

Hello, my name is Linda Doucette-Ashman, Brite Avenue. Tonight I am speaking to you, the Board of Education, on behalf of the Board of the League of Women Voters Scarsdale.

This statement is about the District's gift policy and associated issues including donor recognition and naming rights.

I want to begin by clearly saying that our statement is about process and does not go to the merits of any issues that might arise during any discussion or consideration of any policy related to gifts or donor recognition.

On behalf of my Board, I wish to acknowledge and thank those individuals and entities, including but not limited to, the Education Foundation, Maroon and White, Friends of Music and Art and all of the PTAs, who give so generously of their time and money to help support our children and our school community.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SCARSDALE
BOARD STATEMENT ON
BOARD OF EDUCATION GIFT POLICY AND
RECOGNITION OF DONORS
JANUARY 28, 2019

The League acknowledges that the Board of Education (“Board”) and the School District Administration are currently exploring the possibility of installing lights around Butler Field, based upon a presentation by Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics, Ray Pappalardi, on Monday, January 14, 2019 at the Board’s Special Meeting immediately preceding its Business Meeting. It is the League’s understanding that no final decisions have been made about whether or not the lights will be purchased or how the project will be funded. The League observed, during the presentation, Mr. Pappalardi mention that private donations would be made to the School District to fund a large portion, if not all, of the cost for this project. The current estimated cost is \$881,000. Mr. Pappalardi also discussed the possibility of donor recognition plaques for those members of the community who donate money for this Butler Field light project.¹

For the second time in less than a year, the Board is faced with a situation where updated gift and donor recognition policies are needed. The League has repeatedly recommended that the Board proactively develop gift policies through a thoughtful, methodical, public process that actively engages community input to ensure the resulting policy accurately reflects Scarsdale community values for our public schools. The League continues to recommend that the Board actively engage the community and (1) establish a separate policy setting out the Board’s relationship with the Education Foundation and the gifts that it provides to the School District, and (2) review any existing policies that pertain to these issues, including Policy 1800 (Gift) and Policy 1222 (Relations with Booster Organizations) as well as establish policies that address donor recognition and naming rights.

In 2013, 2014 and 2018, the League issued multiple 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.”² In 2014, the League further suggested that the Board also “develop a policy regarding the recognition of gifts initiated by donors, including naming rights.”³ While certain League suggestions were incorporated into the Board’s revisions to its Gift Policy (1800) in 2014, the Board has yet to adopt these two key League recommendations. In 2018, the League reasserted its recommendations from 2013 and 2014 and recommended that the Board develop policies, with community input, to set out its relationship with the Education Foundation

¹ Board of Education Special Meeting, January 14, 2019

² LWVS Comments December 9, 2013; LWVS Statement to BOE regarding revisions to Gift Policy, September 30, 2014; LWVS Statement, October 6, 2014 and LWVS Statement, April 16, 2018

³ LWVS Statement, September 30, 2014

and to clarify its position regarding donor recognition for gifts and naming rights⁴. Please note that copies of our previous statements referenced herein are attached.

During the spring of 2018, the League observed the Board consider and eventually approve the Education Foundation's two donor recognition plaques to recognize donors who contributed to the Education Foundation's Capital Campaign for projects, including the High School Learning commons and Design Lab. At that time and prior to the Board approval, the League recommended that the Board develop both a separate gift policy specific to the Education Foundation and a donor recognition policy that would appropriately incorporate and reflect Scarsdale community values⁵. However, the Board concluded that the use of a Memorandum of Understanding in combination with the District's existing Gift Policy 1800 provided sufficient authority for the Board to approve and accept the donations and plaques. The Board also decided that there was no need either to engage the community or undertake a study of Policy 1800 or the issues raised by the donations of the Education Foundation, including donor recognition or naming rights. To date, the Board has not had any further public discussions about the Gift Policy, the policy pertaining to relations with Booster Organizations, donor recognition or any of the related recommendations provided by the League.

The League observed that on January 14, 2019, the Board discussed and approved Mr. Pappalardi's request to collect community feedback on the possibility of the installation of lights around the new and improved Butler Field. As part of that discussion, Mr. Pappalardi indicated that Maroon and White would contribute approximately \$200,000 and the balance of the project cost would be funded by private donations as well. Mr. Pappalardi mentioned a suggestion to have donor plaques installed in the project, an idea presented was including a plaque on each lamp post⁶.

Since the Board is facing the possibility of large donations and donor recognition requests again, the League will take this opportunity to reaffirm its previous statements and recommendations on these issues.

Regarding the Education Foundation, the League asserts, as we did in our comments of April 16, 2018, that there is gap to be filled with respect to the definition of the Board's relationship with the Education Foundation. The League suggests that the Board is at an opportune time to develop a policy to establish and clarify that relationship, just as the Board has done with respect to other booster organizations. Again, the League reasserts 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. In addition, the League reasserts that timing is appropriate for the Board to ensure its understanding of community values by engaging the broader community in discussion of the full range of issues that arise with such large donations, donor recognition and naming rights.

⁴ LWVS Statement, April 16, 2018

⁵ LWVS Statement, April 16, 2018

⁶ Board of Education Special Meeting, January 14, 2019

Regarding donor recognition, the League believes that the Board's one-time approval of donor recognition signage for the Education Foundation gifts and donor recognition plaques to the District for the High School Design Lab and Fitness Center, which the Board stated was not intended to set precedent, highlighted issues that existing Board policy has yet to address. At that time, the Board declined to address them. As we have previously stated, we are still of the opinion that members of the Board and District Administration had begun to discuss and recognize both the absence of, and the need for, a policy regarding recognition of donors. Furthermore, we believe that, without an appropriate policy in place moving forward, the Board's one-time recognition of certain donors to the Education Foundation's gift to the District, serves as precedent that potentially governs future Board actions with respect to donor recognition for other projects.

The League further reasserts 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.

Recommendations :

1. 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 deliberate and methodical manner and thereby allow for the creation of a policy that will enable consistent application going forward.
2. 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 recommendations to develop and adopt a separate policy regarding its relationship with the Education Foundation.
3. We also ask that the Board review any and all existing policies that may impact these issues, including, but not limited to, Policy 1800 (Gifts) and Policy 1222 (Relations with Booster Organizations).

Thank you for your consideration.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SCARSDALE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Linda Doucette-Ashman and Janice Starr, Co-Presidents