

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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LWVSC POSITION ON PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

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Brief Background

In the fall of 2007, a task force of educators, policy makers and child welfare advocates appointed by the SC Superintendent of Education to examine options for public school funding adopted the following guiding principle:

"All children in South Carolina should have access to a quality educational program that is adequately and equitably funded, no matter where those children live, where they go to school or what their needs are."

Report of the Task Force on Funding for World Class Learning,
submitted to State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex

The above statement succinctly sums up the long-held position of LWVUS and LWVSC regarding public education. With recent changes in SC tax law regarding public school funding, media scrutiny of the performance of SC students on standardized tests, and public awareness of the federal No Child Left Behind initiative, the time is ideal to make public education a priority with your representatives in the SC General Assembly.

What You Should Know

1) The Education Finance Act of 1977 (EFA) established a formula to determine the minimum funding level sufficient to provide every student with a "minimally adequate education." The State provides each school district with a portion of this base funding. Although subsequent legislation has added further resources, the formula for calculating per pupil allocation is outdated, inequitable and insufficient to meet the needs of today's students. South Carolina can no longer be satisfied with a "minimally adequate education."

2) EFA requires that each school district contribute funds according to the district's assessed property values. Historically, school districts in SC have raised funds through the real property tax. But in 2006, public school funding in South Carolina changed dramatically with the enactment of the SC Property Tax Valuation Reform Act (A388). The intent of A388 is to provide homeowners with some relief from rising property taxes. It does so by removing the ability of school districts to collect real estate tax from homeowners, effectively placing the primary local source of revenue off limits. Beginning in 2007, the state retail sales tax increased by a penny and the state became responsible to distribute the revenue from that increase to the school districts. Initially, it replaces school operating taxes on homeowners. After the first year, the replacement revenue increases based on the inflation rate and population growth. The share going to a school district will depend on its share of the school population.

Tell Your Legislators

Now that the State has assumed responsibility for funding public education, it is up to the General Assembly to assure that resources are sufficient to provide the opportunity for every student to receive a quality public education. LWVSC urges you to support legislation in this session to undertake a comprehensive review of state education fiscal policy and make recommendations for reform. Aid to public schools should be part of a coherent funding system in which:

- Formulas for allocating state fund are aligned with actual costs of educating children to high standards.

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- State funding is stable, timely and predictable. The state fully funds state-mandated expenses, e.g. teacher benefits, charter school allocations. The greatest resources are targeted to the areas of greatest need. Local jurisdictions have the flexibility to meet indigenous needs and allocate resources.
- The state takes more responsibility for funding school construction.

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