

EDUCATION

This position was originally adopted in 1979 and included public school finance, funding sources for schools, citizen participation and other concerns. In 1999 the position on charter schools was added and in 2005 the high stakes testing position was added. In 2017, LWVAZ adopted an updated education position.

Public School Finance

The Arizona State Constitution states that the legislature shall enact such laws as shall provide for the establishment and maintenance of a general and uniform public school system, which system shall include: 1. Kindergarten schools. 2. Common schools. 3. High schools. 4. Normal schools. 5. Industrial schools. 6. Universities...and for the care and education for hearing and vision impaired students. The state constitution declares that the revenue for the maintenance of the state's educational institutions shall be derived from the investment of the proceeds of the sale and rental of trust lands and from "appropriations, to be met by taxation, as shall insure the proper maintenance of all state educational institutions, and shall make such special appropriations as shall provide for their development and improvement." (Arizona Const., Article XI, Sec. 10)

As the Arizona Constitution recognizes education's importance, so too does the League of Women Voters of Arizona (LWVAZ) see the importance of high quality education for this state's citizens: 1) to lead satisfying lives, 2) to qualify for the increasingly challenging jobs in today's and tomorrow's economy, and 3) to function successfully as informed citizens of the United States' democracy.

Therefore, the LWVAZ supports funding of a public education system that results in the uniform opportunity for all students to master the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to thrive in a competitive and changing world.

More specifically, the LWVAZ supports the following:

Funding for Quality

- The primary goal of state and local school governing bodies is the achievement of the best quality education for the students in their districts / schools.
- The establishment of criteria for a best quality education for all students must be made prior to determining the formula for the distribution of monies
- The criteria must be based always on current research, thought, and best practices regarding teaching and learning, and other factors impacting academic success such as school readiness, attendance, parent engagement, and enrichment programs beyond the normal school day / calendar year.

Collection of Funds

Funds for education in Arizona are collected through district property taxes and equalized through state income and sales taxes from the State's General Fund. In addition, the League supports:

- Continued use of the state trust land's income from the Permanent Fund Investments. Funds determined through a public initiative or referendum.
- Funds generated through development impact fees.
- Bond and override funds determined by a majority of district voters.

Adequate Funding Formula

The LWVAZ recognizes the inequities of the local school property tax. Therefore, the League supports a state funding formula which provides for:

- Decreased reliance on the local school district property tax and increased reliance on statewide taxes for support of public school education.
- Taxation by the state legislature to support public schools by a simple majority vote.
- An inflation allowance
- A defined basic amount of money for each student.
- Financing over and above the basic amount to ensure equal opportunity for each student.
- Uniform maintenance of buildings.
- Uniform supplies.

- Nationally competitive salaries that recognize strong leaders, as well as experience and quality teaching.
- New monies that do not supplant present state funding.

Distribution of Funds

The LWVAZ supports a uniform distribution of state funds to include:

- Capital funding.
- Additional allocations which are made based on recognition of differences in needs among district schools and between district and charter schools.
- Funds for special needs of students.
- Funds for the entire duration of mandated programs.
- Allocations for social services for students and their families.
- Allocations for safe, adequate and reliable transportation separate from base maintenance and operation support.

Fiscal Accountability

- All schools using public funds, including public charter schools, will be held fiscally accountable and will be held to same standards of transparent operation that ensure fiscal accountability.
- The district and charter school budget format should call for specific information, such as program detail, salary schedules, and capital improvement programs

The LWVAZ opposes tax “credits” and funding schemes that divert and distort the distribution of funds intended to ensure a quality education for all children in Arizona public schools.

Therefore, the LWVAZ opposes vouchers to private schools, tuition tax credits, waivers, or direct payments to parents for school expenses of their children (as in Empowerment Scholarship Accounts). Public funds should be used only for public schools.

Local Participation in Decision Making & Distribution of Funds

The LWVAZ supports the principle that the governmental entity closest to the school district constituency can best make decisions that will enhance the equal educational opportunity for all students. Therefore, the League urges these policies:

- The state distributes funds uniformly to public school districts and charters, and sets minimal general educational guidelines without inhibiting local decision making.
- The state will maintain a policy of local control on spending decisions, including ability to bond for school renovation and for capital improvements, as well as measures to equalize the ability of school districts to finance those portions of their budgets for which they are responsible on the local level.
- Local district and charter school governing bodies determine how funds are allocated in school budgets.

The LWVAZ, always encouraging responsive government and informed citizen participation, believes that citizen participation is essential, in the district and charter school budgeting process. Therefore, the League supports the following:

- Advisory committees open to all citizens in the school community that provide citizen input into the district and public charter school budgetary processes.
- Timely citizen input into the district or public charter school budgetary process that allows for informed citizen influence on the allocation of funds in the budget.

Public Education Instruction

Academic Assessments

The LWVAZ believes that no single assessment should be the deciding factor for graduation from high school. Therefore, the League supports a diploma being awarded to students who satisfactorily complete their course work.

The LWVAZ supports the use of district, state and/or other government-mandated assessments for the following purposes:

- Identifying and alleviating students’ academic difficulties in a timely manner;
- Identifying necessary changes in curriculum, methods, and materials.

The LWVAZ believes it is important for district and/or statewide assessments to be well-crafted, meaningful, and well-matched with the Arizona Standards.

Therefore, the League supports the following:

- Utilizing Arizona K-12 educators to develop and write the questions for district and/or statewide assessments and educators from institutions of higher learning to evaluate these tests in their areas of expertise.
- Validating the tests to be sure they reflect the Arizona Standards and appropriate grade level academic proficiency.

If state and/or government-mandated assessment testing is required for high school graduation in Arizona, the League recognizes that provisions need to be made for those who fail. Therefore, the League supports retesting students who fail required state and/or government-mandated assessment(s) during their high school years.

Curricular areas not specifically tested or required as part of state and/or government-mandated assessments (such as vocational/technical/career education, visual and performing arts, social studies, science, health and physical education) shall be encouraged and shall not be curtailed.

Charter Schools

The LWVAZ acknowledges that charter schools are public schools that are privately operated. Therefore, the League supports the following for charter schools:

- Provide charter schools more initial direction as they are started and organized, and continued oversight to comply with legal requirements.
- Hold charter schools to the same high standards as all Arizona public district schools.
- Charter schools that close must provide proper and timely notification to students' parents/guardians, as well as plan for an orderly transfer of students to an academically appropriate alternative. Further, charter school operators must return property purchased with state funds and return any unspent state funds that have been appropriated from the Arizona General Fund.

With respect to Charter Schools, the LWVAZ also has the following concerns:

- Funding for charter schools may negatively impact funds available for public district schools.
- Charter schools may not be utilizing standardized sequential curriculum.

Additional Education Policies & Practices:

The LWVAZ supports the following policies and practices that relate to public district and charter schools:

- All public schools should be permitted and encouraged to innovate. They must be allowed flexibility on class size, length of school day, teaching techniques, and special subject focus (such as science, the arts, technology).
- All public district and charter school teachers must be certified by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) as "well-qualified".
- Annual and equitable academic evaluation of charter and district schools should occur.
- The ADE should be sufficiently staffed to ensure student achievement is properly monitored in both public district and charter schools.
- The school curriculum for both public district and charter schools must comply with standards set by the Arizona State Board of Education.
- School ranking must not be based solely on test scores.
- Public information about public district and charters schools must be accessible to all.
- An efficient system of tracking students as they move between schools/participate in open enrollment or other school choice options must be developed and adopted.
- School districts should be reorganized only if doing so will enhance the education of all students in the reorganized districts.