

The League of Women Voters of Illinois

February 18, 2012

Illinois State Board of Elections
100 North 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Superintendent Koch and Chairman Chico,

The League of Women Voters appreciates your willingness to solicit comments regarding the state's bid to request a waiver from No Child Left Behind (NCLB). We applaud efforts promoting transparency in governmental processes.

We recognize that NCLB requirements unfairly penalized certain sectors of the population, most notably students from districts with low property taxes. Having looked through the current draft of the state's request for a waiver from standards, we are pleased to see that it appears to address the following criteria:

- Shape the design, construction, and application of assessment systems so they are valid and appropriate for all students taking tests in Illinois.
- Use multiple sources of evidence to describe and interpret school and district performance fairly, based on a balance of progress toward and success in meeting student academic learning targets, thereby replacing the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) structure.
- Improve the validity and reliability of criteria used to classify the performance of schools and districts to ensure fair evaluations and to minimize bias in accountability decisions.
- Recognize indicators of student growth – rather than simply focusing on whether or not a benchmark was reached.
- Provide effective, targeted assistance to schools correctly identified as needing assistance.
- Help districts and schools fulfill their educational responsibilities to foster learning by ensuring that all students have access to the resources they need to succeed and by building capacity to improve teaching.

We would like to emphasize the importance of that final point. We realize that the waiver requires the state to reward schools, and we appreciate that three of the categories are rewarding Title 1 schools. However we strongly urge you to make sure that resources are targeted primarily at schools which are disadvantaged by the state's reliance on property taxes and by the tremendous discrepancies in school funding in Illinois.

Sincerely,

Jan Dorner, President
Laura Kratz, Vice President - Issues
Elaine Adler, Director - Issues
Claire McIntyre, Specialist - Education
Jean Pierce, Specialist - Education