

## **TUITION TAX CREDITS, VOUCHERS, AND CHARTER SCHOOLS**

In 1985, bills were introduced in both the New York State Senate and Assembly to provide tuition tax credits for parents of non-public school students. The League took strong action in opposing this move on the grounds that this would erode the amount of money available for the traditional support of the public schools.

In 1991, a proposal came before the Board of Regents, which would have allowed parents to remove their children from particularly poor public schools and send them to other institutions through the use of vouchers. Once again, the League opposed the plan and the Regents withdrew it.

In the next legislative session, the issue of vouchers was again raised, and the League along with other public education supporters opposed their passage. In 1993, the aid formula was simplified and transportation aid keyed to take into account a district's wealth. The Regents' term of office was reduced from seven to five years.

In October 1996, an Action Alert was issued urging members to contact the State Board of Regents and Commission of Education Richard P. Mills to voice the League's opposition of a voucher experiment that would permit the use of public tax dollars to give students vouchers to attend private or religious schools. The Board of Regents met on November 7, and the proposal by Regent Emeritus Carballada was defeated by a vote of 12-3.

In 2006 the Governor proposed, as part of his 2006-2007 budget, an income tax credit for certain individuals to offset the cost of private school tuition or tutoring. The League opposed this measure, and it was deleted from the final budget.

Early in the 1998 legislative session, Governor Pataki sent to the Legislature a program bill creating a Charter School Program for New York State. During the session, the League lobbied vigorously against the proposed legislation on the theory that, without a dedicated funding stream for charters independent of the funding for traditional public schools, the legislation would dilute the money available to traditional public schools while continuing to require them to function as educators of last resort. The PTA, AAUW, and the School Boards Association joined us in our opposition to this legislation.

The LWNYS was successful in holding the bill in the Assembly during the regular session, however, during the special session held in late December the legislation became part of a trade with the Legislature for their 38% pay raise. The League was able to work in the Assembly Democratic conference to take out of the bill some of the most onerous language but in the middle of the night without legislators seeing the final printed language and with no debate in the Assembly, the Charter School Action 1998 was passed. It also passed in the Senate where retiring Senator Charles Cook, chair of the Education committee spoke eloquently in opposition to the legislation. Governor Pataki signed the legislation and it became law immediately.

Delegates to the 1999 League convention directed the League board to conduct a monitoring project of the Charter Schools in New York State. The Albany County League will be monitoring The New

Covenant School, one of three charter schools to open in 1999. Several more charter schools are slated to open in September 2000.

The League of Women Voters of Albany County, in conjunction with the State League, has developed a Charter-School monitoring instrument. Leagues who are interested in assessing Charter Schools in their local area can contact the State League for the research-monitoring instrument.

At its 2005 convention delegates voted to study charter schools as part of the larger update of it's on Financing Public Education K-12.

**CHARTER SCHOOL  
STATEMENT OF POSITION  
AS ANNOUNCED BY THE STATE BOARD, NOVEMBER 2006 (continued)**

**To more accurately measure student outcomes in charters and to compare them to those in traditional public schools, the League supports public funding to measure educational growth in individual students as they progress from grade to grade in charter schools (a value added approach).**

- **Charter schools represent an educational experiment whose efficacy has never received appropriate validation. A review of the performance of charters in New York State indicates that, while some do an excellent job of educating children, others are less successful than the most substandard traditional public schools. Moreover, eleven of the forty-four charters that would have come up for renewal by June 2007 are no longer in existence, representing a failure rate of 25%. Current oversight does not require that charters outperform traditional public schools to receive renewal of their charters, and there is no indication of institutional capacity to judge whether charters are in fact doing a better job of educating all children. Therefore, the League of Women Voters of New York State opposes increase of the cap on charter schools at this time.**
- **The Charter School Act should support quality over quantity. Do not increase the number of charter schools without having conducted research into characteristics that are likely to lead to success or failure.**  
**Alternatively, retain the current number of charters at 100, while amending the Charter School Act to provide that a charter may be reissued to another chartering entity upon closure of a charter school.**
- **Adopt measures to ameliorate the financial burden charters place on traditional public schools.<sup>1</sup>**
- **Assure charter schools more fully realize their educational goals by requiring proof for charter renewal of positive educational outcomes for all children (disaggregated by special needs) exceeding those in traditional public schools. To this end, charters should be required to measure educational growth in individual students as they progress from grade to grade in charter schools (value added approach);**
- **Develop public/private partnerships for research into characteristics that lead to charter success and failure, so that overall quality of charters and traditional public schools may be improved.**
- **To increase efficiency of operations, authority to grant, oversee, renew and revoke charters, other than those granted in public school conversions, should be vested in a single entity.**

<sup>1</sup> Such measures should include the following: transition assistance; home district payment to charters based on the same standard used to pay operating aid to school districts (While the League supports enrollment as the appropriate measure, it believes the measure should be identical for both charters and traditional public schools.); separate levels of reimbursement for elementary and secondary education to charter schools based on what the home districts spend for the level of schooling provided; limitation of the percentage of a school district's budget that could be paid to charter schools.