“Out and About with the League”
by Suzanne Schmidt, President

Much of what our Santa Fe League volunteers do is not in plain view for the general public to see. Preparing public statements. Attending committee meetings. Doing research. Logging phone calls. Writing checks and balancing check books. Emailing each other for clarification and direction as policy is set, expanded, or redefined. Organizing events. What some people call dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s. However, the past few weeks have seen our League members become highly visible across the city.

On August 15th, the newly designed LWVSFC website launched to widespread praise from many sources. As one new member summarized, “It’s a remarkably easy to navigate and highly professional website.” Music to the ears of our Director of Digital Experience Marsha Harner, who spent hours consulting with League members to secure content and finalize concepts. There are areas on the site that are still under development. Visit the site often for new information as well as to discover new sections that currently await completion.

The first “Libations with the League” found members and spouses/partners gathering at the Hilton Historic Plaza for drinks and conversation. In a casual, informal setting, people with a League affiliation had the opportunity to get to know one another on a more personal level and to openly engage in an exchange of ideas. It was a lively group, and new members in attendance expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to connect with sustaining members without having a formal agenda.

Under the able leadership of LWVSFC Director of Voter Services Suzanne Ronneau, candidate forums were conducted for statewide offices as well as District Attorney. In addition, the Voter Guide has been completed and is now on the LWVSFC website. Watch for the printed insert in the Santa Fe New Mexican on October 23rd. As if that weren’t enough,
Voter Services has organized multiple voter registration events under the leadership of Ann Coulston (adult voter registration) and the team of Joanie Sparkman, Sharon Starkey, and Virginia McCallum (high school voter registration). Feedback from the community is consistent about the importance of these League activities to voters.

The month was topped off with our first annual “Wine, Women, and the Vote” picnic in celebration of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The event was a fundraiser for LWVSFC, and hundreds of hours were spent in planning and implementation by committee members Nancy Baker, Laurie Glaze, Janet Lincoln, Virginia McCallum, Suzanne Schmidt, Joanie Sparkman, and Sharon Starkey. Although the weather turned cold and rainy at the last minute, the hardy souls who persevered to listen and dance to American JEM were wildly enthusiastic. One gentleman asked, “When’s the next League shindig? This is the most fun I have had in a long time!”

And so it goes when you are out and about with the League…

-Charter School Study

Wednesday, October 5, 2016
10 a.m. – 12 noon
Santa Fe County
Human Services Conference Room
2052 S. Galisteo Street, Santa Fe

LWVSFC will consider the consensus questions from the Charter School study. Please come and share your views.

Introduction
At a time when our state is facing major deficits and further cutbacks of state services, questions arise about whether we should reform and/or put on hold an educational experiment that has provided mixed educational results for our children. The following consensus questions are devised with the hope they will enable the LWVNM to join the discussion about how to get the greatest value for our limited state resources.

CHARTER SCHOOL CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

EDUCATION/MISSION

1. What criteria should be used to determine whether to authorize a new charter?
   A. The charter school’s mission appears to serve a need that regular public schools cannot
   B. Availability of funding and absence of financial harm to district public schools
   C. Demonstrated need based on student population projections

Background: “Demonstrated need” means the charter applicant would have to show that a substantial number of families would enroll. EXAMPLES: La Jicarita Montessori Charter School is now closing itself down after several years because it only has about 15 students. On the other hand, Albuquerque Sign Language Academy serves a critical need not met by traditional public schools (TPS). Over 70% of its students have other “special needs” in addition to hearing impairments.
2. Should New Mexico provide flexibility and supplemental funding for magnet programs and career academies within traditional public schools so that charter schools are not the only entities receiving funding for innovative programs?

3. Should NM disseminate effective charter school innovations to improve the traditional public education system and add a budget item, if necessary, for that purpose?

Background: A primary rationale for establishing charter schools was that they would stimulate innovation that would improve TPS. NM has no process to ensure dissemination of successful innovations and effective teaching practices with other charter schools or traditional public schools. Some model states (NJ and MA, for instance) require their education departments to define what constitutes innovation and apply this definition in awarding charter school contracts. They also require their education departments to assume the responsibility for regularly disseminating the lessons learned by charter schools so they both traditional public school districts and other charter schools benefit.

4. Charter schools are initially licensed for a five-year period and are renewed if they have made “progress” towards meeting state accountability standards and the specific performance goals in their individual charter contracts. If a charter school fails to meet minimum academic, financial, and organizational standards for two consecutive years or for two of the three most recent years, should its contract be automatically revoked?

Background: NACSA identified an urgent need for NM to develop clear written performance standards for authorization and renewal and recommended NM implement an automatic closure policy for charter schools that fail to meet these standards. State charter schools that have made “progress” are allowed to continue even though they have received failing school grades and have not demonstrated the ability to prepare students to meet state academic achievement standards. Automatic closure laws help states avoid costly lawsuits and lengthy appeals and ensure that students are moved into other schools on a timely basis. Charter schools are given warnings and put on improvement plans prior to automatic closure.

FISCAL IMPACT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY

5. a. Should the Legislature determine a set operating budget that can be used for charter schools, especially in a time of budget shortfall?

b. Should there be a cap tied to the fiscal health of New Mexico, with a moratorium or limit to further authorizations until the State’s financial health improves?

Background: Charter school authorization occurs independently of the state’s budget process and does not take into consideration the financial implications for the state. Partly because they receive more funding than traditional schools, local school districts have opened about 40 charter schools, despite declining enrollments. The state has also opened over 60 charter schools. The staffs of the Legislative Finance Committee and the Legislative Education Study Committee have repeatedly alerted legislators to the funding problems related to charter schools in attempts to slow their proliferation and the effects on the state’s expenditures. Many charter school costs are not part of the state’s approved budget. https://www.nmlegis.gov/minutes/ALESCminJul13.16.pdf

c. How should the Legislature address the need to upgrade non-compliant school facilities to meet minimum standards?
Background: New Mexico charter schools, like school districts, are eligible for facility funding if they meet certain criteria. The four basic funding sources for charter schools facilities are Lease Assistance, Standards-based Funding Awards, the Public School Capital Improvements Act, and the Public School Buildings Act. [link]

With regard to school facilities, NM is facing significant funding shortfalls and challenges given the increasing demands and other economic factors. NM’s capital outlay prioritization process requires all schools in sub-par facilities to be brought up to minimum standards before funding maintenance, upgrades, and new construction. Many charter schools are housed in sub-par facilities, meaning their needs must be prioritized over those of traditional schools, which serve 93% of NM’s students. [link]

6. Should a charter school’s finances be available for public scrutiny and should budget processes be similar to those for school districts, which require the public to be provided with an opportunity for input into decision-making? For example, should charter schools, like traditional schools, be required to make publicly available:

- amounts and sources of revenue?
- regular expenditure reports, including procurement contracts?
- teacher salaries and instructional support as a percent of expenditures?
- audit reports?

Background: School districts post their budgets and financial reports on their websites and are required to allow public comment in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. Some charter schools also post their financial statements, but a spot check by the Charter School Study Committee revealed that many do not. The PEC attempted to close several charter schools that overspent their budgets or had audit problems. The PED overturned their decisions and has allowed most of these schools to stay open. PED has taken over the finances of several charter schools with serious audit findings, leading to the State Auditor to order the Public Education Department to develop and implement an improvement plan.

7. Should charter school governing council members adhere to standards and best practices as delineated by the NM School Boards Association?

School board members of traditional schools generally get far more training than governing council members of charter schools. The NM School Boards Association allows charter school governing council members to participate in the additional training if they join as affiliate members, but it is not currently required.

8. Should the school funding formula be more equitable so as not to advantage most charter schools over traditional public schools?

Background: Most NM charter schools set 400 as their enrollment cap because of the funding advantage currently afforded to small schools (15% on average). A traditional public school has to accept every student who lives in the district. The NM funding formula is designed to aid small rural districts by giving them more funding per student because they lack economy of scale. NM statute 22-8-23.1 appears to bar charters in districts of more than 4,000 students from receiving size-adjustment aid, but the NM Public Education Department contends the
supplemental funding small charter schools get is allowable and justifiable. In a 2011 evaluation of the funding formula, Legislative Education Study Committee and the Legislative Finance Committee staff said the Charter Schools Act was never amended to explicitly include that provision. Example: Rio Rancho Public Schools receive $7,106 per student while Rio Rancho charter schools receive $9,452 per student. [https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ ALESC%2020071316%20Item%208%20Charter%20School%20Expansion,%2020Brief.pdf](https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ALESC%2020071316%20Item%208%20Charter%20School%20Expansion,%2020Brief.pdf)

9. While some charter schools serve fewer “at-risk” students than their traditional school counterparts, other charter schools serve as drop-out recovery schools. Some students at drop-out recovery schools are adults working on their high school credentials. Should NM define “school age” to include an upper age limit for student enrollment in public schools?

**Background:** Federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 20 USC §1400 et seq.) requires public schools to serve students with certified disabilities who have not completed high school through age 21. New Mexico has no definition of school age, so many charter schools are serving high school diplomas (rather than high school credentials formerly known as GEDs). In New Mexico, a "school-age person means a person who is at least five years of age prior to 12:01 a.m. on September 1 of the school year and who has not received a high school diploma or its equivalent. A maximum age of twenty-one shall be used for a person who is classified as special education membership as defined in Section 22 -8-2 NMSA 1978 or as a resident of a state institution.” Many charter schools serve adults seeking high school diplomas rather than high school credentials (formerly known as GEDs).

**Pros**
Adult students can attend adult education classes and obtain their high school credentials (formerly known as GEDs) at approximately $350 per year rather than approximately $8,000 per year for a high school diploma. Some charter schools serving adult students have lax attendance requirements for these adults, who often take years to graduate. A small percentage of the adults attending charters complete their diplomas, but charters encourage them to keep trying because they receive funding as long as these adult students are enrolled.

**Cons**
Students may seek a high school diploma instead of the GED or high school credential because some employers give preference to the diploma.

In addition to studying the high school curriculum, adults in charter schools rather than Adult Education classes may learn additional skills that help them function better in society. One nationally recognized example is the innovative Gorden Bernell Charter School in Albuquerque, which has transformed the lives of many adult drop-outs incarcerated in Bernalillo County Jail.

10. Currently the “at-risk” multiplier index of the public school funding formula is calculated for all the schools within a district’s boundary. Should the at-risk index be calculated on the actual enrollment at each school, which would allow drop-out recovery schools with a high proportion of at-risk students to receive more financial support than schools with a less needy student body?

**Overview of NM’s Public School Funding Formula:** [https://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/lesc/lescdocs/briefs/October2007/Item%205-OVERVIEW%20OF%20PS%20FUNDING%20FORMULA.pdf](https://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/lesc/lescdocs/briefs/October2007/Item%205-OVERVIEW%20OF%20PS%20FUNDING%20FORMULA.pdf)
VIRTUAL (ONLINE) SCHOOLS

11. Should public funding for virtual schools be less per student since the schools require less infrastructure?

Background: Virtual schools require less overhead funding than brick-and-mortar schools. In NM, they receive more funding per student than traditional schools, but are not producing good academic results. In addition to the formula funding costs, NM is spending over $4.5 million on contracts with for profit, out-of-state contracting companies, Pearson and K12Inc. For example, South Valley Academy, a brick-and-mortar charter school, spent 82 percent of total operational expenditures on salaries and benefits in FY15 while NM Virtual Academy (K12Inc) only spent 33 percent.

See data on NM Connections Academy, which has an F grade and a student/teacher ratio of 52:1 and the Legislative Education Study Committee Brief on Virtual linked below.


ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

12. Should NM develop an effective performance-based accountability system for charter schools focused on increased proficiency, growth, and college/career readiness and ensure that charter schools demonstrate positive student outcomes before being allowed to grow?

13. Should the Public Education Department have the clear, sole authority to grant, renew, and revoke state charter school contracts?

14. Should the Public Education Commission serve in an advisory role, setting evaluation standards for authorizing, renewing, and revoking contracts for all charter schools and helping to determine budget and other priorities for new charter schools?

Background: New Mexico divides the authority over state charter schools between the Public Education Commission (PEC), a 10-member regionally elected board, and the Public Education Department (PED). The PED is the state agency that oversees and funds all public schools. It employs 20 people in the Charter School Division and uses staff from other areas as well. It’s headed by the Secretary of Education, who is appointed by the Governor. Since its inception in 2007, the PEC has been allowed to authorize state charter schools without regard to budget availability and without consistent quality standards. Tension between the PEC and the PED has escalated, partly caused by the competing structures and this divided authority. The PEC has no budget and no staff and is not part of the budget appropriation process. To better serve the interests of students and taxpayers, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers is recommending that NM have one entity with “strong performance management tools” authorize and oversee state charter schools.

BOOK CLUB REMINDER

The League will hold its next Nonfiction Book Club meeting on Thursday, October 20, 2016, at Collected Works Bookstore & Coffeehouse beginning at 10:30 a.m. At the July Book Club meeting, members chose two books to ready for the October meeting: Saving Capitalism: For the Many Not the Few by Robert B. Reich and Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates.
League of Women Voters’ Citizen Advocacy at the Legislature Workshop

Saturday, December 10, 2016 – 10 a.m. to Noon
New Mexico State Capitol
Senator Peter Wirth and Representative Jimmie Hall

Objective: Advocacy is an action technique that the League uses to bring about passage of legislation at the local, state, and national levels of government. After League members have reached consensus on issues and has developed positions, the next step is to affect and effect legislation through advocacy.

Procedure for Advocating on LWVNM State Issues:

1. Only the LWVNM President, Action Chair, and approved designees are authorized to speak for LWVNM. The President or Action Chair should authorize the content of the testimony in advance. Authorized lobbyists can also testify in support of legislation using the language on LWVNM Issue Priorities sheets or the exact language in the LWVNM position on that issue.

2. Register as a LWVNM Lobbyist with the Secretary of State: Effective advocacy on a regular basis involves registering as a volunteer lobbyist for the League of Women Voters of New Mexico. The LWVNM President or Action Chair must sign the authorization form.

3. How do other League members advocate for LWVNM’s priorities?

If you are not a registered lobbyist for LWVNM, you can still advocate for League positions, but you are doing as a constituent, not representing LWVNM. You can give legislators the LWVNM Fact Sheet on the issue and let them know that you support the position. If you are a constituent, you may consider putting your name and address on the sheet before handing it to the legislator. Using personal mailing labels is an easy way to inform legislators that you are their constituents.

Individual League members are free to take whatever action they wish on any issue at any level of government as long as they do so in their own name. To avoid confusion, League members are asked to not mention the League unless authorized to speak for the League.

Advocacy is what happens before you vote. Extend your influence beyond just voting, as important as that is. Be part of the process that determines what goes on the ballot. Participate in the League’s Advocacy Workshop and learn how.
Senator Peter Wirth's "Top 10" Tips for Citizen Advocacy at the New Mexico Legislature (presented in true David Letterman style)

10. Don't be scared of the Round House – it’s your building.
9. Understand what it takes for a bill to become law.
7. E-mail is a great way to communicate with most legislators - but know legislator's preference.
6. A legislator's constituents are generally the best advocates.
5. Be courteous, and remember your bill is one of thousands.
4. Bills usually take more than one legislative session to pass.
3. A great place to meet legislators is on the chamber floor before or after session.
2. Speak up at committee meetings.
1. Count your votes and don’t lose sight of the target.

A Note from the Editor/Publisher

It has been my pleasure to be the editor/publisher of The Voter since April 2013. Regular items include the monthly message from the president of the Santa Fe League, announcements of regular and special events, a summary of the activities of the Action and Advocacy Committee, highlights of monthly board meetings, summaries of special studies, and the calendar.

What’s been missing is articles written by our members on other topics. This is your publication, too. Write a letter or column on a topic or issue near and dear to your heart, and share it with others. Set down a complaint or constructive criticism (with suggested remedy, of course). Praise the work of an individual who or organization that makes our community a better place to live. Write a book review. Don’t keep the good stuff all to yourself.

I spent many years negotiating and writing government contracts for the U.S. Department of Energy. Contract language had to be precise and clear, had to withstand tough scrutiny, and stand up in court in case of a dispute. Words and language are important. I loved my job. And now, in retirement, I have the good fortune to wordsmith for the Santa Fe League.

Words can hurt. Words can heal. Words can inform and inspire others. Get published. Send your copy to mries415@yahoo.com.

-Miriam Ries
Voter Registration Actions & Summary for the 2016 General Election in Santa Fe County

To encourage adult voter registration (as contrasted with high school registration efforts), we mustered a sufficient number of third party registrars to staff five different venues: Southside Farmer’s Market every Tuesday from 3-5 p.m. from July 12th through September 27th; Co-op Market in the Solano Center every Wednesday in September from 3-5 p.m.; Main Library, September 20th and 27th from 10 a.m.-noon; Christus St. Vincent Hospital all day on October 4th; and three nursing homes: Brookdale, Montecito, and Santa Fe Care Center - one visit each for two hours.

In late August, we posted “how to become a third party registrar” in the Volunteer section of the League website and via a Constant Contact message to all members. Six members were trained as third party registrars. Phillip Salazar, Voter Information Specialist, Santa Fe County Clerk’s Office, told us that they were processing 2,000-3,000 new registrations every two weeks! About 1/3 of these new requests are coming from online registrations. Former registered voters’ names are purged if the registrant hasn’t voted in two consecutive General Elections. This may account for the number of adults seeking to register.

-Ann Coulston
Adult Voter Registration Chair
(for Voter Services)

Guest Speaker Luncheon
Tuesday, October 18, 2016
11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Hilton, Historic Santa Fe Plaza
100 Sandoval Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501

Join us for lunch and hear WildEarth Guardians speaker Rebecca Sobel address whether leasing public lands to oil, gas, and coal industries is in the public interest. Ms. Sobel will present measures we can take both to protect these lands and free them for alternative uses.

WildEarth Guardians protects and restores the wildlife, wild places, wild rivers, and health of the American West.

RSVP by mailing a check for $25.00 to the office or by paying online at the Santa Fe League website: www.lwvsfc.org

RSVP by 10/14/2016.
students were registered to vote at Capital High School on September 22, 2016. Some of the students who registered will be able to vote in the general election on November 8th. Others have preregistered because they will turn 18 in 2017.

Barbara Conroy (standing, left) speaks to students about the history and importance of voting.

A special note of thanks to Capital High School teacher Meredith Tilp for facilitating the League’s access to the campus and students and for the photographs which appear on this page.
Calendar 2016-2017

October
October 5, 10-Noon: Unit Meeting – LWVNMC Charter School Regulation Consensus Meeting, Santa Fe County Health and Human Services Conference Room, 2052 S Galisteo Street
October 8, 1:30 p.m., Eldorado Entertainment Space: CANCELED
Iron-Jawed Angels (film, U.S. suffrage movement)
October 14, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting (this is Friday)
October 18, 11:30-1: General Meeting—“Keep It in the Ground”, Rebecca Sobel, WILD EARTH GUARDIANS, Hilton
October 20, 10:30-11:30: Nonfiction Book Club, Collected Works Bookstore, 202 Galisteo

November
November 8, Election Day
November 9, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
November 12, 11-3: LWVNMC Board meeting, Socorro
November 17, 11-1: Meow Wolf Tour

December
December 10, Time TBD: LWVNMC Citizen Advocate Workshop, Santa Fe, NM Roundhouse
December TBD: LWVSFC Board meeting
December 14, 11:30-1:30: General Meeting Holiday Lunch – Author Lois Rudnick, Hilton

January
January 11, 11:30-1:30: General Meeting Legislative Preview, Hilton
January 17, noon: New Mexico Legislature convenes
January 18, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
January 21, 11-2:30: LWVNMC Board meeting, Santa Fe
January XX or XX, SFPS School Board and SFCC Board Candidate Forum(s)
January 31, 10-12: Unit Meeting-Program Planning

February
February 7, SFPS School & SFCC Boards Election Day
February 8, 5:30-7:30: Legislative Reception, Garrett’s Desert Inn
February 8, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
February 9, League Day at the Legislature

March – Women’s History Month
March 8, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
TBD: Sunshine Week Event
March 11, 11-3: LWVNMC Board meeting, Santa Fe
March 18, noon: New Mexico Legislature ends
TBD: Women’s History Month Event
March 29, 10-12 PM: New Mexico History Museum Tour

April
April 4 or 5, 9-11: Unit Meeting – LWVSFC Economic Development Study Consensus meeting (Jody Larson)
April 12, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
April 20, 10:30-11:30: Nonfiction Book Club, Collected Works, 202 Galisteo

May
May 5, 11:00-1:30: Annual Meeting, Hilton
May 11, 11-1: LWVSFC Board meeting
May 20-21, LWVNMC Convention – Santa Fe, Hilton

Regular meetings:
Action-Advocacy 1st Thursday of each month,
Tiny’s Restaurant (Susan Mertes)
LWVSFC Board meetings 2nd Wednesday of each month @ NM Bank & Trust, St Michael’s Drive
Unit Meetings are only for League members
Check www.lwvsfc.org for locations and updates.
*LWVNMC and other organization functions in italics
NEW MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL FORM
(Please complete fully even if renewing.)

Date: _______________   Name: (please print) ____________________________________________________________

Address: (please include zip) ________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________  Email: _______________________________________________________________

______ DO NOT include my contact information in the annual Membership Handbook Directory listing.

Membership checks made payable to LWVSFC: (Please mail form with check to Attn: Membership Chair at address at bottom.)

____ Individual and Associate membership: $54 (Associate members - non-U.S. citizen, and cannot vote on League matters.)

____ Family membership: $80 (Individual plus one family member) Family member name: ____________________________

  • For separate listing of Family member in Handbook directory, please list phone and email:
    Family member phone: ___________________________  Family member email: ____________________________

____ Student membership: $30 (For students 18-25 years and currently enrolled in accredited institution.)

(Membership is paid annually for the term September 1 through the following August 31. It includes state (LWVNM) and national (LWVUS) dues. If you are joining between April and August of any year, your membership will extend through the following year to September 1.)

  • Donation check payable to LWVSFC - (Please note “General Fund” on your check.)
    ____ Unrestricted general fund contribution (not tax deductible): $ _________ Check # __________

  • Donation check payable to LWVSFC - (Please note “Education Fund” on your check.)
    ____ Education Fund (tax deductible): $ _________ Check # __________

  • Can you attend mid-day meetings, luncheons and other activities during the week? Yes ___  No ___

Volunteer Interests - LWVSFC success is based on the assistance of member volunteers. We welcome and encourage your help! (Circle all that apply):

Voter Services:

• Voter registration  • H.S. voter registration  • Info tables
  (Are you a trained Voter Registrar? Yes ___  No ___)  (If No, walk-in training is available at County Clerk office downtown.)

• Monitor public meetings  • Candidate forums/meetings  • Lobby government officials (w/LWVNM)

Organizational Support:

Help at events  • Development/fundraising  • Membership  • VOTER content  • Website  • Staff League office  • Board member

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO THE LWVSFC, 1472 ST. FRANCIS DR., SANTA FE NM 87505
505-982-9766  ● www.lwvsfc.org 18-April-2016