

EDUCATION POSITION – 1973-74 / Revised 2012

The League of Women Voters Juneau (LWVJ) supports high quality public education for a wide variety of reasons. As an organization with a mission to enhance citizens' knowledge of and participation in our democracy, the LWVJ is especially concerned with education environments in which barriers to education are eliminated, where optimal conditions for education flourish and where students learn about our history and government. Participation in democracy and governance is a necessary prelude to active adult citizenship.

I. Classroom Loads

The League of Women Voters Juneau (LWVJ) recognizes the value of classroom enrollments in grades K-3 equaling 15 or fewer students.

Classroom loads may be adjusted on the basis of the availability of instructional classroom aides, teaching methods and techniques, and room and furniture size. Considerations of subject matter and building construction, i.e., sound barriers, should also be taken into account.

II. Testing

While testing can be a valuable tool for determining academic progress, consideration should be given to avoiding, if possible, or minimizing the loss of instructional time for the purpose of testing.

Testing should provide both diagnostic and achievement data. Informal, in-class diagnostic testing allows teachers to focus on needed skills or comprehension as students work toward national core standards. In addition, the League places a high priority on early identification for student placement in special education or gifted programs. Achievement tests should provide information on student progress toward national core standards and allow students to compare their achievements with those of similar students across the country.

The LWVJ supports efforts to raise Juneau standards to national core levels or higher. Measuring student progress toward these standards will require district-wide testing and knowledge of the most valid tests currently available. For example, such evaluation tools for grades K-6 as those available from AIMSweb (a progress monitoring system by Pearson conducted by continuous student evaluation) and MAP (Measures for Academic Progress) from NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) for grades 7-12 come highly rated.

The League considered other testing programs and concluded the following:

Aptitude assessment for academic and vocational purposes should be available on a request basis for ninth through twelfth grade students.

Students should be encouraged to take PSATs, and these tests should be at public expense.

The League feels that it is important that parents and/or designated caregivers be kept informed by the District about the testing programs, both regular and optional, and should be notified when the tests are to be administered and the meaning of test results.

III. Professional Development

Teacher quality is the primary school-based determinant of student achievement. The League advocates a multifaceted in-service program, with equal access to professional development information for all educators, as an effective means to promote quality education. It should include, but not be limited to:

A. Individual teacher release time, at District expense, to review student data, plan instruction, and pursue the teacher's professional development plan.

B. Student release time to enable teachers to participate in teacher groups, group workshops or seminars on a school-wide or district-wide basis. Parents should be given maximum advance notice of planned student release time in-service dates to facilitate making arrangements for their children. Time away from classrooms is not desirable and should be minimized.

C. As evaluation data warrants, an instructional coach program to provide ongoing training. An instructional coach does not function as an administrative evaluator, but acts as a consultant to classroom teachers on methods and techniques.

League believes in-service programs enabling teachers to discuss student achievement can be most effective if they are responsive to teacher needs and enhance teachers' skill levels.

IV. Evaluation

The League advocates that the District establish performance criteria for teachers to be used in the evaluation program. Evaluation should include analysis of student outcomes. A uniform set of objectives will give teachers a valid basis for self-evaluation and will insure consistency and continuity in the evaluation program throughout the District.

Although an instructional coach plays an important role in promoting improved teacher skills, the League believes it is essential that the instructional coach function independently of the administrative evaluation process. This insures that teachers will feel free to take full advantage of the services of the coach.

V. Libraries

The League endorses the multimedia resource-center concept for the school library program as instrumental in furthering individualized instruction.

The League advocates employing full-time professional librarians for each school library to effectively implement the multimedia program.

VI. Exceptional Students

The League of Women Voters Juneau advocates a multifaceted special education program to meet the needs of exceptional children, those with learning or other disabilities and those with special academic gifts. We endorse mainstreaming as one of the major components of such a program for students with disabilities if, and only if, the necessary support services and staff are available not only to help the children but also to provide consultative services for the regular classroom teachers. In mainstreaming, the responsibility for educating the exceptional child is a shared task: to function well as a team, the classroom teacher and

special resource teachers must have adequate opportunities to meet and confer about the children they serve.

VII. Accountability

The League of Women Voters Juneau advocates accountability in local education. Adoption of the national common core will facilitate accountability.

We advocate development of district-wide curriculum goals and objectives and the establishment of criteria by which components of the program and the program as a whole may be judged. LWVJ supports the goal of all children reading at grade level by the end of the third grade. Students who have not achieved or exceeded grade level reading before they enter fourth grade, according to many studies and research data, are unlikely to catch up with their peers and are, thus, more likely to have academic problems and to drop out of school before graduation.

VIII. Safe Schools

All students should feel safe in school, as well as when traveling to and from school. The LWVJ supports conducting on-going research-based anti-bullying curricula at all grade levels, notably Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Racism, sexism, sexual orientation biases are all deplorable and LWVJ supports JSD and community efforts to eliminate discrimination.

VIV. Pre-K

Many Juneau children are in need of high quality pre-K programming, served by a variety of professionals, to prepare them for school. Currently, the JSD offers an integrated special education and general population pre-K program. The LWVJ supports efforts by the JSD to offer voluntary pre-K programs to children whose school success can be improved by such programming and to advocate that voluntary pre-K programming be a part of the State's School Foundation Program.

Community efforts using research-based early-literacy emphases are essential components of kindergarten readiness.

X. Kindergarten

Each Juneau elementary school should offer voluntary full-day kindergarten.

XI. Attendance

Children have to attend school in order to benefit from it. Truancy should not be tolerated and the JSD should work with families, social service agencies and the court system to assure that all students attend school.

XII. Technology

Technological literacy is important to success in today's world. Students should be afforded opportunities to learn computer and similar technological skills in order to be competitive in our modern world.

Computer literacy must be taught within the context of information evaluation.

XIII. Fine Arts (music, visual arts, drama and dance) and World Languages

The fine arts and world languages should not be viewed as “add-ons” to education, but should be considered basic components of education, especially for young students. Learning the fine arts and a second (or more) language develops brain capacity and enhances the acquisition of mathematics, science, social studies, and reading. The fine arts and world languages should be taught K-12. Language instruction should begin in grade 1.

XIV. Civics Education

Civics education is especially important to the LWVJ. The goal of civics education is to understand the participatory responsibility of all citizens and the functioning of government in our democracy. The LWVJ supports the JSD efforts to increase civics education at all grade levels, through classroom learning, out-of-classroom projects, and in partnerships with local, state, and national organizations.

XV. Alternative Programs

The LWVJ supports effective options for meeting student and family needs at all grade levels within the Juneau School District. The LWVJ rejects the use of public funds to support vouchers for private education. LWVJ encourages collaborative efforts between JSD and UAS to build creative programs that engage students at both the technical and academic level as extensions or supplements to JSD offerings.

XVI. Foster and Homeless Students

For students in non-permanent foster care and for students who are homeless, LWVJ supports the JSD's role as a point of stability in these students' lives and as a focal point for the delivery of social services.

(Updated 2012 by Margo Waring, Marjorie Menzi and Andi Story)