

THE **VOTER**

League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh

Volume 21, No. 5

February 2015

LATE JANUARY THROUGH MARCH • FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Is LWVPA's position on education out-of-date? Or is it time to act on the existing position? Or both?

The January Education Committee meeting and the February and March units will look at these questions.

The LWVPA position has language that addresses the allocation of state funds to local school districts across the state (see page 7). A new statewide *Commission on Basic Education Funding* is looking at that allocation and is tasked with creating an equitable formula for distributing state funds. Senator Matt Smith is serving on that commission. At the **January 28** Education Committee meeting, Senator Smith's Chief of Staff, Jake Pawlak, will update the committee – *and anyone else who wishes to attend* – on the work of the commission.

Ron Cowell, the founder and head of the EPLC (Education Policy and Education Center) in Harrisburg, is also expected to attend. He was Chair of the House Education Committee when he served in the Pennsylvania Legislature representing eastern suburbs. EPLC is a valuable source of information, workshops, and advocacy for public education.

This is an opportunity for all of us to hear the latest information on state funding for education and think about where LWVGP can play a role in addressing inequities.

UPCOMING UNIT MEETINGS by Maureen Mamula, VP Program



We are going to be looking at Education in both February and March. The February units will be looking at information on “high-stakes testing” to develop a consensus to be presented for adoption at the LWVPA convention. Please read the President's Message on page 2 for more information about the process and links to background information. The consensus questions are on pages 5 and 6 of this *Voter*. There will be a few copies available at the February meetings for a memory jogger as we go through the items. This topic does deal with education, so it will involve some homework for all of us to be prepared for the meetings!

In March we will have a presentation from the Education committee. They have been looking at many issues over the last year and are sponsoring the speaker on January 28th about education funding (see above). The topics the Education committee looks at affect all of us, even if we no longer have children in our public schools. Issues such as student outcomes (I want to be sure anyone who operates on me or a family member was a good student!) and funding sources for the schools (property tax? sales tax? income tax?) affect us all.

Editor's note: Just as I was finishing up this issue of the *Voter*, a link to an interview on NPR about high-stakes testing arrived from Sharon Kletzi, LWVPA Education Specialist. You can find this interview at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2015/01/22/377438689/the-past-present-and-future-of-high-stakes-testing>.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

EDUCATION, FACTS, NOMINATIONS ...



Public Education funding and PA State policy decisions pushed by Governor Corbett played a major role in helping to elect our new Governor, Tom Wolf. Your local League has been engaged with public education issues all along. Our **Education Committee** meets monthly at the Squirrel Hill Library to stay informed. Many of you participate.

One key issue is the role of testing. Testing used to be a teaching tool to see how much each student learned. That's all changed. The pressure and policies now focus on using tests to measure teacher/school district performance to establish pay scales and Federal/State funding formulae. It's an effort to apply business accounting practices to education. It's called High-Stakes Testing. The League doesn't have a position on High-Stakes Testing. *You know the rules: No Position – No Action. We're not at the table for this discussion.*

The issue of High-Stakes Testing is hot and important. We need to be able to take action. LWVPA is determined to meet this need with the adoption of a position on High-Stakes Testing at the June convention here in Pittsburgh. To do that, we have to prove that we can study an issue and come to a consensus quickly. This isn't easy for the largest League in Pennsylvania to pull off.

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The League is a nonpartisan organization whose purpose is to encourage the informed participation of citizens in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

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I HAVE A CHALLENGE FOR YOU. We have to reach consensus by February 18th and we must have your input. Here is the plan:

- ✓ Start now to prepare yourself by reading the excellent study guide that is now on our web site. Go to http://lwvpgh.org/about_action.html and scroll down to the second heading. You will find the study guide, a Q&A about testing now, and a useful glossary of abbreviations.
- ✓ Read the consensus questions prepared by LWVPA on pages 5 and 6 of this *Voter*.
- ✓ Then attend one of the February unit meetings: South Hills 2/5; Central 2/13 or North Hills 2/18.
- ✓ Immediately following the North Hills meeting, the LWVPA Board will develop the consensus submission and meet the LWVPA deadline (February 18).
- ✓ If you can't make it to one of the unit meetings, please send your comments by email to the Community Information Center (Barb Simpson) by Thursday, February 12. Barb will consolidate them so that the board has them for its final consensus deliberation.

Over the years, I've heard lots of criticism of the League's process of reaching consensus because it takes too long and some issues pass by before we can react. We are doing this study quickly to be timely on this issue. *Thank you in advance for taking a bit of time to be a part of it.* There is a lot at stake, including the viability of a public education system.

FACTS FOR CITIZENS – The 2015 issue will soon be off the press. Copies are distributed to municipalities, school districts, organizations, legislators, libraries and realtors. Funding to print *Facts* was contributed by the Laurel Foundation. If you have any recommendations or suggestions for additional locations to place *Facts*, please call Barb at the CIC, 412-261-4284. Be sure to get a copy for yourself. It is a great reference to have at hand.

NOMINATIONS – The Nominating Committee has begun work on a slate for the Board of Directors for next year. Board members are expected to attend 10 meetings per year. This is a working board with responsibilities based on one's strengths and

Continued on page 3.

LWVGP Officers / Executive Committee		Local Area Meeting Chairs	
President	Annette Shimer	Pgh. Central 412-802-7266	Martha Raak
V. Pres. Development	Nancy Naragon	North Hills 412-364-7329	Shirley McIlvried
V. Pres. Program	Maureen Mamula	South Hills 412-760-9642	Maureen Mamula
Secretary	Leagha Courtney		
Treasurer	Preston Shimer	Interest & Service Area Specialists	
		City-County Consolidation	Adelaide Smith
Directors		Death Penalty	Hazel Cope
VOTER Editor / Website	Sue Broughton	Education	Evelyn Murrin
Publicity	Jackie Dixon	Legislature Reduction	Mary Larson
Membership / Leg. Interviews	Judy Donohue	City / Cty & Judicial Reform	Nina Helbling
Health Care / Water Study	Shirley McIlvried	Non-Fiction Book Club	Naomi Frenkel
LWVPA Convention Chair	Eileen Olmsted	Transportation	Barbara Simpson
Voter Service	Rosemary Prostko	National / State Program	Carol Walton
Communications	Nyota Robinson	Immigration / Agriculture	Caryl Beal
Youth Outreach	Sabrina Saunders		
		Staff	
		Community Information Center	Manager: Barbara Simpson
		Marcellus Shale Grant	Manager: Heather Harr
League Phone Numbers, Websites, and Social Media			
Greater Pittsburgh	412-261-4284	pittsburgh.palwv.org	
Pennsylvania	717-234-1576	www.palwv.org	
National	202-429-1965	www.lwv.org	
Facebook	www.facebook.com	Search: League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh	

President's Message, continued

interests. Our League is involved in so many aspects of governance that we need a board made up of members with a variety of interests and skills. Serving on our board is a proven way to keep your brain healthy and vibrant. If you haven't served on a League board, this is the time to do it. Don't be shy. Contact Nina Helbling, committee chair, n_helbling@msn.com or 412-341-4744, who is, by the way, an excellent example of a seasoned League member with a brain that is as sharp as a tack.

Oh yes, I understand that we are in a New Year. Hope it is a happy one for each of you. For the LWV of Greater Pittsburgh, it is going to be an extra-ordinary year – highlighted by hosting the annual convention of the LWV of Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh on June 5 - 7, 2015 at the just opened Hotel Monaco, downtown. We have a talented committee working on the arrangements headed by Eileen Olmstead. See the article on page 7. We are all welcome to participate. Plan on it.

—Annette Shimer

Standing Meetings

Board Meetings

- ✓ Held on the **second** Monday of the month (a change in 2014 from the first Monday)
- ✓ Meet for lunch at 11:30 a.m., place TBA.
- ✓ Meeting: 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. in the LWVGP CIC (office) conference room at 436 Seventh Ave., Suite 350

Local Area Meetings

- ✓ **Pittsburgh Central:** 2nd Friday, 1:30 p.m. at the Squirrel Hill Public Library, 5801 Forbes Ave., Pgh. PA 15217. Bring a bag lunch (optional). Contact Martha Raak at 412-802-7266 or marbiker1@gmail.com
- ✓ **North Hills:** 3rd Wednesday, 10:00 a.m. at St. John's Lutheran Church, 311 Cumberland Rd., Pgh. PA 15237. Contact Shirley McIlvried at 412-364-7329 or howardmciii@comcast.net
- ✓ **South Hills:** 1st Thursday, 12:30 p.m. at the Mt. Lebanon Public Library, 16 Castle Shannon Blvd., Pgh, PA 15228 (unless otherwise announced). Contact Maureen Mamula at 412-760-9642 or mamula159@hotmail.com

Other Ongoing Meetings

- ✓ **Non-fiction Book Club**
3rd Friday, 10:15 a.m. at the Squirrel Hill Public Library. Contact Naomi Frenkel at 412-818-2240 or nf1428@gmail.com
- ✓ **Education Committee**
4th Wednesday, 1-3 p.m., Squirrel Hill Library
Contact Evelyn Murrin at 412-661-3306 or evelynmurrin@aol.com

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2015 CALENDAR

January 28: Education Committee, See article on page 1

February 2015

05 Thu	South Hills Local Area Meeting – Program: Building a consensus on high-stakes testing in our schools
09 Mon	Board meeting
11 Wed	Shale and Public Health Committee, noon-2 p.m., CIC
13 Fri	Pittsburgh Central Local Meeting – Program: Building a consensus on high-stakes testing in our schools
14 Sat	LWV Birthday – 95 years!
16 Mon	Presidents Day
18 Wed	North Hills Local Area Meeting – Program: Building a consensus on high-stakes testing in our schools
20 Fri	Non-Fiction Book Club, Squirrel Hill Library, 10:15 a.m.
20 Fri	Naturalization, Federal Courthouse, 10 a.m.
25 Wed	Education Committee, Squirrel Hill Library, 1-3 p.m.

March 2015

05 Thu	South Hills Local Area Meeting – Program: Issues in education including distribution of state funding
09 Mon	Board meeting
13 Fri	Pittsburgh Central Local Meeting – Program: Issues in education including distribution of state funding
18 Wed	North Hills Local Area Meeting – Program: Issues in education including distribution of state funding
20 Fri	Non-Fiction Book Club, Squirrel Hill Library, 10:15 a.m.
20 Fri	Naturalization, Federal Courthouse, 10 a.m.
25 Wed	Education Committee, Squirrel Hill Library, 1-3 p.m.

**League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Education Position – Update Study
Consensus Questions
High-Stakes Testing in Pennsylvania**

1. Assessment/Purposes/Types (**answer yes/no**)
 - a. Assessments are useful tools to assist teachers in monitoring student progress.
 - b. Assessment information provides a basis for teachers to modify instruction
 - c. Standardized tests are useful for comparing student performance across districts and/or states.
 - d. School funding should be related to standardized test performance.
 - e. Assessments should be designed to align with state adopted, academic standards. No
 - f. State-wide assessments in designated subjects should be mandated to measure student growth.
 - g. Competency or achievement tests like the Keystone Exams should be used as a high school graduation requirement.
 - h. Mandated, competency tests hold schools responsible for providing students what they need to succeed in the workplace and college.
 - i. Proficiency in mandated competency testing gives a high school diploma meaning.

2. PA Core Standards and Aligned Assessments.
In looking at the overall impact of high-stakes testing, would you characterize the following areas (**answer Negative, Neutral or Positive**):
 - a. Student well-being
 - b. Curricular program
 - c. District budget
 - d. Accountability
 - e. Student Achievement
 - f. Instructional Time

3. The Use of Assessment as a Tool to Support Effective Schools and Learning (**answer yes/no**)
The following criteria should serve as a basis for holding schools accountable:
 - a. Test participation
 - b. Graduation/Attendance Rates
 - c. Achievement of all students
Achievement of special populations of students:
 - d. those with disabilities
 - e. English language learners
 - f. those with an economic disadvantage
 - g. Test score performance of students should be a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of teachers.
 - h. Test score performance of students should be a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of administrators.

4. Alternatives to High-Stakes Testing and Accountability (**answer yes/no**)
- a. Student learning should include measures other than standardized tests. Such measurements may include projects, presentations, work products, teacher observation, and class participation.)

Data from standardized tests required by the State are useful in

- b. Holding schools accountable
- c. Comparing student achievement
- d. Finding students who need support
- e. Informing placement decisions
- f. Allocating state funds
- g. Evaluating teachers
- h. Evaluating educational leaders
- i. Promoting consistent content in subject areas

5. Legislation to Reduce Impact of High Stakes Testing (**answer yes/no**)
- a. Legislation and policy needs to be enacted to reduce areas of potential litigation.

Assessments should be modified based on

- b. needs of students with disabilities
- c. needs of students who are English language learners
- d. overall resources of a district
- e. parental rights/discretion

Consequences of mandated, standardized tests should be modified based on

- f. individual needs of learners
- g. funding
- h. parental rights/discretion
- i. superintendent's waiver

Access to individual student records on standardized test data need to be

- j. Available to students/parents/schools/colleges
- k. Available to the employers and the public

From the Nominating Committee by Nina Helbling



The Nominating Committee is now meeting to form a slate of members to fill Officer, Director and Nominating Committee offices. Offices to be filled include 1st Vice-President, Development; Treasurer; and 6 Directors, as well as 3 members for the Nominating Committee. If there is someone you would like to recommend, including yourself, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee. Those people are Jackie Dixon, Barbara Grover, Judy Hale Reed, Sabrina Saunders, and Nina Helbling, Chair. There are a variety of tasks and interests to be addressed such as administrative duties, research committees,

data mining, and voter service work. A slate of nominees must be presented in the April Voter.

LWVPA CONVENTION PLANNING by Eileen Olmsted, Chair, Local Arrangements Committee



Have you been reading the press coverage about the opening of the new Hotel Monaco in downtown Pittsburgh? I hope so because, as you may know, it is the venue for the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters 2015 Biennial Convention on June 5th, 6th, and 7th 2015. If you missed the coverage, check out:

- <http://www.post-gazette.com/business/2014/11/05/Hotel-Monaco-Downtown-Pittsburgh-puts-on-its-finishing-touches/stories/201411050054>,
- <http://www.post-gazette.com/life/dining/2015/01/18/Dine-Pittsburghs-New-Commoner-restaurant-at-Hotel-Monaco-attracts-seasoned-lineup-of-chefs/stories/201501180019>, and
- <http://www.nextpittsburgh.com/city-design/boutique-hotel-monaco-opens-downtown>

The local arrangements committee has been working hard to get things ready for League visitors from all over the state who will be coming for the convention. We have planned sightseeing tours, a Friday night rooftop reception



and Saturday evening banquet and expect that all convention proceedings



will run smoothly. For this to happen, we need lots of willing volunteers to serve as pages, door monitors, hospitality extenders and greeters, etc. Get to see the beautiful Monaco by signing up to help showcase our league and our great city.

Virginia Valentine is handling the recruitment and training of volunteers and is waiting for your call. Please contact her at 412 – 922 – 0529 or ramiev@aol.com.

LWVPA Education Position in Detail

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania supports:

- The establishment of basic goals of education, minimum standards, and criteria for curriculum and teacher evaluation by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- A realistic minimum level of expenditures for all districts set by the state. Uniform expenditures across the state should not be required, and local districts should maintain control of spending by determining local priorities with citizen input.
- A combination of state and local funds to finance the public elementary and secondary schools of the Commonwealth, with the Commonwealth's share being the greater.
- Allocation of state funds based on a specific dollar amount per pupil. Additional funding should be provided based on an evaluation of special conditions in a district, including density, adequacy of the tax base, and the number of students eligible for specific programs.
- Allocation of state funds for special education based on the actual number of students with mental or physical disabilities, the nature of the disability, and the costs of appropriate instructional programs and support services.

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania opposes:

- Tuition vouchers and tuition tax credits for students in non-public schools.

NEWS FROM NATIONAL by Carol Walton



The following is from the LWV Blog on the LWVUS website. It gives us an idea of the LWVUS priorities for 2015.

“2015: Full of Opportunities for League Work and Influence

By: Jessica Jones 12/16/2014

“As 2015 approaches, the League is considering the role that we can play on many of our priority issues. We see plenty of opportunity at different levels of government for good things to happen on League issues. Federally, it’s not just Congress that will be taking action on the issues we care about, as we saw this year, decisions will also be made by the President and agencies of the federal government.

“Here’s a sample of some of the important work for the League in 2015.

“Environmental Defense: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently proposed regulations restricting ozone and methane gases. In addition, the agency will finalize two regulations limiting the amount of carbon pollution from new and existing power plants next June as part of their [Clean Power Plan](#). The League was part of an effort that collected over [8 million comments](#) to the EPA on these regulations throughout 2014. The League will continue to be involved in the finalization of the regulations, the implementation process at the state level and in defending the regulations in the face of opposition in Congress.

“Voting and Elections: In Congress, there is work to push passage of legislation that [restores the Voting Rights Act \(VRA\)](#). A new VRA will ensure that every American citizen, regardless of race or language, has equal access to the vote. The League will continue to push back against bad legislation at the state level that would prevent voters from having access to the polls.

“The League is also interested in seeing the U.S. Senate [fill the vacancies on the Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#). Currently, the EAC has no commissioners and filling the two Republican and two Democratic seats open would restore working order to the EAC. The EAC is vital to ensuring that the right to vote for all eligible Americans is not compromised and that our elections are run efficiently and fairly.

“Healthcare: [The League was a strong supporter of the Affordable Care Act \(ACA\)](#) when it was passed in 2010, and we must continue to fight back in Congress and in the courts against efforts to repeal this important law. At the state and local level, Leagues across the country have continued to [educate the public about open enrollment](#).

“Money in Politics: [The DISCLOSE Act](#), which would ensure that voters know the identity of donors who have been secretly financing campaign expenditures in federal elections, is a key League issue in the 114th Congress. We must also closely monitor other legislation that defines coordination between candidates and outside spending groups, including Super PACs, in order to limit the big money flowing into our elections.

“Outside of action by Congress the League is working to [persuade the Federal Election Commission \(FEC\)](#) to set a stricter definition of disclosure and define coordination between candidates and outside spending groups. We will also continue to provide comments to the IRS as they redraft a proposal that [defines election activities](#) of 501(c) organizations.

“It is clear there will be no shortage of work for the League throughout 2015! Many good things can happen, but it is also clear that there will be defense to be played. The League will be very active at the federal, state and local levels to influence public policy and encourage participation in government on these key issues and many others.”

DECEMBER AND JANUARY ACTIVITIES by Maureen Mamula



Program Planning: We had the program planning potlucks in January at all three units, even though the weather gave us a cold and snowy backdrop. Three members volunteered to host them – Mary Larsen, Judy Donahue and Shirley McIlvried. Attendance was good and we looked closely at the local positions – from the county on down. The state positions were discussed briefly, but most of the attention was on the local positions.

I attended all three potlucks and have to tell you we have some really good cooks in the area!

Thanks to all who attended and also to those who came in December to the meetings where we first looked at the local issues – that helped with discussion in January. A big thanks to those who reviewed some of the local positions and made suggestions in advance of the December and January meetings – including Mary Larsen, Annette Shimer, Barb Simpson, Nina Helbling, Adelaide Smith, Patricia Maxwell, Evelyn Murrin and Ann Winkelstein.

Naturalization Ceremony: The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is represented each month at the judicial swearing in of new citizens. We give a short speech and hand out voter registration forms and Facts for Citizens. The ceremony takes place in the federal courthouse in Downtown Pittsburgh on the third Friday of each month, at 10.a.m. and is about an hour long.

The judges who preside change from month to month, but all view accepting the motion to award citizenship and administering the oath of citizenship as an honor. Frequently, they will reflect on their own family's journey to the US or, as one judge did recently, on her own naturalization. They speak about what opportunities the journey has given them and their families, and wish the same for those becoming citizens.

Each ceremony has a new citizen speaker. The December ceremony had Sean Colligan, who was previously a Canadian citizen. He spoke about the opportunities the US had opened for him. The January speaker was Dr. Archana Bandi, previously an Indian citizen. She also spoke about the opportunities the U.S. had given her but also about how she was able to give back to the U.S. – she is a physician at the Veterans Administration here in Pittsburgh.

It is inspiring to see how excited the new citizens and their families and friends are during the ceremony. The judges frequently ask the new citizens to tell the group what their native country was – there are usually 20-30 countries listed. Children are welcomed to the ceremony too – some of the judges invite them to come sit at the bench or to come up and stand with the judge when the pledge of allegiance is made. The naturalization certificates and flags are handed out and lots of photos are taken by family and friends as they are handed out. It is a wonderful experience. Please get in touch with Barb Simpson in the, CIC 412-261-4284, if you would like to help out or represent the League at a ceremony.

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network

A diverse coalition of 55 congregations and faith-based organizations acting together on our values in the community



- Gun violence reduction
- Jobs and economic justice
- Public transit
- Education
- Civil rights for immigrants

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NON-FICTION BOOK CLUB NEWS

Meetings of the LWVGP Non-Fiction Book Club are held on the 3rd Friday at the Squirrel Hill Library. Please try to arrive at 10:15 so that we can begin our discussion at 10:30. The February selection is

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate, by Naomi Klein

We welcome any and all new visitors and prospective members. For more information, contact Naomi Frenkel at 412-818-2240 or nf1428@gmail.com.

HELP WITH LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS

This is the time of the year when we try to interview our legislators to understand their positions and priorities. Judy Donahue coordinates these interviews. Judy needs a few more League interviewers. Contact her at 412-373-8697 or jrdono@verizon.net if you can interview one (or more) of the following legislators:

- In Pittsburgh, Sen. Jim Brewster or Rep. Paul Costa
- In the south hills, Reps. Dan Deasey Jr., Harry Readshaw or Bill Kortz
- In the north hills, Reps. Frank Dermody, Harold English, Robert Matzie or Mark Mustio (whose district is north and southwest)

NEW MEMBER

Jennifer Sweet-Cushman
40 Huston Road
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734-502-0784

jenniecushman@yahoo.com



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