

# Introduction to the LWVMA Study on Charter Schools

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League Leader Lunch  
September 17, 2016  
Hingham, MA



## MA Study on Charter Schools

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## Welcome!

- Study process
- Charter Schools Study
- Questions



## MA Study on Charter Schools

### Study Process



## Why Conduct Studies?

- Process unique to LWV:
  - Integral part of League
  - Thoughtfulness sets us apart
  - Retains our respected reputation
- To consider all sides of an issue
- To involve members in consensus
- To develop positions on issues



## Why This Study?

- Currently LWVMA has no position on charter schools
- Charter schools are topic of proposed legislation every session
- Controversial, multi-faceted issue
- Impacts all residents



## Why Participate?

- Important that every local League participate to achieve a consensus of our statewide membership
- Every member can provide input through consensus
- Opportunity for League members to self-educate and educate the public



## Get Momentum Going

### Generate interest

- Bulletin articles on some aspect of charter schools
- Bulletin reminders about accessing and reading materials
- Build enthusiasm at membership meetings
- Build on public interest in charter schools this fall



## Engage the Public

Ballot question 2 (Nov 8) is an opportunity

- ✓ **Ballot question forum** that includes speakers from the ballot question committees, pro/con
- ✓ **Informational forum** to educate voters about charter schools in MA, based on LWVMA study materials

These are not the same type of forum and their intent should be clearly announced and explained.



## Local League Board Responsibilities

- Appoint study committee and chair
  - Ensure open-minded and balanced
- Schedule information sessions and/or consensus meeting in League calendar
  - Plan enough time for preparation of consensus report and board approval
- Approve consensus report before submission
- Submit final consensus report to LWVMA (Feb 1)

## Role of Local Study Committee

- Be open-minded with regard to both sides of each question
- Meet to:
  - Review available materials
  - Review the consensus questions document
  - Assign members different areas to research
  - Plan consensus meeting(s)
- Have a consensus meeting dry run



## Planning Consensus Meeting

### Roles for consensus meeting

- ✓ Facilitator (discussion leader)
- ✓ Presenter(s) (content expert)
- ✓ Time keeper
- ✓ Recorder



## Practical Considerations

- Plan for three hours; allow 3.5
- May have multiple sessions
- Provide some refreshments
- Provide handout of consensus questions for all attendees
- Time limits for each question
  - Determine in advance which will go quickly and which will require more time



## Typical Consensus Agenda

- Introduction: purpose, format, ground rules, roles, explain consensus
- Summary of background
- For each question:
  - Read/explain question
  - Presentation of yes and no
  - Discussion/consensus
  - Facilitator ensure final consensus decision clearly stated for members and recorder
- Wrap-up: recorder announces each answer



## Preparing Members for Consensus Meeting

- Make materials easily accessible—remind them early and often to read
  - Offer to print for anyone unable
- Strongly encourage coming prepared by reading all materials
- Stress the importance of the study, the process, and every member's role
- Explain consensus process in advance and at the meeting



## What is Consensus?

- A “sense of the members”
- A mutual agreement among members arrived at through discussion and understanding
- Not a simple majority, not unanimity
- Not achieved by voting
- Incorporates interests of all participants in building meaningful agreement



## Reaching Consensus

- See Handbook for Successful Consensus Meetings [http://forum.lwv.org/sites/default/files/handbook\\_for\\_successful\\_consensus\\_meetings\\_final.pdf](http://forum.lwv.org/sites/default/files/handbook_for_successful_consensus_meetings_final.pdf)
- Member agreement emerges through:
  - Discussion focused on the question; give and take; group interaction; exchange of viewpoints
- Three outcomes for each question
  - Yes/No/No consensus
- Comments for clarity; recorder keeps track



## After Consensus Meeting

- Study committee or subcommittee debriefs and prepares consensus report
  - For each question, outcome and comments
- Local board approves consensus report
- Board assigns member to submit consensus report to LWVMA
- Local board should retain a copy of the final, submitted report



## Final Steps

- LWVMA board appoints a committee to prepare position
- LWVMA board approves position
- State Convention 2017 approves position
- Once approved, it becomes the basis for action
- Position added to *Where We Stand*



## MA Study on Charter Schools

### The Charter School Study



## Study Milestones

- ✓ Feb-Mar 2015 State Program Planning
- ✓ May 2015 State Convention vote
- ✓ Jan-Jul 2016 Charter School Study Committee
- ✓ Jul 2016-Sep 2016 Document preparation
- ✓ Oct 1, 2016 Materials available
- ✓ Oct 2016-Jan 2017 Local League study and consensus
- ✓ Feb 1, 2017 Consensus reports due



## Study Overview

- **Purpose:** to reach a statewide consensus on charter schools that becomes LWVMA position
- **Position:** will become part of broader state and national positions on education that already exist
- **Scope:** Charter schools in **Massachusetts only**
- **Not in scope:**
  - District schools; focus is on charter schools only
  - Public school choices other than charter schools
  - Social and other issues that impact education efforts



## Study Materials

### Available at [lwvma.org](http://lwvma.org)

- MA Charter School Study Guide
  - Introduction
  - Charter School Fundamentals
  - Charter School Funding
  - Consensus questions with YES and NO comments
  - Additional Reading/Bibliography
- Handbook for Successful Consensus Meetings
  - General guidelines from LWVUS



## Study Materials

### Committee considerations for study materials

- Balanced
- Based on solid evidence
- Committee investigated controversies and assertions
- Only included an issue if there was factual information available from a reputable source



## Sample Question

11a. Should it be a requirement that charter school boards of trustees include parents?

**YES:** Requiring parents to serve on charter school boards gives parents a greater voice. It would help assure that demographic groups that make up the student body are represented in school governance. Parental involvement is necessary to alleviate any sense of disenfranchisement.

**NO:** Charter school boards may not be able to find parents willing to meet the state's financial disclosure and other regulations for charter trustees. Parents may have a hard time making a decision to serve the best interest of the school rather than the best interest of their child. Setting aside a certain number of board seats for parent representatives may limit the ability of the board to include the mix of skills necessary for good governance. Charter schools may choose to include parents on their boards but it should not be required. Parents can be involved in other ways.

*Background information on this question is in Section II G of the Fundamentals document.*



## Fundamentals Section I

- I. Charter Schools and Public Education in Massachusetts
- A. Why were charter schools established?
  - B. What is a Commonwealth charter school?
  - C. What are Horace Mann charter schools?
  - D. How many charter schools are in Massachusetts?
  - E. How does Massachusetts limit the number of charter schools?
  - F. What options do Massachusetts parents have for public schools?
  - G. What is the judicial and legislative background for charter schools?
  - I. How are charter schools organized?



## Fundamentals Section II

- II. Charter School Accountability
- A. Who authorizes charter schools?
  - B. What is the basis for the decision to award a charter?
  - C. How does Massachusetts hold charter schools accountable?
  - D. What are the challenges for the state in providing oversight for charter schools?
  - E. Are there any gaps in the DESE's oversight of charter schools?
  - F. What is the school district's responsibility for Commonwealth charter schools?
  - G. Who is responsible for the operation of charter schools?
  - H. What information are charter schools legally bound to share with the government and public?
  - I. Who do charter schools serve?
  - J. What are the demographics of charter school students?
  - K. Where are charter schools located?

## Fundamentals Section III

- III. Other issues
- A. How do charter school admissions work?
  - B. What is the role of discipline in charter schools?
  - C. Are charter school teachers certified, licensed and evaluated in the same way as district school teachers?
  - D. How is Massachusetts doing academically?
  - E. How do charter schools in Massachusetts compare academically to district schools?
  - F. How are innovations being shared among schools?



## Funding

- I. Chapter 70 and the Foundation Budget
- II. Calculating the district budget
- III. Charter school tuition
- IV. Other charter school funding
- VI. Chapter 46 Aid
- VII. Critiques of funding process



## Study Committee

- Shelley Drowns, Waltham, Chair
- Clare Gordon, Concord-Carlisle
- Louise Haldeman, Concord-Carlisle
- Karen Mazza, Cape Cod Area
- Sanford Ostroy, Brookline
- Nancy Polan, Northampton Area
- Margie Riddle, Northampton Area
- Carolyn Sellars, Member-at-large
- Palma McLaughlin, Boston
- Nancy Brumback, Sudbury
- Mary Ann Ashton, Acton Area

## Need Help?

For help with the study contact:  
Shelley Drowns (sdrowns@lwvma.org)