



# TODAY

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## A project in Mr. Cluff's class may become law

Vermont-NEA Photos by Tom Walters

By Tom Walters

HINESBURG — Although they are not yet old enough to vote, Greg Cluff's social studies students are old enough to be politically active. What started as an assignment in a current events class, with the help of Representatives Bill Lippert, D-Hinesburg, and David Sharpe, D-Bristol, may very well become law. Representative Sharpe is both a teacher and a member of Vermont-NEA. Cluff, also a Vermont-NEA member, has taught Social Studies at Champlain Valley Union High School for 35 years.

"It started off as a project in Mr. Cluff's class and our teacher loved it," explained CVU senior Alex Egri.

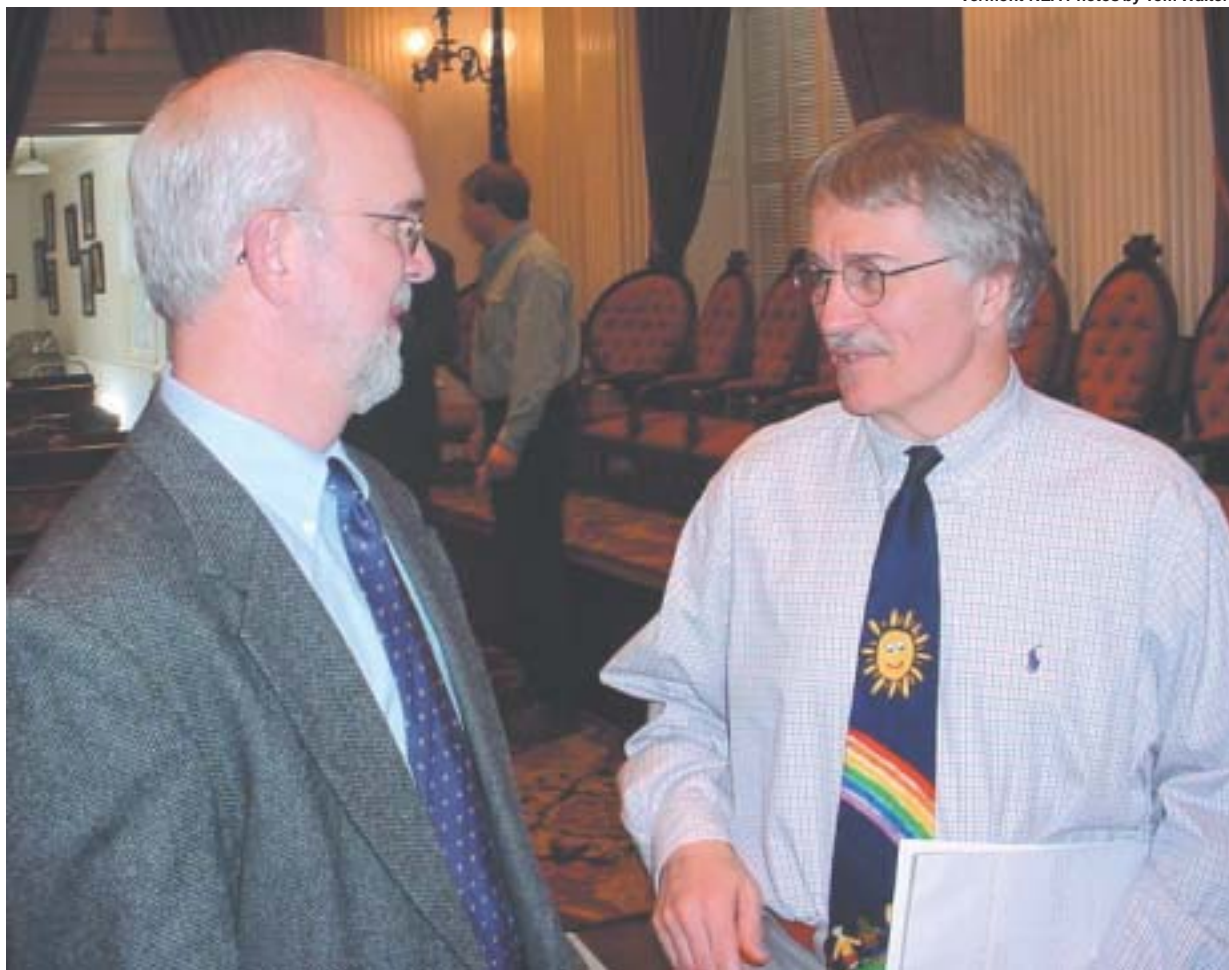
"Hybrid cars came up in class and in order to make them more appealing, we thought it would be good to drop the purchase and use tax," added senior Tom Wilson.

The boys, encouraged by their teacher, called Representative Bill Lippert to see if their idea might be presented to the Vermont Legislature as a bill.

With input from Alex and Tom, Representatives Lippert and Sharpe crafted H.611, which would exempt buyers of hybrid vehicles from purchase and use taxes.

Both Alex and Tom testified in support of their idea before the House Ways and Means Committee during their school vacation. "People need to know that most modern cars are damaging to the environment and we need to work to stop it," said Tom.

Hybrid vehicles combine the engine of a conventional vehicle with the battery and electric motor



Rep. Bill Lippert of Hinesburg crafted H.611 with input from Greg Cluff's (R) students.

of an electric vehicle, resulting in twice the fuel economy of conventional vehicles as well as greatly reduced emissions. The bill also specifies that hybrid vehicles must also employ "regenerative braking." Regenerative braking uses the forward momentum of the vehicle to generate electrical energy while slowing.

Tom Sawyer, Sales Manager at Automaster in Shelburne, said "Customers are always pleasantly surprised by the acceleration and handling of the Honda Hybrid." The Honda Hybrid is rated at 51 mpg highway and 46 mpg, city and sells for about \$20,000.00. It is estimated that customers would save between \$1200-\$1500

if H.611 were to become law.

Clearly, with the guidance of Greg Cluff, these students have learned the importance of political action. "I have learned that anybody can become involved in the Vermont Legislature," said Tom Wilson. Alex Egri added, "I really enjoy politics and voicing my opinion."

Teacher Greg Cluff is an inspiration to his students. "He kept pushing us even when we didn't think it would be possible," said Alex.

Alex and Tom would like very much to hear from other high school students and teachers interested in pushing forward H.611. Contact them through their teacher, Greg Cluff at [greg@cvuhs.org](mailto:greg@cvuhs.org) if you are interested in helping your students to become politically active.

Veteran teacher Greg Cluff is a Justice of the Peace and regularly holds voter registration drives at CVU high school. He holds a bachelor's degree from Lafayette College, as well as master's degrees from both the University of Vermont and the University of Massachusetts. He lives with his wife, Lynn, also a teacher and Vermont-NEA member, in Charlotte.

To view the contents of H.611 and other bills currently in the Vermont Legislature, visit [www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/billtext.cfm](http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/billtext.cfm).

Read more about Rep. David Sharpe on page 4.



CVU seniors Alex Egri and Tom Wilson testified before House Ways and Means.

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# The School Choice "Cake"

"We've already gotten our cake."

With exactly that mixture of arrogance, self-satisfaction, and disdain, Vermont State Board of Education member Chris Robbins expressed his personal pleasure with the State Board's January 15<sup>th</sup> favorable vote to support school choice in concept. No bothersome decisions were made by the Board regarding eligible grade levels, enrollment and transfer limits, program financing, student transportation, admissions procedures, and special education services.

Most education policymakers feel a strong responsibility to carefully discuss such pertinent details before making a good-faith determination to embrace a school choice plan intended to be fair to all students. I say "all students" because students who decide *not* to choose a different school shouldn't be penalized by loss of education funding and programs that inevitably results when schools lose students and the annual \$6,800 per-pupil state support grants.

Robbins's audible remark to his nearby likeminded colleague, Bill Corrow, actually was uttered as the State Board contemplated a re-vote. Board members were considering a re-vote because they soon discovered that they had violated Vermont open meeting laws. The topic of school choice and several others had been listed and publicized on the "work session" portion of the January 15<sup>th</sup> agenda, not as items for official Board action.

Not to worry. The State Board simply rescinded their favorable school choice vote at the same January 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. Then, they scheduled a token public hearing period and an official vote on school choice during the next Board meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup>. Of course, the positive outcome of the State Board's official vote on January 20<sup>th</sup> already was pre-determined, so personal and organizational statements were meaningless except for showcase value and to provide a more legal framework for Board action.

As expected, several of the anti-public school network's familiar leaders provided testimony during the brief hearing. They were backed by a small band of their customary minions: a disgruntled parent or two, a couple of sympathetic Republican state legislators, and a sprinkling of ideological "free market fundamentalists" who always want to privatize nearly everything and who constantly proselytize using tell-tale phrases such as "government schools," "monopoly," etc. It wasn't even worth the time for Vermont-NEA representatives to attend and to testify, so we didn't.

Ultimately, the State Board re-affirmed their earlier vote supporting school choice in general without ever answering the big policy questions and

analyzing difficult procedural details. The bland January 20<sup>th</sup> motion approved by the State Board said: "The State Board supports the general concept of public school choice. We encourage the Legislature to ensure that development of any new system of enhanced public school choice address the needs of all students. The State Board plans to be an active participant in this process."

The State Board's actions on those recent wintry January days are significant because they evidently confirm the highest K-12 education priority of Governor Douglas's Administration. Despite denial of a litmus test for the school choice issue, all four of the Governor's new appointees to the State Board of Education in the winter and spring of 2003 were strong Republican school choice proponents, including provisions to divert public tax dollars to private and religious schools. Two appointees, Robbins and Corrow, already were serving as Board Directors on Vermonters for Better Education, the Libby Sternberg pro-voucher advocacy group.

Prior to the newly inaugurated Governor's '03 State Board appointments, there was absolutely no evidence of State Board interest in expanding Act 150, Vermont's carefully designed school choice law for highschoolers passed by the Legislature in 1999. The law culminates in a comprehensive report with data and findings for further legislative consideration in 2005.

Ignoring Act 150 and taking their cues from Governor Douglas, Republican Speaker of the House Walter Freed, and their hardcore Vermont Republican pro-voucher supporters, the House Education Committee's Republican chair and another colleague introduced school choice bills in January '04. One bill broadened choice to all public schools, elementary as well as high school. The other bill included taxpayer support for private and religious schools.

The final piece of the Republican game plan was ensuring that the State Board actually added its own policy muscle to the looming school choice debate in the Vermont Legislature. Even without passage of a broader school choice bill, the GOP expected that their maneuverings promised a potent '04 election issue.

That last step finally was accomplished by the Douglas State Board appointees at the two aforementioned January meetings. The rookie appointees adamantly insisted that the State Board adopt a favorable school choice position to guide Vermont Commissioner of Education Richard Cate in his dealings with legislators on the State House bills.

Furthermore, the newcomers were unmoved by requests from the more experienced State Board Chair-

person and her colleagues for more time to obtain and examine comprehensive research information regarding the school choice issue. After obviously organizing their powerplay in advance and banding together to act as a bloc, the Douglas appointees' repeated refusals to postpone State Board action simply overpowered and outlasted the other Board members.

Consequently, Robbins's remark about his school choice "cake" really is quite revealing. It was a reflexive and unvarnished expression of satisfaction. After only six months of their seven year terms, he and his novice associates had accomplished the first—and possibly most important—task expected of them: The Vermont State Board of Education now is on record favoring school choice.

When will these ever-present school choice advocates and free-marketeters learn one simple fact: Effective education policy can't and shouldn't be formulated in a divisive, politically partisan environment. So-called "school choice" currently is a tenet of primarily Republican orthodoxy, despite minority public support.

Conversely, most Democrats and Vermont Progressives oppose public monies for private and religious schools. They also are skeptical about public school choice plans that diminish student learning opportunities by channeling money away from some public schools to enrich others.

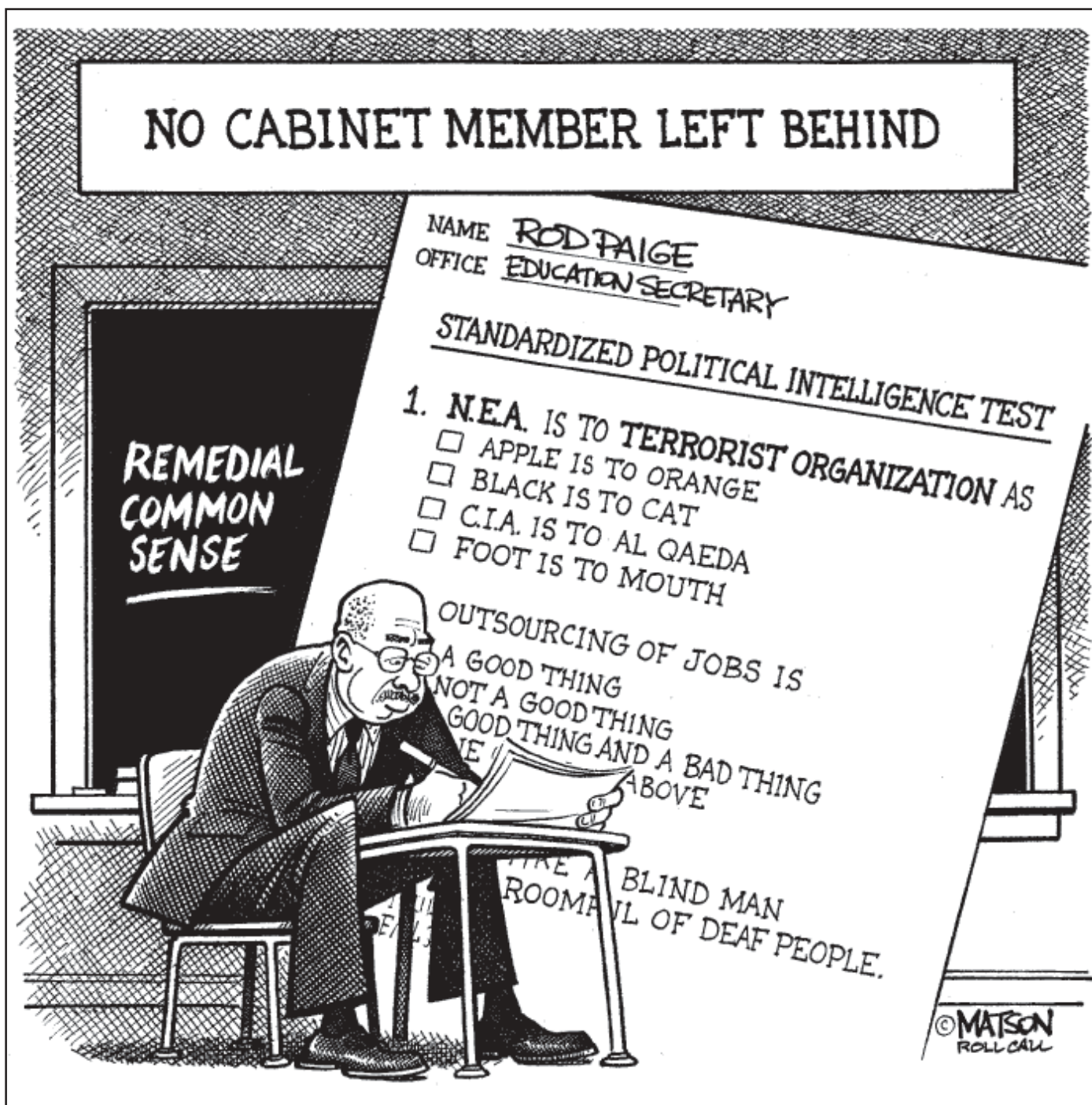
Trying to use political force and dodgy legislative tactics such as floor amendments to other non-germane bills to expand Vermont's present school choice law only will exacerbate public policy divisions among citizens, create resentment, and result in poorly designed programs. Therefore, Act 150 should continue unchanged until it fulfills its purposes and then expires. The mandatory report in 2005 will provide important data for legislators and all constituency groups to use for future advocacy.

Meanwhile, the State Board ought to stop nibbling at the margins of education policy. The Board's school choice "cake" affects less than 1/2 of 1% of eligible high school students. That's 1/10 of 1% of all Vermont public school students.

Instead, the State Board ought to re-focus its attention and deepen its tangible support for systemic improvements. For instance, help strengthen high school and technical/vocational programs. Help increase and integrate early childhood education services. Help promote educator quality via mentoring and induction, professional development and peer assistance, and national certifications. Help modify the unworkable requirements of No Child Left Behind.

That's our "cake." And, frankly, we've been starved for it lately.

- Angelo J. Dorta, President



## Association members protest Rod Paige remark, Jim Douglas attitude

*“Dear Mr. Paige: Let me keep you abreast of my terrorist acts...”*

MONTPELIER — When U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige called our National Education Association a “terrorist organization,” educators across the nation were outraged. In Vermont, that outrage was exacerbated when educators learned that Vermont Governor Jim Douglas, who was at the Washington, D.C. meeting where Secretary Paige made the remark, failed to come to the defense of 11,000 Vermont educators who are members of NEA. Instead, according to the Associated Press, Governor Douglas described Secretary Paige’s remark this way: “Somebody asked him about the NEA’s role and he offered his perspective on it.”

Two days later, back home in Vermont, the Governor changed his tune. After receiving a chorus of criticism from educators throughout the state, including Angelo Dorta, he issued a statement with a new attitude: “Secretary Paige’s recent remarks about the leadership of the NEA were highly inappropriate, especially given the

struggle in which our nation is engaged, and he has rightly apologized.”

Vermont-NEA members shared with the Association their messages of protest aimed at Secretary Paige and Governor Douglas. Here are excerpts from a representative few:

**Robin Long MEd of Cavendish to Sec. Paige:**

As a member of the National Education Association, let me keep you abreast of my terrorist acts. I spend countless hours working on lesson plans, correcting papers and trying to find creative ways to educate my students. I teach them history, spelling, reading, geography, science, math, writing, grammar and technology... Probably the most egregious thing that I try to instill is self confidence and the ability to think for themselves...

Be clear sir, the NEA is an organization of TEACHERS. You have insulted me and my colleagues and we will remember.

**Diane Alberts of Rutland to Gov. Jim Douglas:**

...That you are unfriendly to public education in Vermont has been evidenced by your appointments to the State Board of Education, your public statements about Vermont schools, your support for the most draconian

provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, and your timidity in “requesting” that the president fully fund his own NCLB law as well as the chronically underfunded special education law.

Be that as it may, as our governor, you still owe it to the thousands of educators who center their lives on the improvement of the education of Vermont’s children every day and often throughout that “long summer vacation” to defend them against such callous statements....

**Alison Sylvester of Huntington to Gov. Jim Douglas:**

When I decided to become a teacher the last thing I thought I would be called is a terrorist. I cannot believe the audacity of Education Secretary Rod Paige for even associating educators with terrorists! ... I am also appalled that you did not stand up for the teachers of Vermont. I am deeply disappointed and concerned in your lack of action....

**Ann Lauterbach of Putney to Pres. Bush**

I am writing to urge you to ask for Education Secretary Rod Paige’s resignation. I am disturbed that a member of your administration would

*Continued on page 5...*

### Resolution before Vermont Legislature condemns Paige remark

MONTPELIER — A resolution condemning Rod Paige’s remark that NEA is a “terrorist organization” was introduced in the Senate by Jim Condos (D. Chittenden), who chairs the Education Committee, and Mark MacDonald (D. Orange), long-time teacher and Association member.

#### Senate resolution condemning U.S. Secretary of Education Paige’s characterization of the National Education Association as a terrorist organization and urging that President Bush demand Secretary Paige’s immediate resignation

Whereas, the United States Secretary of Education occupies the most sensitive and important position from which to enunciate federal policy with respect to public education, and

Whereas, the vast majority of public school educators in the United States have organized into education associations, as is their right in accordance with both federal and state laws, and

Whereas, 2.7 million educators belong to the National Education Association and invest their lives and their pride, as well as their money, to achieve their professional goals and those of their professional association, and

Whereas, the National Education Association is a leading voice across this nation on behalf of the interests of both public school educators and America’s schoolchildren, and

Whereas, the Vermont affiliate of the National Education Association and its more than 10,000 members are our friends, our neighbors, our family members, and the teachers of our children, and

Whereas, as one Vermont-NEA member put it, the teachers of our children feed, clothe, hug, nurse, play with, listen to, discipline, teach, dance with, share time and thoughts and feelings, accept, model and teach acceptance, respect and demand the same, and love their students, and

Whereas, the current Secretary of Education has called the National Education Association, in public and utterly without justification, a “terrorist organization,” and

Whereas, the members of the National Education Association, its Vermont affiliate, and the members of this general assembly know all too well what it means to be referred to as a terrorist organization while our nation wages real war against real terrorism, and

Whereas, labeling groups “terrorists” today is reminiscent of how some officials stooped to Red-baiting half a century ago, now, therefore, be it

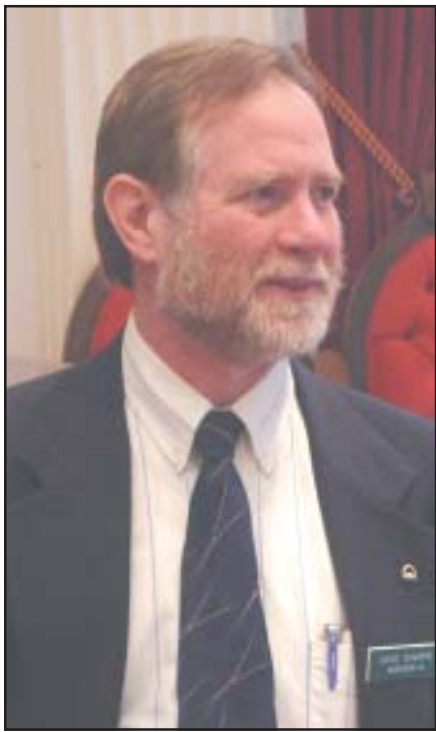
Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly condemns the use of the term “terrorist organization” to describe any American organization devoted to the welfare of our children or of working people or, for that matter, of any underprivileged members of our society, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly calls upon the President of the United States, George W. Bush, to repudiate this confoundingly inappropriate and inflammatory statement, unbecoming any cabinet official, least of all his Secretary of Education, and to require Secretary Paige’s resignation, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly requests Governor Douglas to repudiate the use of such defamatory rhetoric from whatever source as not befitting a civil society, and be it further

Resolved: That the secretary of state be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the President Bush, Governor Douglas, the members of the Vermont Congressional Delegation, the National Education Association in Washington, D.C. and the Vermont-NEA in Montpelier.



*Teacher and Representative David Sharpe was born and brought up in the rust belt: Detroit, Michigan, Erie Pennsylvania, and Youngstown Ohio. He met his wife Pat as a senior at South High School in Youngstown. He graduated from Kalamazoo College with a Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry and a minor in Political Science in 1968. As Vista Volunteer in Bristol, VT, he organized a self-help housing project and his wife Pat started the Headstart program. Dave and Pat raised two boys, Jason and Matthew, who both graduated from the University of Vermont.*

**Your Union-Your Voice**

**Educator as Legislator —  
David Sharpe is in the House!**

**By Tom Walters, Organizer**

What job requires great communication, leadership, time management, organization, the ability to inspire others and build consensus? If you were thinking “teacher,” in the case of David Sharpe, you would be only half right.

Sharpe, a teacher at the Essex Technical Center is also a member of the Vermont House of Representatives. He clearly loves both his jobs: “I began my teaching career at the Hannaford Career Center in Middlebury in 1991. I had served on the Automotive Technology program advisory board for several years and I was asked to fill in for a year when the current instructor took a year’s sabbatical. I enjoyed the year so much that I applied at the Essex Technical Center the next year. I have been teaching Automotive Technology in Essex ever since.”

Sharpe encourages educators to get involved in community affairs, including the legislature: “I enjoy working as a legislator a lot. I would recommend that *anyone* get involved in the future of their community, state, and country. Our political process per-

mits citizen involvement and in Vermont, the political process is available to citizens of moderate financial means...

“One of the great things about teaching is that a teacher’s schedule will often allow for participation in

tial campaigns. I was active in Vermont Town meetings beginning in 1968 and entered my own name for state representative in 1972. I was soundly defeated in the primary and returned to local activities. I served the community on the solid waste board, and

*“I can’t say enough about how important it is that people take part in the political process.”*

various community affairs. Do it!”

Sharpe comes from a family which embraced community service: “My grandfather and father were both involved in community service which helped me develop an interest in public policy and what an individual can do to improve the world in which we live. In fact, I was taught that it was our responsibility to leave the world in better shape than we found it. This led me to become politically active at an early age.

“My first effort in electoral politics was working for the Eugene McCarthy campaign in 1968. I subsequently worked for several presiden-

as a member and chair of the Bristol Planning Commission before being elected as a town selectboard member in 1997. In 2002 I was elected to the Vermont State House of Representatives.”

Asked about the work of CVU Teacher Greg Cluff and his students Alex Egri and Tom Wilson (see page 1), Sharpe said: “The efforts of the teacher and students from CVU are a great example of what citizens can accomplish in Vermont. I can’t say enough about how important it is that people take part in the political process. Good things happen when citizens participate.” ■

*Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie issued this statement the day after Education Sec. Rod Paige’s infamous remark...*

**“Our teachers are not terrorists.”**

MONTPELIER — Vermont Lt. Governor Brian Dubie today issued a statement following US Secretary of Education Rod Paige’s characterization of the National Teachers’ Association as a “terrorist organization.” Dubie said, “I have seen what terrorists do. As an Air Force Reservist at the time of the September 11 attacks, I went to Ground Zero to coordinate emergency response services. I will never forget the scenes of destruction and horror. That was the work of terrorists.

“Teachers are not terrorists. Vermont teachers work hard every day to help our kids learn and grow. They deserve better.” Dubie observed, “Secretary Paige has said that he regrets his remarks. We all say things we regret at times. I just want our teachers to know I, for one, recognize and value their dedication to our kids, and appreciate the hard work they do.”

###

**ESEA — National Round-Up**

**Platitudes and Stonewalls**

It’s been tough going of late for Ken Meyer. He is one of many Bush administration officials traveling the country trying to explain — and defend — the so-called “No Child Left Behind Act.” Meyer was quoted in the February 22 edition of “The New York Times” (NYT) as saying, “I’ve been in some, I don’t want to say hostile, but very contentious environments” in recent months. Places where I wondered whether I’d get out of there with my skin intact.”

According to NYT, more than a dozen states so far have passed or introduced laws or resolutions “challenging the federal law or commissioning studies of the cost of carrying it out.” In January, Virginia’s House of Delegates, which is controlled by Republicans, voted 98 to 1 in favor of a resolution urging Congress to exempt the state from implementing the law. The vote came after Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education, and other administration officials visited the state to defend NCLB. James Dillard, Chairman of Virginia’s House Education Committee, said, “Six of us met with Paige. He looked us in the eye and said, ‘It’s fully funded.’ We looked him back in the eye and said, ‘We don’t think so.’ We got platitudes and stonewalls, but no corrective action.”

Russel Sias, a retired engineer and

registered Republican, whose daughter teaches middle school, had strong misgivings about the law after hearing Ken Meyer speak at Kearns High School near Salt Lake City. He told a reporter, “I feel like we’re hearing the best vacuum cleaner salesman in the world. They’re going to label every school in the country as failing, and they call it empowerment.”

**Doing the Math in Dongola**

In Dongola, Illinois, school officials in this small, rural community, have decided that giving up their Title I funds — \$16,000 in total — made more sense than playing by NCLB’s rules. William Mowser, Dongola’s superintendent, determined it would cost his district \$230,000 — money it would have to borrow — to send just 16 students to another district until they graduate, as provided for under NCLB’s school choice provision.

**Better Late than Never**

Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts was one of four lawmakers who played a significant role in writing the NCLB law, and he has been resistant to amending it. Not any longer. According to his spokesman, Jim Manley, the senator “feels we’re at a crossroads with No Child Left Behind.” He has “detected a lot of confusion and frustration around the country,” said Manley, and now believes “corrective legislation may be needed....”

**New Report from Harvard University on NCLB**

A new report, “Inspiring Vision, Disappointing Results: Four Studies on Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act,” has been released by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. It argues that ESEA/NCLB’s accountability requirements are impeding state education reforms and assessment strategies. The report contends that the law has no common meaning for our fifty states, sends conflicting signals about student performance to school districts, and is imposing sanctions the hardest on schools with large minority or integrated student populations. Gary Orfield, co-Director of the Civil Rights Project, says, “The reality for too many public educators is confusion and frustration as No Child Left Behind is leaving too many children...and teachers...behind. The time has come for local, state and federal educators and officials...to adopt administrative and legislative remedies to save the good objectives of the programs and remove the arbitrary and unworkable provisions.”

**Say that Again!**

“Mr. Paige’s “terrorist” remark has finally exhausted his credibility and disqualified him as a spokesman for national education policy.” — “Another Mistake by Rod Paige” (The New York Times, Feb. 25, 2005).



*U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige was superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, the nation's seventh largest school district and home of the "Texas Miracle."*

## Members protest Rod Paige remark— continued from page 3...

discuss the NEA in this manner. It is important that this organization question the No Child Left Behind Act if they have concerns. The NEA and the teachers they represent have worked in the field of education for their entire careers and you and your administration would be wise to listen carefully to their concerns, instead of berating and alienating thousands of educators across the entire country... If you only listen to your tight circle of advisors and close yourself off to the rich diversity of ideas in the country, you will be doing all of us a great disservice.

### **Robert Raskevitz of East Randolph to Sec. Rod Paige:**

I have been a member of the National Education Association for almost twenty years. I take your calling the NEA a "terrorist organization" as a personal and professional affront. As a public educator I worked tirelessly for the welfare of children, my community and my nation.

Democracy requires an informed citizenry. Informed discussion, debate and disagreement are the hallmarks of our great nation. Next Tuesday, I will gather together with the other citizens of my small Vermont town at town meeting. We will elect our officers, adopt our school and municipal budgets, plan for the future, and discuss any other items of business that come before our assemblage. Having attended and served as Moderator at many town meetings, I know there will be spirited debate over many items. Disagreements will erupt and

tempers will flare. However, I also know that my fellow citizens will not resort to name-calling or hate speech. We will respect each other and our differences and we will leave neighbors and friends for another year. I should have the right to the same treatment by the U.S. Secretary of Education...

### **Deb Lowe-Murray of Swanton to Gov. Jim Douglas:**

I am dismayed to see that you condoned Sec. Paige's maligning of teachers who are members of a reputable professional organization—the NEA—including teachers in Vermont. Are we returning to an era in which persons of differing points of view are "convicted" of being unpatriotic and even terrorist? I do not take Sec. Paige's accusation lightly, nor do I excuse his comment as a poor choice of words. I am most disheartened by your lack of appreciation for the injustice of his comments, and Sec. Paige's lack of respect for civil discourse between stakeholders over the direction of education in the U.S.

### **Bruce J. (Ike) Bergeron of Brattleboro to Pres. Bush:**

Please ask Secretary of Education Rod Paige for his resignation today. To have the highest ranking education officer of the United States government joke about the National Education Association is an embarrassment to all educators. No public official today can "joke" about terrorism. To combine the NEA and terrorism into one "joke" is an insult to the people who teach our future – the students

and our country...

### **Charles Wanzer of Cabot to Sec. Rod Paige:**

...I am a hard working, dedicated, professional teacher and am insulted by your remarks. The NEA and my State organization, the Vermont-NEA, are strong advocates for public school students and their public schools and in no way espouse terrorism.

...Remarks such as what you made hinder a necessary working relationship between Washington and the States. Perhaps you ought to resign if you feel this way.

### **Kaiya Korb of Montpelier to Sec. Rod Paige:**

...I'm extremely hard-working and dedicated to trying to make public education really work — I spend more than 70 hours a week up to my elbows in this endeavor. The NEA has been a terrific resource to me, as both a new and an experienced teacher, in pursuing this goal. I have reviewed NCLB legislation somewhat warily, finding a few good points and many that leave me questioning. This questioning is always with the goal of creating a system that can work.

To hear such thoughtful, professional dialogue classified as "terrorist" activity is one of the greatest affronts I have heard uttered. Our schools are the backbone of our nation — I would think you would appreciate this more than most. To vilify the primary organization which supports and gives voice to the teachers that form this backbone is beyond inappropriate. It is inexcusable... ■

## From Vermont-NEA President Angelo J. Dorta to Governor Jim Douglas, with copies to the Vermont news media...

Dear Governor Douglas:

I am deeply disappointed by your failure to defend 11,000 Vermont educators who are members of Vermont-NEA against U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's pronouncement on Monday that he considers the National Education Association to be a "terrorist organization." Your blasé response to Secretary Paige's hateful remark was insufficient and unworthy of the Governor of our State.

We are a nation at war against terrorists. Secretary Paige's attempt to characterize the good, decent citizens who teach our children as "terrorists" because they voice reservations about the Bush Administration's so-called "No Child Left Behind" law is frightening. Our members tell us they are insulted and demeaned by Secretary Paige's remark. You should have objected.

On behalf of Vermont educators, I ask that you move immediately to make amends. First, please join the call from throughout the nation for Rod Paige's resignation as U.S. Secretary of Education. He has lost all credibility as a legitimate education leader. Ask President Bush to remove him.

Second, please issue a statement affirming the free speech rights of Vermont educators and their right to disagree with the Bush Administration without being labeled as "terrorists." Recognize their hard work and the excellent results they have achieved. Acknowledge the legitimate points they have raised in positive democratic efforts to amend "No Child Left Behind" to make it fair.

The fine educators of Vermont deserve your support

Respectfully yours,

**Angelo J. Dorta**  
Vermont-NEA President

*In a statement the next day, Governor Douglas called Paige's remark inappropriate and said: "Vermont is fortunate to have so many wonderful and dedicated teachers and administrators who share the goal of providing the best possible education to every child."*

**Advice for teachers planning to retire this year or next...**

MONTPELIER — Teachers who are planning on retiring this June or June of 2005 should be making plans to contact the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System (VSTRS) as soon as possible. Here is what VSTRS recommends prospective retirees do in preparation for the end of their teaching careers:

1) Call VSTRS at 828-2305 (or call toll free in Vermont at 1-800-642-3191) and request a **retirement packet**. At the same time you do this, obtain an **estimate of your pension amount**.

2) After you've read the information VSTRS sent you, make an appointment with a **retirement counselor** to discuss health insurance, taxes and your pension choices. The counselor will also explain your employment options after retirement. At this meeting, you can also complete your **retirement application** and other necessary forms. If you have a spouse or partner, it's wise to bring that person along to the meeting, so that both of you can be fully involved in this process. What's the best time to schedule this meeting? Preferably, late winter or early spring. And, remember, school recess periods fill up fast, so have other dates in mind for an appointment if VSTRS staff are booked solid during school breaks.

3) Contact **Social Security** to determine if you will be eligible for benefits when you retire, and, if so, to decide what the best payment option is for you. Social Security can provide you with an estimate of your payments, if you are interested in taking the "level-funding" option from the teachers' retirement system. The level-funding option, and much more, is explained in detail on VSTRS's web site:

[www.vermonttreasurer.gov](http://www.vermonttreasurer.gov)

**One last bit of advice: VSTRS doesn't know when you are retiring until YOU tell them and fill out an application.** That's right, you need to get the ball rolling in this process. So, if retirement is coming up for you this year or next, give the staff at VSTRS a call and set up a meeting. You'll find them knowledgeable and helpful. - Mark Hage

Ask your attorney

**Important considerations for educators planning a field trip**

By Donna Watts, Associate General Counsel

As the spring semester rolls around, the staff at Vermont-NEA begins to hear about field trips being planned all over the state for all sorts of wonderful, education locations. We get lots of questions about these trips -- and I get a churning stomach.

There is no question that the trips that educators plan are valuable, incredible experiences for students. Trips vary from overnight trips to the local environmental camp to trips to Europe or beyond. The educational value of these trips is not the problem. The problem is the risk to school employees and licensed educators when students or chaperones fail to live up to school and trip rules. Each year we have educators threatened with discipline or licensing action as a result of the actions of others or in a few instances, their own actions while on these trips.

Since it is clear that educators will continue to go above and beyond for students and plan these trips (and ignore my selfish advise not to do it), here are some important considerations before you go:

■ **REMEMBER THAT THE TRIP IS "SCHOOL" AND THAT SCHOOL RULES AND STATE**

**LAWS GO ALONG ON THE TRIP. THIS MEANS NO SMOKING OR DRINKING BY ADULTS OR STUDENTS. THINK OF THE TRIP AS IF IT WERE TAKING PLACE INSIDE THE BUILDING.**

■ Involve your school board in the planning for the trip. This should include an adopted board policy for field trips which establishes the rules for both students and chaperones.

The policy should include forms for both students and chaperones to sign which require each to acknowledge that they know the rules and the consequences if the rules are broken. Many such policies require that the individual will be returned home immediately at their own expense. I recommend a meeting for parents chaperones, students and parents to fully explain the policy well in advance of the trip.

■ Don't take groups of students on field trips with only yourself and another teacher or chaperone. If one adult has to take a student to a hospital or accompany a student home, the other chaperone will be unable to adequately supervise the students. Plan well in advance for adequate supervision in case of the unexpected.

■ **DO NOT TAKE STU-**

**DENTS ON FIELD TRIPS IF THE SCHOOL BOARD SAYS THE TRIPS ARE NOT SCHOOL SPONSORED OR SANCTIONED.** The school district's insurance may not cover you in case of litigation, workers compensation may not be available to you if you are injured and your NEA Liability Policy may not cover you because you were not doing work for your employer. In other words, any liability for incidents on the trip will be your personal liability.

■ **DO NOT PLAN TRIPS WITHOUT EITHER BOOKING THROUGH A STUDENT GROUP TRIP COMPANY OR AT LEAST PURCHASING TRIP INSURANCE.**

■ Be aware that medical insurance does not always cover you or the students when you are out of the United States.

■ Don't cover up any infractions of rules. Report them to your administrator as soon as you arrive home if not sooner.

Educators plan these fabulous trips with the needs of the students in mind. Please take the time to plan them with the protection of educators in mind, also. ■

**Vermont schools celebrate reading**

RUTLAND TOWN — Marcia Barron reports that K-4 physical education classes in Rutland Town participated in a Dr. Seuss obstacle course to celebrates Read Across America. She said, "A lot of enthusiastic energy, noise, and grand interest in challenges occurred at each of nine station activities prepared to represent a Dr. Seuss book." At one station, the one for *If I Ran the Zoo*, students went to the low rings and performed a Skin the Cat, a Bird's Nest, and other interesting shapes and movements.

Meanwhile, in Bennington, 30 middle school and other guest readers, including the Cat in the Hat, read to over 400 pre-school and elementary students.

Go to [www.nea.org/readacross](http://www.nea.org/readacross) to read about activities in schools in these Vermont communities: Arlington; Brattleboro; Bridport; Burlington; Castleton; Charlotte; Chesapeake; Colchester; Concord; Danby; Dummerston; Essex Jct.; Fair Haven; Highgate Center; Irasburg; Jericho; Londonderry; Lyndonville; Milton; Montpelier; Morrisville; New Haven; Poultney; Randolph; Rutland; Sheffield; South Burlington; South Hero; Stowe; Tunbridge; Vergennes; Wells; and Woodstock. ■



Above: Physical education class at Rutland Town

Below: The staff at Monument Elementary School in Bennington.



Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse



*Rina Choiniere and Ernie Hemingway of the Traveling Storyteller and Company are ready to hit the road to bring their Literacy Education arts Programs to your school...*

## Vermont-NEA welcomes new Partner: The Traveling Storyteller

MONTPELIER — Vermont-NEA is pleased to announce Vermont-NEA's newest Partner: The Traveling Storyteller and Company, Inc. Here founder and Vermont-NEA member Ernie Hemingway of Sheldon describes the Company:

Once upon a time in the land of Highgate, Vermont, a teacher was asked by a community outreach program, "Highgate Cares," to develop a program that would reach the children of Franklin County, Vermont. The teacher dreamed of a program that could enrich libraries by promoting literacy through creative movement, great literature, puppetry and crafts.

So, in October 1998, "The Traveling Storyteller and Company, Inc." was born. The teacher, Ernie Hemingway, recruited the help of Rina Choiniere, a 27-year employee of Hannaford's Super Store with amazing managing skills, and together they put together their first Literary Educational Arts Program (L.E.A.P): "Little Red Riding Hood." Ernie would be the storyteller and Rina would be the puppeteer.

"Highgate Cares" gave The Traveling Storyteller and Company some grant money to buy the necessary materials to begin the project. Bernadette Tremblay, an amazing seamstress from Highgate, rushed to make the puppets. David Roddy, also from Highgate, made the first puppet theater. Teens were quickly recruited and trained to help with the puppetry.

The Company hit the road at the end of October 1998, performing for 15 libraries in Northwestern Vermont before Christmas. As 1999 rolled around, the grant money had been spent, but the mission to promote literacy in libraries had begun. Ernie and

Rina wanted to continue. Where would the money come from? Who cares? The Company developed their second package, "The Three Bears," and asked for donations for the shows. Then, when "The Three Pigs" premiered later that year, the Company began asking for a nominal fee from each library. By the end of the first year, The Traveling Storyteller and Company had performed 100 shows.

Now in 2004, The Traveling Storyteller and Company has performed over 500 shows, in the Northeastern United States and Canada, and has developed 16 packages. Over the years, they have recruited over 15 teens and preteens to help with the productions. Two of the teens, Trevor Marsha and Aimee Rheame, students at Missisquoi Valley Union High School, have performed over 100 shows with the company.

In 2002, The Traveling Storyteller and Company was awarded a partnership grant from Barnes and Noble to develop three L.E.A.P. packages that would promote Barnes and Nobles' "Close the Book on Hate Campaign."

The Traveling Storyteller and Company has also provided comprehension workshops to school and libraries, helping parents to develop excellent reading habits and comprehension strategies, based on the Vermont Reading Standards. In 2001, Ernie was the keynote speaker and presented a workshop at the Early Childhood Conference in Rutland, Vermont. She will be returning as a keynote this year and her topic will be "Using Puppetry to Enrich Mathematics and Science Curriculums."

The Traveling Storyteller and Company Literacy Educational Arts

Programs are one hour long and include: a fine motor activity; a story read to the children; a gross motor activity (i.e. Hokey Pokey); the original puppet show complete with original music composed by Vermont students Adam Desrochers and Ryan Dempsey; a craft created by the child (usually a stick puppet of one of the story's characters).

The L.E.A.P. Packages include: Little Red Riding Hood; The Three Bears; The Three Pigs; Rumpelstiltskin; Princess and the Pea; Jack and the Beanstalk; Gingerbread Boy; Frog Prince; Beauty and the Beast Ugly Duckling; Little Red Hen; The Elves and the Shoemaker\*; Susan's Friend\*; The Hill Family\*; Nanuk's Arctic Adventure the Periwinkle Family (a show for churches). \* Developed with a partnership with Barnes and Noble

### Vermont Prices

(They are kept low and affordable.) Small Libraries \$80; Medium Libraries \$90; Large Libraries \$100; Success by Six, Head Start, Schools and Private Organizations \$150

Mileage is added to sites 50 miles or more: \$15 for 50 miles and then \$5 for each additional 10-mile increment. We charge only one-way, so if your site is 120 miles round trip, we only charge you for 60 miles (\$20). Maximum mileage charge \$100 for in or out-of-state.

### Out-of -State Prices

Libraries \$150 plus mileage; Private Organizations \$200 plus mileage. Block Bookings welcomed and will help bring down mileage cost

See us on the web at: [www.travelingstoryteller.com](http://www.travelingstoryteller.com), email: [dramatic@together.net](mailto:dramatic@together.net), phone: 802-933-5075, address: 188 Sheldon Height, Sheldon, VT 05483 ■

## Upcoming Association events...

### April 2-3

Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly convenes in Burlington.

### April 5

Deadline for May issue of *Vermont-NEA Today*.

### April 5-19

Vermont-NEA Election weeks.

### April 19

Vermont-NEA Election ballots are due at Vermont-NEA headquarters by 5:00 p.m.

### May 1

Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier.

Partnership/Sponsorship Committee meets in Montpelier.

### May 2-8

Teacher Appreciation Week

### May 4

National teacher Day

## 2004 VAAE Spring Arts Ed Conference

The Vermont Alliance for Arts Education is presenting its Spring Conference on April 2-3 in Chester, registration and meals at the Fullerton Inn on Main Street and workshops and performances at local schools and the Baptist Church.

Go to the VAAE website ([www.vaae.org](http://www.vaae.org)) for workshop descriptions, presenter biographies and registration forms.

## Summer field course

On June 23-25, 2004, three college faculty will conduct a teacher's workshop designed to provide middle and high school science teachers with greater understanding about the ecology of freshwater and forest ecosystems in our area. For three days and two nights, we will live and work in the outdoors at a local forested site in Canaan, NH. The goal is to provide teachers an opportunity to improve field research skills, and to become more familiar with local, regional, and global issues relating to the conservation of biodiversity. We are currently taking interested applicants for our 2004! summer field course.

For additional information, please contact one of us:

David.Peart@dartmouth.edu  
Celia.Chen@dartmouth.edu  
leonr@plymouth.edu

## Vermont-NEA will sponsor Handshake Project kits for three Association members

MONTPELIER — Maggie Sherman's Handshake Project is a Vermont-NEA Partner. The Association endorsed the project for its good message and positive impact on students who participate.

A Handshake Project kit provides the material necessary to serve 50 and make 25 handshake casts. Maggie developed the kit as a tool to help people connect and learn from one another.

The Vermont-NEA Partnership/Sponsorship committee has decided to sponsor three of the \$200 Handshake Project kits, one each for three Association members.

**To apply for one of the FREE kits for use with your students, write a letter to "Handshake Project" c/o Vermont-NEA, 10 Wheelock St., Montpelier, VT 05602. Tell us how you will use the kit and what purpose it will serve in your classroom or school community.**

Here's how Maggie Sherman, Owner of Hands On Productions, describes the Handshake Project:

### © Connect & Accept

The handshake gesture originally meant, "I come unarmed." Wouldn't it be a dream come true if students in every school and in every classroom could say to their educators, peers, and community that they come unarmed, without bias or judgment, and will do so everyday?

I am a community artist. For over 25 years I have been offering creative experiences to people of all ages so that people will connect and accept one another. Basically, I encourage people to get gooey and giggle as a way to connect. The premise I work from, is that when you have fun you relax. When you're relaxed you open up to receive information. This information you take in helps you learn and grow. One of the tools I have developed to help people connect and learn from one another is the Handshake Project™, which includes a standards-

based curriculum.

People often ask me to explain The Handshake Project™. I've always found that challenging, since the transformation that occurs happens on an emotional level. After observing thousands of people participate in the Handshake Project, the "explanation" has become much clearer to me. The Handshake Project™ gives people courage to connect, accept, and open our hearts.

**Connect...** In The Handshake Project™ people connect by joining hands. The skin is our body's largest organ. We learn by touch, using our tactile communication systems. Touch has the power to heal. Touch soothes people as we introduce ourselves in a new situation. Touch is one way we learn.

It is said if you want to get the feel for something you need to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty. Well, that's the best way I have found for people to really experience connection. Reach out and sink your hands into the experience.

**Accept...** The handshake equalizes status. It was the Quakers who popularized it as an egalitarian gesture rather than the more popular gestures of the day such as kissing, bowing and sweeping one's hat.

The first recorded handshake was in 1066 after the Battle of Hastings when soldiers grasped each others arms to check for weapons.

Today the handshake still means "I come unarmed." "Unarmed" meaning open— open-hearted and open-minded to receive and respond to what this encounter will produce, whether it's a professional agreement, a sports volley or a "good to see you" greeting.

Trust begins with the initial touch of a handshake.

The Handshake Project™ is about building trust. The simple steps of creating a handshake sculpture are a metaphor to how relationships are built.

## Karen Hesse, David Budbill among highlights for Teachers Who Write, May 14

Now in its seventeenth year, Teachers Who Write is a daylong conference on the campus of Vermont College in Montpelier. A spring ritual for many of Vermont's teachers and writers, it offers an array of interactive workshops on writing and teaching writing. "Another excellent day," writes Newton Baker of Union Elementary School, "where I plan to be until the fee reaches 100 or I do."

This year's conference, scheduled for May 14, features a keynote reading by Karen Hesse, the noted author of *Witness* and *Out of the Dust*, which won the Newbery Medal in 1998. Following her reading, Hesse will take questions from the audience.

Singer-songwriter Patti Casey, a nationally known, Montpelier-based performer whose credits include an appearance on *A Prairie Home Companion*, will present a luncheon concert, and offer a hands-on workshop, "The Musical Muse: Writing Songs with Elementary Students." Winner of several national songwriting contests, Casey has released three albums of her own original songs.

In addition to the keynote reading and Casey's concert, conference participants may register for two workshops. These include Casey's workshop, mentioned above, a poetry writing workshop, "Common and Ordinary: Poetry Plain and Simple," with David Budbill, and playwright Dana Yeaton's writing workshop, "Playwriting for All Ages."

Other workshops include Nick Boke's "Helping Students Compre-



**Karen Hesse, author of *Out of the Dust*, will deliver a keynote reading.**

hend 'Difficult' Text," Dr. Hasse K. Halley's, "What Happens When a Whole School Reads the Same Books?" "Poetry in Motion, Grades K-5" with Katie LaFrancois, Sydelle Pearl's "Storytelling and Imagination Games that Lead Children to Write," "Creative Journalism as a Key to Teaching Writing," with Ronna Ziegel, and Jill A. Ziemski's "Using Self-Assessment as a Middle-School Writing Workshop Tool."

Teachers Who Write is sponsored by the Vermont Department of Education, the Vermont Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, and the National Writing Project in Vermont. A \$60 registration fee covers all activities and a simple luncheon. Contact Elizabeth Rand for more information: [lrاند@doe.state.vt.us](mailto:lrاند@doe.state.vt.us) 828-3150.

## Green Mountain "Moovie" Competition comes to Vermont

### Digital Storytelling Competition for Vermont Schools

MONTPELIER — Vermont public school students in grades 5-12 have an exciting opportunity to compete for an all expense paid trip to Denali National Park, Alaska, to attend a science and technology camp in June of 2004. The winning school team will be competing for a prize worth over \$10,000 by entering their two-minute movie in a digital storytelling competition.

This event is sponsored by the Vermont School Boards Association and the Vermont Information Technology Association for the Advancement of Learning. The winning team will present their movie at the VITA-Learn Dynamic Landscapes Conference, May 21, 2004. The top three entries will do the same at the Vermont School Boards Association/Vermont Superintendents Conference, October 14-16, 2004.

The theme for this digital

storytelling competition will be, "My Learning Community." Movies submitted will be original content, created and edited by students and must be two minutes or less in length.

This original movie project began four years ago in Alaska, through the efforts of Mark Standley, an internationally known technology consultant. Standley has helped schools in Alaska, Hawaii, England and Japan use simple video technologies to tell digital stories generated by students and enter these movies in competitions. Of particular note is the Alaska movie challenge, nicknamed the "IdidaMovie," where the winning school received an all expense paid trip to Hawaii. In turn, Hawaii began a competition coined the "Island Movie Project" which sends the winning team to Alaska.

Hurry, the deadline for entries is April 16, 2004. For rules and submission guidelines, go to: [www.vtvsba.org](http://www.vtvsba.org) or [www.vita-learn.org](http://www.vita-learn.org)

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