



Vermont-NEA

TODAY

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Congratulations to Cheryl Currier of North Country UHS, winner of Vermont-NEA's Education Support Personnel Award

MONTPELIER -- Cheryl Currier, long time Audio-Visual Coordinator at North Country Union High School, has been selected to receive the 2001 Vermont-NEA Education Support Personnel (ESP) Award. She will be honored at a banquet on March 9 at the Sheraton Conference Center in Burlington, and she will represent Vermont in the National Education Association ESP Award competition.

"It is a privilege for Vermont-NEA's 9,400 members to recognize and celebrate the outstanding professional contributions of Cheryl Currier," said Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta. "In addition to her work at NCUHS as AV Coordinator, Cheryl is senior class advisor, junior class advisor, majorette and flag girl coordinator, graduation coordinator, hockey cheerleading coach, and creator of the senior volunteer service project. She has served her Association as vice president, chair of the county political action committee, and contract negotiator. Cheryl Currier is a colleague to be admired, and as an educator, she sets a standard to strive for."

Currier was nominated for this prestigious award by Pat Vana, a teacher at the high school and member of the North Country Union Education Association. According to Vana, Currier's "professionalism and volunteerism have given her the respect of the teachers, staff, administration, parents, and students in this district."

Currier's nomination was enthusiastically supported by recommendations from an impressive cross section of the North Country school community, including:

■ Superintendent Rod Weston, who said, "Her energy and drive are immense and directed at the continuous improvement of the educational product delivered to our students and community."

■ NCUHS Principal Robert



Cheryl Currier of North Country, pictured here at the 2000 ESP Conference, is the ninth winner of Vermont-NEA's annual ESP Award.

McKenney, who said, "Cheryl has an energy force that drives a lot of initiatives here at North Country Union High School."

■ Parents Doug and Vivian Spates, who said, "Cheryl Currier is a wonderful employee of North Country Union High School whose focus is

entirely on the welfare of students."

■ NCUHS Executive Secretary Pauline Gage, who said, "Cheryl can always be counted to take the initiative to organize several projects at one time."

■ Former student George Vana, IV, now a student at Harvard, who said, "She helped me get where I am today and unspoken lessons which I have taken from her will help me for the rest of my days."

■ Social Studies teacher and local Association president Lisa Grout, who said, "Cheryl is such an integral part of our school community and Vermont-NEA that it would be impossible to imagine the school or our local association (North Country Union Education Association) without her leadership and hard work."

■ Senior student Kristen Phelps, who said, "She is all around, one of the most amazing women I know. Cheryl takes on a number of things because she believes that students shouldn't have to miss out because no one else wants to do it."

The Vermont-NEA ESP Award was established in 1992 by the Association's Representative Assembly to honor the contributions of education support personnel in Vermont public schools. This year, runners-up for the award were Patricia Aldrich, paraeducator, of West Rutland EA and Rose Pels, paraeducator, of Burlington EA. These are the past winners of the Award: 1993 - Janice Sicard, paraeducator, Orleans Central EA; 1994 - Christine Allard, paraeducator, Chittenden South EA; 1995 - Mary Smokoski, cook, Orange Southwest EA; 1996 - Ron Watts, custodian, Woodstock Elementary EA; 1997 - Mary Hobbs, library assistant, Blue Mountain Union EA; 1998 - Alfa Gautreau, secretary, Orange East EA; 1999 - Lynnca Perkins, paraeducator, Fairfield EA; and 2000 - Karen Greene, paraeducator, Winooski EA. ■

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Support New Teachers

The traditional hands-off, sink-or-swim approach to new teachers finally should be relegated to our public education trash heap. In U.S. Department of Education sampling surveys during the 1990's, four out of five teachers across the nation said they were "not ready" after their college studies to teach special education students or limited-English proficient students. Although more than three-fourths of the teachers received technology training, only 20% felt "very well-prepared" to use instructional technology in their classrooms. More than a third reported no degree in the subject they teach or not enough preparation time in their subject specialty.

In fact, new teachers generally should be considered "teacher interns" or "teacher residents" anyway, just as doctors-in-training are called "interns" or "residents" during their first extended hospital placements.

In both cases, these novice professionals seek to apply their college and university training to serve vulnerable and needy individuals in workplace environments with real-world expectations, requirements, problems, and consequences. Most new teachers, however, rely on only 12 weeks of formalized student teaching under supervision of a seasoned educator. The unproven aspect of their initial skills is acknowledged in the probationary two-year Level 1 licenses required to begin their Vermont teaching careers.

Consider these facts: (1) Teaching is the only profession with no apprenticeship phase. (2) Our students are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse each year. (3) Attrition rates for new teachers are unacceptably high, since at least 30% depart within five years. Therefore, school districts can and must do more to help new teachers gain a firmer working grasp on effective instruction and classroom management during their first crucial early years.

Increasingly, U.S. schools — some with the support of state legislation — now are stepping up to the challenge with structured "mentor/induction" programs for new teachers. The best mentoring and induction programs are developed, implemented, and overseen collaboratively by school district officials and the local Association. Normally, they are funded locally and designed to aid new teachers for up to three years, but for no less than one full school year. Participation is mandatory for all new teachers.

Despite great variety among mentoring and induction programs, there is one significant component in common: a veteran educator who has

accepted an assignment to become a mentor. A mentor provides guidance, instruction, encouragement, straight talk, and many other kinds of basic information and assistance to help one or more new teachers successfully adjust to the instructional demands and the professional responsibilities of daily school life.

The mentor teacher is not a supervisor and does not provide data for formal evaluations. Instead, he/she regularly observes new teachers, provides them with constructive feedback, and invites them to observe the mentor's own classes. The mentor helps new teachers increase and utilize their content knowledge, access

their duties during the normal school day. They must see new teachers instructing students to best know how to assist them. Meetings with new teachers before school at 7:30 a.m. or after school at 4:00 p.m. nearly guarantee ineffectiveness, dissatisfaction, and burn-out for both the mentor and new teacher. Part-time mentors need released-time from their classroom duties and a reduction in their other professional tasks to do this work well. Also, time should be reserved each week for mentors to meet together to share expertise and concerns.

Mentors need training. Professional development geared to their specific duties should be planned and

delivered by the school district, by the local Association, by a college or university partner, by an external entity with demonstrated success in training mentor teachers, or by a combination thereof. Program requirements, fund-

Teaching is the only profession with no apprenticeship phase... school districts can and must do more to help new teachers gain a firmer working grasp on effective instruction and classroom management during their first crucial early years.

ing for professional activities, and the role and responsibilities of the mentor, new teacher, principal, and other district staff should be clear to everyone prior to the start.

Besides positive mentorships, successful induction of new teachers into their schools and chosen profession depends on some further practical and reasonable accommodations. These include:

- ✓ reduced class size;
- ✓ carefully structured class composition with limited numbers of special needs and gifted students;
- ✓ minimal non-classroom professional tasks;
- ✓ specialized professional development activities;
- ✓ released-time to confer with mentors, special services staff, and other new teachers, and also to make purposeful visits to particular classrooms, schools, and community groups;
- ✓ a pre-opening day orientation or series of orientations that lets new teachers begin to meet and network with other new teachers, mentors, school principals and central office administrators; that describes the assigned school and school district, the district's policies and practices, and relevant community characteristics; and that assists new teachers address personal needs such as housing, shopping, health and medical, and entertainment.

We share responsibility for the welfare of the next generation of teachers. Our local and state Associations must make high quality mentoring and induction programs a bargaining priority.

Angelo J. Dorta, President



Organizer Jason Serota-Winston, who coordinated the Association's candidate interview and recommendation process for the 2000 election, began his new job at Vermont-NEA in January.

Welcome Jason Serota-Winston, Vermont-NEA's new organizer

MONTPELIER -- Jason Serota-Winston began work at Vermont-NEA in January as a permanent half-time organizer. Winston assumed responsibility for Vermont-NEA political action activity, as well as work supporting local Association organizing and merger efforts.

Winston already is a familiar face to many Vermont-NEA members. He coordinated the Association's candidate interview and recommendation process for the 2000 election, and he managed election-related member information and get-out-the-vote activity. His excellent work helped to achieve important Association goals in the election: the defeat of Ruth Dwyer and election of Howard Dean, the reelection of Lieutenant Governor Douglas Racine, and the preservation of a Democratic majority in the Senate.

We can expect to see a lot more of Jason Winston. He says he wants

"to reach out to more Vermont-NEA members on the issues that affect their work lives." And he promises, "I'll be visiting schools to talk about issues and how Association members can work political and legislative involvement into their routine."

Winston is acutely aware of how busy everyone is. He says educators are "incredibly overworked" and "do not get the respect they deserve." The key to making a difference, he believes, is to make participation in the political process doable by involving as many people as possible: "More people means less work for each person."

The work Winston has in mind is pretty simple. "We need to support our lobbyists," he says, "and make sure legislators hear from constituents." He will be working closely with Vermont-NEA lobbyists, President Angelo Dorta and Executive Director Joel

Cook. Their work will focus on promoting and advancing public education, improving the work lives of educators, and dealing with threats to the quality of public education, such as voucher plans.

Winston also will work with Vermont-NEA UniServ staff to build stronger merged locals. In that, he will join long-time Association Organizer Ellen David Friedman. Winston is well qualified for local Association organizing, thanks to his background as Director of the Vermont Workers' Center, organizer for the Vermont Livable Wage Campaign, organizer for Rural Vermont, and field organizer for the United Electrical Workers.

Winston is pleased to be part of the Vermont-NEA staff, because he wants to help build a stronger union. "If you want to have an impact in Vermont," he says, "education and schools are the place to do it." ■

Waterville teachers settle excellent 2-year contract

Waterville teachers -- a small (8.3 FTEs!) unit of the Lamoille North Education Association -- settled a two-year contract early in January that boosts their base salary in 2001-02 10%, from \$21,450 to \$23,595. The increase in 2002-03 will be 5%, to \$24,775. Health insurance coverage is improved, from a dollar cap, which this year amounted a 24% co-pay on Dual Option, to a straight 10% co-pay for the years 2001-03.

Waterville teachers bargained on their own, with advice from Vermont-NEA UniServ Director Suzanne Dirmaier. "This settlement includes no rollbacks and no extra days," says Dirmaier. "It brings Waterville in line with other schools in Lamoille County and will help the school attract new teachers."

Waterville teacher Pat Whitcomb served as chief negotiator in this very successful bargaining effort, and Sue Brown worked on the team. Whitcomb said teachers are overjoyed and "pinching themselves to see if this is real." She herself is retiring at the end of this year and will not reap any of the benefits of the new contract. But, she told Dirmaier, "The settlement is really important for the current staff and the new teachers who will be coming in after me."

CEQ honors Bradley Frohloff

Congratulations to Bradley Frohloff of the Otter Valley Teachers' Association! He has been named one of the first recipients of a prestigious White House award that recognizes outstanding environmental educators. Frohloff is one of 37 recipients of the awards announced by the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Frohloff's use of environmental-based education brought him national recognition because it produces positive learning results in 9th-12th grade students, particularly in science achievement. "In his classes, Mr. Frohloff not only provides his students a variety of learning activities that are designed to help them master complex information about environmental issues, but also to develop a respect for the environment," said principal Gary Taber.

Frohloff will receive a certificate and \$1,500 to be used to further his professional goals.

Receive Vermont-NEA's Legislative Update

Do you want to be kept informed about what's going on in the Legislature this year? What will happen with the retirement health benefit, school choice, Act 60, and other education and labor issues? To give members the inside scoop, Vermont-NEA has started a Legislative Update -- a short, regular (weekly to bi-weekly) e-mail update about what's going on.

To receive the Legislative Update, please send your name, e-mail address, regular mail address, phone number, representative (if you know) and school you work in to Vermont-NEA Organizer Jason Winston at jwinston@nea.org or call 1-800-649-6375.

What is Vermont History Day?

Vermont History Day is an exciting way to study history and learn about issues, ideas, people, and events. History Day provides students an opportunity to express what they have learned through original dramatic performances, media presentations, research papers, or exhibits.

Each History Day entry must have a relationship to the annual theme. The theme for History Day 2001 is "Frontiers in History." The possibilities for a topic under this theme are endless, focusing on world, U.S., or local history.

There are two divisions for Vermont History Day. The junior division is for grades 6-8. The senior division is for grades 9-12. Within each division there are seven possible entry categories (group entries are 2-5 students):

- Individual Historical Paper
- Individual or Group Exhibit
- Individual or Group Documentary
- Individual or Group Performance

Vermont History Day greatly enhances the knowledge and skills of your students. There are endless benefits to participating. Students learn research skills used by professional historians, such as using primary sources, and conducting oral history interviews. They develop critical communication skills, research and reading skills, as well as refine their presentation skills through writing, visual projects, performances, and documentaries.

Participating students gain expert knowledge in historical subjects and are able to explore resources within their own community, by utilizing library, historical society, and museum collections. By working in groups, students learn the meaning and importance of cooperation and teamwork.

Vermont History Day is an affiliate of the National History Day network. First and second place winners attaining a superior ranking at the state competition will be eligible to compete at National History Day in College Park, Maryland. Vermont-NEA awards \$250 to the Association member who students are top winners.

The Vermont Historical Society serves as the Vermont History Day coordinator. **The registration deadline is March 2, 2001.** To receive a History Day curriculum packet and entry form, contact Jennifer DePrizio at the Vermont Historical Society, www.state.vt.us/vhs or (802)828-2291

Vermont-NEA announces Award for Teaching Excellence

The Vermont-NEA Board of Directors approved criteria at its January meeting for an Award for Teaching Excellence to be presented annually by Vermont-NEA. The Award is intended "to recognize, reward, and promote excellence in public school teaching and to underscore high standards of service to students and to our profession." It carries with it a \$1,000 cash prize. The winner will represent Vermont in the national competition for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence, which pays the winner \$25,000.

In its announcement of the new Vermont award, the Board said: "Vermont-NEA believes that all students deserve the highest quality education and that the single most essential ingredient is a caring, competent, and qualified teacher who is supported by skilled and committed school support staff. Expert teachers who understand both the subjects they teach and the children they teach, aided by trained and experienced education support personnel, make the most important difference in student achievement. Therefore, Vermont-NEA should select and honor one of its active members in order to celebrate teaching excellence, public education, and our dedicated school workforce."

The Award: A \$1,000 cash award, a commemorative plaque, recognition at the annual Vermont-NEA Awards Dinner prior to the April Representative Assembly, and submission of the awardee's nomination materials to the NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education for national consideration as Vermont's nominee that year for the annual NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.

Eligibility: All active teacher and Education Support Personnel (ESP) members of Vermont-NEA. [Vermont-NEA statewide officers and Board Directors are ineligible for this award during their years of service on the Board.]

Who May Submit Nominations: Any active Vermont-NEA teacher or ESP member, or any NEA-Retired /NEA-Student member from Vermont.

Deadline for Nominations: All nomination materials must be submitted in hard copy by or before April 1 for year 2001, and by or before January 15 hereafter. Nomination materials must be received at the Vermont-NEA office by 5:00 p.m. and may not be submitted electronically or by facsimile.

Nomination Materials: Nomination materials must include all of the following, in order:

A. Data Sheet: The data sheet requests basic nominee and local affiliate information. It also provides a

checklist to ensure that the several other parts of the nomination package have been completed. (Call Vermont-NEA for a copy: 1-800-649-6375)

B. Nomination Letter: The nomination letter is a statement that addresses the question, "How do my [or the nominee's] accomplishments reflect teaching excellence?" The letter should be typewritten using no less than 12-point type and should be only one single-spaced page with margins of no less than one inch.

If self-nominated, the nomination letter should be written by the nominee. If nominated by another individual, or by a group or local affiliate, the nomination letter should be written by the nominating individual, group, or local affiliate.

C. Criteria: (To be addressed by the nominee, or by the nominating individual, group, or local affiliate) For the nominee to qualify, all of the following questions must be answered. Responses must be numbered and typed double-spaced, using no less than 12-point type and no less than one-inch margins, in eight (8) pages or less.

1. Provide a brief overview of the nominee's career (degrees earned, positions held, current work).

2. In what ways has the nominee demonstrated teaching excellence? Give specific examples.

3. In what ways has the nominee advanced student learning and addressed individual learning needs and styles of students?

4. How does the nominee define and address issues of cultural diversity in his or her professional work?

5. How has the nominee demonstrated advocacy for the profession, for public education, and for students? Provide an example of each.

6. How has the nominee demonstrated teaching leadership among colleagues and/or been recognized as exemplary by peers, education organizations, or others familiar with the nominee's collegial work? Give examples.

7. How has the nominee undertaken engagement with parents and/or the community? Provide examples.

8. How is the nominee exemplary as a lifelong learner? Has the nominee pursued professional development opportunities, applied in the classroom what has been learned, and shared results with colleagues? Give examples.

9. In what ways is the nominee creative or innovative? Give examples.

10. Are there other special characteristics or significant professional achievements that distinguish the nominee? Please list and explain.

D. Endorsements: A maximum of three (3) letters of endorsement for the nominee may be at-



tached. The endorsements may come from current peers or past colleagues, from professional partners, from current or past students, parents, or community citizens, or from the nominee's local affiliate president

Letters of endorsement should specify the duration and type of professional relationship with the nominee and must be no longer than two (2) typewritten pages. Endorsement letters must be submitted with the nomination package.

E. Format: Submit one copy of the complete nomination package for receipt by 5:00 p.m. on the specified deadline date. Do not staple or bind the materials. Please number the pages of the entire package consecutively, starting with the data sheet as page 1. Send by postal mail or bring to:

**Vermont-NEA
Award for Teaching Excellence
10 Wheelock Street
Montpelier, VT 05602-3737**

Please Note: Do not bend, bind, or staple materials. Do not use covers or other decorative or packaging materials. Include only the information requested in the guidelines. Incomplete or late nominations will not be considered by the Award Selection Panel. All nomination materials must be submitted together and received at Vermont-NEA's Montpelier office by the deadline date and time.

Selection Process: Selection of the award recipient will be made at the state level by the Vermont-NEA Teaching Excellence Award Selection Panel. The Panel will be comprised of two statewide officers, three at-large Board Directors, and two local affiliate teacher leaders/members. The Panel will read and evaluate all nomination materials, will interview the finalists, and may arrange for classroom visitations. Finalists also may be asked to provide additional information and materials, such as professional portfolios, video, journals, etc. The Panel will inform the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors of its recommendation no later than the Board's March meeting, and the Vermont-NEA Board will take official action on the Panel's recommendation. ■

A new legislature - and new legislators

By Joel D. Cook, Vermont-NEA Executive Director

As I write this in mid-January, it is obvious that the major changes in this year's House of Representatives mean a major shift in the issues it will pass on to the Senate. It is equally obvious that Senate Committee assignments were made partially in anticipation of having to respond to those issues. The House has a Republican majority for the first time since the mid-1980's, and the Democratic majority in the Senate is razor thin.

At this point, virtually no bills have been examined, but we have an idea what kinds of things to expect. I make only a few basic observations here and ask all Association members to take an active interest in further accounts this winter and next.

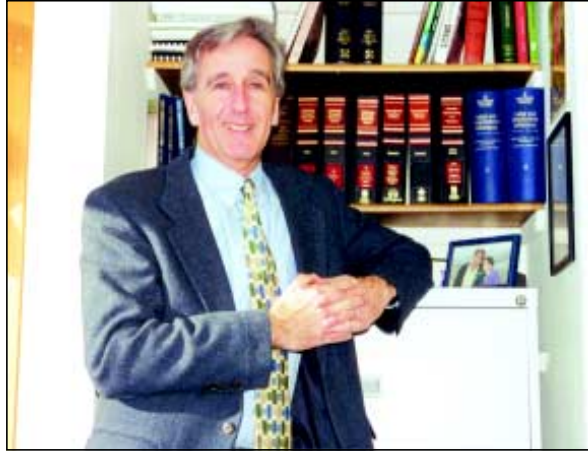
A different House means different issues. We will undoubtedly see serious consideration given by this House to issues that we have not had to worry much about before. Where we have really not been concerned in the past, for example, that a Vermont House would ever seriously consider enacting private school vouchers, we fully expect that issue to be taken up during this session.

This will impel us -- largely through the work of Organizer Jason Winston -- to develop communication links with many of you over the coming weeks, through which to let you know quickly what's going on in Montpelier and what you can do in your own communities to help shape it. We will need to educate some House members just how unpopular the concept of private school vouchers really is, despite some common statements to the contrary. We also will have to demonstrate to lawmakers in Montpelier -- and in their

home communities -- why the concept of public funds paying for private schools itself is destructive.

The Governor follows through

Governor Howard Dean has carried through on the two basic commitments made to us last summer. He has



Vermont-NEA Executive Director Joel Cook says the Governor has budgeted to improve the health insurance benefit for retired teachers.

added more than \$3 million to his recommended budget to improve the health insurance benefit for retired teachers. Cola Hudson (R. Lunenburg), who chairs the House Government Operations Committee which considers public pension programs, has agreed to sponsor any legislation needed to improve that benefit.

The Governor also has recommended more than \$1 million be allocated to educator quality initiatives, including money to support National Board certification candidates and winners.

The Senate gets ready

The Association owes the Senate Committee on Committees -- Lieutenant Governor Douglas Racine, Senate President Peter Shumlin, and Senator Richard Mazza of Colchester/Grand Isle -- its gratitude for appoint-

ing that no one has yet developed a plan that provides equity without sharing. That is, unless the State were simply to dole out and dictate how much -- and no more -- every district is allowed to spend on its schoolchildren, certainly not a popular notion.

Legislative Update

Please consider signing up to receive *Legislative Update*, our new e-mail service for members interested in learning every week or so what's happening in Montpelier. You will also learn how you can get involved and affect the outcome of proposed legislation. Call Jason at 1-800-649-6375 to get on the list. And feel free to contact your lobbyists -- me and President Angelo Dorta -- if you have questions or concerns about the Association's legislative activity. ■

Senate Education Committee

- Jean Ankeney, Chair (D. Chittenden)
- Hull Maynard, Vice Chair (R. Rutland)
- William Corrow (R. Orange)
- Sara Kittell (D. Franklin)
- Richard McCormack (D. Windsor)

House Education Committee

- Howard Crawford, Chair (R. Burke)
- Jason Barney, Vice Chair (R. Highgate)
- Jack Anderson (D. Woodstock)
- Erron Carey (R. Chester)
- George Cross (D. Winooski)
- Virginia Duffy (R. Rutland)
- Kathy LaVoie (R. Swanton)
- Alice Miller (D. Shaftsbury)
- Donny Osman (D. Plainfield)
- Neil Randall (R. Bradford)
- Susan Wheeler (D. Burlington)

News from the federal level

NEA on Paige as Ed Secretary

NEA President Bob Chase commented last month on President-elect George W. Bush's selection of Rod Paige as Secretary of Education, saying the choice "signals an important commitment to public schools and recognizes the exceptional challenges that face urban schools."

He continued: "Like many of our members who work in urban classrooms every day, Rod Paige has seen firsthand the challenges they face. His sincere and productive work on behalf of urban schools and children will be enormously valuable in his role as U.S. Secretary of Education."

"In accepting President-elect Bush's offer of the position, Paige stressed the importance of a public education system that serves all children -- a belief and practice shared by NEA and its 2.5 million educators. We believe that this is a moral imperative that cannot be compromised. We look forward to working with the new

President and Education Secretary to ensure that public schools serve all children. Such a school system provides children with smaller class sizes, quality teachers, safe and modern schools, preschool and early learning opportunities, and extra help for students who need it."

NEA's Don Cameron receives Presidential Citizens Medal

Don Cameron, executive director of our National Education Association for 17 years, was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal at a White House ceremony on January 8 for dedicating his life to improving America's public education system.

Cameron started his education career as a teacher of American and World History in Birmingham, Michigan. He moved on to become executive director of the Birmingham Education Association, executive director of the Michigan Education Association and executive director of NEA's

Florida affiliate before starting at NEA headquarters in Washington in 1979 as assistant executive director. He became executive director of the organization in 1983 and retired in December at the age of 62. During his time as executive director of the NEA, the organization nearly doubled, growing by more than 1 million members.

NEA President Bob Chase called Cameron "a pioneer and visionary" for the NEA and public education itself.

"Don Cameron is an outstanding citizen. He has been a strong voice for education since his earliest days in the classroom," Chase said. "The NEA applauds Don for this prestigious honor. America's public education system is better because he has been part of it."

The Presidential Citizens Medal was established in 1969. The medal is awarded by the President of the United States to U.S. citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for our nation. ■

Health Insurance Rates Increase For 2001-2002

By Joseph P. Blanchette,
Vermont-NEA Director of
Benefit Programs

The Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI) has completed its renewal process with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont (BCBSVT). While there will be an increase in rates, we can take some consolation in the fact that we are not seeing another huge rate spike as occurred last year. Beginning July 1, 2001, health plan premiums will increase by an average of 14.2%. Depending on plans selected by your district and additional riders, your increase may vary somewhat.

Rate increases for other purchasing associations and employers throughout the state will vary depending upon their size, plan design and, most importantly, claims experience. At the extremes, increases range from 4% to 44%. Comparisons of comparable benefits and accompanying rates, however, will find VEHI to be among the most competitive in Vermont and beyond. In spite of the significant increases of the past few years, VEHI's ten-year average rate increase is just 7.3%. Few enjoy a rate trend or actual premiums as low as VEHI for comparable benefit design.

Why are rates increasing?

While some attempt to place

blame on some one entity or factor, the truth is far more complex, and perhaps, disconcerting. Premiums increase because we are using more medical services, more sophisticated procedures and more costly procedures. There are some factors that have had a significant impact on recent rate increases, including:

Overall utilization: VEHI utilization data mirrors state and national trends: more physician office visits, more emergency room visits, more outpatient surgeries per thousand persons. Prices charged by providers have also increased.

Demographics: "Baby boomers" have moved into their fifties, an age bracket when they will be getting more care and more costly care, including routine diagnostic tests, maintenance drugs, and more life-saving (and costly) procedures.

Benefit Mandates & Regulation: While there were few mandates during the 2000 legislative session, the many mandates passed in the previous two years will continue to have an impact on utilization, administrative expenses and overall medical costs.

Medicaid and Medicare Cost Shift: Vermont Medicaid provides coverage for individuals and families with incomes up to 300% of poverty

level (just under \$51,000 for a family of four). Unfortunately, although medical benefits are guaranteed, state and federal funding do not pay anywhere near the cost of the care provided for Medicaid. Medicare is also seriously under-funded. Because physicians and hospitals receive such significant underpayment from these government plans, they must shift costs onto commercial plans like BCBSVT. It is estimated that insurance premiums could drop by as much as 20-25% if federal and state government fully funded these programs and the recently passed mandates.

Prescription Drug Utilization:

As we reported earlier this year, prescription drug utilization has dramatically increased over the past two years -- up 44%. The trend continued this year, as well. While the media seems to focus on drug company price increases, it is important to note that about 80% of the growth in drug spending is actually due to the rise in overall prescription drug use, physician recommended substitution to more sophisticated medications, and the introduction of revolutionary treatments for cancer, AIDS, heart disease, MS and other serious diseases. Many of these drugs help to keep people out of the hospital and often eliminate the need

for costly and dangerous surgery.

No Refunds from the 1999-2000 Claims Year

As mentioned in VEHI's preliminary announcement this past fall, VEHI paid out more claims dollars than it took in as premiums during the 1999-2000 claims year. As a result, there is no money to return.

A Look at the Past Year

This has been a hard year for school districts, their employees and VEHI. In response to last year's 23% average increase and consecutive years of claims exceeding revenue, VEHI made a number of difficult changes that shifted more costs onto the employees. Up until July of 2000, there had never been any changes in co-payments, co-insurance or deductibles within VEHI plans. While the shift to the new drug card payment formula has been challenging for some, the vast majority of subscribers have understood the economic realities. Most have realized that even a \$12 co-pay for a prescription drug that would have cost \$100, \$200 or more is a very good deal. Hopefully, we have seen the worst in the most recent surge in health insurance premiums. It is important, however, that all subscribers understand their role in helping to keep costs under control. ■

Vermont-NEA Board approves new partnership, works on budget

MONTPELIER -- At their meeting on Saturday, January 6, the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors spent the first hour considering the concerns of Association member Jan Schultz of the Riverbend Technical Center at Oxbow UHS over a gun safety petition. The petition was called for by our National Education Association's Representative Assembly last July and was distributed to local Associations by Vermont-NEA in December. The Board took no new action.

In other actions, the Board:

- ☐ Accepted the recommendation of the Partnership/Sponsorship Committee that the partnership application of the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont be approved and the application of Creativity Quest be denied.

- ☐ Approved nominations to statewide Association committees.

- ☐ Selected Cheryl Currier of North Country Union High School to receive the Vermont-NEA ESP Award.



Vermont-NEA's budget committee works above and beyond normal Board meeting time to develop the Association's budget proposal in time for the Representative Assembly in April. Meeting here are (L-R): Bonnie Tuscany (vice president), Corrie Palmer, Lisa Champagne, Joel Cook (executive director), Jeff Isham (secretary-treasurer), Claude Janus (business manager), Cherrie Torrey, Jay Burnell and Angelo Dorta (president).

- ☐ Affirmed that the Board will meet March 10 at the ESP Conference at the Burlington Sheraton.

- ☐ Approved a new Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence, which will be presented annually. ■

NEA Director's Report

No merger... "NEAFT" partnership proposed

By Wayne Nadeau

The NEA/AFT unity discussion talks have not produced a merger document in time for the 2001 NEA Representative Assembly (RA). What has been agreed to is a partnership, NEAFT Partnership. The next step is for the NEA Board to discuss and take action on the partnership agreement; the agreement will then be debated and acted upon at the 2001 NEA RA.

Presently NEA and AFT collaboration on our common interests is ad hoc; the NEAFT Partnership is to systematize a process of collaboration on issues of common interest and shared solutions. The partnership agreement would allow separate activities when we do not have shared solutions. Partnership activities will occur within existing staff and budgets. The activities of the partnership will occur within the policies and directives of each organization.

The partnership's joint council will advocate for interaction and collaboration at local, state, regional and national levels. Many of our state and local affiliates have very bad histories with the AFT and/or the AFL-CIO. If collaboration throughout the organization is desired, it will take national commitment from both organizations to bring the various foes to the table.

I fully support the NEAFT Partnership. In Vermont we may not derive a direct benefit from this partnership, but we will indirectly benefit by the ability for these two organizations to help shape an agenda for public education.

Support IDEA funding

Your Vermont-NEA leadership has recommended the partnership address '97 IDEA funding. At the time Congress initially passed IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), they stated they would fund it at 40%. Presently national funding has hit an all time high of 13%. IDEA is civil rights legislation born of compromise, as is most legislation. NEA's legislative agenda on IDEA will be to work to have it categorized as an Entitlement. This would remove it from the yearly funding battle and allow Congress to meet its financial and moral obligation.

We have heard from both major parties in Congress that full funding of IDEA is a goal. Now is the time to press our Congressional delegation to meet its obligation and fully fund IDEA. The negative impact of a failure to fully fund IDEA is felt by many: students, education employees and taxpayers. We in Vermont have not been immune to the negative fallout. Special Education expenditures have been a point of contention in every state due to a lack of appropriate funding at the national level. Under '97 IDEA, a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed by a team of professionals, including the mainstream classroom teacher(s), and parent(s) or legal guardian(s). The fact of the matter is we have rising costs because we have rising needs. We must not shrink from what is right. Contact our Congressional delegation. Let them know how a lack of proper fund-

ing impacts your school.

Jeffords: 202-224-5141
vermont@jeffords.senate.gov

Leahy: 202-224-4242
senator_leahy@leahy.senate.gov

Sanders: 202-225-4115
bernie@mail.house.gov

NEA's research divisions, in collaboration with others, has developed and compiled booklets, training sessions, a CD, and educational packets on IDEA. A cadre of practitioners is prepared to come to your local/district to provide training in IDEA. For more information contact NEA at www.nea.org and follow the IDEA links. Another excellent link is the NEA Professional Library for a great booklet on IDEA made simple.

NEA resources

NEA is a rich resource for us. As I travel and inform members of what NEA has to offer them, they are amazed at the research that one can access through their national association.

Public education is under scrutiny, which may be good; but if the intent is to "Shine the light of shame on failing schools," then that scrutiny is inappropriate. NEA, your national voice on education issues, is prepared to help you respond to our detractors. *Making Low-Performing Schools A Priority: An Association Resource Guide* is but one of many resources that is available to you. Your dues dollars at work.

Comments, questions, contact me: wfnadeau@yahoo.com; 802-860-6410 (h) ■

Coming Events

February 1
Deadline for Vermont-NEA Scholarship Application
Candidate Petitions Due

February 3
Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier

February 5
Deadline for March issue of *Vermont-NEA Today*

February 19
Presidents' Day

March 1
Deadline for Vermont-NEA Human & Civil Rights Award nominations

March 2
Dr. Seuss's Birthday

VEHI-Delta Dental Program announces 2001-02 rates

VEHI's venture into dental insurance has proven to be very successful. After years of hearing requests by district and union leaders to investigate a dental insurance program, VEHI introduced its dental program last winter. Our goals were the same as for the health program: high quality benefits at cost-effective prices. After less than a year, the program has reached critical mass with respect to participation levels: almost 5,000 subscribers with more expected each month. The VEHI dental pool is fiscally sound and providing dental insurance at prices below Delta Dental's "direct buy" rates. Once again, pooling makes a difference.

We have just finished our renewals for the 2001-2002 claims year, which starts July 1, 2001. Overall, we have had an excellent claims year. Because each participating district is merit rated (rather than a community rate), increases or decreases vary from district to district. Sixty-eight percent of participating districts, almost seven out of ten, saw a decrease in rates, while 32% saw an increase. In spite of a 6% overall trend in dental inflation, districts participating in the VEHI-Delta Dental program will see an average overall decrease of 4%. Thus, this year's VEHI rates were lower than a direct purchase from Delta Dental, and for most, those rates also will go down next year.

The VEHI-Delta Dental program is interested in signing up new groups. Any districts that come into our program during the winter or spring of 2001 will receive a rate guarantee through to June 30, 2002.



1/4 page Canter ad - color

1/4 page VALIC ad

1/2 page NEA Member Benefits ad