

Statement of the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale  
to the Board of Education regarding Revisions to Gift Policy  
September 22, 2014

The following statement is made on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale, prepared in connection with the draft revised gift policy presented to the public at the Board of Education meeting on September 8 (referred to herein as the September 8 draft). Before that statement is read, however, the League notes a few things.

We understand that the Board has before it this evening a revised draft of the revised gift policy, which was made available to the public when the Board's agenda packet was posted on the district's website this past Friday, September 19 (referred to herein as the September 19 draft). Note that the public may not have had adequate notice that the September 8 draft had been revised, as the September 19 draft was discoverable only if one clicked on the information item and scrolled down to the revisions to proposed gift policy page; the agenda does not refer to a revised draft – only to a “second reading of proposed revisions” to the gift policy. While we have not had sufficient time to fully review the September 19 draft and to develop a comprehensive statement with respect to that draft, we believe that the September 19 draft still does not address the issues we raised in our statement to the Board last December. In that statement, among other things, the League asked for clarification regarding how current gift policies apply to gifts to the district by the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation, and recommended that the Board “consider developing and adopting a new policy, specific to gifts given by the SSEF to the district, in light of the new and unique relationship between the BOE and the SSEF.” Accordingly, we recommend that the Board not take action this evening on the September 19 draft so that it may consider addressing in a further revised gift policy the concerns we raised regarding gifts given by the SSEF, as well as allow the community time to review and comment on the September 19 draft that has been available to it for only three days.

What now follows is our statement with respect to the September 8 draft:

We appreciate the time and effort that the Board of Education has spent in crafting a revised gift policy. However, we recommend that the Board provide the community sufficient time to reflect and comment on the proposed draft before the Board adopts it.

As you may recall, in our statement to the Board last December, among other things, the League asked for clarification regarding how current gift policies apply to gifts to the district by the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation, and recommended that the Board “consider developing and adopting a new policy, specific to gifts given by the SSEF to the district, in light of the new and unique relationship between the BOE and the SSEF.” We thank the Board for undertaking to flesh out some of the questions we raised. The draft, however, gives rise to a number of important issues that merit thoughtful consideration by the community, such as whether, in determining if a gift will be accepted, a distinction should be made between gifts pursued by the district and

unsolicited gifts, and/or whether a distinction should be made based on the dollar amount of the gift. Moreover, we believe the gift policy should provide for a mechanism for the Board to monitor the aggregate of gifts given, both those above and below the threshold allowed for Superintendent-accepted gifts, to each school.

Furthermore, the proposed revised policy's omission of certain existing policy language and the use of the conjunction "or" in item 5 may warrant further discussion and community input. For example, are these proposed modifications to the gift policy language intended to signal a change in the Board's discretion whether to accept a gift that fails to adhere to all four of the stated criteria? How will these modifications change the long-standing guidance provided to all donors, including the PTAs and booster organizations, that previously were required to consult with the principals, Superintendent or the Board before offering a gift or undertaking fundraising for one?

We believe the Board would benefit from hearing the views of, and engaging in a dialogue with, the public on the substantive issues that emerge from the proposed changes to the district current gift policy, and therefore ask the Board to defer taking action on the proposed revised gift policy until the next meeting of the Board to provide the public adequate opportunity to weigh in.