

League of Women Voters of Montana Education Position Update Study Guide

Before the Meeting to Prepare for League Membership Discussion: Please read the materials included in the Table of Contents of the Education Briefing Materials email and consider the questions listed at the end of each Working Group paper.

Discussion Questions for League Membership Meeting on Education Issues in Montana:

General School Funding – Discussion Time 5 minutes

- 1.) What are the benefits to a society of a well-funded quality public education system?

Teacher Licensure, Supply and Accreditation Issues – Discussion Time 5 minutes

1. Do you believe the preparation of teachers is important for the provision of a quality education that teaches people how to be part of our democracy? How do you feel about the relaxation of teacher certification standards in order to fill teaching vacancies?
2. Is a starting salary in the low \$30,000s a year is sufficient to attract college graduates with student loans to pay off? (We are 51st in the nation for starting salaries, and 42nd for average teacher salaries, including Puerto Rico). Should districts in high growth areas where housing is problematic receive an adjustment in funding allocations? How do you suggest dealing with the lack of housing in rural areas?

Special Needs Education Savings Accounts and Tax Credit Programs – Discussion Time 10 minutes

1. Do you believe all schools or organizations receiving public funds should be accountable for and provide public academic and fiscal outcome reports and should comply with state curriculum and teacher certification standards?
2. Most of the recipients of assistance from these programs in other states were previously attending private schools. Should public tax dollars flow to families who can already afford private schools?
3. Do you believe these programs will increase or diminish stratification by race and class? Why or why not?
4. Funds from the Innovative Educational Tax Credit Project went to less than 10% of the schools in the state in the 2024 school year. What does equity in education and in funding education for Montana youth mean to you?
5. Is a \$200,000 per taxpayer tax credit a fair way to finance preK-12th grade education for students in the state?

Funding of Public Education in Montana – Discussion Time – 10 minutes

1. Do you believe Montana’s current system of funding education, including the two tax credit programs and special needs savings accounts outlined in the materials, meets the League’s position of “efficient, equitable, and accountable financing of public education, with the state funding its share of the cost.”
2. Does the current financing system support “a high-quality basic education?”
3. Reflecting on the impact of ESAs, vouchers and tax credits in other states such as Arizona and Indiana, and Montana’s existing struggle to staff classrooms with qualified teachers, should Montana be diverting public funds to be used for private education, preschool through 12th grade?

Discussion on Proposed Changes in LWV MT education position – Discussion Time – 15 Minutes

The proposed changes to the existing Montana LWV position on education are below. The existing position is in black ink. Proposed changes are noted **in red ink**. NOTE: This position update deals primarily with funding issues for Montana’s public preschool through 12th grade education system. The Working Group did not address broader education issues such as curriculum and book banning.

Please discuss the proposed changes, and determine whether League members concur with the proposed changes or not. Please have a League member take note which parts Local League members agree with, and which parts if any they do not and the reasons why, and send these notes to nancleifer@gmail.com

The current position is in black ink. The suggested update language is in **red ink**.

LWV Montana position on EDUCATION,

To promote efficient, equitable, and accountable financing of public education, with the state funding its share of the cost.

Position In Brief:

To promote efficient and equitable financing of public education, with the state funding its share of the cost, and to provide a basic education, beginning in early childhood, which produces graduates with critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematical skills and **an understanding of democracy and how government functions**.

The League of Women Voters of Montana supports:

1. **Remove:** The existing structure which governs and funds the public school system of the state. **Insert instead: A structure of public schools for preschool through 12th grade, governed and funded by the public.**
2. That structure should provide:
 - That the state fully funds a high-quality basic education **for all**;
 - That the state fully funds state-mandated services;
 - That equity of funding and equity of taxpayer effort be primary goals.
3. Preschool Education for all children in the state of Montana.

We oppose programs that directly or indirectly divert public funds to private educational programs by any means, for example tax credits, vouchers and education savings accounts.