ratings based on test performance can affect teacher employment and educator morale, resources available in a school district, the reputation of a community, and local taxpayer investment in public education.

Making high-stake decisions based on standardized tests violates what testing experts consider to be legitimate uses of tests. Experience over the last two decades indicates that this form of accountability has not achieved its goals and has been harmful to children, educational quality and equity, and our public education system.

Therefore, the committee is putting forth a concurrence proposal for adopting positions on high-stakes testing and accountability to be considered at the 2019 LWVO convention in May.

## ***What is concurrence?***

In *League Basics*, a leadership handbook prepared by LWVUS (updated 2009), **concurrence** is defined as: “Agreement by League members with a position on an issue reached by a small group of members or by another League.” LWVO’s *In League* handbook elaborates the definition further:

Concurrence...is a method in which members are asked to approve or disapprove of a position statement proposed by the board. Often this will be a request to concur (or agree) with a position arrived at by some other League which has studied the issue or with a statement compiled by the study committee or the board. Background materials will be shared.

Most often, concurrence is based on positions arising from other Leagues that have done full studies, including consensus sessions; that is the route this committee has chosen to pursue.

## ***Why concurrence?***

Increasingly, grave doubts, even anger, among citizens, professionals, and some lawmakers are questioning the value of test-driven accountability in public education. Other than professional organizations, many citizen groups have spoken out on this issue largely within their local school districts. The League has a credible voice that can span multiple school districts and the entire state, but on this issue our League voice is mute due to the lack of appropriate positions. Because concern about testing is intensifying, LWVO should adopt appropriate and well-studied positions and advocate on this issue sooner rather than later.

A full study typically requires two years and usually begins after approval at the convention in late spring. Under that timeline LWVO would not have actionable positions until the spring of 2021. Adoption of positions by concurrence can take place at this upcoming LWV Ohio Convention in May 2019 and be available for advocacy beginning late spring 2019.

Also, a full study requires valuable League resources – time, volunteers to do the research, and member participation. Concurrence is a process by which a League does not have to “reinvent the wheel” if a set of members, usually from another League, has already invested the time and effort in thoroughly studying an issue.

## ***LWVPA and LWVTX positions as basis for concurrence***

After searching many state League websites for positions on high-stakes testing and school accountability in order to find ones usable for a concurrence proposal, the committee identified two state Leagues with strong positions in this area – Pennsylvania (LWVPA) and Texas (LWVTX).

Overall, we prefer the LWVPA positions. LWVTX positions cover more detail than we feel is necessary or desirable. LWVPA’s positions, while to the point and clear in purpose, are flexible enough to cover what we would need for advocacy. Furthermore, the LWVPA study and consensus process is more recent. LWVTX adopted their positions in 2008; LWVPA, in 2015.

We are proposing a mixed concurrence with adoption of all LWVPA positions on “High-stakes Testing and Accountability,” which came out of their 2015 study, and one LWVTX position that refers to test frequency. To create a more consistent format, position #7 was rearranged from LWVPA’s presentation of positions regarding the negative impact of high-stakes testing. While LWVPA’s statement notes the drain testing can have on school resources, we decided to adapt a LWVTX position, which was more explicit, as another bullet point.

You can find the position statements for the Pennsylvania and Texas Leagues online at:

LWV Pennsylvania

<http://www.palwv.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Education-Position-8-2015.pdf>

(see section on High-stakes testing and Assessment.)

LWV Texas

<https://my.lwv.org/texas/position/public-school-testing-and-accountability>

### ***Additional documents***

Supporting documents providing more background, resources, and information on likely legislation in Ohio are being prepared and will be posted on the LWVGC website.

*[Go to pages 4 and 5 for the **concurrence proposal language**]*

## ***The concurrence proposal***

Position in Brief: Regarding standards, LWVO’s Position in Brief states that LWVO “Support[s] state education standards as a method of attaining a high-quality education.” If this concurrence is adopted, the committee recommends expanding this statement to state that **adoption and implementation of standards must avoid consequences that may harm educational quality and the futures of children.**

Below is the concurrence proposal as it could be incorporated into current LWVO positions on education standards. Proposed concurrence changes are shown in bold.

### **LWVO on State Education Standards (proposed update 2019)**

*Positions #1-4 were adopted by LWVO in January 1984 and updated May 1995.*

***Bolded positions #5-9 are LWV of Pennsylvania positions adopted in 2015, except for 7d, which is adapted from a LWV of Texas position adopted in 2008.***

1. LWVO supports the use of state education standards as a method of “requiring a general education of high quality.”
2. LWVO supports compliance with the same state standards by all chartered schools.
3. LWVO supports 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. LWVO supports 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.~~ ***[We propose dropping the last sentence of #4 as the same position is stated and elaborated in position #5 – part of the proposed concurrence with LWVPA positions]***
5. **Within schools, assessment of student learning should include measures other than standardized tests. Such assessments (including standardized tests) provide a useful tool for**
  - a. **Monitoring academic progress**
  - b. **Helping teachers modify instruction**
  - c. **Identifying students who need additional support, and**
  - d. **Informing placement decisions**
6. **State-mandated standardized tests should be developed in a transparent manner with a clearly designated purpose. They should be aligned with state-adopted academic standards. Such assessments and their consequences should be modified based on needs of students with disabilities and those who are English-language learners. Standardized tests may be useful in:**
  - a. **Monitoring student academic growth**
  - b. **Promoting consistent content in subject areas**
  - c. **Measuring overall academic progress and achievement within and across groups, and**
  - d. **Comparing student performance across schools, districts, and states**

- 7. While well-designed standardized tests have positive uses, the League believes that attaching high-stakes consequences to test results negatively impacts student well-being, curricular programs, district budgets, and instructional time. These negative effects may include aspects such as student and teacher stress, a narrowing of curriculum to spend more time on tested subjects, lack of availability of student electives because of focus on tested subjects, demands on district budgets for testing and remediation, and loss of instructional time to test preparation and administration. Therefore:
  - a. Standardized assessments should not be used for high-stakes determinations such as grade promotion or graduation requirements.**
  - b. Standardized assessments should not be a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of teachers or administration.**
  - c. Funding should not be linked to standardized test performance. All schools should have adequate funding to enable their students to be successful.**
  - d. Standardized testing, including benchmark and practice tests, should be limited in frequency.****
- 8. Information obtained through testing should be made available to students, parents, and schools of attendance. Without student and/or parent permission, individual student data should not be available to colleges, employers, and the general public.**
- 9. The League believes that legislation and policy regarding education assessments need to be carefully formulated to reduce potential litigation in areas such as special education, parental rights, and privacy concerns.**