

Alternative Schools

The League of Women Voters' interest in Alternative Schools is a natural extension of our overall concern for education. The drop-out rate in Moscow is below the national average, but alarming nonetheless. In addition, we recognize that some students, because of their life situation, have special needs. Examples of these students include: pregnant teens, teenage parents, emancipated youth. We advocate alternative learning methods, not an alternative to learning.

Another group of students could be called discouraged learners. These youth lack a sense of competence, usefulness and self esteem. They go to school every day with a feeling of incompetence as a learner, and their feeling is reinforced by the work they are given that they can't do. They become "lost in the crowd" and are potential dropouts, and even potential law violators.

It is our belief that an educational program that meets the needs of these youth will produce citizens who will contribute to society rather than be a burden on it. The welfare system and prison system are extremely costly. We view Alternative Schools as a preventive measure. The Idaho State Legislature has recognized the value of Alternative Schools and has modified the funding formula: 12 at-risk students make up a funding unit as opposed to 18.5 for the ordinary high school unit, at approximately \$40,000 a unit.

The Alternative School that we advocate would have the following characteristics: a non-traditional setting, a close working relationship between staff and students with the students feeling ownership in the program, small classes with abundant individual attention, an emphasis on improvement of basic skills, an employment preparation component with work experience included, a curriculum that emphasizes fulfilling the state requirements with high school graduation as the goal.

The League's position on alternative schools is as follows: "The League of Women Voters of Moscow supports the establishment of an alternative school to serve dropouts, discouraged learners, non-traditional students and other at-risk youth, with the goal of teaching basic skills, vocational education and/or college preparation leading to the attainment of either a high school diploma or a GED."