

What's Going On in Virginia?

An Update on LWV-VA Program Committees, With Focus on “Public Funds for Public Schools”, AKA School Choice Task Force

By Sherry Zachry, based on LWV-VA School Choice Task Force Reports from Carol Noggle, Chair

The LWV of Virginia (LWV-VA) Program for 2017-2019, adopted at the 2017 Convention in Leesburg on June 11, was ambitious. In addition to the LWV-VA positions contained in the April 2017 edition of POSITIONED FOR ACTION (with newly adopted Hydraulic Fracturing position), it included:

- 1) a Study Committee to conduct a **major update** of the **LWV-VA Mental Health** position, now known as Behavioral Health, covering substance abuse, group homes, court orders to place mentally ill in treatment facilities instead of jails, and broader services of the VA Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services;
- 2) a Task Force to update the **LWV-VA Women's Rights and Virginia Law** position based on current laws; and
- 3) a Task Force to research pros and cons of **charter schools, vouchers and other school choice** options in Virginia, which became known as the “School Choice Task Force.”

Status Update on Three Teams

LWV-VA Program Director Anne B. Smith wrote the following in the April *Virginia Voter Express* summarizing the status of the three study groups:

The Women's Rights Study has reviewed the Code of Virginia and confirmed legislative progress made since the position was adopted. That Team will be meeting again in the next several weeks to work on drafts of findings and positions.

Both the Behavioral Health and Schools studies are complete. Each has opted for the concurrence alternative and is prepared to seek action at Council in June.

The Behavioral Health study has been circulated and the Team warmly welcomes input from Local Leagues by April 15. Comment will be carefully considered in finalizing the report for distribution in the Council package.

The Schools Task Force has also completed its work and materials were sent to Local League Presidents for review and to share with League members. *(Editor's note: We are doing that here; read on.)*

School Choice in Virginia, From the “Public Funds for Public Schools” Task Force

The LWV-VA School Choice Task Force (aka “Public Funds for Public Schools”) is requesting a concurrence at LWV-VA Council, June 2018, to update the meeting of the LWV-VA Education Position, with additional text to cover areas of school choice, tuition tax credits, vouchers and virtual schools. The information presented here comes mostly from Task Force Chair Carol Noggle's letter to the LWV-VA

Board in which she proposes that the LWV-VA Education position be expanded through the concurrence process. She will attend the May 5, 2018 LWVFA Briefing and At-Large meeting to lead the discussion. Discussion questions are designed to elicit members' reactions and feedback. Although the wording of the proposed concurrence is set (once it is approved by the Board), suggestions on how to implement it can be passed along to the LWV-VA Council. The difference between the consensus and concurrence process is briefly covered later. The Task Force provided charts and resources to back up its proposed wording; some of them are included here, but most are furnished as separate documents

The current LWV-VA Education position (adopted in 2003) addresses school choice options with only one statement (see POSITIONED FOR ACTION, 2017 for complete wording): “Support opportunities to select a specific program or school. These opportunities should be based on a system of equity so that all qualified students have equal access.” In 2003 charter schools were only starting to be authorized in Virginia so the LWV-VA Education Position does not address that type of public school choice.

After considerable research, the School Choice Task Force concluded that the Education position needs to be supplemented with specifics on Virginia school choice options, which currently can result in public funds going to private schools. They analyzed the parameters, funding, and administration of Virginia's charter schools, tuition tax credit programs, virtual (online) schools, and proposals for voucher programs to determine the impact on public school funding and the level of quality of the private schools and private resources that receive the public funds. They

acknowledge that there may not be adequate overview of the policies and qualities of the private schools such as for protection of rights, accountability, accreditation, transparency, discipline measures, student retention rates, achievement, and curriculum.

The research also determined that the Virginia Charter School regulations are very extensive and that there is a wealth of information on the Virginia Department of Education website making it possible to analyze and monitor these **public school** choices. Only eight charter schools currently exist in Virginia.

However, previously unbeknownst to the Task Force members, Virginia has an “Education Improvement Scholarship Tax Credit” Program (EISTC) that allows taxpayers to donate to Scholarship Foundations that provide scholarships for students in certain approved **private schools**. Thus, public funds are going to private schools. Virginia does not have a “voucher” program for private education but legislation for one is regularly proposed. Legislation to expand virtual schools by profit-making companies that would receive public funds has also been proposed.

Additionally, as they extensively researched the types of funding provided to Virginia’s K-12 public and private schools the Task Force realized that 2018 legislation would need to be scrutinized and potentially opposed. Indeed, they quickly discovered that legislators were proposing bills that would provide more funds for private schools with tuition tax credit programs, vouchers and virtual schools (online learning).

While analyzing and monitoring these bills and those regarding new charter school laws carefully, the Task Force’s chief goal was to assure that state funds (primarily general revenue collected as taxes from taxpayers) are directed to public schools, not to private schools, as prescribed in our Virginia Constitution. Their study provided specifics on the methods some legislators used to provide **public** funds for **private** schools.

With the support of and dependence on collaboration with advocacy groups, the bills were defeated. Carol states that it is apparent there are guardians of public schools in both the House and the Senate and the League is indebted to the advocacy groups who could speak to the specific legislation that purported to use public money for private education

Following is the 2018 school choice legislation that the LWV-VA School Choice Task Force examined with

explanation and final results.

Did 2018 Legislation Send Public Funds to K-12 Private Schools?

1. Tuition Tax Credits Educational Improvement Scholarship Tax Credits (EISTC)

*Note: The EISTC program allows taxpayers to receive a 65% tax credit and charitable donation deductions when they donate to a Scholarship Foundation that provides scholarships to certain students at approved **K-12 private schools**. Currently the program targets families with incomes at or below the 300% Federal Poverty Level, or 400% of the Federal Poverty Level for families with children with disabilities. The scholarship amounts cannot exceed the SOQ amount provided for each student in school division where the student resides. The average per student is about \$4,600 to \$4,700.*

Several bills to expand the EISTC program were proposed.

- **SB869** would have expanded eligibility to students with an IIP (Individualized Instruction Program) who are attending a school for students with disabilities, and significantly increase the allowed scholarship amount by 300% for those students. Thus, an average state fund amount of \$5,000 would be increased to \$15,000. It passed in the Senate 21-19, but the House directed it to Appropriations because it had to have specific appropriations passed by the General Assembly first. It was then left in House Appropriations.
- **SB172** would have expanded eligibility to Pre-K children in a **nonpublic** pre-K program. The grant would not exceed the state share of the local Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The bill passed the Senate but did not survive the House Finance Committee with an 11 to 11 tie vote.

Some of the EISTC bills proposed by Delegates that were withdrawn or failed:

- **HB221** was similar to SB869. **HB395** would have actually increased the scholarship amount 400% and to as much as \$26,000 for a student with an autism spectrum disorder.
- **HB1165** would have expanded eligibility to Pre-K nonpublic students but also failed in House Finance by a vote of 11 to 11.

2. Vouchers Parental Choice Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

- **HB1286** would have allowed parents to apply for local school division per pupil SOQ funds to be used for their child’s education-related expenses wherever they wanted **outside of the public school system**.

The estimated fiscal impact was \$394,200 for just the first year start-up costs. This bill was heard only in an Education subcommittee where it was defeated with a vote of 4-4. The 2017 bill passed in the House and Senate but was vetoed by the Governor based on noncompliance with the Virginia Constitution.

3. Virtual Schools (online learning programs):

- **HB1504** would provide for all public and home-schooled high school students to enroll in **Virtual Virginia**, the public online learning program, free of charge. It had an unusually long journey after once defeated but then was amended by striking the free-of-charge portion. After passing in the House the Senate amended it to require that the home-schooled students pay tuition. The House rejected that and sent the bill to a conference committee after which the House rejected its recommendation.
- **HB521** and **HB831** to expand online learning options failed also.

4. Charter Schools

- **SB 516** proposed Regional Charter School Divisions that would have a board that could approve applications for charter schools without approval from the Virginia Board of Education or by a local School Board in those divisions. The Senate Education Committee passed it 8 to 7, but the Senate Finance voted 16 to 0 not to approve it this year.

The following chart (see next page) gives current options for school choice in Virginia and illustrates how public money can flow to private educational entities.

While tracking the legislation, it was clear to the Task Force that LWV-VA's current position does not contain enough content on charter schools or current private-school funding mechanisms to provide an extensive, clear and readily available rationale (pros and cons) for crafting advocacy statements on legislative proposals in Virginia. The LWVUS education position in IMPACT ON ISSUES (2016-2018) states opposition to vouchers and to tuition tax credits, but it is not specific to Virginia legislative proposals

Without specificity in the aforementioned areas, the League will be hindered in developing effective advocacy on future school choice legislation. Therefore, the Task Force proposed that the LWV-VA Education Position be supplemented with language and guidelines in four categories: 1) **Charter Schools**--support public charter schools; 2) **Tuition Tax Credit** program--oppose this program and any expansion; 3) **Vouchers**--oppose vouchers, (*aka* Parental Choice

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs); 4) **Virtual Schools** (online classes)--support public school providers and oppose profit-making providers.

Further, the Task Force proposed five **Principles for Public Schools**, based on Sarah M. Stitzlein's publication, *American Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens*, Oxford Press, 2017 and her article at <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/09/06/how-to-define-public-schooling-in-the.html>. (See sources.)

1. Public schools should prevail as the highest priority for school choice in Virginia.
2. Public schools sustain democracy by being open to all children.
3. Public schools serve the public and prepare citizens to maintain our government.
4. A public school system allows the public to vote on school governance and school policy.
5. Public schools allow the exchange of ideas and participation in decision-making.

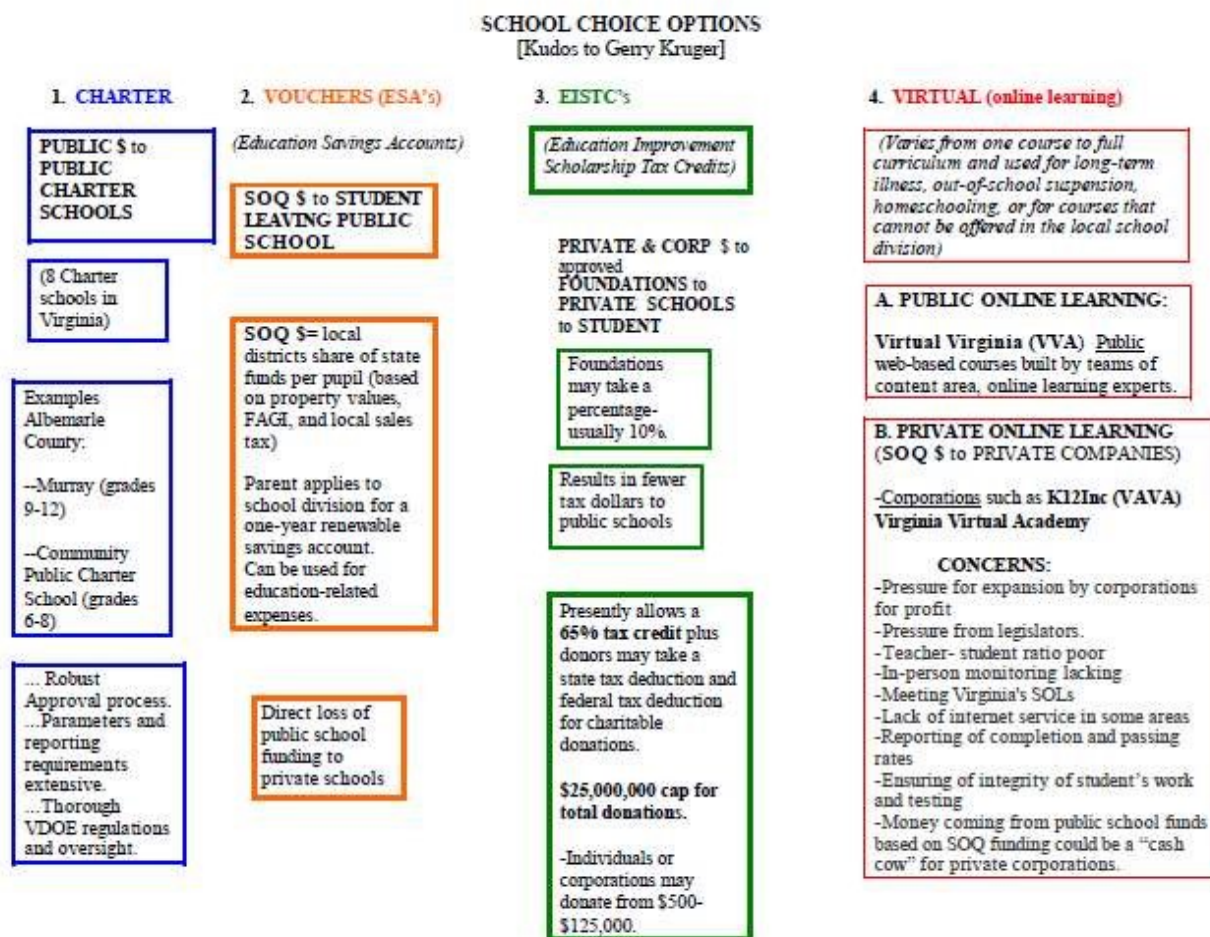
The Task Force also suggested specific criteria and guidelines to be added to the LWV-VA Education position as **Part III. School Choice Options: Standards and Criteria**. The Concurrence Statement contains the complete wording to be added to the position.

The following is what the LWV-VA Board approved on April 3, 2018, to go to the 2018 Council for adoption by the delegates. All of the following text would be added after **PART II** of the LWV-VA Education Position as **PART III**.

LWV-VA EDUCATION POSITION--Concurrence 2018 Proposal to add the following language as Part III :

PART III: School Choice Options: Standards and Criteria

- A. The League of Women Voters 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.
 - Allow the public to vote on school governance and school policy. and
 - Allow the exchange of ideas and participation in decision-making. (2018)
- B. The League of Women Voters believes that Public Funds should go to Public Schools, **not** to Private Schools.
- C. The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that any programs that may provide public funds for



school choice options should be required to meet certain standards and criteria for approval, funding, and operations.

(NOTE: text in italics is for explanation only and will not be part of wording of position.)

1. Charter and Virtual Schools - NOTE: **All** Virginia Charter Schools ARE Public Schools.

- a. Require (the elected) Local School Board authorization for establishing a Charter School *.Include methods for public input.*
- b. Require local monitoring of administration and management as in current (2017) VA law.

2. All School Choice Option Requirements

- a. Fair and legal funding (No Public funds shall go to sectarian schools.)
 - i. Require separation of church and state (*See U.S. and VA Constitutions.*)
 - ii. Oppose unconstitutional ESAs aka Vouchers that would allow public funds for private sectarian schools. (*See VA Constitution Article VIII, Section 10*).
 - iii. Prohibit for-profit operations and profiteering.
- b. Nondiscrimination
 - i. Uphold Federal civil rights laws.
 - ii. Uphold Virginia non-discrimination law:.
(Shall not discriminate against any individual

The status, in 2018, of the League's approval for current school choice options or proposals are these:

1. Charter Schools: Support the current (2018) extensive regulations in the Virginia Code for establishment and administration of these Public schools.
2. Tuition Tax Credit Programs: Oppose this type of program, oppose any expansion from the current parameters (2018), and support limits to decrease the loss of revenue for public schools.
3. Vouchers: Oppose vouchers aka "Parental Choice Education Savings Accounts" (ESAs).
4. Virtual Schools: Support Public School Providers with the current regulations and oversight by the Department of Education and local public school administrators. Oppose profit-making providers.

D. Standards and Approval Criteria for School Choice Options

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that these standards and criteria should be required:

- on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services: Virginia Charter School Law).*
- iii. Ensure equity in choices (e.g. transportation problems can limit participation by low-income students.)
 - iv. Require a non-biased student selection process such as a lottery, or by criteria for the special purpose of a school option, such as by need, or ability, or at or below a certain Federal poverty level (FPL) percentage.
 - v. Prevent re-segregation. (*Analysis available; see “Controlled choice” (Brookings, TCI.2 Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/06/23/integrating-charter-schools-and-choice-based-education-systems/>)*)
- c. Standards for School Climate
- i. Require proper and effective student retention process. (*Prevent easy removal of problem students that would return a student to public school.*)
 - ii. Require proper and fair discipline policy (e.g. “Classroom not Courtroom”).
 - iii. Provide health and safety measures; follow laws.
 - iv. Provide “positive,” “proactive” role in meeting needs of children.
- d. Accountability/oversight/transparency. (*See [NCSL National Conference of State Legislatures.](#)*)
- i. Require proof of well-maintained, monitored financial/fiscal management system.
Show proof of fiscal soundness and budget accountability:
 - (a) Annual audit by independent, licensed accounting firm with no personnel from receiving agency/individual.
 - (b) Tracking in the budget of designated gifts.
 - (c) Tracking of public money in the budget by line item.
 - (d) Require board of directors of agency receiving funds to be legally responsible for ensuring that all funds are used as designated.
 - ii. Require open meetings and public access to records.
 - iii. Evaluate periodically with minimum frequency established.
 - iv. Report attendance often; track students’ participation and completion of program.
 - v. Assess student achievement in all schools and report to Virginia DOE.
- vi. Establish method and parameters for closing, discontinuing or denying recertification.
 - vii. Comply with Federal requirements (e.g., ADA, IDEA, Titles I, VI, IX, FAPE, ESSA; FAPE: 2010 <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>)
 - viii. Notify parents, prior to enrollment, of any loss of rights protection (e.g. for students with disabilities; see Government Accounting Office ([GAO](#)) report and Council Of Parent Attorneys and Advocates ([COPAA](#)).
- e. Credentialed and qualified teachers; Personnel support
- i. Maintain adequate number of personnel (both brick-and-mortar and Virtual).
 - ii. Provide Human Resource quality (employee pay, benefits, grievance process).
 - iii. Provide a fair pay scale; incentives to succeed not based on monetary bonus.
 - iv. Require continuing professional education and re-certification.
 - v. Require substantial initial mentoring of teachers.
 - vi. Require background checks.
3. Virtual Schools – Public, charter, and private
- a. Require robust Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) oversight, accreditation, and accountability (*Multidivision Online Provider [MOP Guidelines at VDOE](#)*)
 - b. Require best student/teacher ratio (Need to define “best” that is effective; standard 150:1 or better).
 - c. Require in-person monitoring of testing (for validation, accountability, reporting).
 - d. Require method to determine actual time at computer, to prevent signing-in and leaving.
 - e. Assure integrity and purpose of providers – motive must not be for profit. (*Note that private MOP lobbyists and private companies have donated to members of Virginia Education Committee members.*)
 - f. Require counseling that meets the Virginia Standards for Academic, Career, and Personal/ Social School Counseling
 - i. Academic counseling that assists students and their parents to acquire knowledge of the curricula choices available to students, to plan a program of studies, to arrange and interpret academic testing, and to seek post-secondary academic opportunities.
 - ii. Career counseling helps students to acquire

information and plan action about work, jobs, apprenticeships, and post-secondary educational, and career opportunities;

- iii. Personal/social counseling that assists students by developing an understanding of themselves, the rights and needs of others, how to resolve conflict, and to define individual goals reflecting their interests, abilities and aptitudes.

g. Require records and reports of amount of teacher's instruction and assessment time.

- h. Assure fair funding statewide. (*Payment to MOP based on per pupil Standards of Quality (SOQ) of student's resident jurisdiction; not the current practice that pays the MOP based on the school jurisdiction where the MOP establishes itself.*)

4. Non-Public schools that receive specific public funds

a. Assure that a Tuition Tax Credit program is well-managed. *Virginia currently has a tax credit scholarship program: Education Improvement (EISTC.) LWVUS opposes Tuition Tax Credits.*

b. Assure that a Tuition Tax Credit program is not a fiscal detriment to public schools.

c. Limit or oppose the VA Education Improvement Scholarship Tax Credits Program (**EISTC**).

d. Consider lowering EISTC annual donation cap and/or lowering the percent credit allowed.

e. Prohibit private schools receiving public funds from using the funds for religious training.

f. Prohibit establishing *Educational Savings Accounts* (ESA).

i. Vouchers, or voucher-like funding for individuals cause local school loss of state funds.

ii. LWVUS opposes vouchers.

(*See opposition statements by National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) and The Commonwealth Institute (TCI)*)

The School Choice Task Force provided extensive documentation, created from their research, along with a comprehensive list of sources and resources used, to support the foregoing proposal. These and other resources will be provided to the May unit discussion leaders and are posted on the LWVFA website (www.lwv-fairfax.org) on the May Unit Meetings page, under Events tab.

In her letter to the LWV-VA Board Carol Noggle (cnogg@comcast.net) acknowledged help and support from the members of the "Public Funds for Public Schools" Task Force who are members of the following Local Leagues: Charlottesville Area (CVA), Fairfax Area (FA),

Fredericksburg Area (FRE), Montgomery County (MCVA), Prince William Area (PW), Richmond Metro Area (RMA), and South Hampton Roads (SHR).

Also, gratitude for significant support goes to these helpers:

- Michele Kellerman, LWV-CVA for documents from the 2003 study
- Geraldine Kruger, LWV-CVA for creating school choices chart
- Virginia Cowles, LWV-RMA for school choice documents from LWVUS Convention in Dallas
- Lois Page, LWVFA for documents from LWVUS Convention in Dallas
- Ryan Brimmer, Counsel for the House Education Committee, for sending PowerPoint presentations made to the committee
- Meghan Dorsett, LWV-VA, for outstanding maps for PowerPoint presentations and websites.
- Dr. Todd Dathje, VDOE, for data of EISTC Scholarship Foundations, scholarship award amounts per student, and lists of private schools receiving scholarships.
- Chris Duncombe, The Commonwealth Institute, for data from Dept. of Taxation re: EISTC donations; , and analysis of legislation related to Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits.
- Holly Coy, Virginia Deputy Secretary of Education, interview regarding EISTC and Virtual Schools.
- Jean Pierce, LWVIL, interview about development of their Position and research on charter schools, and her encouragement for us to move forward on research for our Position.

A word about the League concurrence process

As mentioned above the Education Concurrence Statement approved by the LWV-VA will be considered by the delegates at the 2018 Council for adoption (along with any other proposed concurrences approved by the Board) by voting for or against the concurrence. So, let's explore a League position updated or formed by concurrence versus a position updated or formed by consensus.

The current LWV-VA Concurrence Policy (adopted July 2013) states, in part:

Concurrence is the act of agreeing with or concurring with a statement or position. A decision-making technique used by the League for some time, concurrence can work in several ways. Groups of League members or League boards can concur with (1) recommendations of a resource committee, task force, members or unit group; (2) decision statements formulated by League boards; or (3) positions reached by another League or Leagues. (*League Basics* 9-17.)

The revised LWV-VA Bylaws, adopted at the 2013 Convention, expanded the process by which concurrence can be used to adopt or amend program. *See Article X, Sec 3.* This change recognized the fact that the LWV-VA has many support positions which are due for updates, and which can most likely be achieved through a concurrence process. The new bylaws open the process of proposing and adopting updated positions while retaining the oversight of the Board and role of the membership. *(Specific process follows in the Policy.)*

Note that the LWV-VA Bylaws govern the timing and process used to achieve concurrence at Council or at a Convention (a concurrence can be adopted at either meeting). Changing the bylaws in 2013 allowed for a “Board recommended” concurrence to be adopted at Council (not previously stated as a function of Council) which can speed up the process for updating a position. Both processes require research and presenting a report based on the research to back up the conclusions.

If a position is updated through the *consensus* process, feedback **first must be solicited from the membership** who give input to the respective League Board of Directors by answering consensus questions about the topic. The new or updated position statement is then formed (by the Board) based on that feedback, this can take up to two years.

In a *concurrence* the committee or task force proposes the new wording for a positions, and/or sections to be added to an existing position, to the League Board in **one complete statement**. Once approved by the Board the wording of the concurrence statement *cannot be changed*. Members are asked approve the entire statement as a whole (or not) at the convention or council. This considerably shortens the time needed to write or rewrite the position since feedback starts at the committee level and goes to the Board without individual member consensus input being gathered first.

So we can expect proposals to update one or more LWV-VA positions with new language to be presented as concurrences at the 2018 LWV-VA Council. We look forward to your comments about using this method to update the Education positions, with the understanding that once approved by the Board there is little room for individual member input. It is a “yes” or “no” vote by the delegates. It can be an efficient way to update positions as long as everyone agrees with the outcome! We will discuss in May and then see what happens at Council in June.

Discussion Questions

1) “Public School Principles” included in Concurrence statement (and connection with democracy).

What do you think about the “Public School Principles” in the concurrence statement? Do you think these principles should be part of the LWV-VA Education position?

Do you think a robust democracy depends on high-quality public educational systems?

2) Charter Schools

Should the requirement that charter schools not charge tuition be continued and supported? Should the requirement that Charter Schools not charge tuition be an exception?

Should a charter school continue to be managed by a local management committee and not by a for-profit entity? (CMO is nonprofit, EMO is a for-profit entity.)

Under what added conditions (such as other authorizers) should charter schools be approved, e.g. Regional School Boards? Explain.

Do you think that charter schools should be open to any child residing in his/her respective school division? Should a lottery process for enrollment continue to be used? Is it the best process? Does it give equal access to charter schools for all students?

Do you think revenue sources for charter schools should be the same as non-charter public schools in the same jurisdiction? Should donations be allowed?

Other than the foregoing categories, would you change anything else in the current Virginia legislation regarding charter schools?

3) Tuition Tax Credits / Vouchers

Can you think of any circumstances where public funds should be allowed to flow to private educational institutions?

What do you think of the EISTC and ESA programs that are currently allowed?

4) Virtual Schools

What do you think of charging tuition to home-schooled students to use Virtual Virginia?

Do you agree with the statement: “Virtual Schools (Online Learning Programs or “CyberCharterSchools”) should be operated by nonprofit entities with robust state requirements

for Authorization, Regulations, Standards, Accreditation, Administration, Academic Achievement methods and Reporting. (Similar to current Charter School requirements)? Should they ever be operated by for-profit entities (if receiving public money)?

Do you agree that “Virtual School” funding should be based on actual costs rather than the same level of SOQ funding provided to brick-and-mortar schools?

5) What do you think about the League concurrence process and the education concurrence in particular?

The League at the UN

The LWVUS sent 20 delegates to the United Nations in mid-March 2018 to attend the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62). The CSW is the largest annual gathering at the UN of individuals interested in pursuing initiatives for gender equality. This year, 4,300 representatives from 600 civil society organizations plus 170 Member States (nations) attended. Annual participation is trending upward and suggests the leverage of NGOs in holding governments accountable for improving and accelerating the pace of reform for gender equality.

Historically, CSW has researched the status of women globally and formulated international conventions targeting the elimination of discriminatory laws affecting women and girls. This year CSW62 focused its programs and deliberations on the needs of women and girls living in poverty in rural areas throughout the world.

The end result of the two-week session was the publication of the AGREED CONCLUSIONS. This document was adopted by the participating Member States. It identified action steps to lift rural women and girls out of poverty, ensure their human rights, and promote their resilience. The challenges facing rural women and girls are exacerbated by armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, and adverse impacts of climate change. And yet, we must meet these challenges and lift rural women and girls out of poverty because their well-being and success is essential to sustaining the development of our world. The following concrete steps, articulated in the AGREED CONCLUSIONS from CSW62, are necessary to empower rural women and girls:

- Adopt reforms that eliminate discriminatory laws prohibiting women's access to land ownership and inheritance rights.
- Accelerate progress toward closing gender gaps in secondary and tertiary education in rural areas.
- Reduce the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work burdening rural women and girls.
- Ensure that rural women participate equally in household

and community decision-making as a means of ensuring women have access to decent jobs with equal pay for work of equal value.

- Provide access to safe drinking water, clean stoves, sanitation facilities, and internet connectivity as beginning steps toward developing essential rural infrastructure and technology.
- Step up investments and access to financial services for women farmers as a means to ensure their food security and nutrition.
- Provide universal health coverage and recognize the need for rural women and girls to manage their own sexual and reproductive health.
- Accelerate actions to end all forms of violence against women, including the elimination of child marriage and female genital mutilation.

We must leave no one behind. Your contribution to the work of the LWVUS at the United Nations is requested. Please let me know of your interest in learning more about the work of the UN Observers and delegates to the annual Commission on the Status of Women. Email me at UN@lwv-fairfax.org

By Jill Follows, *UN Observer for LWVUS and member LWVFA*

