



The final results of the update conducted since the last convention are shown below, as approved by the state Board and as may now be used for advocacy. Once the bolds are removed that show changes from the previous position, this version will replace the existing position in Study and Action. (5/2/07)

School District Regionalization – 1980 (amended 1993, updated 2007)

As long as the constitutional right to equal access to educational opportunities is not abridged, the League of Women Voters believes that the final decision on regionalizing school districts should lie with the citizens in the affected districts.

*The League of Women Voters believes in the encouragement of regionalization of schools and services under certain circumstances. **In particular, we support the merger of non-operating districts and sending-receiving districts into a regional district, and the merger of limited purpose regional districts (such as K-6, 9-12) into a single K-12 district. We also favor the elimination of small districts (under 500 students).***

*Such encouragement should be in the form of technical assistance **and** financial aid by the state, rather than by state mandate. **Such aid should be substantial and should continue for an extended period.** Independent voluntary sharing of services should also be encouraged as a means of improving efficiency and the quality of education. **The restrictive requirement that all constituent districts vote in favor of changing the tax allocation formula should be revised.***

The League does not support the formation of countywide school districts.

Explanatory Statement

A serious concern of the League is the quality of the educational program in New Jersey's schools. A school district should not only teach the basic skills, but also provide a breadth of curriculum and special services to meet the varied needs of all its students.

Where a district is too small to provide such a quality education with efficiency and economy, it should consider regionalization.

Initiation of such consideration should come primarily from local school boards or their citizens, secondarily from the county or state. The state should assume the role of facilitator. It should provide leadership, information as to alternatives, technical

assistance and financial incentives to regionalize. Sharing of services should be encouraged as a possible alternative to regionalization.

The law provides that the Commissioner of Education has the authority, in extreme cases, to form regional districts without the concurrence of the local districts involved. However, the League feels that the local districts should have the option of choosing between potential benefits and disadvantages of its organizational structure.

Lack of direct citizen participation in the governance of the education of their students in nonoperating and sending districts, the tax inequities inherent in non-operating districts, a possible lack of continuity of education in non K-12 district, and racial imbalance in the schools are problems of concern to the League. However, it does not feel K-12 regionalization should be mandated for their solution.

There is no League consensus on the desirability of establishing a single intermediate unit to handle shared services. Those in favor see a need to eliminate duplication of services. Those against are fearful of another formalized layer of bureaucracy. There is consensus, however, among those who favor a single unit, that districts should not be required to join the unit, nor to use its services. They should remain free to continue advantageous ad hoc agreements on their own. Any intermediate unit should be initiated, governed and monitored by local districts with State support in its initiation, monitoring and funding of administrative costs.

During the LWVNJ School Regionalization Update Study (2005-2007), the NJ Legislature discussed the formation of countywide school district and the formation of a demonstration countywide district. Most citizens strongly opposed countywide school districts, and this is also reflected in the consensus. In explaining their opposition, many pointed to the inadequacy of large urban districts such as Newark and New York City. Some of those opposed to countywide districts also were concerned about upsetting existing cross-county regional relationships.

Since school population and property values change with time, we support legislative amendments to allow for a majority of the constituent districts to change the tax allocation formula in a regional school district. Currently changing a tax formula is virtually impossible, because at least one constituent district will need to agree to pay more school taxes. Regional districts agree to dissolve instead, because only a majority of constituent districts need to agree to dissolution.

The issue of shared services was not studied for this consensus.

Position History

In 1979 the state convention voted “to study the effect of certain management procedures on the efficient operation of the public schools.” The study focused on the issues of regionalization or consolidation of school districts and/or services. In March 1980,

consensus was reached. No legislative action regarding regionalization of districts or services took place until 1992.

Delegates to the 1993 LWVNJ convention voted to amend the 1980 position to reflect League principles and LWVUS positions regarding the protection of the constitutional rights. Delegates approved the addition of a new clause, which appears at the beginning of the position statement. The basis for the change was to conform to LWV principles and LWVUS positions in Social Policy (Equality of Opportunity and Education) and Government (Citizens Rights).

Regionalization legislation was signed into law in 1993. Designed to encourage school districts to regionalize, the law changes the basis for allocation of costs among constituent districts to allow the use either of per pupil enrollment, equalized valuation of property, or any combination of the first two factors when agreed upon by vote of citizens in the affected districts.

Regionalization was a major goal of the Whitman administration's 1995 proposal for improving education and revamping the funding system. Despite the enactment of state incentives to regionalize, no district has combined since 1995 and the Union County Regional High School and the Camden County Regional School dissolved. Attempts by Englewood to force regionalization with Englewood Cliffs and Teaneck to bring about integration did not gain state support and a magnet school was opened at Englewood High School. While the magnet school has racial diversity, the regular high schools remain highly segregated.

The timing of the LWVNJ School Regionalization Update Study (2005-2007) overlapped the NJ Legislature Special Session on Property Tax Reform. The issue of regionalization and consolidation of school districts was studied in the context of reducing local property taxes. P.L. 2007, Chapter 63 gives a county superintendent authority to eliminate non-operating districts. Also the county superintendent must recommend a plan consolidating non-K-12 school districts to the Commissioner of Education.

One of the obstacles to regionalization in 2007 was the existing legislation that set teachers salaries according to the contract of the constituent districts with the largest number of union members. In practice the result was that teacher salaries increased when districts regionalized thereby eliminating much of the savings expected.