

## EDUCATION

### Position in Brief:

The League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA) believes that K-12 public schools are the foundation of our democracy because public schools are open to all children, prepare students to become active citizens, and are financed by elected representatives who formulate policy.

The League supports a challenging curriculum, high expectations of students and teachers in mastering that curriculum, and appropriate assessments of student achievement for a quality education in the public school system K-12. In addition to the core disciplines of English, mathematics, science, history and social sciences, essential curriculum elements are listed under Part I: Quality Education below.

The League supports professional education for principals and teachers and on-going staff development; class size appropriate to instructional goals; a safe environment for students and staff; discipline with preventative programs and a consistently enforced, well-defined system of rules; guidance counseling for academics and support services; and parental and community support and involvement. The League also supports all qualified students' having equal access to opportunities to select a specific program or school based on a system of equity.

The League supports state funding for public schools that ensures a high-quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children, including

- Full funding for the Standards of Quality (SOQ) and other state and federal mandates;
- Increasing the state's share of education costs;
- Identifying and adopting a school funding model or formula for operational costs that—after adjusting for local cost factors—guarantees a funding stream that will allow all school divisions to offer programs and services at equitable levels, regardless of local funding capacity;
- Funding for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs for all children; [\[See the LWV-VA childcare position.\]](#)
- Increasing state capital funding to ensure that all students go to school in buildings that are safe, healthy, accessible, and conducive to a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment;
- Improving the operational funding formula for determining local ability to pay, using it as a basis for distribution of state education funds.

To support this priority, the LWV-VA believes that public money should go to public schools. Any K-12 school programs that receive public funds should be required to meet certain standards and criteria for their approval: administration, accountability, oversight, transparency, nondiscrimination, assessment, fiscal management, and operations.

- LWV-VA opposes public funds going to private schools and decreasing revenue for public schools.
- LWV-VA opposes tuition tax credit and voucher programs that provide scholarships to private schools.
- LWV-VA opposes private profit-making providers of K-12 schools and providers.
- LWV-VA supports following the extensive regulations in the 2018 Virginia Code for the establishment and oversight by public schools of public charter schools and virtual online programs provided by public schools.

- LWV-VA supports expanding Virginia’s Standards of Quality to include minimum standards for school construction, renovation, and maintenance to ensure that all students go to school in buildings that are safe, healthy, accessible, and conducive to a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment.

The League supports amending the 1970 Virginia Constitution to include language that will legally require the General Assembly to ensure a high-quality education for all students, not just “seek to ensure” such an education, as the 1970 language states. The language proposed for the amendment is as follows:

Article VIII. Education. Section 1. Public schools of high quality to be maintained.  
*The General Assembly shall provide for a system of free public elementary and secondary schools for all children of school age throughout the Commonwealth, and shall ensure that an education of high quality is established and continually maintained.*

### **The League’s History**

Support for public education is a cornerstone policy of the LWV-VA. Even before founding the Virginia League in 1920, women suffragists were early champions of education for all children – despite the reign of Jim Crow. Lila Meade Valentine, a founder of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, helped start the Richmond Education Association, which “raised funds for a new high school, founded programs to train kindergarten teachers, called for better training and higher wages for all teachers, and created initiatives to help poor white and African American students receive excellent educations” (“Lila Meade Valentine,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*).

For almost 50 years, League concern about how Virginia funded its public schools prompted studies and League proposals for change. The 1970 Constitution states that Virginia will “seek to ensure that an educational program of high quality is established and continually maintained.” The state committed to funding Standards of Quality (SOQ) and to sharing the cost with local governments; however, the General Assembly has historically refused to fully fund the SOQ recommended by the State Board of Education. When local Leagues studied their own school systems, they questioned whether the formulas to distribute the state monies were fair. In 1979, a LWV-VA study of financing education in Virginia was adopted. The 1991 convention adopted a new statewide study on Financing Public Education. Improving the formula for determining local ability to pay and using this formula in the distribution of all state school funds was one of the League’s positions. The League also supported increasing the state’s share of education costs as most of the cost for public education continues to be financed by localities.

In 1997, the convention approved a study “of the essentials of quality education, including alternatives, initiatives, vouchers, charters, contracts, etc., in the public schools.” The study coincided with new state legislative and administrative initiatives to improve the quality of public schools in Virginia.

In the 1999-2001 biennium, the LWV-VA Board recommended a review of current state positions which combined the Financing Public Education and the Education positions. At the recommendation of the LWV-VA Board, delegates to the 2018 LWV-VA Council approved an update on School Choice detailing the League’s position that charter schools funded by tax

dollars should be part of the local school system and that no public funds should go to private schools.

In 2021, Virginia faced a \$25 billion backlog in school construction needs as well as widespread concern about significant gaps in funding between wealthier urban schools and the state's rural and inner-city schools. The League 2021 convention approved a statewide study of Education Equity in Virginia. That study found that education funding in Virginia was both inadequate and unequal. Leadership in both parties has failed to fund high-quality education for all students. The LWV-VA adopted the following education position at its 2023 convention.

### **The League's Position**

The LWV-VA supports the goal of a high-quality K-12 public school system because it is the foundation for our democracy.

- Public schools sustain democracy by being open to all children regardless of their family's wealth, ethnicity, religion, or other factors.
- Public schools serve the public by preparing students with the intellectual skills to become active citizens who can exchange ideas, prepare for discourse, respond to ideas, and work across differences to make freedom-oriented decisions and to maintain our government.
- Public schools are financed by elected representatives who formulate policy.

The LWV-VA believes that state funding for elementary and secondary public schools should ensure a high-quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children. In order to accomplish this goal, the League supports amending the 1970 Virginia Constitution to use language that will legally require the General Assembly to fund a high-quality education for all students, not just "seek to ensure" such an education, as the 1970 language states. The language proposed for the amendment is as follows:

Article VIII. Education. Section 1. Public schools of high quality to be maintained.  
*The General Assembly shall provide for a system of free public elementary and secondary schools for all children of school age throughout the Commonwealth, and shall ensure that an education of high quality is established and continually maintained.*

### **Part I: Quality Education**

The LWV-VA believes the following elements are essential to quality education in the K-12 public school system: Challenging curriculum, high expectations of students and teachers in mastering that curriculum, and appropriate assessments of student achievement. The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) merely establish minimum standards for student achievement; they do not include all of the knowledge, skills, practices, and understandings students should be expected to learn.

The following elements of the curriculum are essential:

- Four core disciplines: English, mathematics, science, and history/social sciences;
- Art, music, physical education, health, and foreign languages;
- Analytical skills, application of knowledge and decision-making, collaboration, planning, problem-solving;

- Application of learning to relevant life experiences in further education, work, and leisure activities;
- Technology integrated throughout the curriculum;
- Strong remedial programs implemented at the earliest indication of a student's academic weakness;
- Special offerings for at-risk and gifted students and educational programs for students with special needs, using specified minimum standards;
- Education for students with limited English proficiency, in which emphasis is placed on teaching English, while other course content is presented in English;
- Career and technical education.

The LWV-VA believes that the following are important elements of quality education in the K-12 public school system:

- Professional education of principals and teachers and on-going staff development; class size appropriate to instructional goals;
- A safe environment for students and staff that includes discipline, providing preventative programs and a well-defined system of rules that are consistently enforced;
- Guidance counselors for academics and support services;
- Parental and community support and involvement;
- Opportunities to select a specific program or school based on a system of equity so that all qualified students have equal access (2003);
- Incentives, recognition, and awards for both students and teachers (1999).

A quality education today also requires school buildings that are safe, healthy, accessible, and conducive to a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment. To accomplish this, Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ) should be expanded to include minimum standards for school construction, renovation, and maintenance to ensure that all students go to school in buildings that meet those standards, regardless of where they live (2023).

## ***PART II: Funding***

The LWV-VA believes a high-quality public school system is only possible with the full support of the state. The actions below will help provide that support.

### Fully Funding the Standards of Quality (SOQ)

- The General Assembly should fully fund the SOQ as determined and prescribed by the Board of Education and state mandates as a minimum requirement for ensuring Virginia's students a quality education. The SOQ should be updated regularly, including regional hearings and public comments.
- Virginia's investment in K-12 public education should be comparable to other similarly wealthy states.
- Virginia must support competitive teacher and staff salaries and benefits to develop and maintain a high-quality workforce in Virginia's schools.

### Local Funding

- Localities should invest in the costs of education based on their capacity; the General Assembly should increase the state's share of the costs of education.

- The General Assembly should identify and adopt a school funding model or formula for operational costs that—after adjusting for local cost factors—guarantees a funding stream that will allow all school divisions to offer programs and services at equitable levels, regardless of local funding capacity.
- The General Assembly should allow localities, with voter approval, to tax themselves for school construction (2023).

Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten Funding [\[See the LWV-VA child care position.\]](#)

- The General Assembly should provide state funding for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs for all children.

Other General Assembly Funding

- The General Assembly should fully fund the actual costs to local school divisions of state and federal mandates that are not included in the SOQ.
- Virginia must change its long-time position and accept that fiscal responsibility for the construction and maintenance of safe and up-to-date public school facilities for Virginia's PreK-12 student population is a state obligation as well as a local obligation. Therefore, the General Assembly should provide state funds to local school divisions for capital outlay, using an improved measure of local ability to pay and prioritizing educational need.
- The General Assembly should commit to financing school capital costs/construction using grants, low-interest loans, bonds, and other mechanisms and should increase and should prioritize using Literary Fund money for school infrastructure.
- The General Assembly should continue funding a share of the employer costs in local school budgets for Social Security, retirement, and group life insurance.

***PART III: School Choice***

The LWV-VA believes that K-12 public schools should prevail as the highest priority for school choice in Virginia because public schools sustain democracy by being open to all children, serve the public and prepare citizens to maintain our government, and allow the public to exchange ideas and participate in decision-making and vote on school governance and school policy.

The LWV-VA believes that public funds should go to public schools, not be diverted to private schools, including religious schools. All publicly-funded schools must uphold federal and state non-discrimination law, including but not limited to requirements in the ADA, IDEA, FAPE, ESSA, and Titles I, VI, and IX. In order to prevent re-segregation, publicly-funded schools must ensure equity of choice and access for all students, regardless of income, disability, or other factors and must require proper and effective student retention processes to prevent easy removal of problem students. Publicly-funded schools must require an unbiased student selection process.

The LWV-VA believes that any programs that provide public funds for school choice options (such as charter, lab, and virtual schools) should be required to meet standards and criteria for approval, funding, and operation. As of 2018, these were the League's positions on school choice options or proposals:

- LWV-VA opposes any type of program that decreases the revenue for public schools or expands school choice beyond the Virginia Code 2018 parameters.

- LWV-VA opposes vouchers, tuition tax credits, educational savings accounts, and any other unconstitutional (VA Constitution Article VIII, Section 10) mechanisms that divert public funds to private schools and schooling, including religious schools.
- LWV-VA opposes private profit-making providers of K-12 schools and providers.
- LWV-VA supports holding these charter, lab, virtual, and other alternative schools accountable to the same standards and criteria for approval as other public schools, including accreditation and oversight by local school boards and the Department of Education, as well as enforcing the extensive regulations in the 2018 Virginia Code (§ 22.1-212.5 through § 22.1-212.16) for the establishment and administration of public charter and virtual schools. This should include well-maintained facilities, monitored fiscal management, and a method to assess student achievement that is supervised by and reported to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Teachers should be credentialed and qualified; adequate student-to-teacher ratios must be maintained.

#### ***Part IV: Equity and Advocacy***

The League's position is that "state funding for elementary and secondary public schools should ensure a high-quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children," regardless of where they live. Therefore, the League supports amending the 1970 Virginia Constitution to use the following language that will legally require the General Assembly to fund a high-quality education for all students, not just "seek to ensure" such an education, as the 1970 language states. The language proposed for the amendment is as follows:

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The LWV-VA should continue to educate the public about the benefits of high-quality public education, to develop partnerships with other interested state and national organizations, to advocate actively for improved and more equitable school funding, to combat misinformation, and to promote positive narratives about our schools.

*Revised June 4, 2023 by the LWV-VA Convention*