

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SCARSDALE  
STATEMENT ON  
BOARD OF EDUCATION GIFT POLICY AND  
RECOGNITION OF DONORS  
APRIL 16, 2018

The League acknowledges the efforts of the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation (Education Foundation), the Board of Education (the Board) and District Administration for the work that resulted in the creation of the High School Design Lab and Fitness Center.

The League further acknowledges that:

- An October 20, 2014 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered into by and between the Board and the Education Foundation for the funding of the High School Design Lab and Fitness Center specifically stipulates Board support for “an appropriate means of recognizing donors to the projects;” and that
- On June 20, 2016 the Board approved plaques to recognize individual donors who provided various levels of financial support to the Education Foundation, while clarifying such recognition be limited to the one-time and specific situation of the Education Foundation gift to the District of funding for the above-named capital projects.

We also understand that the Board considers its relationship with the Education Foundation to be adequately defined and governed by the 2014 MOU and its existing Gift Policy (1800), last revised on October 6, 2014.

Since the Education Foundation was formed in 2012, the League has repeatedly recommended that the Board proactively develop gift policies through a thoughtful, methodical process that actively engages community input to ensure the resulting policy accurately reflects Scarsdale community values for our public schools.

In 2013 and 2014, the League issued several statements recommending that the Board develop and adopt “a new policy, specific to gifts given by the Education Foundation to the District, in light of the new and unique relationship between the BOE and the Education Foundation,” as well as “the size and nature of past and contemplated gifts from the Education Foundation to the District.”<sup>1</sup> In 2014, the League further suggested that the Board also “develop a policy regarding the recognition of gifts initiated by donors, including naming rights.”<sup>2</sup> While certain League suggestions were incorporated

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<sup>1</sup> LWVS Statement in Connection with the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation, December 9, 2013; LWVS Statement to the BOE regarding Revisions to Gift Policy, September 22, 2014; LWVS Comments to the BOE on Proposed Revisions to the Gift Policy, September 30, 2014; and Third Statement to BOE Regarding Revisions to Their Gift Policy, October 6, 2014, available on LWVS website at <http://lwvs.org/issues.html>.

<sup>2</sup> LWVS Comments to the BOE on Proposed Revisions to the Gift Policy, September 30, 2014

into the Board's revisions to its Gift Policy (1800) in 2014, the Board has yet to adopt these two key League recommendations.

The League observes that on March 19, 2018 the Board discussed and approved the Education Foundation's preliminary designs for two donor recognition signage plaques, listing individual donors who contributed at various tiers of financial support above a certain threshold to the Education Foundation's Capital Campaign 2015-17 for the above referenced projects. The Education Foundation's public presentation of the preliminary designs for these signage plaques indicates a total estimated cost of \$38,000. While the overall dimension of the donor recognition plaque for the Fitness Center is clearly shown to be 105.5 inches by 104 inches (about 8.8 feet x 8.7 feet), the overall dimension of the Design Lab signage appears to be approximately 23 feet by 11 feet, with a donor recognition portion of approximately 38 inches x 59 inches (about 3 feet x 5 feet).<sup>3</sup>

We further observe that:

- The March 19, 2018 meeting was the first opportunity for the public to see the actual preliminary design of the proposed recognition signage plaques and to learn such details as their overall dimension and cost;<sup>4</sup>
- The March 19, 2018 Board Meeting Agenda afforded no opportunity for public comment between the Board's discussion and its action to approve the preliminary design of the plaques;<sup>5</sup> and that
- Subsequent community discussion and concern has arisen, now that the details of the two donor recognition signage plaques have been made public.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: March 15, 2018 Education Foundation Director Letter to Dr. Hagerman with attachments, plus two separate documents with signage dimensions, included in the March 19, 2018 Board Meeting Agenda, located on the District website under "Board of Education - Board Meeting Agendas."

<sup>4</sup> At the December 11, 2017 Board Meeting Dr. Hagerman presents the SSEF letter regarding an installment of their gift in the amount of \$263,000, adding, "We are also in the process of continuing to work with the Foundation on the signage that will commemorate the donors." There is no subsequent Board discussion of the signage details or how it will commemorate donors. [See: Board Meeting video recording, minute 2:24.] In addition, neither the District Minutes nor the District *Highlights* of the December 11, 2017 Board Meeting mention the issue of donor recognition signage.

<sup>5</sup> The District Meeting Notice for the March 19, 2018 Board Meeting emailed on March 15, 2018 lists several agenda topics but does not include mention of the SSEF proposal for donor recognition signage; and, according to the Board Meeting Agenda for March 19, 2018, there was no public comment period scheduled between "8. Information/Discussion Items," including "8.03 SSEF Donor Recognition Signage," and "9. Action Items," including "9.03 SSEF Donor Recognition Signage." In addition, the March 15, 2018 Education Foundation Letter addressed to Dr. Hagerman and describing their proposal is an attachment to the Board's Agenda for March 19, 2018, which members of the public could only access on the District website under "Board of Education – Board Meeting Agendas," was not posted until the afternoon of the same day as the public meeting.

The League believes that now is the time for the Board to develop both a separate gift policy specific to the Education Foundation and a donor recognition policy that appropriately incorporate and reflect Scarsdale community values.

With the 2014 MOU coming to closure, there is a gap to be filled with respect to the definition of the Board's relationship with the Education Foundation. As such, now is the time to develop a policy to establish and clarify that relationship, just as the Board has done with respect to booster organizations. The League asserts that if the Board continues its process by replacing one MOU with another, without first establishing policy to guide what principles, priorities and values will shape the next agreement between the Board and the Education Foundation, it will not be incorporating necessary public input to ensure consistency with Scarsdale community values and priorities. The recent Board discussion and public comments on the issues surrounding the current donor recognition signage, including dimensions and cost, make this an especially opportune time for the Board to ensure their understanding of community values by engaging the broader community in discussion of the full range of issues that arise with such large donations.

We believe that the Board's one-time approval of donor recognition signage for Education Foundation gifts to the District for the High School Design Lab and Fitness Center, which the Board stated was not intended to set precedent, has also highlighted issues that existing Board policy has yet to address. Based on our review of the June 20, 2016 Board meeting referenced above, we believe members of the Board of Education and District Administration had already begun to discuss and recognize both the absence of, and the need for, a policy regarding recognition of donors.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, we believe that, without an appropriate policy in place moving forward, the Board's supposedly one-time recognition of certain donors to the Education Foundation's gift to the District, does, in effect, serve as precedent that potentially governs future Board actions with respect to the recognition of donors.

The League further asserts that:

- As elected officials, Board members are accountable to the public and have a responsibility to engage in public deliberation and public discussion, and to give the public an opportunity to observe the Board's decision-making process and to weigh in on its deliberations;
- The Board has a responsibility to provide ample public notice of, and public opportunity for comment on, Board discussions and actions regarding the Education Foundation, and donor recognition, including separately scheduled Board meetings for Board discussion and Board action; and
- The Board has the responsibility to develop a donor recognition policy that can be applied with consistency, fairness and transparency for both the donors and the community.

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<sup>6</sup> The video of the June 20, 2016 meeting is posted on the District website under Board of Education videos 2015-16: <https://vimeopro.com/scarsdaleschoolstv/boe20152016>.

Recommendations:

1. While the League acknowledges that preliminary designs for two donor recognition signage plaques have already been approved by the Board, we request that the Board still allow for and consider community input to ensure the Board's decision on the details of the donor recognition signage for the High School Design Lab and Fitness Center appropriately reflects the values and priorities of both the school community and the broader Scarsdale community.
2. We urge the Board to develop a policy regarding the recognition of donors of gifts to the District, including naming rights. We further urge the Board to solicit public input and schedule opportunities for public comment to ensure that resulting policy reflects community values. In addition to obtaining a sense of community values, this effort will provide the Board with opportunities to identify and address specific issues associated with donor recognition in a methodical manner and thereby allow for the creation of a policy that will enable consistent application going forward.
3. Finally, in light of the Board's unique relationship with the Education Foundation, as well as the size and nature of past and contemplated gifts from the Education Foundation to the District, we continue to urge the Board to reconsider our previous recommendation to develop and adopt a separate policy regarding its relationship with the Education Foundation.

Thank you for your consideration.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SCARSDALE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sincerely

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Linda Doucette-Ashman and Janice Starr, Co-Presidents