



# TODAY

Website:  
www.vtnea.org

The official publication of the Vermont-National Education Association - Vol. 71, No. 9 - April 2005

## A restructured format, broader scope, and new name for the Association's annual professional meeting: **Vermont-NEA Education Exposition**

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse

MONTPELIER — The Vermont-NEA Exposition Planning Committee, a group of Association members from throughout the state, is at work restructuring and broadening the scope of the annual Fall Educators' Convention. The new event, which will run from Wednesday, October 19, through Thursday, October 20, will be called the *Vermont-NEA Education Exposition*.

The new Exposition will include:

- Educators' Convention
- Leadership Academy
- ESP Conference
- Educational Materials Exhibits
- Retirement consultations for members
- Presentations on the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System and the Vermont Municipal Employees Retirement Systems

Vermont-NEA Professional Programs Director Sherry Gile advises the Exposition Planning Committee. She is pleased about the revamped fall meeting. "For the first time, Vermont-NEA's different advocacy services and member benefit programs will be under one roof!," she points out, adding: "Our goal is to offer something meaningful and useful to every educator who attends the Exposition."

### Exposition Theme

The Convention Planning Committee announced a contest earlier this year to name a theme for the 2005 Exposition. Fifty-seven Vermont-NEA members submitted ideas. Brenda Hunt, teacher at Mallets Bay Elementary School in Colchester, won the \$100 prize for suggesting the winning theme — "Vermont Educators: Building Tomorrow Starting Today."

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS

#### Selecting Workshops for the Exposition

"Vermont-NEA is striving to offer a significant number of workshops at the Education Exposition, including an increase over previous years of those that carry recertification credit and/or possibly one graduate credit," says Sherry Gile. "To do this, we are recruiting highly skilled educators who are interested in facilitating workshops on professional development or pedagogical issues."

Sherry explains that the findings of an extensive professional development issues survey administered by Vermont-NEA in January, 2005, will guide the Exposition Planning Committee. The Committee will select workshop offerings that align with members' needs and aspirations. These are the criteria: for Exposition workshops:



Teacher Brenda Hunt won the contest to name an Exhibition theme. She wanted her kids in the picture.

• Presenters will offer workshops that are 2 hours, 6 hours or 15 hours in length. (The fifteen-hours training option can be accommodated in the following way: two hours of training on Wednesday evening, seven hours on Thursday, and the last six hours on Friday, October 21, or as part of our Professional Issues Conference later in the school year (date to be determined).

• Workshops must relate to the general theme of the Education Exposition.

• Workshop proposals must cover professional development or pedagogical topics that are of high interest and relevance to educators.

• Workshop facilitators must possess excellent presenter credentials.

Vermont-NEA will offer an honorarium of \$150 per two hours of instruction to the presenters of

workshops that are selected by the Exposition Planning Committee.

#### How to apply

To apply to be a presenter at the 2005 Vermont-NEA Education Exposition, please complete the workshop proposal form found on-line at [www.vtnea.org](http://www.vtnea.org). The form is found by clicking on the "Educators' Convention" link. The deadline for completing the form: May 1, 2005.

These are the members of the Exposition Planning Committee: Judith Allard of Burlington, Stephanie Keitel of East Montpelier, Margaret McNeil of Hinesburg, Ted Fullard of Northfield, Cynthia Knowles of Chester, Karen Heath of Barre, and Linda Berger of Montpelier. Sherry Gile advises the committee. Direct questions to her at [sgile@vtnea.org](mailto:sgile@vtnea.org) or 1-800-649-6375 x123.■

## INSIDE

Attacking Our High Schools .....	2	Health Care Is Legislature's Big Issue .....	5
SBEA: A Membership Success Story .....	3	Letters .....	6
SWVEA Turns Up the Heat.	3	Privatized Pension Plans Dangerous, Uncertain .....	7
Survey Results Guide Professional Program .....	4	Sign Up for Early Bird Membership Enrollment ....	7
NCLB Unconstitutional .....	4	Teachers Who Write .....	8

Presorted Standard  
U.S. Postage PAID  
Permit No. 30  
Burlington, Vermont

Vermont-NEA  
**TODAY**

Published monthly except July by  
Vermont-NEA, Inc.  
10 Wheelock Street  
Montpelier, VT 05602-3737  
Telephone: (802) 223-6375  
FAX: (802) 223-1253  
Email: vtnea@together.net  
Website: www.vtnea.org

President  
**Angelo J. Dorta**  
Executive Director  
**Joel D. Cook**  
Communications Director  
**Laurie B. Huse**

Subscription Price: \$6.00 per year.  
Vermont-NEA assumes no responsibility for  
claims arising in connection with products or  
services advertised in Vermont-NEA TODAY.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Vice President  
**Thomas J. Gallagher**  
Secretary Treasurer  
**Jeff Isham**  
NEA Director  
**Joyce Sullivan**  
Addison-Rutland, Area 1  
**Rose Wenzel**  
Addison Rutland, Area 2  
**Diane Alberts**  
Central Vermont, Area 1  
**Cindy Bubrouski**  
Central Vermont, Area 2  
**Terri Vest**  
Chittenden, Area 1  
**vacancy**  
Chittenden, Area 2  
**Richard Wise**  
Chittenden, Area 3  
**Brian Walsh**  
Northeast Kingdom, Area 1  
**Lydia Alexander**  
Northeast Kingdom, Area 2  
**Pat Vana**  
Southern Vermont, Area 1  
**Susan Rusten**  
Southern Vermont, Area 2  
**Jay Burnell**  
Southern Vermont, Area 3  
**Dennis Ladd**  
Northwestern Vermont, Area 1  
**Bonnie Tuscany**  
Northwestern Vermont, Area 2  
**Ann Lavery**  
Upper Valley, Area 1  
**Cherrie Torrey**  
Upper Valley, Area 2  
**Lisa Champagne**

**STAFF**

Attorneys  
**James "Jeff" Fannon**  
**Donna M. Watts**  
UniServ Field Staff  
**Norman P. Bartlett**  
**David R. Boulanger**  
**Jerry Carruba**  
**Suzanne B. Dirmaier**  
**Joyce E. Foster**  
**Sean Leach**  
**Robert Raskevitz**  
Organizers  
**Ellen David Friedman**  
**Thomas J. Walters**  
Professional Programs  
**Sherry Gile**  
Benefit Programs  
**Mark L. Hage**  
Administrative Assistants  
**Ellie McAndrew**  
**Sheree O. Parker**  
**Sandy Perkins**  
**Yolly Turner**  
Membership/Accounting  
**Teri Leo Drury**  
Business Manager  
**Claude C. Janus**

# Attacking Our High Schools

Why does it almost always have to be this way? Whenever American politicians and business leaders organize a "summit" intended to discuss proposed improvements in public education, it usually starts with a thorough trashing of our schools.

The national and state-level political drumbeat often embraces overly harsh assessments of current "reality" in schools. Politicians, many with keen aspirations for higher office, and their influential business supporters seemingly only can see "failings." They don't easily recognize many core strengths in our schools.

Furthermore, they minimize or completely overlook society's historical, nearly institutionalized, out-of-school shortcomings. Such shortcomings include persistently inadequate investment in schools' human and financial resources, too many indifferent and uninvolved citizens, growing numbers of impoverished, stressed, dysfunctional, and broken families, and badly conceived regulation by legislators and education policymakers.

Inevitably, the criticisms of political and business leaders and attendant media extend to educators themselves, at least by implication. At times, teachers and their colleagues feel like virtual co-conspirators indicted for poor school performance. These are the same educators who've devoted many years of their working lives to students and to their communities.

The latest target is U.S. high schools. The name-blame-shame game began in grand style just last month. The National Governors Association's two-day winter meeting in February exclusively focused on American high schools.

Featuring MicroSoft wunderkind and multi-billionaire Bill Gates as their celebrity CEO and tone-setting mouthpiece, nearly 50 governors heard Gates depict our nation's high schools as "obsolete" and able to serve only about one-third of U.S. students well.

"By obsolete, I mean that our high schools — even when they're working exactly as designed — cannot teach our kids what they need to know today," said Gates. "Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today's computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It's the wrong tool for the times."

He continued: "Our high schools were designed fifty years ago to meet the needs of another age. Until we re-design them to meet the needs of the 21st century, we will keep limiting — even ruining — the lives of millions of Americans each year... This isn't an accident or flaw in the system; it is the system."

"Obsolete?" "Ruining lives?" These are very powerful remarks from someone who later self-effacingly

states, "I'm not here to pose as an education expert."

Really? Well, the fact is Gates was posing as an education expert, and he knew it. He even proceeded to blame "the poor performance of our high schools in preparing students for colleges" as a major reason why the percentage of young U.S. adults with college degrees has dropped from first to fifth in the world.

What about the soaring costs of a college education today? What about increased options for well-paid high tech employment that doesn't require a college degree? What about the rising trend of older Americans obtaining degrees later in life for a wide

spect. Rather, it recommends that schools begin by adapting existing programs and school action plans to the so-called Twelve Principles, including challenging standards, engaged and responsible learners, multiple pathways to graduation, personalized learning, flexible schedules and structures, real-life experiences, family participation, community partnerships, and several more.

The Principles place individual student learning at the center of high school operations. They also focus on community assets — human services agencies, businesses, colleges, etc. — to help foster personal aspirations and to meet high standards described in

*The notion of "re-designing" high schools indeed may be a necessary option. But can't we also emphasize basic and achievable upgrades that we know will add rigor and equity to high school education?*

variety of reasons? A few statistics on student dropout rates, some international student testing comparisons, and data on college degree attainment do not constitute a compelling or indisputable case for a blanket indictment of our nation's high schools and for wholesale "re-design."

I'm not saying our high schools are perfect today and that we shouldn't constantly examine realistic and promising ways to serve all students better and more equitably. My primary concern is the use of negative and overblown rhetoric to make the case. It's unnecessarily alarmist, ignores the tremendous progress states have made with standards-based education in the two decades since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, and adds to the unfair perception of mediocre public education.

Vermont provides an ideal example. In 1999, like many states before and after it, Vermont established its High Schools Task Force to assess conditions and critical issues in secondary schools and to recommend changes that could improve learning for all high schoolers. Its final report, *High Schools on the Move*, culminated over three years of work and is posted on the Vermont Department of Education website ([www.state.vt.us/education/new/html/pubs/highschools\\_on\\_the\\_move.html](http://www.state.vt.us/education/new/html/pubs/highschools_on_the_move.html)). Several Vermont high schools are formally involved right now as pilot sites seeking to implement major recommendations in the report.

*High Schools on the Move* doesn't suggest a uniform blueprint for strengthening Vermont high schools because unique community settings and school traditions should be re-

Vermont's *Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*. The Principles also mesh with New England Association of School and Colleges (NEASC) high school accreditation standards and Vermont's School Quality Standards.

High school improvement efforts like Vermont's pre-date the '05 National Governors Association Education Summit and Gates's recent questionable analysis by six years or more. Shouldn't they not only be acknowledged, but serve as leavening to help notable politicians and business people make more accurate assessments, more responsible statements, and more pertinent recommendations?

The notion of "re-designing" high schools indeed may be a necessary option. But can't we also emphasize basic and achievable upgrades that we know will add rigor and equity to high school education? Expanding Advanced Placement and college prep courses, targeting additional funds and time to help at-risk students during and after the school day, recruiting accomplished teachers and establishing better working conditions for schools with large enrollments of low-income students, and carefully coordinating and integrating high school curricula are steps forward that always should receive serious consideration.

Vermont educators and their counterparts around the country are committed to the hard work necessary to improve high schools for all students. It's the frequent posturing and negativity of political and business leaders that are so bothersome and unfair.

**Angelo J. Dorta**  
President

# SBEA: A membership success story

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse

**SOUTH BURLINGTON** — In recent years, increasing numbers of our veteran teachers have been retiring, and many teachers, new to the profession, are being hired. The influx of new people creates a challenge for local Associations that must find ways to recruit new members.

The South Burlington Educators' Association membership program is particularly successful. SBEA has achieved 97% membership; 213 of the district's 220 teachers belong to the Association.

SBEA's history of successful contract negotiations leading to one of the best teachers' contracts in Vermont can be attributed, in part, to strong membership numbers. But what is the key to SBEA's success recruiting and keeping members?

## Speak with new teachers

We asked SBEA President Rich Wise what activities by his local are most effective in reaching/recruiting new members. "Having the opportunity to speak with new teachers at their orientation day, so that the message being delivered is clear, thorough, and being delivered by the president of the Association," said Rich, adding: "In South Burlington, a very few days later, new teachers hear the president deliver a very professional speech at convocation. At the orientation, we have the membership forms already filled out for teachers. I get the names of every new teacher from the central office prior to meeting with them. Building reps then follow up with individual teachers."

## Provide Association service

Rich says that the top two most effective arguments for convincing a teacher to join are Association services and relationship with colleagues.

According to Rich, a teacher in the first years of employment is MOST likely to need the services of the Association. There will be contractual issues they may not understand, and they are likely to need help with questions regarding their license, probationary status, how to handle RIF notices, etc. Rich says, "The Association is a resource that is always available for very important issues related to employment."

## Link membership to the profession

Rich tells us not to overlook collegiality. "Membership acknowledges your relationship with your colleagues and your profession," he tells new teachers. "It is our professional organization, and it is important to be a part of the PROFESSION."

Rich says local Association leaders need to be professional and well respected teachers in the district. "Our colleagues need to know we value young people, and are always strong advocates for kids," he emphasizes.

## Approach every non-member

SBEA approaches every non-member every year. "We want them to know we value them, and would like them to join," says Rich. "Most years, in addition to being approached by a building rep, non-members receive a letter from the president."

## Select the right recruiters

We asked Rich what motivates him to do the hard work necessary to recruit members. "I simply believe in the Association," he explained. "I have been teaching long enough to understand where we started, and how far we've progressed. Beginning teachers sometimes start feeling as though their salary, benefits, class size, etc. are fine, and why do we need



South Burlington's Rich Wise says, "Membership acknowledges your relationship with your colleagues and your profession."

a union? That's when I talk to them about the Carl Frattini's and Tim Comolli's [respected South Burlington teachers], who understand it wasn't always that way. You get what you are strong enough to get."

Tim Comolli, the award-winning teacher in charge of South Burlington's highly regarded Imaging Lab, is retiring this year. He wrote a note to SBEA leaders that sums up

what's important about joining the Association: "I hope you know that it is only at this time of a teacher's life that you really get to appreciate the work of the SBEA. I found my first year's contract. It was for \$4,500. Thanks to the SBEA, I will be able to retire with dignity. That represents a lot of work on the part of people like yourselves who have done so much for all of us." -LBH

# SWVEA members turn up the heat!

## By Tom Walters, Organizer

**BENNINGTON** — March 7 was a cold, blustery night in Bennington. But in the tiny Monument Elementary School gymnasium, well over 100 teachers and ESP from the Southwest Vermont Educational Association were turning up the heat.

The SWVEA members, all wearing buttons which proclaimed "Proud to Teach," were there to support Chief Negotiators Nancy Czarniecki and Vincent Pesce as they presented a petition, signed by more than 300 educators, to the Bennington School Board. Copies of the petition were also mailed to the North Bennington, Shaftsbury, Pownal and the Mount Anthony Union District school boards.

SWVEA teachers have been working for more than 260 days without a contract. Negotiations are at impasse. The SWVEA petition to the

school board read:

"We, the undersigned teachers of the SVSU District, have been waiting over 230 days for a new contract. We are writing to respectfully ask you to do whatever you can to encourage your Board Negotiators to *respect the negotiations process* and settle a fair and equitable contract."

Said Negotiator Nancy Czarniecki: "Standing up with all of my colleagues was a great feeling. I knew I wasn't speaking for myself, but for everyone in that gym and the others who wanted to be there but couldn't. Clearly, our message got across. Why? Because it was simple, respectful and clear."

SWVEA President Stefanie Peters added: "It was a *powerful* experience. I believe the fact we were able to get so many teachers to participate made it successful, regardless of the Board's perception. It gave us more

energy and encouragement to move forward."

School board Chairwoman Margaret Lochner interrupted the presentation, tersely stating that discussing negotiations was in violation of the ground rules.

Nancy Czarniecki calmly reminded her that outside discussion was clearly allowed once the sides had reached impasse. Ms. Lochner had no further objections.

Last fall, once it became apparent that negotiations had reached impasse, members in SWVEA formed a "Negotiations Support Committee." The committee consisted members from each of the nine schools SWVEA represents.

According to President Stefanie Peters, "The most important, most effecting thing we did was to get members involved. By organizing the Negotiations Support Team, we were

able to get folks who were not building reps or involved as negotiators, to inform and rally other teachers."

The Negotiations Support Committee's efforts also included a very successful membership drive, which garnered 34 new members for SWVEA.

In addition to organizing the petition drive and board meeting appearance, the Negotiations Support Committee also arranged for a reporter from the Rutland Herald to cover the school board meeting. The resulting article portrayed SWVEA in a positive, professional light. Stephanie Peters said, "We were portrayed as professionals! Pick a quality media person you can rely on!" ■

Vermont-NEA UniServ Director Norm Bartlett and Organizers Ellen David Friedman and Tom Walters advise the local.

## Vermont testing requirement for Languages

Praxis II for anyone seeking an endorsement in Modern & Classical Language (Spanish, German, French) will be required as of October 1, 2005. Individuals must take and meet Vermont's passing scores on two tests.

### Spanish:

Title code 0191—Content Knowledge—passing score 163;

Title code 0192—Productive Language Skills—passing score 165.

### French:

Title code 0173—Content Knowledge—passing score 157;

Title code 0171—Productive Language Skills—passing score 163.

### German:

Title code 0181—Content Knowledge—passing score 148;

Title code 0182—Productive Language Skills—passing score 169.

To further complicate things, a Praxis II test will be required for **Latin** as of 12-1-05. The title code is 0600—Multiple choice—passing score 580.

## Program focuses on landmine removal

Vermont teachers who want to incorporate landmine awareness into their curricula will soon have an opportunity as part of a statewide campaign organized by the Marshall Legacy Institute.

More than 100 million landmines remain buried in at least 64 nations, killing and maiming thousands of people every year. Because specially trained mine-sniffing dogs are the single best way to find unexploded landmines, MLI's focus is to purchase and train mine-detection dogs for nations where landmines remain buried.

In September 2003, the MLI launched CHAMPS — Children Against Mines Program. The program provided teachers with ideas for incorporating landmine awareness and collected enough money to send one dog to Sri Lanka.

Marcelle Leahy, wife of Senator Patrick Leahy, and MLI will kick off Vermont CHAMPS during the week of April 25. Call MLI at (703) 243-9200 or visit [www.marshall-legacy.org](http://www.marshall-legacy.org).

# Survey results will guide Vermont-NEA's Professional Development Program

MONTPELIER -- Since its inception, Vermont-NEA's professional development program has been committed to securing the organizational capacity necessary to meet the training needs of teachers and Education Support Professionals (ESP). "We knew we needed to learn more about the availability, quality and effectiveness of training and other activities teachers and ESP engage in for professional growth and development," explained Professional Programs Director Sherry Gile, adding: "To learn about our members' professional development needs, we conducted a formal *Professional Development Issues Survey*."

The survey was mailed in January to more than 1,200 members of Vermont-NEA. Now, enough survey results are in for statistically valid conclusions to be reached. The survey is providing the information we need about the types of content members want to see in training, as well as their preferences for delivery and scheduling of professional development. Sherry says, "We will use this survey data in the design and implementation of offerings over the course of the next few years."

Here are a few samples of very interesting survey results:

**How much of an obstacle is each of the following for you to receiving professional development:**

- Too much work to take time off (73% of respondents indicated "Very Much or Somewhat")

- Activities/training offered at inconvenient locations (70% of respondents indicated "Very Much or Somewhat")

- Activities/training offered at inconvenient times (68% of respondents indicated "Very Much or Somewhat")

**How much do you need professional development in the following areas:**

- Helping low-performing students achieve high standards (79%)

- New and innovative teaching strategies (72%)

- Evaluation your own teaching in order to make improvements (63%)

**How much would you prefer to receive professional development in the following ways:**

- Practical or "hands-on" activities (86%)

- Workshops and activities sponsored by your school district or college institution (82%)

- Observations of and interactions w/colleagues who work in similar position/area (80%)

Watch for more survey results in Vermont-NEA's electronic newsletter **MONDAY!**

**What is "good" professional development?**

Sherry says that Vermont-NEA survey results will guide committee

work such as the Professional Development Committee, the Human and Civil Rights Committee, the Partnership/Sponsorship Committee and the staff Training Committee. She also promises more: "We will strive to assure that the components of 'good' professional development are present in our professional development offerings."

Professional development is the process of enhancing personal growth and job skills and improving job performance to contribute to outstanding education results of students. What constitutes "good" professional development? According to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and based on years of research, effective professional development:

- Is ongoing
- Includes training, practice and feedback;
- Is school-based and embedded in staff work
- Is collaborative, providing opportunities for staff to interact with peers
- Focuses on student learning, which should, in part, guide instruction of its effectiveness
- Encourages and supports school-based initiatives
- Recognizes staff as professionals and adult learners
- Provides adequate time and follow-up support
- Is accessible and inclusive

## Focus on ESEA/NCLB

# Report: NCLB flawed and unconstitutional

**A Special Report on NCLB finds the law flawed and unconstitutional**

A task force convened by the National Conference of State Legislatures released a 77-page report in late February on the so-called "No Child Left Behind" Act. The report concludes that under NCLB "...the federal government's role has become excessively intrusive in the day-to-day operations of public education."

The report, written by a bi-partisan panel of 16 state legislators and six legislative staff members, contends that NCLB has expanded federal powers in the realm of public education to a degree that is unconstitutional.

Furthermore, the law has had the effect of "curtailing additional state innovations and undermining many that had occurred during the past three decades."

The report also finds that the federal law contradicts provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), which requires schools to design educational programs uniquely suited to the needs and abilities of each disabled child. Instead, accord-

ing to the authors of the report, the law "requires disabled students to be tested by grade level."

Kory Holdaway, a Republican state representative from Utah who served on the task force, as well as a special education teacher, voiced a concern shared by many state politicians and educators: "I hope the feds will have an open mind as far as letting us run our educational system as we feel it should be run."

### Strange bedfellows

Utah State Rep. Margaret Dayton, a conservative Republican who "adores President Bush," said she will continue to push her bill on ESEA/NCLB, which calls for the federal education law to take a back seat to the state's statutes, especially when the two levels of government conflict.

Utah's House education committee unanimously approved Dayton's legislation on February 3.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that both the conservative Utah Eagle Forum and the Utah Education Association have endorsed Dayton's bill and a related measure.

"[The legislation] makes the statement that we believe the federal

government has overstepped its authority," said UEA President Pat Rusk. "It says we believe in each other and trust in each other to educate our children."

### Other state and local updates

Missouri has won approval from the U.S. Department of Education to substantially lower its AYP requirements for 2005. Virginia and Connecticut are also lobbying the Department for waivers from certain ESEA/NCLB requirements.

### President Bush's FY06 Budget

The Bush administration proposed a \$2.5 trillion budget on February 7 that would eliminate or severely cut 50 education programs, including \$1.2 billion alone for vocational education state grants to high schools and community colleges.

If this budget is passed, the U.S. Department of Education would receive a net reduction in financing (-0.9%) for the first time in a decade.

ESEA/NCLB FY06 funding would rise only 1.3 percent, leaving a shortfall of \$12 billion below the authorized level under the law and a cumulative five-year shortfall of \$39 billion. ■

# Health Care – This Legislature’s “Big Issue”

**Joel D. Cook, Vermont-NEA Executive Director**

The list of legislative issues the Association is pursuing is lengthy. It extends from education policy (things like whether education should be provided 3- and 4-year olds and whether teachers should regulate their own profession) to workers rights (including for us the agency fee for teachers bill and, for labor generally, worker compensation policy and the composition of the Labor Relations Board), to education funding (largely the extent to which increasing property values should affect the state education tax rate and how to tie the so-called prebate process more closely in taxpayers’ minds to its moderating effect on their property tax bills), to retirement (focused primarily on ways to bring the Teachers Retirement System funding to safer levels and how, if at all, to improve retiree benefits).

As this Legislative Session continues, we’ll be discussing a lot of issues. To date, though, and it is still early in the session, the issue that is driving all other issues is health care policy. As a result, I focus on it in this article.

Each Legislative Session develops both its own personality and, while the rules and procedures driving legislation remain generally the same, its own approach to public policy.

In recent sessions, the “big issues” — besides the budget, almost always the biggest issue — have been dictated externally. For example, the state Supreme Court “B” decisions — *Brigham* regarding equity in school funding and *Baker* regarding equality of rights for gay couples — made a huge impact on how the legislature approached its work during the past decade. This time, the big issue is health care policy. While not dictated by a court decision — and that fact may very well make addressing it more difficult, not less — the felt need to address health care is simply overwhelming — and that fact is making addressing it more difficult. Indeed, the election that brought these legislators to Montpelier was characterized largely by challenges and commitments to address health care, and the pressure to do so is quite tangible in the State House.

## Multiple pressures

The pressure comes, in part, from the federal government’s intentional squeezing of funding for social services generally, Medicaid chief among them, for purposes here. It comes from the level of funding the state itself has allocated to pay doctors and others under public programs. It extends to long-term care, public employment (including, of course, school districts), retirees (including retired school employees), tax policy, administrative costs, and much more. It is a function of cost, and the infla-

tionary cost of health care far outstrips that of the rest of the economy. It stems from “utilization” — the gray-ing of American society and, perversely, extended life expectancies resulting from improved health care — and the need to administer a complex system of insurance claims, but it is also a result of the major, helpful, costly advances in medical technology, and, of course, ever faster growth in prescription drug output, use, and cost.

Health care issues have their own ‘multiplier effect.’ In the school context, not only is the cost of employee health insurance at issue, but health costs are part of the reason special education costs have exceeded growth of other school items. And, within special education, the State-driven policy to make use of Medicaid to defray some special ed. costs to Vermont taxpayers, is contributing now to the angst over the cost of the Medicaid program as a whole.

All that being said, this Legislature appropriately has spent the lion’s share of its time to date — just two months as I write — studying the issue. The Senate’s Health and Welfare Committee is drafting legislation. The House’s Health Care Committee, established just this year to provide an exclusive focus on the issue, is now discussing components that ought to characterize a good, statewide health care policy. Both committees conducted a four-and-a-half hour public hearing on March 10 to hear from dozens of Vermonters what they think should characterize useful reform. We understand that, once the House Committee develops an approach, it intends to take it on the road to a series of public meetings, about which we will notify Association members when they are scheduled.

To date, the Governor’s Office has focused almost exclusively on ways to what it calls “save” the Medicaid program. While sustaining Medicaid is hugely important, most observers understand that addressing the way Medicaid is financed, while part of the overall health care debate, is just that — a part of the debate.

Over the past couple of decades, the ebb and flow of Medicaid services and costs has always had the secondary effect of shifting around — not reducing — the costs of health care generally. When, for example, physician services are reimbursed through Medicaid at rates below some standard measure of their cost, physician services provided under other insurance plans have simply gone up in price, affecting premiums paid by those with private insurance. Addressing Medicaid in isolation of its effects on the rest of the health care system would literally be no different from what has happened in just about every legislative session over the past two decades.

## Vermont-NEA’s role

For our part, correctly anticipating what this session’s “big issue” would be, the Association adopted this set of principles to guide our advocacy. We know how dominant the issue of health insurance is at bargaining tables around the state. We’ve been enormously successful, through VEHI, in establishing for public school employees statewide high quality coverage at what passes for reasonable costs in this context. We are working hand-in-glove with other Vermont labor groups in monitoring and participating in the debate. In addition, we are a lead player (through Mark Hage, our Member Benefits Director) in the one setting that, to

date, can claim to include all players — policy-makers, business leaders, insurance providers, health care providers, and working Vermonters and patients. That setting is the so-called “Coalition 21,” whose purpose is to attempt to develop a consensus approach to addressing the issue. The principles it adopted in most respects mirror our own.

We’ve printed our principles before. They are posted at [www.vtnea.org/Health.htm](http://www.vtnea.org/Health.htm). We’re printing them here again to reach more and more of our members. Our statement begins with an introduction, a basic explanation why we developed the principles, and proceeds to state the principles. Here’s how it reads:

## Principles of Health Care Policy Reform – 2004

Vermont-NEA wants to participate in the development of a consensus regarding how to change the health care system — in Vermont and nationally.

We recognize that Vermont educators have struggled and sacrificed to obtain and, particularly, to retain high quality health care coverage for themselves and their families. We will do nothing to jeopardize that.

We recognize that it has become increasingly difficult for educators without such coverage to obtain it. We must do something to help them.

We recognize that retired educators deserve and need access to good health care at rational and realistic cost. We must do what we can to help them get it.

We know that most approaches to “reform” in public health care policy have typically been little more than shifting costs from one group of patients or providers to others. That is because reform has almost always been partial, incremental, inadequate. No approach to health care reform short of one that addresses the whole system and the entire population can appropriately meet the principles we establish here for proposals we can support. Therefore, Vermont-NEA will endorse approaches to this public issue of fundamental importance in Vermont that adhere to the following principles:

**1. Reform in health care policy must encompass the entire health care system.** It should not seek or result merely in the shifting of system costs from one group of patients or providers to others. In particular, it should not seek to lump together those who receive some or all of their health coverage through taxpayers.

**2. Health care reform should not be piecemeal.** It should not address first one group with the mere hope or intention that other groups will be affected later.

**3. All Vermonters should be able to obtain safe and timely health care services when they need them,** with the guidance of medical providers they know and trust.

**4. Access to health care should be available to all regardless of employment.** Many thousands of Vermonters, whether or not disabled, are unemployed without fault. Many thousands are retired. Many thousands are employed but do not have adequate or, in some cases, any coverage. Their ability to obtain needed health care should not be compromised.

**5. Access to health care should be established as a fundamental right of citizenship.**

**6. Health care finance should be adequate, affordable, and sustainable.** These three standards characterize all good social institutions.

**7. The health care system should be efficient.** It should provide fair, equitable payment to providers and encourage them to implement those practices identified as best and as improving overall quality.

**8. Health care providers must be accountable.** There should be high standards, good evaluation systems, and thorough public oversight mechanisms.

# LETTERS

Vermont-NEA Today welcomes letters to the editor from Association members. The maximum length: 200 words, please. -LBH

## **Terri Vest for Vice President**

Terri Vest would make a great Vice President for Vermont-NEA. I have worked with her for 7 years at the National Representative Assembly and I have seen her leadership qualities. Not only would she be a good Vice President within the state, but she represents Vermont well at the national level. We need someone like Terri—smart, informed, and always willing to work.

**Jay Kaplan**

Essex Jct Westford EA - Retired

## **Support Tom Gallagher**

I am writing in support of Tom Gallagher, the current Vice President of Vermont NEA. He has also served at the local level in many roles and has represented Vermont-NEA at the national level. I have served on the Board of Directors with Tom for several years. During that time I have found Tom to closely listen to issues, ask clarifying questions, and make sound decisions. His calm nature is an asset to the board.

I encourage you to support Tom in his efforts to continue his service to us! Look for your ballot to come in the mail at HOME in early April. Please follow the directions carefully and vote before April 18th.

**Cherrie Torrey**

Hartford EA

## **Bonnie for a new outlook**

I am writing to support Bonnie Tuscany for election as Vermont-NEA President.

Bonnie is a well-informed educator and Vermont-NEA Director. She knows the needs of students and the demands placed on teachers and para-educators in our schools today.

Bonnie favors term limits for this very important office. She will bring a new outlook to current issues facing all of us at this time.

**Anna B. Lamb**

Hartland EA

## **Angelo is the best candidate**

I write to express my support for Angelo Dorta's re-election as president of Vermont NEA. I believe Angelo is the best candidate for the position because of his commitment to both Vermont NEA and the principles of the NEA, his highly successful experience in leading our organization, and his clear vision for our future.

Throughout his service as president, Angelo has consistently and diligently worked to improve education for all of Vermont's children as well as to improve working conditions for Vermont-NEA members. He has been an outspoken advocate and a thoughtful, responsive listener. From my conversations with NEA staff at the national level, I know that as our president, Angelo has gained an outstand-

ing, widely respected voice nationally, unusual for the representative of a small state affiliate.

We are fortunate that someone of Angelo's integrity, caring, courage, and commitment seeks to continue to serve us. Please think back on our many accomplishments under his leadership and consider a vote for Angelo. Thank you.

**Michele Forman**

Middlebury UHS TA

## **Bonnie has a fresh new vision**

I'm writing this letter in support of Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President. I feel that Bonnie will fill that position as she has great leadership skills. Bonnie has served and continues to serve her local association. She has held many positions and has just been part of the negotiating team that bargained a new contract in one day for their local association.

Bonnie has served as vice president of Vermont-NEA and is currently serving as a member of the Board of Directors.

Bonnie has the pulse of Vermont support personnel and teachers. Working in a school setting, she is very much aware of what support staff and teachers are facing on a daily basis. She will bring a new perspective to the position of president that is very much needed.

Bonnie has a fresh new vision that Vermont-NEA needs at this time. Vermont-NEA is facing different challenges, such as a budget crisis, public perception of the teaching profession, and the far reaching effects of NCLB for both teachers and support staff.

I feel that Bonnie has the determination, work ethics to institute the changes that Vermont-NEA needs. Please vote and give your support to Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President.

**Corrie Palmer**

Ferrisburgh ESPA

## **Angelo is hardworking, well prepared, and articulate**

It is an honor for me to write this letter in support of Angelo Dorta in his quest for another term as Vermont-NEA President. Angelo supports and represents Vermont teachers and Educational Support Professionals (ESP) in all of our educational endeavors. He has promoted the "I Can Do It!" workshop for new teachers and has advocated for many professional development workshops for all teachers. The Vermont Retirement System is a concern for all. Angelo has been working with legislators regarding this issue, and continues to do so. He supports livable wages for ESP, as well as lobbying for Municipal retirement in all ESP contracts.

Please consider voting for Angelo Dorta for Vermont-NEA president. Angelo is committed to the professionalism of education. He is hardworking, well prepared, and articulate when addressing our needs, whether on a state or national level.

He has the dedication, enthusiasm, and compassion that we need in a president. It is necessary to elect someone that one can feel comfortable in approaching with any issue – and that is Angelo Dorta!

**Sally Conway**

Addison Northwest TA

## **Bonnie is a team player**

I am writing in support of Bonnie Tuscany's run for the Presidency of the Vermont-NEA. Bonnie's experiences as a teacher, special educator, Vice President of the Vermont-NEA and her participation on her local negotiating team, make her an excellent candidate for the presidency of Vermont-NEA. She knows first hand the issues that need to be addressed in our public schools. Bonnie is a team player who understands the importance of building relationships between different groups. In closing, Bonnie has not lost sight of the current issues facing Vermont teachers and students.

**Tamara Bourne**

Morristown EA

## **Support for Angelo**

Angelo Dorta has served and will continue to serve the teachers of Vermont well. I have always been impressed by his work ethic, his ability to communicate effectively, and his genuine interest in both the professional and work-related needs of teachers. Angelo's tireless efforts to improve the educational climate of this state are laudatory. The number of professional development programs now available to the membership through the Vermont-NEA speaks volumes not only to Angelo's commitment to the betterment of education, but to the fulfillment of his campaign promises.

Angelo has my wholehearted support in his pursuit of the office of

president. Indeed, I am proud to have him representing me and my profession.

**Mary Ann Chaffee**

Essex Jct Westford EA

## **Bonnie is a committed and respected veteran teacher**

I am writing to urge you to vote for Bonnie Tuscany for President of Vermont-NEA. Bonnie is a committed and respected veteran teacher who knows the needs of teachers and students in Vermont. She has shown strong leadership skills as a member of our local negotiating team and as a member of other school-wide committees. She is always eager to help out teachers with any kind of issue and she can certainly be counted on. I support Bonnie for President!

**Kelly Macy**

Morristown EA

## **Proud to have Angelo as president**

I am writing this letter of support for Angelo Dorta's candidacy for president of the Vermont-NEA for many reasons, but the one I most want to cite here is his ongoing ability to articulate in our Vermont-NEA publication, the state's most prominent newspapers, and in his many verbal addresses, and to our legislators, the issues which are most important to educators and to our ability to do our very best for the children of Vermont. Angelo not only knows what is crucial for others to know about our work, he is able to express it in an extremely compelling and comprehensive way that broadens support for high quality education in our state. I am proud to have him as our president and fervently wish that he continue on, fighting the good fight on our and our children's behalf.

**Margaret Munt**

Chittenden South EA

## **Shop at Montpelier's Restore - on-line!**

The Restore, Central Vermont's most unusual retail store, and a 2005 Vermont-NEA Partner, has begun selling its low-cost products on-line.. The Montpelier warehouse and storefront is a favorite of educators, filled with valuable cast-offs from Vermont industry and small business.

For 15 years, The Restore has served Vermont teachers, artists, childcare providers, and home craftspeople with an off-beat product line. Now, those hundreds of useful products, once destined for landfills and incinerators, are available to the on-line community for creative reuse. Among the products listed on the new site are dozens of bags, boxes, cups, cases, and other unusual containers. There is also an interesting assortment of wood, wire, and widget items, plus fabrics, foams, and oddball items.

Hundreds more products from the warehouse will soon be listed. On-line customers can purchase the products using highly secure PayPal, credit card, or personal check.

Two Vermont foundations provided the seed money for the new website, The Vermont-National Education Association and the Walbridge Foundation of the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District. For more information, visit the virtual Restore at [www.therestore.org](http://www.therestore.org), or visit the real thing at 186 River Street in Montpelier, behind the Trading Post.

## NEA Director's Report

# We are a member driven organization

By Joyce Sullivan

Recently a Vermont-NEA Board member expressed a member's concern that s/he wasn't getting anything out of being a member of the Association. The first question I asked was, "Does that member participate in the organization?" As we continued to talk, it sounded like the person was looking for tangible benefits like discounts at businesses in Vermont. Another member was looking for more immediate services from Vermont-NEA staff.

Participating members and governance leaders clearly see the benefits of membership because they are engaged in the activities of the organization. These members attend local membership meetings and Vermont-NEA's Representative Assembly, serve as an elected leader on the state Board of Directors, attend the NEA Representative Assembly, or serve on a state or national committee. Other members take advantage of professional development through the annual Vermont-NEA Convention, summer leadership, conferences for new teachers, ESP Conference, PRAXIS test taking training, and other offer-

ings by Vermont-NEA. Members who participate know what's going on because they can see it.

How many members receive *Vermont-NEA Today* or *NEA Today* and never find time to read it? How many members attend Vermont-NEA Board meetings that are open to the membership or the Representative Assembly? Do members access the Vermont-NEA web site that also links to the NEA web site? Members who don't actively participate can easily read all about it.

I think many of us are guilty of paying for a service but not taking the time to get to know what we're paying for. Some of us contribute to a 403b retirement plan but don't track our own portfolio, even though it's important to us. Sometimes participation or educating yourself can be challenging and time consuming.

So, my response to this member's concern are these: You always have a right to a your opinion if it has a basis in fact. If, in fact, the member participates in the organization, reads on-line or paper publications, and still has a complaint, then that person should express this concern to a leader



Joyce Sullivan, NEA Director  
Jas3@sover.net

and expect a response. If the person wants more services from the state or national organization, then the best opportunity to voice that is at a representative assembly or directly to an officer of the organization. If the person doesn't feel like services are delivered from the staff in a timely manner, this indicates a need to share this concern with our Executive Director or President.

We are a member driven organization. It's much easier to see what you get from your membership when you contribute (not just dues) and participate. ■

## Privatized pension plans... A dangerous and uncertain path

By Mark Hage, with research assistance from Jay Kaplan.

A February 22 article in the *L.A. Times*, by reporter Peter Gosselin, challenged President Bush's assertions that Americans would be more secure in their retirement years by diverting funds from Social Security into private accounts. Bush says workers could make more money investing on their own rather than by entrusting a regular portion of their income to Social Security. The facts tell a different tale.

Nebraska started experimenting with private accounts almost four decades ago with state and county workers. During this same period, the state's teachers, judges and others retained their traditional pensions and their assets were professionally managed. According to Gosselin, "They [workers with private accounts] made so many investment errors that they ended up making less than colleagues with fixed-benefit pensions — and less than what analysts have said is needed for old age."

In 2000, an analysis of the two systems revealed that "private account holders were making 6% to 7% a year on their money while the investment professionals who handled the state's [defined benefit] pension assets earned 10.5% to 11%. The Nebraska legislature scrapped the private accounts in 2003 for new employees.

Nebraska isn't the only state re-considering the wisdom of privatizing retirement accounts. Employees and retirement officials in a host of other states, including Michigan, Montana, Washington, and West Virginia, are also sounding the alarm.

Joseph Jankowski, Executive Director of the West Virginia Consolidated Public Retirement Board, said: "The vast majority of people don't have the inclination or comfort level to be responsible for their own retirements." Washington state finance experts learned during trainings that most workers "rate themselves as practically unknowledgeable" about stocks, bonds and other basic investment terms. Montana officials discovered that most private account holders did not actively manage their money, but opted instead to direct their investments into a default investment set up by the state.

Private accounts, also known as "defined contribution" plans, have failed to catch on nationally. Of the more than 1.5 million workers offered the choice of such accounts in the past ten years, only 125,000, or 8%, have taken the bait. In fact, the sign-up rate for such plans in many states is only about 5%. To make matters worse, several states, like Michigan and West Virginia, had hoped to save money in making the switch to private accounts, but actually lost revenues or accrued

no savings.

In privatized retirement plans, the employer's obligation ends with a *fixed contribution* to a worker's account; the responsibility for investment decisions and risks rest squarely with workers. There is no *guaranteed pension* with privatized accounts, as there is in a "defined benefit" system like Social Security or the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System. The popularity of private plans rises and falls with the volatility of the stock market. For example, 75% of teachers in Washington moved to a "hybrid" retirement plan — a combination of a traditional pension and a private account — when the stock market was booming in the 1990s. After the market crashed, only 14% of public employees elected the hybrid option.

George Bush's new "ownership" society, if it comes to pass, will be a dead end for many teachers, public workers and their families. Sadly, Governor Jim Douglas is a big fan of privatized retirement accounts and defined contribution systems. Let's make sure he doesn't change or erode the guaranteed benefit and professional management structure of the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System's pension plan, or unduly influence the debate on privatizing Social Security. Nothing less than your retirement security is at stake. ■

## Upcoming Association events...

April 2

Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly convenes at Alumni Hall, Vermont College, Montpelier. Awards Luncheon at noon.

April 3-18

Vermont-NEA elections.

April 18

Election ballots due at the Vermont-NEA office in Montpelier by 5:00 p.m.

May 1-7

Teacher Appreciation Week

May 3

National Teacher Day

May 11

National School Nurses Day

May 14

Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier.

## Early Birds!

Local Associations that participate in Vermont-NEA's Early Enrollment Membership Program can recruit members now for the 2005-06 school year. The recruits pay no dues until Sept. 1, but get these services after April 1 this school year, in return for a signature on the membership form:

- NEA's \$1 million Educators Employment Liability Program
- Association publications, including *Vermont-NEA Today*
- Vermont-NEA's electronic newsletter, *MONDAY*, which includes lots of negotiations news, legislative updates, professional announcements, and offers of free stuff.
- Training opportunities and Vermont-NEA staff consultation services

New recruits get all this for free, from April 1 until September 1, 2005. When they start paying dues, it will be for the 2005-06 membership year.

Educator Employment Liability coverage as an early enrollment incentive is available only to individuals who are joining the Association as first-time as NEA Active (Teacher and ESP) and/or Student Enrollees for 2005-06.

Participation in Vermont-NEA's 2005 Early Enrollment Membership Program is voluntary for Vermont-NEA local Associations. Local Associations must agree to participate before new enrollees can take advantage of this program.

## Chris Bohjalian will keynote Teachers Who Write



*Chris Bohjalian*

Photo by Victoria Blewer

Teachers Who Write, a day-long conference on the campus of Vermont College in Montpelier, features an array of workshops useful to any teacher, grades K-12. Now in its 18th year, the conference has become a mid-May ritual for many of Vermont's teachers and writers.

This year's conference, scheduled for May 20, features award-winning novelist ("Midwives," "Before You Know Kindness") Chris Bohjalian, with a keynote address, "Three Inspiring Words All Writers Should Hear Once in Their Life and (Preferably) at the Start of Their Careers: 'Be a Banker!'" Following his talk, Bohjalian will take questions from the audience.

Colin McCaffrey, an East Montpelier-based singer-songwriter with two well-received CDs to his credit, will offer a luncheon concert, "Songs for the Weary Teacher."

In addition to Bohjalian's keynote address and McCaffrey's concert, conference participants may register for two workshops, including a poetry/autobiography writing workshop with John Engels; "Technology in the Writing Classroom, Digital Storytelling," with Dr. Margaret A. Cintorino; "Writing with Primary-level Students," led by Janice Case;

and Marty Gephart's "Using the Literacy GLEs Creatively."

Other workshops include: "Writing for Young People," with author Louella Bryant; Joe Greenwald's "In Defense of the Five-paragraph Essay, Why Everyone Should Be Teaching It"; "Building Understanding of Literature Through Writing," with Joey Hawkins; and "The Teacher Writes His/Her story with New York author ("The Krazees," "I Am a Pencil") Sam Swope.

Participants may also register for a workshop on writing for slams (three minutes or less spoken word competitions with judges selected at random from the audience) led by Burlington slammaster Charlie Hoag, who will host, later in the day, a slam that will welcome competitors, potential judges, and audience members.

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. Deadline for registration is May 12. Contact Rose Wheeler, at the Vermont Department of Education, for more information: (802) 828-3114. or [rwheeler@doe.state.vt.us](mailto:rwheeler@doe.state.vt.us) ■

1/2 page AIG AD