



## **The League of Women Voters of Delaware**

### **Comments on The Wilmington Education Improvement Plan**

The League of Women Voters of Delaware commends the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (WEAC) for its work. We appreciate the complexity of the problems addressed and applaud the depth of analysis that was done. The recommendations are far reaching and ambitious.

As the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission approaches the task of finalizing its report, there are two areas we wish to highlight and support -- namely (1) property reassessment and (2) funding that is equitable and equalized.

The need for property reassessment, articulated clearly in the WEAC report, has been on the radar of the League for many years. We take note of the fact that property in New Castle County has not been reassessed since 1983.

In Kent and Sussex, no reassessment has been done since 1986 and 1974 respectively. Given that property values do not remain constant, inequities arise. After three or four decades, how can anyone disagree?

The League completed a study of the need for property tax reassessment in 2010. It can be found at [http://www.lwvdelaware.org/files/reassessment\\_report\\_-\\_lwvde.pdf](http://www.lwvdelaware.org/files/reassessment_report_-_lwvde.pdf). While data in our study is a little out of date, the message is clear. The time has come for property tax reassessment – statewide!

The need for funding equity and equalization is also clear. Scrutiny of the School District profiles, found on the Department of Education website, reveals the current inequity. Looking at the school districts in northern New Castle County, we found that the Brandywine School District spent \$14,458 per student in 2013-14 (the most current data available), while Red Clay spent \$12,368. Between these extremes are Christina, which spent \$13,586 per student and Colonial, at \$12,493 per student. If the funding equalization process is not updated and made more equitable, the impact of the proposed shift of students from various Wilmington schools into the Red Clay District will be profound. Expenditures there per student would have to go down drastically.

Similar inequities exist in Kent and Sussex.

Clearly, a new funding allocation system is needed to eliminate these inequities, as articulated in the report of the WEAC. The system should take into account the characteristics of the students in each district, factoring in the income level of the families and the presence of children with special educational needs, including *basic* needs, from pre-kindergarten all through grade 12. In addition, allocation amounts should not be based – as is currently the case – on enrollments at one particular point in time during the year. Given family transience and changing circumstances, shifts in the characteristics of each district’s student population are inevitable. As recommended in the WEAC report, adjustment(s) should be made during the year to reflect the characteristics of the student population at the time of the adjustment.

Reforming the process of equalizing funding among Districts is complex but much needed, a fact duly noted in the WEAC report. Studies done for the General Assembly in 2008 and again in 2015 address the technical aspects of this matter, and the reports on those studies are included in Appendix D of the report. We agree that the recommendations contained in those reports need to be addressed by the General Assembly so that a path toward genuine equalization among Districts can be found.

We would expect any change in the equalization formula to apply statewide since there are great inequities in meeting the needs of children throughout the state.

We call upon the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission to stand firm in pushing for these changes. **We pledge our support in that effort.** We know that such initiatives will take resolve, but the future of our state is in the balance. To ensure that Delaware’s economic and social fabric remains strong, we must put aside narrow interests. We must educate all our children in the best way possible - to prepare our future leaders and to enable every child to live up to his and her potential.