



The VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE PENSACOLA BAY AREA

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Summer 2009

Education Study & Consensus: The Impact of Retention of Third Graders in Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties



Background

In April of 2006, the Education Committee of the League of Women Voters of the Pensacola Bay Area began investigating the impact of retention of third graders in the public schools of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties as effected by the federal legislation No Child Left Behind.

Standards under NCLB do not define the achievement parameters of proficiency; this designation was left to the states. Florida, under the A+ plan, set the 51st percentile as proficient in reading, and the Florida legislature and governor established rather stringent requirements for students passing third grade. FCAT is the test Florida youngsters take over a period of several days in the spring. It is a pass-fail test. Retention in Florida is mandatory for any third grade student scoring at Level 1 (lowest) on the reading section of the FCAT. Level 3 is considered proficient. In Escambia County during the spring of 2007, 3,136 third graders took the test with 596 or 19% scoring at the lowest level. In Santa Rosa County during the spring of 2007, 1,800 third graders took the test with 126 or 7% scoring at the lowest level.

Before examining the information gleaned from the study, the committee felt it was important to consider the demographics of the two counties. Escambia County and Santa Rosa County lie in the panhandle at the extreme west end of the state of Florida. Though neighboring, these two counties are dissimilar.

Demographics	Escambia	Santa Rosa
Population in 2006	295,426	144,561
% of growth 2000-2006	0.3%	22.8%
Racial breakdown (2006)		
White	71.3%	90.5%
Black	23.0%	4.5%
Other	5.7%	5%
Home Ownership (2000)	67.3%	80.4%
Median household income (2004)	\$36,743	46,298
Percent of free lunches		
2006	49.5	30.1
2007	45.7	23.1
2008	46.9	22.4

	Escambia	Santa Rosa
Percent of reduced lunch		
2006	11.0	7.8
2007	11.9	8.7
2008	11.9	8.6
Percent of free & reduced lunches		
2006	60.5	37.9
2007	57.6	31.8
2008	58.8	31.0

History

Percentage of third graders in Escambia County Scoring in reading on the FCAT

	2005	2006	2007
Level 5	6	4	7
Level 4	27	31	28
Level 3	32	36	33
Level 2	12	13	14
Level 1	23	15	19

Percentage of third graders in Santa Rosa County scoring in reading on the FCAT

	2005	2006	2007
Level 5	12	10	12
Level 4	41	47	46
Level 3	30	32	28
Level 2	8	6	8
Level 1	8	5	7

Number of third graders scoring at Level 1 in reading on the FCAT

	Escambia	Santa Rosa
2002	899	226
2003	758	130
2004	882	150
2005	738	137
2006	492	86
2007	596	126

In both counties, students were given the opportunity to attend summer school in hope the necessary skills would be acquired to pass on to fourth grade.

Summer School

Number of students participating in summer school June, 2007 - Scoring on the FCAT

	Escambia	Santa Rosa
Level 1	433	89
Level 2	51	21
Level 3 or higher	2	0

During the summer of 2007, committee members spoke with Dr. Kathleen Heubach at Spencer Bibbs Elementary School, where her graduate students were using the Howard Street Tutoring Program. This program involved graduate-student volunteers tutoring children, with a teacher making the lesson plans.

Tutoring Programs

UWF is a supplier of tutoring programs under Title I. During the 2006-2007 school term, the University, as one of the 30 authorized centers in Escambia County, served 800 students of the 1350 students in 18 schools. The UWF program provides bus service, following the school tutoring sessions. Of the Title I budget, 20% is allocated for tutoring and transportation. In the Escambia County School district, this amounts to \$1200 per child.

Number of Students Retained School year 2007-2008

	Escambia	Santa Rosa
Actually retained in 3 rd grade	209	23
Passed by portfolio	224	9
Passed/Good Cause Exemptions	163	36
Retained 2nd time 3rd grade	10	0
Number retained previous grade	99	7

Good cause exemptions are given to:

- students who show through a teacher-developed portfolio that they can read on grade level
- students who show an acceptable level of performance on the alternate reading test (the SAT)
- limited English-proficient students who have had less than two years of instruction in an English for Speakers of Other Languages program
- students with disabilities whose individual educational plan (IEP) shows that it is not appropriate for them to take the FCAT
- students with disabilities who take the FCAT and whose IEP or 504 Plan says that they have received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years but who still show a deficiency in reading and who were previously retained in kindergarten through grade 3
- students who have received intensive remediation in reading for two or more years but who still have a deficiency in reading and who have already been retained in kindergarten through grade 3 for a total of two years

Concern

The numbers of students who already have been retained in a previous grade and those who were repeating third grade for the second time are of great concern.

Since NCLB has not been in operation long enough to determine the percentage of students graduating who have repeated one or more grades, or the number of students who have been retained who have dropped out of school before graduation, the committee examined available research. The research indicates that, “grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out of high school.” Research does show the earlier the retention the better and

that parent involvement is essential for long-term success.

During the fall of 2008, the committee obtained the FCAT scores of Escambia and Santa Rosa third-graders who were retained as well as those taking the FCAT the second time they were in grade three. The committee greatly appreciated the assistance of Malcolm Thomas, Escambia County and Sharon Diamond, Santa Rosa County who provided the following statistics which were not required under NCLB.

Repeating Third Graders - FCAT SCORES

(for students repeating third grade and taking the FCAT for the second time as a third grader)

Date	number of third grade repeaters taking FCAT	number scoring at Level I the second time	%
Escambia County			
2005	307	134	44%
2006	307	94	31%
2007	192	71	37%
2008	176	60	34%
Totals	982	359	37%
Santa Rosa County			
2005	55	11	20%
2006	46	9	20%
2007	42	9	21%
2008	29	5	17%
Totals	172	34	20%

Between 2005 and 2008, the percentage of retained third-graders taking the FCAT for the second time and scoring at Level 1:

Escambia County	37%
Santa Rosa County	20%

Conclusions

1. The beneficial effect of mandatory retention in third grade for a significant number of children in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties is questionable.
2. Longitudinal data or long-term tracking of individual student progress should be required under NCLB and Florida’s A+ plan. Currently there is no established process for determining whether or not an individual student receives any long-term benefit from retention.
3. Academic research does not favor mass retention as a viable means for determining student success in school or in learning. Our study seems to validate that premise.
4. Consideration needs to be given to educational programs rather than continued retention for those children not performing successfully at the third-grade level

5. Research indicates there is a relationship between socioeconomic status and school success or student test score-performance. Our study seems to validate that research..

LWVPBA supports tracking of individual students over the long-term, including through the 12th grade, to determine whether, and to what degree, retention correlates with subsequent student academic success.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Goggins, Chair, Marge Anderson, Nancie Lake, Gene Pettis, Charlotte Schipman and Pam Schwartz

List of professional sources:

Malcolm Thomas, Director of Evaluation Services, Escambia County.

Vicki Wolf, Director of Education, Santa Rosa County.

Sharon Diamond, Director of Elementary Education, Santa Rosa County

Dr. Kathleen Heubach, Department of Education at UWF
Dr. Craig Jones, Educational Research and Development Center at UWF.

Six visits to Escambia County summer school program sites.

Two visits to Santa Rosa County summer school program sites.

The League extends condolences to Dr. Bob Williamson and his family on the death of Sara, a longtime League and board member.

League Membership

by Susan Metzger, 932-4039

One of the responsibilities of each member of our League is to provide financial support for its activities. Each year at the Annual Meeting members approve a budget that is based on the gifts and dues to the League. Without that income, your League cannot produce the *Voter* newsletter, purchase supplies, pay for the telephone or web site, www.lwvpba.org. It is incumbent on all members to provide this support. The fiscal year for our League runs from May 1 to April 30 of the following year. Annual dues are payable at the Annual Meeting..

At this time almost one third of our members have not paid their dues. Your support is vital for our League to continue to be a rational voice in local government decisionmaking. Look at your mailing label on this *Voter*. If the date on the label is May-09 and is printed in red, we have not received your payment. Please use the form on the back of your newsletter and send in your check to support your League.

59th Annual Meeting

The 59th Annual Meeting and Luncheon was held on May 2, 2009 at New World Landing with more than 60 people in attendance.

The business meeting reflected the passage of the 2009-2010 budget as published.

The following Local Program was adopted:

1. Continue to review and update the Solid Waste and Garbage Collection positions.
2. Continue to review and update Port of Pensacola position.
3. Monitor the issue of consolidation for Escambia County.

The existing local program was adopted, including the education position on the retention of third graders in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties.

The membership elected officers and directors for 2009-2010.

President, Deborah Nelson, 449-1746

1st Vice President, Susan Metzger, 932-4039

2nd Vice President, Rosemary Hays-Thomas, 477-5560

Secretary, Haley Richards, 438-4214

Treasurer, Marilyn Badessa, 478-1830

Directors, Paula Montgomery, Dian Parsley, Ellen Roston, Mary Bishop with Mary Gutierrez and Kathy Kerr returning to the board.

The 2010 Nominating Committee is Vivian Faircloth, chair, Charlotte Schipman and Laurie McBee.

Dr. Carol Malt, the luncheon speaker, presented an interesting overview of the current life of women in Morocco. She incorporated slides into her talk. ♦♦

Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy

by Vivian Faircloth, 438-5539

The Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy (FCFEP) is a newly formed independent, nonprofit, non-partisan organization engaged in research and education on state fiscal and economic matters, with particular attention to their impact on low and moderate/middle income Floridians and local small businesses owned by, and employing, Floridians.

Focused on Florida's fiscal and economic matters, FCFEP is coordinating workshops throughout the state to provide opportunities for local communities to have input on financial decisions that will be made in next year's legislative session.

The workshop in Pensacola is tentatively set for September 24th. LWVF is a member of the coalition to examine a fair tax structure.



President's Journal

President Deborah has been very busy representing League in our community this summer. Letters were published and presentations were given, based on existing League positions.

Public Option Is Key to Health Care Reform

While it is encouraging that Senate and House committees are beginning to seriously consider health care reform legislation, it is critical that the U.S. Congress takes action and passes real health care reform in the next few months. America is facing a health care crisis, caused by a combination of skyrocketing costs and a broken insurance system that leaves 47 million of us without any coverage. Americans who do have insurance face ever-higher premiums, the fear of losing employment-subsidized policies, and the threat of bankruptcy if complicated, industry-oriented claims processes deny payment for catastrophic illness or life saving drug expenses.

The current health care system is endangering both our economy and our health, and voters have made it clear that they want change. According to a study reported in The New England Journal of Medicine, 70 percent of Americans surveyed believe the health care system needs major changes, if not a complete overhaul. Health care reform legislation must guarantee access to quality, affordable, comprehensive health care to all U.S. residents. It is universal coverage of this fundamental need that will measure the humanity of our system.

But coverage is not enough. We also need to provide for quality and safety in the health care system. The legislation must establish a system-wide program to coordinate information, edify best practices, and provide consumers the information they need to protect themselves and their families. In addition, it is essential that comparative data on treatments, benefits packages and medical outcomes be made publicly available so that individuals can make informed health decisions.

Congress needs to take additional strong action to reduce the costs of health care for individuals, businesses and communities. As a nation, we are spending \$1 out of every \$6 we earn on health care. Over the last three decades, increases in the amount we spend on healthcare have consistently risen faster than wages and inflation. Legislation must provide effective cost controls, equitable distribution of services and allow for efficient and economical delivery of care.

It's not a "free market" if consumer demand is a matter of life-or-death. Parents don't have a "choice" to seek or not seek treatment for sick children. But one choice, a

government administered health insurance plan like Medicare that would compete with private health insurance plans, will be key to controlling health care expenses and keeping everybody honest. Achieving this kind of comprehensive, system-wide reform will take a shared effort by citizens and **Congress. Please urge Senators Nelson and Martinez, and Representative Miller to support real health care reform.**

- ★ A letter of support for public transit service, including a route between Milton and Nine Mile Road, was sent to the Santa Rosa Commission.

[President's note: The project was approved. It is estimated that service between Hwy.90 in Milton and Nine Mile Rd. will be begin shortly.]

- ★ The League sent a letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers in reference to an applicant's proposal for the transplantation of seagrasses from healthy beds to areas of boat propeller scarring within Santa Rosa Sound. The League of Women Voters of the Pensacola Bay Area has concerns about this proposal and its long term effects on the seagrasses themselves and the ecosystem of Santa Rosa Sound.

- ★ "The League of Women Voters of the Pensacola Bay Area has been following the **Charter** process since its inception. As you are probably aware, it was League concerns about the existing referendum process that initiated the move to rewrite the Charter." In part, the following excerpts were made in a statement to the City of Pensacola Charter Commission,

"... City's charge to the Committee directed that "The City of Pensacola Charter Review Commission (CRC) shall be charged with the task of undertaking a **COMPREHENSIVE** review of the Charter of the City of Pensacola..."

"...like to hear why this document is better for the citizens of Pensacola than the current version. ...we're especially concerned that this document be tailored to fit the unique needs of Pensacola."

"... the League is not taking a position one way or the other regarding a mayor-council government change. ... we do believe a stronger role for the mayor was emphasized from the start. ... haven't heard a clear analysis of why the current council format is not working."

"...ask that the Committee explain the reasoning behind their recommended changes, to include, as stated in their charge, a **comprehensive** analysis of why the current system does not work."

“...pleased to see that the proposed charter directs that Council create a City Code of Ethics. We would actually recommend that you consider adding an Ethics Code to the charter itself.”

“... taking issues unique to this area into consideration, we would also urge you to affirm in any new Charter that elected and appointed officials as well as staff, committees and other appointed agencies will fully comply with or exceed Florida Sunshine and public records laws.”

“... Regarding the recommendation to remove elected officials from governmental Committees, we would suggest that a new charter, in fact, do away with committees completely.”

“... Regarding the recommendation to do away with the Civil Service Commission, we would advise careful consideration and study before making changes to this particular oversight authority.”

★ The League is concerned that recent changes to the **Comprehensive Plan update** would effectively negate its practical future use as a guide to smart growth planning. Some of the points from the League statement to the Planning Board in support of an effective and farsighted Comprehensive Plan which the transmittal draft represents are:

“A commitment to protecting agriculture and rural communities and concentrating growth in areas where urban services already exist, is the essence of this Comprehensive Plan. It should be supported by this Planning Board.”

“... find the concept of the Transfer of Development Rights in this plan to be a key to successful growth management. For the first time, owners of agricultural land will have the ability to realize value from their land without selling it for development purposes. This provides the best of both worlds – it protects agricultural land for the future but it enables the farmer to reap financial benefit from his land by selling development rights to an area more appropriate for growth.”

Read the complete letters/statements on our website at www.lwvpba.org. Have a cool summer!

Deborah, 449-1746

**Domestic Violence in Escambia County Forum
Saturday, September 19th, Presbyterian Church
9:00 am coffee, 9:30 am program**

Social Policy Committee Investigation of Domestic Violence Morbidity in Escambia County

by Bette Boddy, 473-0648



Beginning in 2005 the Social Policy Committee began investigating the problem of morbidity rates related to domestic violence in Escambia County, Florida. This came at a time when three women had been gunned down

by former spouses/partners as a result of escalating domestic violence. At that point in time, the domestic violence morbidity rate in Escambia County compared to other murder rates was 33%. Statewide morbidity rates related to domestic violence were an average of 17% while nationwide the average was 10% according to statistics provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).

At the time of the initial foray into this study, a young woman came forth (requesting anonymity) to tell the committee her story of abuse and the consequences of her attempts to leave her abusive husband and seek a divorce. She explained that the number of forms she was forced to complete to obtain a restraining order was daunting. However, she feared for her children's life and proceeded with the paper work. Her husband violated the restraining order several times, and she had him arrested, although he was only held for a day or two, and then he was back harassing her and the children again. She felt the judges and the attorneys simply did not take her seriously at all and that one day she would be dead at the hands of this man.

The current Social Policy Committee has begun to study current statistics of morbidity rates connected to domestic violence in Escambia County. Escambia County's population has changed from 303,623 in 2005 to 313,000 in 2008, the numbers of murders and manslaughters related to domestic violence have remained approximately the same with four in 2005 and 5 in 2008. Committee members are following cases through the system as well as studying the epidemiology of other forms of domestic violence and what is being done in Escambia County to prevent domestic violence and to provide a safe living environment for women and children.

The September 19th program will continue the examination of Domestic Violence in Escambia county, with a panel of local experts. Look for more information in the next issue of the Voter.

[Note: Red bandaged broken heart icon found on Escambia County Clerk of Circuit Court and Comptroller website for DV information.]



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Calendar

August

- 26 Wednesday, 10:30 - 11:30 am, **Women's Equality Day Observance** at NAS Aviation Museum hosted by the Federal Women's Program & Naval Education and Training Command. Deborah Nelson will comment on visionary women in the struggle for women's right to vote. Contact Betty Enfinger, 438-2842 for information.
- 27 Thursday, 11:00 am, Port Review Committee to meet at Panera's at Cordova Mall. Contact Dian Parsley, 492-6004, for information.

September

- 1 Tuesday, 5:30 pm **Board Meeting** at Tryon Branch Library, 9th Ave. Members are welcome.
- 15 Tuesday, 10 am **International Relations Committee**, Azalea Trace in the auditorium, Gene Feicht will lead the **Great Decisions** discussion on *"Egypt: key ally in the middle east."* Contact Gene Feicht at 479-3352 for information.

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**Domestic Violence in Escambia County
Public Forum**

**Saturday, September 19th, Presbyterian Church
9:00 am coffee, 9:30 am program**