
DISCUSSION POINTS KEYED TO CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

The goal of the consensus meeting(s) is to come to agreement on your League's answers to the consensus questions. The following discussion guide has been compiled to help focus your discussion. It is presented in a format parallel to the consensus questions for convenience of reference. These comments and questions will enable you to "jump start" a discussion that is lagging, veered off topic or failed to start. This is **not** a script that must be followed, but ideas and aids to help you cover the material in a limited amount of time.

We suggest you either do your consensus meeting in one session (maybe background in the morning, a break for lunch and discussion, then consensus in the afternoon) or two shorter meetings. The first two sets of questions (under History and Common Core Standards) can be covered in one meeting, the last set (Equity and Funding) in another. It is important to do background and consensus on each part at the same session so all those coming to consensus have access to the discussion during the background presentation.

Do not use the computer form to record your session. Use the WORD form that has been provided. The online form should be completed only after your board has approved the consensus.

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

General Questions

These General Questions apply to the overall focus of the study. We think you will find it interesting to ask these questions briefly at the beginning of your consensus meeting(s), record the answers, and then go back to them again at the end of the session. See if opinions have changed during the discussion. While they may seem simple, they are important to developing strong positions. All page numbers are from the PDF versions of the background papers.

1. The current role of the federal government in public education is
Much too small too small about right too large much too large
2. What should be the role of the federal government in public education? (Rank)
 - a. To ensure that all students preK-12 receive a quality education.
 - b. To develop accountability measures that will study the progress of all students so that they achieve adequate yearly progress.
 - c. To mandate Common Core Standards for all students K-12.
 - d. To monitor state efforts for funding
 - e. To measure teacher effectiveness through test data.

This looks like an easy question but will be very important in forming a strong position for future action.

3. A quality public education is important to perpetuate a strong and viable democracy.

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Common Core Standards

Common Core Standards and the related assessments are an important part of the study with one section devoted just to this. Make sure members clearly understand that these are national standards, developed by the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and are not a federal government mandate, even though acceptance of the standards was a requirement to qualify for "Race to the Top" funding. Remember this is a national study and the question is how these should relate to national programs. This is not the place for a discussion of "our state math standards are better than these," however tempting it may be. Background on pages 3 and 4 of the "Common Core Standards and Assessments" research paper will help with understanding.

Educational standards define the knowledge and skills students should possess at critical points in their educational career.

Curriculum is an educational plan that spells out which goals and objectives will be achieved, how to achieve those goals and what topics should be covered as well as the methods and materials to be used for learning and evaluation.

There is a logical progression from standards to assessments based on these standards to curriculum aligned with the standards and tests. How much of a role do we think the federal government should have in this continuum? (see pdf page 3 of Common Core Standards paper)

4. Currently the governors and state education officers have developed Common Core Standards that are national but not federal. Should the standards be mandated of the states in order to obtain federal funding? (Choose one)
- Special grant programs such as Race to the Top
 - All programs under Elementary and Secondary Education Act where the needs qualify for funding.
 - All programs receiving federal funding from any source
 - All of the above
 - None of the above

This is a key follow-up question to the previous one. If your group rejects the national standards, then the answer will be easy. If they accept the common core standards, then this will be an important discussion. Pages 7-9 of the "Common Core Standards" paper discuss the assessments that are being developed. The first question is simply – are these assessments needed, and the second question is how should they be utilized? Here you may want to discuss the comparisons of states that are published by different organizations each year and how they are usually based on different tests in different states. There is also room for discussion of the costs of these tests and whether those costs should be fully covered if mandated. Be sure to also consider the costs of tests originated by the state and local districts. (see pdf pages 1-6 Common Core Standards)

5. Should there be a **national assessment aligned** with the common cores standards?

Yes

No

If Yes, Should implementation be voluntary or federally mandated? (choose one)

- a. Voluntary
- b. Mandated
- c. Mandated, if fully funded

If No, what other accountability measures might you suggest? (choose one)

- a. Continue to allow the states to develop their own assessments.
- b. Suggest that the local education districts use their own assessments or adopt one that is a nationally norm-referenced assessment such as the *Stanford Achievement Test* or *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*.
- c. Suggest that districts use a portfolio type of assessment where student projects and activities would be scored holistically

A potentially logical next step could be to develop a national curriculum that would meet the standards and be aligned with the assessment tools. Carefully consider this in light of answers to the two previous questions and strive for a consistent answer. What should the federal role be? Is this different from a national role that is not mandated? (see pdf page 11 Common Core Standards and Glossary)

6. National standards should lead to: (choose one)

- a. A nationally mandated curriculum to be aligned to the national standards and assessments.
- b. A national curriculum that is only suggested but not mandated.
- c. A suggested structure for states and local education agencies to develop their own curriculum.
- d. No national curriculum.

This question concerns the current two consortia who have won \$3.5 million to develop assessments that follow the Common Core State Standards by 2014. This is where streams get mixed, as they have received a **federal** grant to prepare assessments based on **national** standards. What should be the goal(s) of these groups? (see pdf page 7 Common Core Standards)

7. What role should the national assessment consortia play in student evaluation? (Rank order)
 - a. Provide an assessment system that is aligned to the Common Core Standards.
 - b. Provide comparison data showing progress toward reaching Common Core Standards.
 - c. Provide criteria for determining readiness for college and careers.
 - d. Provide information to students, parents, teachers and school districts about student achievement.
 - e. Provide diagnostic information on each child.

This question focuses upon the purpose of a national assessment program. The purpose of any mandated, nationally normed (see Glossary) test has been much debated. This goes to the much debated parts of NCLB, to value-added statistical models for evaluation of teachers, merit pay and similar topics often in the news. Be prepared here for discussion that may be highly charged. But it is important to know if we have consensus on these items. (pdf pages 8-11 Common Core Standards)

8. Data from the national assessments are often difficult for parents, teachers and others to understand. If we have a national assessment, what information is most important to be reported to parents, teachers, students and the community? (choose one)
 - a. Data should be “norm referenced” (where students are ranked) for district comparison only.
 - b. Data should be “criterion referenced” and clearly informative so that teachers, parents, and students know how individual students have mastered criteria established at a national level.
 - c. Data should be used to determine “cut” scores knowing if students have mastered requirements for special grade levels.
9. Information from nationally required assessment data should be used to (Choose one):
 - a. Sanction schools not measuring up to the specific levels
 - b. Reward schools that achieve high scores
 - c. Rank teachers based on student test score data
 - d. Reward teachers who have exemplary scores
 - e. Inform districts how their population compares to others similar to theirs.

If you are taking consensus in two sessions this would be the end of session one. This is the time to go back and review the first question with this group and to check that the recorded consensus is that agreed upon by your members.

Funding and Equity

This part of the study deals more with the traditional federal involvement in public education and how it has evolved. You might want to briefly review the history paper and Timetable posted on the lwv.org website. Allow time to fully discuss these questions: whether members think federal funds should be distributed mostly based on need, population and enrollment or they should be given only to those who best qualify for competitive grants. How should mandates and funding be related, or should they? What should the relationship be? One example of a mandate attached to funding was the requirement to lift the cap on the number of charter schools to qualify for Race to the Top funding. This is an area that will require time. (pdf pages 7-8 Equity and funding)

10. In the past most of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding has been non-competitive based on need. All/Any Schools that prove they fall under the federal guidelines for funding receive those funds. However, competitive grants are now being proposed to states/districts who meet certain federal requirements, such as Race to the Top. Which would be appropriate: (choose one)
- Non-competitive funding for all applicants meeting requirements
 - A combination of non-competitive and competitive grants
 - Competitive grants only
 - No federal funding

Mandates are not always a bad thing. Integration was a mandate, so was Title IX (gender equity). Most school administrators would emphasize the need for federal mandates to be federally funded. Some are; some, like Head Start, are only expected to do what the funding allows. Others, such as Special Education, have never been fully funded. Think carefully about this one. What is the “common good”? (see pdf pages 3-5 Equity and Funding)

11. If the federal government’s role is the concern of the “common good” then: (choose one)
- Mandates only should be sanctioned.
 - Mandates and funding should both be provided.
 - Funding should be provided through grants only.
 - A combination of funded mandates and grants should apply.
 - No mandates should be required and limited grants for innovation available.

Equity is a word that has had an evolving definition (see Glossary). It is not the same as equal funding as there is a growing awareness that some students are more expensive to educate than others. Others talk about “adequacy,” “equity of opportunity” and “opportunity to learn” – ideas that deal with access to what is deemed necessary in order to have an equal opportunity, opportunities that are often denied children of poverty. While not all of these may be considered the responsibility of the local educational system, is it a federal responsibility to tackle them? Is it a local responsibility? Should these non-academic issues be considered? This is more fully discussed early in the “Equity and Funding” paper. (see pdf pages 3-4 and 8-10 Equity and Funding)

12. Equity in public education means equitable access to: (Rank order)
- a. high quality teaching/learning
 - b. adequate and current learning materials
 - c. clean and well maintained physical facilities
 - d. food and health care
 - e. safe and secure neighborhoods
 - f. secure housing

Traditionally all federal funding has been aimed at special groups, those that were deemed underserved by Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizers. These may be minorities – those with disabilities, living in poverty, not speaking English as a primary language or with other identifying characteristics. Each population and its justification are discussed in the paper on special populations. Many of these numbers are growing nationwide, and funding does not always keep up with the growth. The question is, should this funding still be targeted to individual groups? Or should it be either block granted, where it can be used for multiple purposes, and/or blended into the general fund? (see pdf pages 1-4 Equity and Funding and all pages of Special Populations on Equity and Funding)

13. Currently Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding is considered “categorical” rather than for general use. This means that it can only be used with special populations for special purposes. ESEA should remain targeted toward poverty and special needs.

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

Much current educational research emphasizes the role of early childhood education in giving all children an even start when entering kindergarten. The question here is the role of the federal government: Should it play a role in extending this to all children? (see pdf pages 1-5 Early Childhood)

14. The federal government has a role in supporting early childhood education, birth to 5, for all children?

Strongly agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly disagree

15. Federal support for early childhood education programs (e.g.Head Start, Title I, Special Education, Early Start) should include funding for parent education and support regarding child development, child health and nutrition, and access to other supportive services, such as mental health as needed.

a. Strongly Agree Agree No consensus Disagree Strongly Disagree

b. This funding should be extended to :

All children only those with special needs special needs first