



Accountability in Education Point of View Article from League of Women Voters
Education Action Team
For Public Release
January 30, 2019

As the General Assembly convenes, its 2019 session, the League of Women Voters of North Carolina is encouraged to learn that there is an effort to enact more meaningful and consistently applied accountability systems for publicly supported schools across North Carolina. Such action would both serve the students of North Carolina and protect the investment of public monies. Currently, accountability measures, are unevenly applied to public and private schools, with voucher supported programs being virtually free from all educational accountability requirements. This, despite the fact that \$55 million of public monies are allocated this year alone to the NC voucher program; an amount slated to increase significantly.

The League position on public education includes “holding all schools and entities that receive public funds to the same educational and transparency standards as traditional public schools.” Similarly, the recently released Public School Forum of North Carolina’s annual analysis of priority educational issues calls attention to the need for standards and accountability to be applied evenly on behalf of all students. Given that vouchers are currently part of NC law, applying consistent standards makes sense.

Leaders charged with protecting and promoting the public interest- now and into the future - owe it to our children and our communities to ensure that whether a child attends traditional public school, a charter, or a private school receiving voucher funds, she/he is assured of an education that is grounded in high quality standards; one documenting steady growth and allowing for acceptance to an array of diverse universities, colleges, technical programs and promising careers.

Our current system of accountability, especially with respect to voucher funded education, fails children and taxpayers. The need for a remedy is highlighted by the 2018 LWV study, “NC Private Schools Receiving Vouchers: A Study of the Curriculum”. This review found that more than three-fourths of schools receiving vouchers in North Carolina use a curriculum in the Sciences, History, Government, and Literature, that is not accepted by major universities and which educators criticize as lacking academic rigor and critical thinking, as well as having serious errors and omissions. (ACSI, et al., v. Roman Stearns, et al.)

When presented with a copy of this report in spring, 2018, legislators and members of the public expressed surprise at the findings. Such a reaction was troublesome for everyone,

including legislators committed to both doing right by all children and acting as responsible guardians of public monies. Unfortunately, lacking substantive information due to absent or less than transparent accountability requirements, it is impossible for legislators, parents and taxpayers to fairly assess educational programs and schools and to make informed decisions.

We have heard the argument that application of quality accountability standards across all public and private programs and sites is not possible. We do not concur; just because a task is challenging does not mean it should be forsaken. Nor should poorly designed systems be maintained out of expediency, frugality or deference.

There is no excuse for delay. Models for and components of next generation accountability and reporting systems exist. For example, The Children's Law Clinic of Duke Law School study on the "Opportunity Scholarship Program" offers a number of recommendations for all participating schools. Use of such research, along with already existing high quality curriculum standards embedded in North Carolina frameworks, provide a foundation for this work.

Education is no less critical than medicine to the well-being and health of individuals and our democracy. As potential patients we would never presume to write surgical practice standards; a task best left to medical experts. Our legislators have access to education professionals and scholars who are well versed in current research about learning, curriculum, instruction and assessment- key dimensions of educational accountability systems. Such experts should comprise the majority of any team charged with studying and updating accountability policies and practices. To assign this task to others, no matter how deep their concern for children, is irresponsible.

Responsibility is reciprocal; in addition to urging legislators to undertake this work, we encourage educators to be proactive and persistent in reaching out to advise and guide elected officials in the updating and even application of accountability standards and practices. We also call on voters to insist that, as long as public monies are involved in support of education, all programs and instruction be grounded in high standards, evenly applied to everyone and fully transparent.

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