The League of Women Voters Minneapolis is hosting two education forums this fall. The first, October 4, is titled Chalk Talk: Teachers Take on Education Policy. Then on October 25 it will host a debate among Minneapolis School Board candidates.

The League put together the first forum because during the perennial election-year school reform debates, one voice often missing is the classroom teacher: the most important person at the end of the education policy funnel. The classroom teacher works at the intersection of complex and ever-changing federal, state, and local education policies and the nuts-and-bolts world of helping students learn.

Chalk Talk offers a panel of teachers with varying experiences and viewpoints to discuss how education policies affect work in the classroom. Topics will range from teacher evaluation policies to testing.

The speakers are: Crystal Ballard, who teaches AVID at Olson Middle School; AVID is an international college readiness program. Ballard also is a member of the African American Leadership Forum's Education Workgroup, a group dedicated to closing the achievement gap for African American children, birth through 12th grade, in the seven-county metro area.

Jim Barnhill, a special education teacher at South High School's Life Skills Program, which helps students live and work independently. Barnhill is a Minneapolis Federation of Teachers executive board member, and serves on several school district working groups on teacher evaluation.

Susan Bell, who taught grades 1-8 for 38 years in both the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts. Bell was a Minnesota Teacher of the Year finalist in 2003. Now retired from teaching, she is the test coordinator at the Hmong International Academy, a job that lets her stay in touch with students.

Paul Hegre, who taught in Minneapolis for 23 years at Nawayee Center School and Seward Montessori. Hegre is on special assignment working on the district's teacher evaluation process. He also spent four years coordinating the district's TAP/QComp program, a strategy to attract, develop, motivate and retain high-quality teachers.

James Kindle, a third to fifth grade English Language Learner teacher at Anne Sullivan Elementary, a union steward, and a member of Empowering Educators for Equity, a newly formed group that works to promote educational equity by ensuring that teachers' voices are heard in policy decisions.

The forum will be held at Plymouth Congregational Church, 1900 Nicollet Ave. S., from 7:30-9 p.m. It will include prepared questions, but audience members also will have the opportunity to submit written questions.

On Thursday, October 25, the League will host a Minneapolis School Board candidates forum, tentatively scheduled for Jefferson K-8 School, 1200 26th Street West from 7:30-9 p.m.

Co-sponsors of these community forums include Achieve Minneapolis, African American Leadership Forum, the Education Equity Organizing Collaborative, MinnCAN, and Don Fraser's Achievement Gap Committee.

Support for these forums has been provided by a grant from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi LLP Foundation for Children, a supporting organization of the Minneapolis Foundation.

More information available at: www.lwvmpls.org or call (612) 333-6319.