

Minutes

Full Membership meeting of League of Women Voters of Brown County

Consensus Questions on High Stakes Testing

LWVIN Educational Study 2015-2017

January 25, 2017

Present: Laura Hammock, Tim Clark, Judy East, Heather Nicholson, Clint Studabaker, Mary Perez, Jeanne Lager, Julie Winn, Pam Raider, JoAnn Himebaugh, Casthy Rountree, Marge Cook, Janet Kramer, Shari Frank, Robyn Rosenberg-Bowman, Bill Todd, Jan Swigert, Linda Todd.

Julie opens full membership meeting by reading both the League State and US positions that all children deserve full education. The purpose of this meeting is not to vote on position but to discuss questions until come to consensus as a local league. As an introduction Julie reads her father's valedictorian speech on education which iterates the purpose of education is to produce citizens who are able to read and understand their responsibilities as citizens.

The membership hears opening remarks from our school superintendent, Laura Hammock on her experience on school testing. The subject is complex and there is a place for accountability however the tools being used are not giving the data needed to make appropriate changes. In her opinion ISTEP is not working – it is static, time consuming and results are not timely often a year later. There is another test NWEA (North West Educational Assessment) which is learner based as you answer questions the test determines the next appropriate question for the student based on their level of understanding. This test is an option for Indiana. This test gives better data is cheaper to administer and the quality of the data is better. It is based on national basis grade level across nation. Several of the questions on ISTEP require young students to be savvy with the computer which requires extra teaching about technology not what students know. Furthermore ISTEP does not help the teacher evaluate where the student is on spectrum, whereas NWEA helps to inform the teacher what to teach next to each student. Apparently there is a difference between summative or formative evaluations. Furthermore we learn that charter, private and home schooled children who receive tax money do not have to do testing.

We begin discussion of the consensus questions.

- 1) For what purpose should State of Indiana require testing of children – individual progress, compare child's score to peers, adjust and improve instruction, evaluate teachers, evaluate schools or other? The group reaches consensus that all these points are important but not to the same degree. Several would replace the wording comparing child to scores of peers to comparing child to grade level standards. Testing should be expanded to include all students receiving tax monies.
- 2) Who should be responsible for selecting tests – State legislature, staff at Indiana Department of Education, State Board of Education, educators employed in school corporations, committees of parents and school board members, or other? Discussion ensues that perhaps legislature is too politicized the Department of Education does not have a full body of experienced educators on board. Parents and local school boards are most often not qualified as educators to select tests.

Rather than having boards or political entities select required tests should be personnel involved in educational process – need to have Staff of Indianan Department of Education involved.

- 3) How frequently should individual students be require to take tests and should it be random sampling? Group felt summative tests such as ISTEP should not be given at all but formative testing which informs the teacher of student’s progress could be done up to three times a year. ISTEP requires 1 ½ weeks to administer each time whereas the NWEA requires only 9 hours.
- 4) How much time should be subtracted from regular instruction for testing? Depends on what kind of testing – ideally no extra time would be devoted as the tests should be testing grade level understanding.
- 5) What provisions could insure all children are tested fairly – timing, learning styles, language, special education, socio-economic, factors, rural vs urban, available technology, students’ computer skills? All children using tax money should be tested equally. All criteria are important however not all schools have equal technology available – schools should have option of paper and pen tests not just computer – local special educational teams should evaluate how many children actually qualify for special needs testing – the state should not artificially limit how many children get what tests.
- 6) What role should mandated test results have in evaluating teachers? Currently salaries are attached to testing which has led to all kinds of problems – Teacher evaluations tied to testing has led to top heavy administrative costs and extra work. Evaluations are not doing their jobs – even failing schools have good teachers. Formative tests provide real time children’s progress would want some evaluative influence but not total evaluation. Teachers need to be given resources, tools and support encouragement to be effective.

Pam Raider

Secretary

League of Women Voters of Brown County