

INSIDE the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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Fall 2011

What Should Be the Federal Role in Public Education?

The tenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Education does not appear as one of those “delegated” powers but it has assumed increasing importance at the federal level and the LWV of the US supports a range of federal education programs. Delegates to the League’s 2010 convention approved a new study of the federal role which will focus on core standards and questions of equity in funding. LWVNYC will address these issues at two meetings in our “LUNCH WITH THE LEAGUE” series.

Education Discussion and Consensus

[Part One - Wednesday, October 19, 11a.m. - 2p.m.](#)

Part Two - Wednesday, November 16, 11a.m. - 2p.m.

4 West 43rd St. (check in at 1st Floor lobby)

\$10 - Lunch included

Background information and consensus questions are included in this newsletter.

Fall Calendar of Events

Tuesday, October 11 th , 1pm	LWVNYC Board Meeting (<i>all members welcome</i>)*
Saturday, October 15 th , 5-7 pm	LWVNY State Wine Tasting Fundraiser 21 Norman Drive, Rye, NY (<i>for details call (518) 465-4162</i>)
Wednesday, October 19 th , 11am	Consensus on Federal Role in Education (Part One)*
Tuesday, November 15 th , 5:30 pm	LWVNYC Board Meeting (<i>all members welcome</i>)*
Wednesday, November 16 th , 11am	Consensus on Federal Role In Education (Part Two)*
Wednesday, December 14 th , 11am	Visit of LWVUS President, Elisabeth MacNamara*

**At League office, 4 West 43rd St.*

Watching the Board of Elections

In 2010, after many years of advocacy at the Board of Elections, the League welcomed the arrival of the new optical scan voting system which called for secure, recountable paper ballots at all polling places. For the most part, voters adapted to the change from the mechanical lever machines without difficulty but some old problems continued and new ones arose. Complaints focused mainly on the design of the ballot and the small size of the type; other issues were related to the inadequate training of poll workers and the vote-counting methods adopted by the Board of Elections. We hoped there would be improvements this year but problems continued, even with the small number of races and votes cast in the special elections on September 13. Our concerns were included in a letter to the editor of the New York

Times and testimony before a committee of the City Council.

An editorial in the *Times* on September 17 called attention to the “overly complicated counting process” which delayed the reporting of the votes cast in the special elections and “invites human error.” In response, **Kate Doran, chair of the City Affairs Committee** and an election specialist, wrote: “The NYC Board of Elections’ insistence on manually transferring computer-generated election results to paper ‘returns of canvass’ is another example of the Board’s resistance to sensible change. We believe it is unreasonable to insist that law requires this archaic process when counties outside of New York City have adapted their return of canvass practices while complying with the

same state law.

“Copying results onto paper is not only redundant,” she wrote; “it invariably leads to mistakes because poll workers have to manually enter names of candidates and add up votes by hand. The League supports a process which would accept the tapes printed by the optical scanners as the ‘Return of Canvass’ for purposes of announcing preliminary vote totals.”

The letter also included our support of split shifts for poll workers, who now are required to be on the job for sixteen hours. Half-day shifts are permitted under a 2010 amendment to the State Election Law but the Board of Elections has refused to consider this option, even as a pilot project.

Highlights of testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations Evaluating the Board of Elections’ Performance in the 2011 Primary Election. Presented by Kate Doran.

Many voters experienced confusion on Primary Day because they did not know whether there was an election in which they could participate. This could have been averted if sample ballots were available online and the League congratulates the Board of Elections for its commitment to implement this important innovation in time for the November 8 election.

On and after the September 13 elections, the League’s Telephone Information Service received many calls from voters who had difficulty reading the small type on their ballots. This was a major complaint last year and we were surprised that it reappeared since the small number of contests allowed space for larger type. In 2012, voters will again be faced with multiple candidates to fill a number of offices and the small type size must be addressed before those ballots are printed. State legislation to require more user-friendly design of ballots is the goal of a City Council resolution which the League supports.

On the basis of her experience as a poll site coordinator, Kate noted the need for changes in the Board of Elections use of its Standby Pool of poll workers and improved training of all workers: “The paper ballot optical scan system can run smoothly with fewer employees than in the old lever days but the scanners and ballot marking devices take longer to set up and inspectors now have more time-consuming responsibilities. Late arrival of poll workers means late opening of polls, and inadequately trained inspectors translates into unacceptable service to voters...It is long past time to revamp the training, and it makes sense to couple new training procedures with split shifts on Election Day.

In summary, we encourage the Board of Elections to embrace the 8-hour work shift; develop a transparent sensible Standby system for poll workers; and use the scanners to do the things that they can do faster and more accurately than humans: count and record votes.

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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Message from the President



LWVNYC President,
Miriam R. Adelman

Welcome to a new and exciting League year!

I am pleased to announce a major new feature of the League's calendar, a series of monthly programs entitled "Lunch with the League" which will be held on Wednesdays from 11 am to 2 pm and will cover a wide range of topics. A capacity crowd attended the kickoff event in

September, when our speaker was Errol Louis, host of Inside City Hall on NY1. Our next two meetings, on October 19 and November 16, will focus on the national League study of the federal role in public education (see background material elsewhere in this newsletter). Elisabeth MacNamara, president of the LWV of the United States, will be speaking at our meeting on December 14th about the League as an Advocate. The series will continue in 2012 with further exploration of League programs and concerns. Mark the third Wednesdays on your calendar and watch for announcements.

In addition to our ongoing support of legislation in areas such as education, our work in citizen education and voter service will be at center stage during 2012. Despite the seemingly infinite number of other sources of information, the League remains a vital force in the electoral process and an essential support for the voter. Throughout the year our Telephone

Information Service provides personal, non-automated responses to hundreds of queries about registration, candidates, polling sites, etc. We provide speakers on election issues and moderators for candidate debates; we register voters and provide training for other organizations wishing to do voter registration. In our advocacy work, we monitor the work of the Board of Elections and strive to improve the experience of the voter at the polls. Also high on our list of legislative concerns at this time are the creation of an independent redistricting commission; the potential impact of hydrofracking, especially in the NYC watershed; and the need for pay equity and ethics reform.

No other organization provides the breadth and depth of nonpartisan information and service that is the hallmark of the League of Women Voters. To fulfill this time-honored role, however, we depend upon member participation and also financial contributions over and above membership dues. With your support of our Annual Fund Appeal, we will continue to conduct programs and provide information to all New Yorkers, in person, on our website, by phone and email. We cannot do it without you. Every contributor of \$75 or more will receive a 2012 League of Women Voters date book.

The well-being of our city rests ultimately upon a strong participatory democracy. This is our cause. I hope you will help us to keep it strong.

Sincerely,



ANNUAL FUND APPEAL

A contribution of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Please make your check payable to:

**League of Women Voters
of the City of New York**
4 West 43rd Street, Suite 615
New York, NY 10038

You can support us using a credit card by visiting our website: www.lwvnyc.org

[Contributions to LWVNYC](#) are **not** tax-deductible.
To make a tax-deductible contribution, please make your check payable to: [LWVNYC Education Fund](#)

Name: _____

If your address has changed, please complete section below.

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email (for League use only) _____

Please join us! If you are not already a member, check here to receive membership information.

In Memoriam, Jeanne Felker

We were all saddened to learn of the passing of Jeanne Felker, a dedicated member of our New York City League since 1986.

Jeanne's extraordinary intellect, enthusiasm and grace were admired by all who had the pleasure to work with her. Among her many League activities, she monitored the City Council, attended meetings of and testified before the Campaign Finance Board and participated in our efforts to bring a secure, accurate and accessible voting system to New York City. Last spring Jeanne joined a small delegation of League members in a visit to her City Councilperson to lobby for inclusion of the Department of Education in the City Charter.

To Jeanne learning was a lifelong expedition through the books she read, the city she loved and the elderhostels which she found so enlightening. We are all richer for having her in our lives and we take comfort in knowing that she lived a full, rich life on her own terms.

Adrienne Kivelson

Interns at the League



Growing demands on the time of our office staff led to the development of an Internship Program which was launched this summer. Emily Rivard, a law student at Hofstra University,

worked with us for several weeks and established a high standard for the program. She was ably succeeded by Eli Heerman, a graduate student at Brooklyn College, whose service provides crucial support for our work. Areas in which their contributions have been especially helpful are research and fact-checking, data entry, and managing voter service outings.



We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with local students and are looking into expanding the program to have two interns at one time. We already have two applicants for Spring 2012. Applicants for the program should [contact our office](#) for more details.

Ashton Stewart

Membership Committee

Focus for 2011/12

In addition to identifying potential new members and encouraging them to join the League of Women Voters of New York City, we are planning new ways to encourage those qualified to vote to actually go to the polls and exercise their responsibility to do so. One reads that voter turnout has diminished, that citizens have come to believe that their vote is unlikely to count, etc. We cannot accept that!

This Get-Out-the-Vote effort will be an expansion of the League's traditional Voter Service efforts, which will also be focused on increasing voter participation in 2012. (*See page 8.*)

Do join us in this endeavor. Call or write the League office or visit our website for more information about our committee.

Elinor Miller & Nicky Heller, co-chairs

Welcome, New Members

Roxanne Boothe
Ida Campbell
Lisa Frenchik
Pamela Johnson
Naomi Z. Katcher
Alina Larson
Mariana Mohylyn Blume
Radha Patel
Sharon Peake
Jennifer Pryer
Emily R. Rivard
Suzanne Stassevitch
Heather Swift
Stephanie Tate
Linda Walberg
Doris Welch
Elizabeth Wills-King

Online Voter Guide VOTE411.org

LWVUS has made the online voter guide vote411.org available to local and State leagues. Here leagues can provide candidate statements and contact details in addition to information from the Board of Elections. In the recent NYC Special Election races, eleven out of thirteen candidates responded to our request for information and the site is now linked to the online voter guide prepared by the NYC Campaign Finance Board, with whom we will be collaborating in future elections. We look forward to using this valuable tool to help voters to cast an informed vote.

New League Study of Education

by Nancy Schwartz, Chairman, Education Committee

At the 2010 convention of the League of Women Voters of the United States, delegates approved a new study entitled *The Role of Federal Government in Public Education, pre-K through grade 12*. The study has been organized to provide historical perspectives and then to engage members in the discussion of 1) Common Core Standards and Assessments and 2) Funding and Equity issues in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. After months of delving into a vast amount of resource material and after numerous challenging and heated discussions among ourselves, the LWVNYC Education Committee is ready to lead the membership in two meetings where we will present background information for a series of questions on which we hope to reach consensus.

What is consensus?

Consensus is not the outcome of a vote; it is based on mutual agreement arrived at through discussion in which everyone has an opportunity to express her views and the subject is examined from all sides. It represents an *overall sense of the group* in relation to specific questions which will then be analyzed to provide the basis for the organization's positions on the issue.

Our consensus meetings will be held on two Wednesdays, October 19 and November 16. Details are shown on page 1 of this newsletter.

In October we will deal with questions related to Core Standards and Assessments. Background information can be found below.

Our November meeting will cover Funding and Equity. Related information can be found on the League's website. *Call or write the League office if you would like a paper copy of the material.*

Ideally, a consensus is the result of give and take at

a membership meeting and we hope members will attend and participate in the discussions. We also recognize that many members who wish to participate in this study will be unable to attend daytime meetings. [The consensus questions can be found on a separate page in this newsletter.](#)

If you cannot be present in person, we hope you will read the background information and give careful consideration to each of the questions. Return your completed form to the LWVNYC office before November 15 so that your responses can be incorporated into our overall response.

To learn more about the issues involved in these topics, visit the national website, LWV.org, or write or call the LWVNYC office to have materials mailed to you.

4 West 43 rd Street, Ste. 615 New York, NY 10036
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National Education Standards, Curriculum and Assessment

Based on an article by Mary Hughes

National standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics were developed by the [National Governors Association](#) and the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), not by federal government mandate, and have been adopted by 41 states. They are intended to provide a common educational framework for use in all schools in all states and are designed to prepare all students for college or a career and to have the skills needed to compete effectively in a global market. Schools that adopt the national standards will be teaching the same rigorous content in literacy and mathematics at every grade level from kindergarten to 12.

Should standards be mandated for states to obtain federal funding?

Arguments for: 1) Clear consistent research-based expectations and benchmarks in ELA and Math for all students on each grade level. 2) All students, no matter where they live, learn the same content and skills in ELA and Math, needed to prepare them for college and the workforce and to succeed in the global economy. 3) Teachers organizations were given a critical voice in the development of the standards.

(continued on next page)

Redistricting: The struggle continues

As a result of population shifts across the country, New York will lose two Congressional seats next year, requiring new lines for the remaining 27 districts, and movement within the state requires new lines for all State Senate and Assembly districts. With deadlines for decisions fast approaching, legislative leaders and the Governor are still trading words over the process for drawing the new lines. The League of Women Voters of New York State supports establishment of an independent redistricting commission and has presented testimony at several hearings of the Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment ([LATFOR](#)) around the state. Mary Lou Urban, secretary of LWVNYC, spoke at a hearing in Queens on September 7. Following are highlights of her presentation.

1. It is clear that public opinion favors independent redistricting and no longer supports a system in which each legislative body draws its own district lines.
2. We are concerned that the population be equitably and fairly distributed among the new districts. We are also concerned about how the 2010 census undercount, estimated at 200,000 people in NYC, will affect downstate representation and funding.
3. The new districts must reflect the new state law which calls for counting prisoners in their home districts and not in locations where they are temporarily incarcerated.
4. The redistricting plan adopted after the 2000 census allowed a population differential of plus or minus 5% in legislative districts; while this may seem like a small disparity, it resulted in a significant difference of 10% between some districts in sparsely populated upstate areas and the densely populated downstate region.
5. Historically, the redistricting process has protected incumbents and deliberately discouraged competition in our electoral system. One result of this is voter apathy and New York State has one of the lowest rates of voter participation in the nation, coming in at 47th among 50 states. We need an impartial system.

(An [informative brochure](#) about Legislative Redistricting is available from the City League office.)

(National Education Standards, Curriculum and Assessment, cont.)

Arguments against: 1) During this economic downturn, can we afford to implement new standards throughout the nation? If we pilot a program for two years in several states to assess the efficacy of the core, this would allow time to fine-tune the standards. 2) Are we encouraging more “teaching to the test” by endorsing new standards? Will more classroom time be spent preparing students for tests than in learning new material? 3) Will this ensure higher dropout rates as lower-achieving students face one-size-fits-all standards? What needs to be done so that these students don’t fall through the cracks? 4) Establishing core standards will not address other issues that result in poor student achievement, such as poor design of schools, lack of qualified teachers, and instability of families and communities. We need to decide how to get the most bang for our buck.

Currently, core standards are

required only for states applying for the federal grant program “Race to the Top.”

Should there be a national assessment aligned with the common core standards?

Arguments for: 1) Will enable cross-state comparisons. 2) Will track student progress toward college and career readiness standards.

Arguments against: 1) Who would fund the costs of a common assessment? 2) Will results be skewed by some states so that they do not reflect a true consistent assessment of students’ skills/knowledge? 3) If states use different assessments, can data be used for comparison across students, schools, states? 4) There might be too much “teaching to the test.”

Should national standards lead to a national curriculum?

A curriculum specifies the topics and methods that students will use to master the standards. Some

educators believe that the standards alone are not enough to bring improvement. Others believe that a national curriculum would bring unnecessary constraints that stifle creativity and innovation. Both reading skills and math can be taught in many ways.

If we have a national assessment, what information is most important to be reported to parents, teachers, students and the community?

Individual student scores can be interpreted by: 1) Rank ordering of student scores (norm-referenced); this is designed to rank individual students in comparison to a sample (local, state, national). 2) Reporting whether students meet predetermined standards (criterion-referenced); this is designed to determine how well individual students have mastered objectives. 3) Cut scores, which provide information about whether or not students have mastered specified criteria.

Update from the Executive Director

Goals recently identified by the LWVNYC board of directors in order to strengthen our outreach and promote the League's mission include adding new members to our board, drawing more New Yorkers into our activities, identifying potential new sources of funds, and raising our public profile. In addition to projects described in this report, much staff time this summer was devoted to creation of an orientation kit for board members and committee chairs, opening the doors to volunteer and retired attorneys to become active in the League through the NYC Bar Association, and arranging voter registration programs in high schools and colleges. We continue to improve our website, which has seen exponential growth in visits (see below), and we established a program for office interns (page 4).

Development

Our goal is to locate and develop continuing relationships with foundations and other funding organizations whose interests coincide with the work of the League. I attended a conference at the Support Center for Nonprofit Management where representatives from Con Ed, Motorola Solutions Foundation, JP Morgan and the New York Life Foundation spoke about recent changes in grant making and the effect of the current economic climate on funding decisions.

We have submitted a proposal to participate in the LWVUS 2012 Youth Voter Registration Project. Grants of up to \$1,000 will be awarded to

Leagues that "undertake voter registration activities in high schools, community colleges and alternative/vocational schools in underrepresented communities." As the LWVNYC has worked with several units of CUNY and local high schools we believe that we have a strong proposal.

Following up on our successful course on How to Run for Public Office in New York City, we are seeking funding for a webinar on that subject. We hope to secure funding for this innovative project in the near future.

We recently completed our own Request for Proposal for Get Out the Vote 2012 for which we will use a portion of the McFarland bequest. We will be sending the RFP to a carefully selected diverse group of advertising and political consulting firms and hope to partner with a marketing, advertising, public relations, promotion/special events or social media promotion company in a campaign designed to improve New York City voter turnout, which, despite a high level of excitement and media coverage, was well under 50% in the 2008 election.

Marketing - Press Relations

Gaining recognition in the crowded NYC media market is a major challenge. In addition to increasing the number of our press releases, we hope to engage the interest of journalists who write about government and public affairs. New contacts have been made at *Village Voice* and *PolitickerNY* (an online news source created by *the Observer*) and we hope to see League publicity there as well as in the other publications where we have contacts.

During the coming election season, the eye-catching PSA developed for us by WABC-TV will be aired on Public Access Television in all five boroughs. (The PSA can be viewed on the [membership page](#) of our website, [LWVNYC.org](#).)

Websites and Social Media

If you have visited our [website](#) recently, you will have noticed significant changes in design, especially on the home page, as well as in content and ease of navigation. On the home page we have posted an ad for what we do best, register new voters, and our voter service requests have skyrocketed. The number of visitors to the site continues to grow and in a recent 30-day period there were over 9,000 visits, an increase of 37% over our monthly average. We hope to soon add a "search" feature that will simplify navigating the site for specific items.

The [Elections](#) page also saw a lot of changes leading up to the September Primary and will continue to change as we get closer to the General Election and beyond. Our goal is to provide as much information as we can about candidates and voting for every election that affects New York City. (Despite increasing reliance on technology, our Telephone Information Service is still an important resource for many NYC residents during election season; call our office if you would like to serve as a TIS volunteer.)

Our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) sites continue to grow as a result of our increased website exposure ~ 21% growth in Facebook and 31% growth in Twitter since our last issue of *INSIDE*. We are constantly adding new information, updates, invitations and reports on our meetings to these sites and encourage you to visit them and tell others about them.

Ashton Stewart

Volunteer for Voter Service

[Voter Service](#) is the heart and soul of the League of Women Voters. It's what we're all about – educating, motivating and assisting eligible New Yorkers who are 18 years and older to register and vote. *And that's where we need your help!*

With a Presidential election on the horizon, and with redrawn district boundaries forcing candidates for Congress and the Legislature to campaign in unfamiliar territory, 2012 promises to be an exciting year. The challenge is to reverse the trend to lower and lower voter turnout that has developed in recent elections. *And that's why we need you help!*

Our first step is to register as many voters as we can and provide them with detailed information on the process and the issues. We will be concentrating on student voter registration in high schools and colleges. All it takes is to volunteer a few hours once or twice a month to join a two-member League team at a school or community organization to provide registration assistance. For those interested there may be opportunities to speak to students and others on the importance of voting. We will train all volunteers and provide a Voter Registration Training Guide. *And that's how you can help!*

VOLUNTEER FOR OUR VOTER SERVICES COMMITTEE. Call the office on 212-725-3541 or email: office@lwnyc.org.