

LWWV[®] League of Women Voters *of the* Monterey Peninsula

VOTER

October 2011, Volume 84, Number 2

General Meeting, Wednesday, October 12, 2011

Special Advocates for Children and the County Foster Care System

Siobhan M. Greene is the **Executive Director of CASA Monterey County** (Court Appointed Special Advocates) for children. Originally serving as the organization's Development Director, she has been with CASA since 2002. Through CASA Siobhan is able to integrate her extensive development and marketing background; her years of clinical experience in mental health services; and her training as a mediator.

Siobhan sees her work with CASA as a wonderful opportunity to provide children with a degree of support and care that is critical to their future; as well as to influence the overall system of care throughout the state.

Siobhan is a board member for California CASA,

serves as the Chair for the **Juvenile Justice Commission for Monterey County** and is President of **AFP Monterey Bay** (Association of Fundraising Professionals). Siobhan is part of the local implementation team for the **Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care**.

Siobhan says: "The work of CASA is central to fulfilling our fundamental obligation to advocate for a child's right to be safe, treated with dignity, and learn and grow in the security of a loving family".

She and her husband **Joe** live in Carmel and are the parents of two children; **Brigid** who is a professional dancer and **Byron** who is a freshman at UCSD. Kramer is the dog, who is not allowed to go away to college.

LWVMP General Meeting Luncheon

(General Meetings are held the 2nd Wednesday of each month)

Lunch begins 12 noon / Presentation starts 12:30

\$20 per person for lunch

(hot/cold entrée, salads, beverages, dessert)

Reservations are a must for lunch!

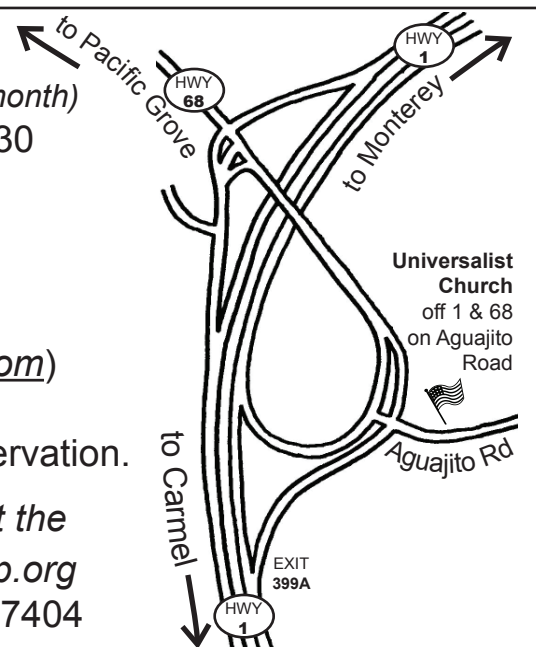
Contact Lorita Fisher

(phone 375-8301 or e-mail GLFisher@redshift.com)

Please pay at the door for lunch.

Lecture at 12:30 is **FREE** and does not require a reservation.

LWVMP General Luncheon Meetings are held at the
Unitarian Universalist Church <http://uucmp.org>
490 Aguajito Road / Carmel CA 93923 (831) 624-7404



LWVMP

Officers

President

Bev Bean 484-2451
BeverlyGB@gmail.com

Vice-President

Vicki Gilfix 622-9510
gilfix@att.net

Secretary

Jean Donnelly 372-3599
jeanmdonnelly@comcast.net

Directors

Government

George Riley 645-9914
georgetriley@gmail.com

Membership

Tamara Harris 649-3865
TBHarris146@aol.com

Natural Resources

Janet Brennan 659-2090
JanetB@montereybay.com

Public Relations

Melanie Billig 626-3826
HBillig@sbcglobal.net

Social Policy

Open for nomination

State & National Action

Anne Bell 626-4761
Anne-Bell@comcast.net

Voters Service

Dennis Mar 372-9388
DennisRMar3@yahoo.com

Webmaster

Robin Tokmakian 655-5047
trillerud@mindspring.com

At Large

Carole Dawson 647-8845
carole@dawsonmonterey.com
Sylvia Shih 484-9747
58eugenia58@gmail.com
Talma Taormina 375-1477
talma@pacbell.com

Nominating Committee

Marilyn Maxner, Philomine Smith

Appointed Positions

Treasurer

Marilyn Maxner 649-0335
montmm@aol.com

Luncheon Logistics

Lorita Fisher 375-8301
GLFisher@redshift.com

Video Webmaster

Bob Evans 372-8323
BobEvans13@me.com

Newsletter Editor

Regina Doyle 375-4496
ReginaDoyle@aol.com

The **PRESIDENT'S** Message

Sometimes I get discouraged about how difficult it can be to convince the League to take a stand on an important issue, such as the dangers of computerized voting. However, working within the constraints of our existing positions to find a basis for action makes me appreciate the League's careful, process driven approach.

Recently I became involved with a broad coalition of citizens concerned about the licensing and use of the extremely toxic fumigant methyl iodide. The group called **Safe Strawberries Monterey County** is trying to convince the Boards of Supervisors of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties to sign a resolution against the use of methyl iodide.

Methyl iodide is the proposed replacement chemical for the banned ozone-depleting chemical methyl bromide. Methyl iodide is a known carcinogen, neurotoxin, and thyroid toxin, which can also disrupt fetal development, cause miscarriages and contaminate groundwater. It was nevertheless approved in 2010 by the **California Department of Pesticide Regulation** under lobbying pressure from the chemical manufacturer **Arysta LifeScience**.

At first it seemed we could not take action on a statewide issue but limiting our focus to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors made it local. The existing position which was the basis for our action was found in the Hazardous Materials portion of the LWV of California Natural Resources positions. This position was listed as vertical which means that it is approved for use at lower levels of the League without prior permission.

The next hurdle was that LWVMP cannot take a position on a countywide issue without the agreement of the LWV of the Salinas Valley. Luckily the LWVSV Board was meeting soon after our Natural Resources Committee approved the action letter to the Board of Supervisors and recommended it to our Board. The key issue that I stressed at the LWVSV Board meeting was that we should take action based on our positions, no matter how unpopular they might seem to others. After circulating the letter to their membership, the LWVSV agreed to support it and our Board was unanimous in its approval.

Adding the local Leagues of Women Voters to the list of organizations opposing the use of methyl iodide in Monterey County was very important to the coalition because they appreciate the high regard that the League enjoys. The coalition scheduled an educational forum on September 29 at **Hartnell College** and requested that the League provide a facilitator. **Phyllis Meuer**, a longtime



U.S. LEAGUE'S PUBLIC EDUCATION STUDY



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As we reported in the previous issue of *The Voter*, our League is participating in the US League's Education Study. In September we published the first two background documents and the consensus questions for your understanding of the issues. Following are two additional documents to enable meaningful discussions and consensus in November.

The longer background articles are available at the LWVUS website. You can find them at www.lwv.org and then click on "FOR MEMBERS"; then in the left column click on "Projects and Programs"

and then in the left column under *Projects and Programs* click on "Public Education." For those who don't like to click and would like a print copy of the articles, please contact me at (831) 622-9510.

As also mentioned, the plan is to do the first half of the consensus meeting following our **November 9th Lunch & Learn** meeting. All are encouraged to stay and participate. The second half will be conducted on **November 10th at Mariposa Hall** from 1 to 3pm.

Vicki Gilfix, Education Study Group Chair
gilfix@att.net



Common Core Standards

Students who move from one part of the United States to another during their K-12 school careers are likely to encounter substantial variations in requirements for graduation. The **Common Core Standards Initiative** (CCSI, 2010) stated: "We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students."

Currently, standards for student performance vary widely by state. The roots of current state-to-state inconsistencies lie in the fact that public education in the United States has traditionally been a local responsibility. However, textbook publishers have created something of a "de facto" national curriculum, based on market needs. Consequently, many textbooks from major publishers have reflected the curricular choices that were made by educational groups in the largest states. Some

publishers do create textbooks and other curricula for smaller markets.

Rothman (2009) summarized the efforts of various groups to create common standards across the United States. Initial efforts to foster development of national standards and a related system of assessments in the core subject areas began in the early 1990's through awarding grants to a dozen national organizations.

The **National Governors Association** (NGA) and the **Council of Chief State School Officers** (CCSSO) launched the Common Core State Standards initiative in March 2009 after the nation's governors agreed in concept to adopt a uniform set of standards. The final report was issued on June 2, 2010 (NGA, 2010), and, by early 2011, 40 states have adopted the Standards. The adopting states are currently aligning them to their own state standards.

The Fordham Institute (Carmichael, et al. 2010) reported that the Common Core standards received high marks when compared to state standards across the country. The Institute

suggests that Common Core Standards represent an opportunity for creating consistency and raising standards in all states.

Assessments

The implementation of the federal **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** has created a 50-state and 50-test environment in public education. As a result state-to-state expectations and performances vary greatly. States publish annual reports of **Adequate Yearly Progress** (AYP), which are required by federal law, but the meaning of “proficient” in those reports can vary widely from one state to another (Cronin, et al. 2007).

Larger testing companies market a variety of norm-referenced standardized tests. However, they are designed to rank students, rather than to determine how well students have mastered curricular objectives as criterion-referenced tests would do. The **National Assessment of Educational Progress** (NAEP) publishes results that are technically adequate for state-to-state (and international) comparisons, but that assessment is not designed to produce individual student scores. NAEP requires a large sample of students to produce results. Most school systems are too small to qualify for testing that would produce local NAEP results. The tradition of local governance has led to inconsistent requirements and standards for student performance across the country. Thus, in 2010, the United States does not have a consistent set of academic assessments for grades K-12.

Two coalitions, together representing 44 states and the District of Columbia, won a U.S. Department of Education competition for \$330 million dollars federal aid to design “comprehensive assessment systems” aligned to the Common Core and designed to measure whether students are on track for college and career success. The awards, announced in September 2010, were divided between the **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers** (PARCC), comprised of 26 states receiving \$170 million, and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium that comprises 31 states and received \$160 million.

At least 12 states participated in both coalitions and are waiting to decide which assessment system will best meet their needs. An advantage of having assessments that are used in more than one state is that results from all participating states could be compared.

Why Not National Standards or Assessments?

The most common arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards for K-12 center on two issues: 1) the cost and difficulty of changing the existing curriculum and assessments and (2) the sovereignty of states in issues related to education and local control. Governor Rick Perry of Texas stated that the Race to the Top funding would only generate a one-time amount of \$75 per student, yet cost Texas taxpayers an additional \$3 million. A third argument is that the individual state standards might be more rigorous. However, states that adopt the Common Core are permitted to add 15 percent more in content.

Another concern is the potential to use scores from the student assessments as a major component of teacher evaluations and merit pay plans, an idea that has popular appeal. (TIME, 2010). In August 2010, ten of the nation’s premier educational researchers (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravtich, Rothstein, Shavelson & Shepard, 2010) co-authored a report that cautioned against relying on student test scores as a major indicator for evaluating teachers, citing the technical problems associated with using scores from standardized student assessments in value-added statistical models.

Does the United States Need a National Curriculum?

The U.S. Department of Education presents the view that, since the developers of the Common Core Standards and the proposed assessments have been groups with state representation rather than the federal government, neither program is a federal initiative. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March 13). In March 2011, the **Albert Shanker Institute** issued a call for common

curriculum guidelines (Albert Shanker Institute, 2011; Gewertz, C. 2011, March). This document voices the concern that common assessments are being developed from the common standards with no curriculum in between. In May 2011, another group published an article with a different view: "Closing the Door on Innovation: Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America" (2011), discussed by Gewertz, C. (2011, May). The article also cites the prohibition against a federal curriculum contained in the 1965 ESEA.



The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Equity & Funding

Public school funding comes from many sources – federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used. Additionally, the United States invests 5 percent of the GDP in public education. Nearly half of the k-12 education funding in the United States is intended to come from the states, drawn from a combination of income taxes, fees and other taxes. However, some states resemble Illinois, where the state's share is only 27 percent. The remainder usually comes from local property taxes.

Equity

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Hurst (2007) noted that inequities in wealth stem from the fact that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and/or inherited funds, while the poor earn all of their income from jobs and they spend it on food, shelter, transportation, etc. In the United States,

the wealthiest 20 percent own 84 percent of the total wealth.

Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns. During the past 50 years since **Brown vs. Board of Education**, schools have become re-segregated (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Currently, three-fourths of the Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.

Adequacy

Since, 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is providing local districts with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education. Odden and Picus (2008) developed a model calculating the cost of an adequate education. They defined an adequate education as one that includes factors such as a full-day kindergarten, core class sizes of 15 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6 and specialist teachers. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

Funding Priorities

When schools are not funded adequately, this has a long-lasting impact. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that dropouts cost the country at least \$200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services and crime. Since the 1980s, national investments have spent three times more on the prison system than on education. Data show that the national average for educating a child is \$9500, while it costs \$43,000 per year to keep a person incarcerated. With 5 percent of the world's population in the United States, we house 25 percent of the world criminals (Kang & Hong, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2001, **President George W. Bush** signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, "**No Child Left Behind**," which



was intended to close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the **National Assessment of Educational Progress** (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB. One provision of NCLB permitted parents to remove a student from a low-performing school and transfer to another, better performing school. They would receive a voucher which would pay some of the cost of attending another school – public or private. Additionally, courts and education agencies stepped in to “remediate.”

The sanctions imposed by NCLB had the effect of punishing or threatening punishment to low-performing schools and teachers, sending them the message that they were incompetent and that they should not have the right to make decisions about how to educate students. Studies (Reeve, 2009) showed that threatening public schools and teachers with punishment had harmful effects on students who remained in the public schools.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts. One goal of NCLB has been to offer choice to parents whose children attend poorly performing schools. However, large-scale studies of voucher school students have revealed little difference in their performance compared to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the most needy students (Rouse & Barrows, 2009). Furthermore, many (Holland, 2011) argue that the NCLB goal of 95 percent of students meeting state standards in reading and math by 2014 is unrealistic.

Race to the Top (RttT)

Race to the Top was signed into law by **President Barack Obama** in 2009. This program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward reform planned in the

winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT. Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

While both these funding requirements can be effective, neither is foolproof, and each addresses only one part of the problems schools face. For instance, research studies show that promising increased pay based on teacher effectiveness is not an effective incentive. Furthermore, research showed there is a problem when teacher performance evaluation is based only on student scores in standardized tests (Springer et. al. 2010). Although there is no question that some charter schools are effective, they have not been the panacea many expected. They were originally proposed as an opportunity for educators to test research-supported methods for reaching hard-to-educate children, and some have done quite well.

However, a large-scale research study funded by pro-charter advocates revealed that only 17 percent of the 2403 charter schools had significantly more growth in test scores compared to traditional public schools, and, in fact, 37 percent showed significantly less growth (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). Furthermore, many charter schools do not admit and/or retain students who need increased support, e.g., students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

The progress of the U.S. Department of Education’s Equity and Excellence commissions can be tracked through <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/index.html>



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Lunch & Learn with the League

Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport

Date: **Wednesday, October 12, 2011**

Time: **12 noon lunch / 12:30 speaker**

Topic: **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for
Children and the Foster Care System in Monterey County**

Speaker: **Siobhan M. Greene, Executive Director, CASA Monterey County**

More than 300 local children live in Monterey County's foster care system because of parental abuse, neglect or abandonment. In the face of trauma, stress and change these children need someone focused on their best interests. CASA also advocates for delinquent youth and those aging out of the social welfare system and provides community education and awareness concerning issues of child abuse, neglect and child welfare policy. CASA is committed to public policies that promote child abuse prevention and reforms in the Juvenile Foster Care and social welfare system.

See page 1 for luncheon venue and details.

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER: *Are you one of 30 members who have not renewed? If you are, kindly rejoin LWVMP now. If you're not sure of your status, you're welcome to call or e-mail me!*

Tamara Harris, Membership Director 649-3865 TBHarris146@aol.com