

**LDC League Consensus Statement**  
LWV/LDC Study on Federal preK-12 Policy  
Adopted November 10, 2011

**Part I: General Questions**

1. The current role of the federal government in public education is

a. Much too small.

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

- Government should expand funding without unreasonable mandates.
- We view No Child Left Behind and Race To The Top as including unreasonable mandates.

**RATIONALE:**

- US aid is needed because state funding is too small. Antitax forces keep the states in line based on interstate competition.
- Education is a right which the feds should help guarantee.
- US incentives are needed for pre-K, longer school year, action on urban core education.

2. What should be the role of the federal government in public education? (Rank)

a. To ensure that all students preK-12 receive a quality education.

d. To monitor state efforts for funding.

b. To develop accountability measures that will study the progress of all students so that they achieve adequate yearly progress.

c. To mandate Common Core Standards for all students K-12.

e. To measure teacher effectiveness through test data.

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

- Item a addresses pre-K, school year, race, social class, and poverty.

**RATIONALE:**

- We are actively opposed to c and e.
- Test data are counterproductive when used as indicators of teacher effectiveness, even on a value added basis.

## Part II: Common Core Standards

3. A quality public education is important to perpetuate a strong and viable democracy.

a. Strongly agree.

### ASSUMPTIONS:

- This goal should drive education policy over and above economic goals.

### RATIONALE:

- Good citizens understand the world they live in.
- Democracy requires a well-educated citizenry..
- Universal education will not happen without government mandates and funding.

4. Currently the governors and state education officers have developed Common Core Standards that are national but not federal. Should the standards be mandated of the states in order to obtain federal funding? (Choose one)

e. None of the above.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

- a. Special grant programs such as Race to the Top.
- b. All programs under Elementary and Secondary Education Act where the needs qualify for funding.
- c. All programs receiving federal funding from any source.
- d. All of the above.]

### ASSUMPTIONS:

- We do support federal funding assistance for development and adoption of Common Core Standards.

### RATIONALE:

- Adopting CCS is needed to achieve a modest degree of educational uniformity across and within states.
- Most states have already done so.
- Trying to reform states like Texas from outside is a waste of political energy.

5. Should there be a national assessment aligned with the common cores standards?

Yes.

If Yes, Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated? (choose one)

1. Voluntary.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

2. Mandated.
3. Mandated, if fully funded.]

If No, what other accountability measures might you suggest? (choose one)

1. Continue to allow the states to develop their own assessments.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

2. Suggest that the local education districts use their own assessments or adopt one that is a nationally norm-referenced assessment such as the *Stanford Achievement Test* or *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*.
3. Suggest that districts use a portfolio type of assessment where student projects and activities would be scored holistically.]

ASSUMPTIONS:

- The feds should provide specific funding incentives for national assessment.

RATIONALE:

- There is a need for valid interstate comparisons.
- There is a need for interstate uniformity in core standards, and assessment encourages uniformity.

6. National standards should lead to: (choose one)

c. A suggested structure for states and local education agencies to develop their own curriculum.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

- a. A nationally mandated curriculum to be aligned to the national standards and assessments.
- b. A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated.
- d. No national curriculum.]

ASSUMPTIONS:

- We support having multiple national model curricula.

RATIONALE:

- Curriculum should reflect a response to local conditions such as ethnic background, local industry and history, teacher skills.
- There is no scientific basis for a single “best” curriculum.

7. What role should the national assessment consortia play in student evaluation? (Rank order)

a. Provide an assessment system that is aligned to the Common Core Standards.

d. Provide information to students, parents, teachers and school districts about student achievement.

- c. Provide criteria for determining readiness for college and careers.
- b. Provide comparison data showing progress toward reaching Common Core Standards.
- e. Provide diagnostic information on each child.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- We are actively opposed to b, c, and e.

RATIONALE:

- Readiness for college and career is not a good general criterion. Not all students have mapped their life at age 18, nor is it the purpose of K12 education to serve short term interests of employers. What students need is a general basis for continued learning.
- Diagnostic information makes the tests too long, yet is inadequately focused on local curricula.
- Comparison data are not valid.
- Used as a policy tool, annual progress data lead to counterproductive policies.

8. Data from the national assessments are often difficult for parents, teachers and others to understand. If we have a national assessment, what information is most important to be reported to parents, teachers, students and the community? (choose one)

b. Data should be “criterion referenced” and clearly informative so that teachers, parents, and students know how individual students have mastered criteria established at a national level.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

- a. Data should be “norm referenced” (where students are ranked) for district comparison only.
- c. Data should be used to determine “cut” scores knowing if students have mastered requirements for special grade levels.]

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Norm referencing of data can’t be prevented.

RATIONALE:

- Norm referenced data don’t answer the right questions, such as whether an average student is learning what needs to be learned.
- Cut scores on a national assessment have no valid uses and plenty of negative effects.

9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to (Choose one):

e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

- a. Sanction schools not measuring up to the specific levels.
- b. Reward schools that achieve high scores.
- c. Rank teachers based on student test score data.

d. Reward teachers who have exemplary scores.]

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

- We are opposed to *requiring* national assessment.
- We are actively opposed to a, b, c, and d.

**RATIONALE:**

- Peer community comparisons create an appropriate political incentive to improve education.
- Grading students on a single national test is harsh and somewhat random. It biases curriculum choices and encourages “teaching to the test.”
- Incentivizing teachers and school districts based on student scores is unscientific and has perverse consequences.

**Part III: Funding and Equity**

10. In the past most of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding has been non-competitive based on need. All/Any schools that prove they fall under the federal guidelines for funding receive those funds. However, competitive grants are now being proposed to states/districts who meet certain federal requirements, such as Race to the Top. Which would be appropriate: (choose one)

b. A combination of non-competitive and competitive grants

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

- a. Non-competitive funding for all applicants meeting requirements.
- c. Competitive grants only.
- d. No federal funding.]

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

- Competitive grants would be used only in very limited situations having to do with experiments or demonstration projects, not as program incentives.

**RATIONALE:**

- The purpose of grants is to accomplish equal opportunity all across the US, not merely in successfully competing districts.
- Competitive programs tend to reward the local districts that have the least need for assistance.

11. If the federal government's role is the concern of the "common good" then: (choose one)

b. Mandates and funding should both be provided.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

a. Mandates only should be sanctioned.

c. Funding should be provided through grants only.

d. A combination of funded mandates and grants should apply.

e. No mandates should be required and limited grants for innovation available.]

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Indeed, the federal government's role should reflect a concern for the common good.
- Funding and mandate programs would have different goals. Mandates mainly address student rights to equal opportunity, while funding mainly addresses tax base inequity.

RATIONALE:

- Some unfunded mandates such as racial and gender equity are justified by Constitutional civil rights, or by principles equally basic and universal.
- Some funding not directly related to mandates is justified by inequities in tax base that make it difficult to comply with mandates.
- Some funding for mandates is justified by the need to reimburse local government for policy initiatives based on national decisions.
- Some mandated programs may be partially but incompletely funded because local governments benefit from the programs and because they are justified on grounds of equal opportunity.

12. Equity in public education means equitable access to: (Rank order)

a. high quality teaching/learning.

b. adequate and current learning materials.

c. clean and well maintained physical facilities.

d. food and health care.

e. safe and secure neighborhoods.

f. secure housing.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- No matter what the ranking is, school systems would be expected to take a broad view of their own responsibility for helping to provide resources.

RATIONALE:

- All of the listed resources are necessary for the educational success of students.
- The rank ordering reflects two considerations:
  - degree of criticality for, or immediate connection with, the educational process, and
  - capability of the school system to provide this resource.

- School systems have a significant capability for affecting all of these resources except housing.
- School systems should not be allowed to use poverty as an excuse for failure, but those districts with disproportionately high poverty need federal assistance.

13. Currently Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding is considered “categorical” rather than for general use. This means that it can only be used with special populations for special purposes. ESEA should remain targeted toward poverty and special needs.

Strongly agree.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Pre-K as such would be viewed as a “special need.”

RATIONALE:

- Practically speaking, federal education funds are likely to be undersupplied in the foreseeable future. It follows that they need to be targeted to areas of highest need.
- Because of lack of a critical mass of affected families at the local level, special needs populations are especially likely to be shortchanged in local political decisions.

14. The federal government has a role in supporting early childhood education, birth to 5, for all children?

Strongly agree.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- The role would include both mandates and funding.

RATIONALE:

- Pre-K education is critically important for later academic and non-academic success.
- Middle class families typically provide moderately good substitutes for pre-K, but poor families typically do not.
- The states have failed miserably to provide adequate pre-K programs.
- Tax base competition makes it very difficult for state and local governments to initiate new pre-K programs on their own.

15. Federal support for early childhood education programs (e.g. Head Start, Title I, Special Education, Early Start) should include funding for parent education and support regarding child development, child health and nutrition, and access to other supportive services, such as mental health as needed.

Strongly Agree.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Federal support for pre-K would be conditioned on supplying services.

RATIONALE:

- The listed resources are necessary for successful pre-K education.
- Typically those resources are least available to populations that need them the most.
- School systems should not be allowed to make excuses for failure based on absence of these resources.

b. This funding should be extended to:

Special needs first.

[NOTE: items not chosen were:

All children.

Only those with special needs.]

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Even though federal funding would not be universal, the services would be universally available where needed.
- Targeting would not be used as a major barrier to service provision wherever needed.

RATIONALE:

- Given a likely penuriousness of funding at all levels, some targeting seems needed.
- Targeting is always harmful to some degree, but the harms can be mitigated.

#### **IV. ADDENDUM: Comments on the study structure and questions**

1. The questionnaire focused on solutions without first diagnosing the problem. We think the LWV education policy needs a preamble stating explicitly what the major problems are.
2. We believe that:
  - a. There are two main symptoms of educational system failure:
    - i. K-12 schools produce excessive numbers of poorly-educated students with high drop-out rates, mainly concentrated among minority groups and the poor
    - ii. As a result, average scores of American students on standardized assessments are generally below those of the countries we compete with.
  - b. There are three leading factors causing these educational failures:
    - i. poverty and minority group problems external to the education system, inadequately compensated for by the system
    - ii. the short school year, as compared with other leading countries.
    - iii. intervention from political and ideological forces outside the education professions: many politicians have a false understanding of successful education as based on a commercial model motivated by money and producing simply defined outputs, rather than on a service model motivated by professional dedication and producing complex outputs that are hard to measure.
3. The questionnaire could have done a better job of addressing the trade-off between increased federal funding and increasingly overbearing federal mandates. The LWV education policy needs to support higher preK-12 funding while resisting the counterproductive ideological mandates.