

EDUCATION

Our local education position includes

- i. Support of a unified school district with current and projected enrollment and phasing out of inadequate or outdated schools
- ii. Continuous upgrading of school facilities which should be flexible for future and current needs in order to provide a complete educational program
- iii. Continued land acquisition in relation to area growth with the district
- iv. Effective communication among school board, administrators, teaching staff, fiscal body, and the public
- v. Equitable and adequate taxation to support school needs and the exploration of sources of taxation other than property tax
- vi. Upgrading of teachers' salaries sufficient to maintain a staff of qualified teachers
- vii. That the school district is fiscally independent. Within the framework of the state league education position and our local position the Steven Point Area League School Issues Committee is currently addressing how to improve Wisconsin school funding. Use the Contact Us if you would like more information.

History and Rationale

We believe all electors in the school district should have an equal opportunity to run for school board positions and seats should be divided as equally as possible between city and outlying areas on the basis of population.

Significant change in the public school system was shaped by events which occurred before the organization of the Stevens Point League. In 1947 the legislature mandated the creation of county school committees to develop plans for school district reorganization in each county. July 1, 1962 was targeted as the date by which all territory in Wisconsin should be part of a high school district. In Portage County three districts were formed, the largest being the Stevens Point Joint District. Other areas of the county were attached to high schools in Rosholt and Almond - Bancroft.

In 1950 a 21-member citizens advisory committee was appointed to study and make recommendations for the Stevens Point school system. Goals for Industrial Expansion had focused attention on buildings that were antiquated and poorly maintained. The factual material collected and the scope of the public information were impressive and resulted in the

beginning of a long-term building program including four new elementary schools, improved or new junior high schools and expansion of the high school.

By 1962, when Leaguers did a survey of schools as a requirement of the provisional status —Know Your Town study, the two oldest elementary building had been replaced with new facilities —Jefferson in 1956 and McKinley in 1958. Another school, Washington, in the northeast area of the city, was in the planning stage.

School Board membership had been cut from eighteen (18) to nine (9) members to be elected at large—six from the city; one from Park Ridge or the towns of Dewey, Hull and Sharon; one from the villages of Whiting or Plover or town of Plover; one from the village of Junction City or towns of Sharon, Carson, Eau Pleine and Linwood.

The first local study, adopted in 1963, was —a thorough study of the public school systems. It focused on the types of districts allowed under Wisconsin statutes, operation of the local school board, district administrative and teaching staffs, salaries, enrollment and attendance. The study was continued in 1964 with emphasis on curriculum.

All schools in the district operated on a K-8-4 plan. Consolidation brought into the district McDill, Roosevelt and Kennedy buildings along with seven smaller building of which five were phased out. The number of school-age children in the district increased from 5047 in 1961 to 9104 in 1963. Of the latter number, 4269 or 47% attended public schools.

One of two studies adopted in 1965 was a study of improving facilities and educational methods. The study explored new teaching methods and materials and questioned the traditional building concept of contained classrooms. Overcrowding was apparent and the financing of a building program was more realistic politically by vote of a fiscal body than by a referendum. The consensus reached in the spring of 1966 was:

We support the continued development of our public school system.

1. The immediate building of a new junior high school
2. Upgrading of teacher salaries sufficient to maintain a staff of well-qualified teachers.
3. The present Joint School District system.

In 1967 members voted “continuation of the study of present and future needs of the Stevens Point school system with special emphasis on acquiring lands, building schools, and related financing.” The study showed that 343 elementary school children were housed in rented facilities in five buildings other than school property. In addition, 18 classrooms located in schools built between 1891 and 1914 had been recommended for phasing out by the citizens’ committee in 1953 as inadequate and/or unsafe. Crowded conditions in Emerson junior high would be alleviated with the opening of a new junior high school in September 1968, but increasing enrollments would soon necessitate a second junior high. P. J. Jacobs High School, with a recommended capacity of 1200, had 1723 students and used temporary facilities at four nearby locations. Many deficiencies in programs, particularly in the sciences, resulted from

inadequate and crowded conditions that forced 700 students outside the main building every hour of the school day.

The LWV resource committee for this study printed a 14-page factual report to members and the community on the status of the schools, budgeted receipts and expenditures, Wisconsin school taxation policy, federal and state aids, the district's borrowing power and a comparison of per-pupil expenditures in eight central Wisconsin districts. The February 1968 Consensus was:

Support of a Stevens Point Joint District to assure:

1. High School facilities to provide a complete educational program
2. Continued building in keeping with current and projected enrollments
3. Continued land acquisition in relation to area growth
4. Equitable and adequate taxation
5. Effective communication among school board, administrators, teaching staff, fiscal body and the public through the use of mass media.

Action began in April '68 with a go-see tour of the high school, which was reported, in newspaper article and pictures. The **Daily Journal** ran a series of three articles based on the League's published report.

The 1968 annual meeting voted to consolidate the 1966 and 1968 positions. Item I-1 included "with immediate priority to high school needs and the phasing out of inadequate or outdated buildings." This phase was deleted in 1972 after successful action in support of a new school in the Plover-Whiting area and unsuccessful action to seek consideration of another site for the new high school. (Our opposition was based upon reports of the soil conservations, whose testing showed the land to be undesirable due to high water table.) Item I-5 "encourage exploration of sources of taxation other than property tax resulted from local consensus during a state study of taxes and state-local relationships the same year. We also dropped "building of a new junior high" in 1972.

In 1976—a study aimed at reaching local League agreement on type of school district was adopted after years of watching the common council cut the school board's budget. The legislature had made it easier to change the type of district and consensus change item I to "support of a Unified District" and added item I-7 as reason for the change. The annual meeting vote directed the committee to enlarge the scope of the study if needed and the study was enlarged to include a study of school board elections. League sought a legal opinion from the district attorney following a proposal in January 1976 to split the city into Board of Education districts. The opinion, with supporting case evidence, was that access to the ballot is a right equal in principle to one man, one vote.

When the nine-member school board was set up in 1962, it was by gentleman's agreement. At that time it represented a fair balance of city-rural interests relative to population and assessed value—board member being elected by voters at large for three-year terms with the

requirement that six be from Stevens Point, one from the western sector of the district, one from the southern sector, and one from the northeastern sector. Under this arrangement, openings for city representatives occur every year, but an opening for a representative in each outlying area occurs only once in three years. The study showed that districts no longer have approximately the same number of electors. Both population and assessed value are closer to a 5-4 ratio than a 6-3 ratio. Member agreement resulted in item II.