



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF TEXAS

*Empowering all Texans to engage in a more responsible and responsive
democracy*

2017 ACTION PAPER- PUBLIC EDUCATION IN TEXAS

On May 13, 2016, the Texas Supreme Court ruled unanimously in a 100-page opinion that Texas' system of school finance, while imperfect, was not unconstitutional. The Court effectively closed the door on future lawsuits to effect funding equity for public schools. It is up to us to ensure that all of our students receive a quality public education.

The League of Women Voters of Texas supports a school finance system that provides taxpayer equity and an equitable distribution of funds to ensure that all Texas school children receive a high-quality education.

Why:

1. Currently, Texas is 43rd in the nation, falling from 39th last year, in the annual “Quality Counts” report from the national publication *Education Week*. This ranking, based largely on per student funding, is routinely used by businesses and professionals when considering where to locate.
2. Because property tax revenues (which constitute the primary funding for public education in Texas) vary widely from one area to another, even within cities, state funding is critical to ensure all students are provided with quality schools and teaching.
3. State funding of public education is critical to ensuring:
 - Safe and secure facilities
 - Hiring and retaining highly-qualified teachers and staff
 - Up-to-date textbooks, supplemental materials and libraries
 - Programs that adequately address various students’ needs
 - Maintenance of and upgrading technologies needed for teaching and for tracking student progress (we are rapidly moving to online test administration in Texas)

LWV-TX opposes vouchers.

Why:

1. Whether called “vouchers”, “tax credits”, “scholarships”, “grants”, “school/parental choice programs”, “taxpayer savings” or anything else, vouchers fund private and religious schools.
2. The purpose of vouchers is to transfer students and funding from public schools to private schools.
3. Numerous independent studies have been unable to prove that vouchers are effective. They don’t produce academic gains over public schools.
4. Studies show they don’t provide a way out of poverty for poor students.
5. Private schools are not required to follow the state curriculum, ensure academic accountability, address issues of equity and social justice, or respond to transparency concerns.
6. Vouchers are costly, requiring taxpayers to fund both public and private school systems as the majority of vouchers have gone to students already enrolled in private schools.
7. Private schools are not obligated to accept all students. The vast majority of our students (about 90%) still need high quality public schools.

The 84th (2015) Legislative session established the Texas Commission on Next-Generation Assessments and Accountability (TCNGAA) which published its draft report in July. Among other recommendations, it proposed streamlining the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are the state's academic standards.

LWV-TX supports academic standards and a state curriculum that prepares students for success in college and/or various careers.

Why:

1. The primary purpose of a public education system is to prepare our students to be successful in their communities.
2. Prioritized state standards, upon which the curriculum is based, should support the rigor necessary for postsecondary success in college or careers.
3. The state's curriculum will be most effective when it:
 - Is developed by educators and acknowledged experts
 - Is sensitive to the diversity of the state's population
 - Addresses prioritized knowledge and skill requirements
 - Covers tested subjects as well as others to develop well-rounded students
 - Reflects ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) requirements to ensure federal and state alignment

Currently, passing STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) scores in Reading and Math are tied to promotion for 5th and 8th graders, and high school students must pass the English 1, English 2, Algebra 1 and US History End of Course (EOC) exams to graduate. The Texas Commission on Next-Generation Assessments and Accountability recommended limiting state testing to Readiness Standards.

LWV-TX supports achievement tests that measure individual mastery and proficiency on the state's academic standards for diagnostic purposes.

Why:

1. The most effective use of students' test results is to make instructional decisions for the future success of those students.
2. To enable teachers to use the tests diagnostically, the number of TEKS tested should be limited to those directly correlated to adequately preparing students for the next grade level or for college or career success.
3. Research shows that many factors (including subject grades, portfolios, teacher recommendations and various types of assessments) should be considered when determining whether a student should be promoted or allowed to graduate.
4. Grade Placement Committees (which may advance elementary and middle school students who fail STAAR exams) and Individual Graduation Committees (for high school students who fail one or two EOCs) consider numerous other factors in determining whether such students may be promoted or may still graduate and should be continued.
5. Mandated state-wide (STAAR) and national standardized tests (SAT, ACT, etc.) have *not* proved to be good indicators of success in college.
6. Use of failed exams to affect students' course grades or to prevent the promotion or graduation of students who have met all other academic and attendance requirements is punitive.

HB 2804 (84th Legislature) mandated a new A-F measure of school and district effectiveness. It calculates school and district quality using: student test scores, growth in student test scores, progress closing performance gaps, college or career readiness and a district self-assessment. 222 school boards have passed resolutions calling for the repeal of this bill.

LWV-TX supports a fair, non-punitive accountability system.

Why:

1. Parents and tax payers need to know how best to support their students. School and district accountability systems should be complex enough to diagnose successful efforts for replication and unsuccessful efforts to plan for improvement.
2. The federal ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), signed into law December 2015 and effective for the 2017-2018 school year, does not require and may not support an A-F reporting system.
3. Accountability systems that “grade” schools and districts oversimplify problems and may lead to adversarial, rather than collaborative relationships, between parents, school staff, and the community.
4. Accountability systems that reduce reporting to a letter or number tend to adversely affect schools and districts with challenging student populations.
5. There is no proof that such simplified accountability reports improve student performance.

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