

Today

Vermont-NEA

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Educators testify before House Education Committee: *What do we expect from our public schools?*

Vermont-NEA photo by Tom Walters

MONTPELIER—As our newly elected Vermont Legislature took up its work in January, various committees within the House and Senate began exploring in depth the campaign trail mantra by some that “property taxes are too high.”

To address public school funding and the property tax issue, the House Education Committee set out to answer three fundamental questions:

- 1) What do we expect from our public schools?
- 2) What is the most cost-effective way of meeting these expectations?
- 3) What is the fairest way to pay for this?

The Committee invited Vermont-NEA to find educators to testify at a hearing on January 17 to answer the first question: *What do we expect from our public schools?*

Five Association members were recruited by Vermont-NEA Organizer Tom Walters and President Angelo Dorta: **Jane Bryan** of Colchester’s Mallets Bay School, **Ellen Green** of Rutland High School, **Christopher Hood** of Champlain Valley Union High School, **Sue Rusten** of Brattleboro Middle School and **Donna Waelter** of Blue Mountain. They traveled to Montpelier on January 17 and, according to Walters, delivered an earful to the Education Committee about the remarkable breadth and depth of services public schools provide for kids.

Ellen Green opened the educators’ testimony by describing how dramatically expectations of public schools have grown in the last 15 years. She said we prepare students for a technology-based culture that must compete with the rest of the world, while we attempt also to offer a liberal arts education.

Walters said **Jane Bryan** framed the issue of class size masterfully. She



Ellen Green, a Spanish teacher at Rutland High School, told the House Education Committee what our public schools are expected to do for children, from teaching academics, life skills, and social skills, to providing social services, civics training, a safe environment, and much more -- and all the while, dealing with federal mandates.

pointed out that six of the 19 children in her elementary classroom have special needs and are pulled out of class for services upwards of 36 times each week. She pointed out that class ‘size’ really is not the issue. Rather, “it’s the size of the problems that children today bring to school.”

Jane also spoke to the issue of equity—the budget for her entire classroom was \$300 in one district where she taught, while in another district just ten miles away, the figure was \$250 per student!

Sue Rusten told the Committee about the superhuman efforts she and her coworkers in Brattleboro perform to help children affected by poverty and a myriad of other social problems. She testified that staff members often pool their own money to buy children basic necessities such as clothing and school supplies.

Donna Waelter described with

passion the incredibly negative effect that NCLB—particularly the onerous testing components—has had on students with special needs, and she talked about the hurdles she faces as a special educator in a rural setting. Some students in her area need to travel 45 minutes to receive vital services, and yet the school has no transportation system to deliver the child to the service provider.

Christopher Hood added his insights as a high school mathematics teacher and spoke about his philosophy of teaching. He said that in his second year teaching, an experienced educator shared her technique for getting students motivated and involved in their learning. Tell students:

- 1) You can do it.
- 2) I believe in you.
- 3) Don’t give up.

The legislators were touched by the “other-than-academic” expecta-

tions that educators address daily, according to Walters. The discussion lasted more than two-and-a-half hours, and could have gone on much longer—the legislators were thirsty for front-line, in-the-trenches information.

“From my personal perspective, this hearing was the completion of a cycle that I hope that we, as a professional organization, continue to pursue,” said Walters.

He believes educators must engage candidates during the election season, then communicate with those candidates who are elected. Several of the Vermont-NEA members who testified at this hearing were the very same who helped to elect the Committee members.

If you have any questions about grassroots political action, or you want to volunteer, contact Tom Walters at 1-800-649-6375, ext. 118 or twalters@vtnea.org.

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The Battle for Early Education

By Angelo J. Dorta, President

The preponderance of research findings has been definitive for years: Participation in high quality, pre-kindergarten early education programs readies *all* students for K-12 school success academically and behaviorally. Preeminent and nonpartisan advocacy organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Institute for Early Education Research, all concur and provide easy gateways to source reports and analyses of pertinent, related pre-K issues.

One of the nation's foremost early education researchers, economist Steven Barnett from the National Institute for Early Education Research, personally summed up the fundamental importance of excellent early education to students' later academic accomplishments during his testimony in Vermont's Senate Education Committee last year: "There are literally hundreds of studies that show that preschool programs can improve children's learning and development... What is of more interest beyond those [studies] are probably 40 or so rigorous studies that show [it's not just] preparing kids to do better in kindergarten, in fact kids' cognitive ability and achievement [and social behavior] are improved long-term..."

Access to early education programs is the essential first step to diminishing -- and eventually eliminating -- "achievement gaps" between sub-groups of students from different economic and social classes, from assorted cultural and religious traditions, and with varied personal abilities. These achievement gaps persist in urban, suburban, and rural classrooms across the U.S. They undermine esteem and support for public schools. The problem requires not just an effective *school* response, but rather a multi-faceted *community-wide* plan to comprehensively address educational, family, and societal factors that hinder students' and diminish their adult abilities to live together as active and productive citizens in a diverse and democratic society.

Voluntary, public pre-kindergarten has been funded by various Vermont school aid formulas for at least 20 years, according to Commissioner of Education Richard Cate. Approximately one-third of Vermont's school districts either wholly provide such programs or participate in successful partnerships with private early education providers in their communities. As long as specific state requirements are fulfilled, these programs are funded by local budgets, whereby each pre-kindergarten student is counted as a 40% Equalized Pupil when per-student costs are calculated.

State House efforts over the past two years to clarify current rules and to improve access to publicly funded

early education have been fiercely opposed by the usual coalition of anti-public school and anti-tax critics. At various times, John McClaughry's Ethan Allen Institute, Vermonters for Better Education, and Freedomworks have unleashed radio and newspaper media salvos and inflamed community meetings to rail against "adding two more grades to the public school system" for three- and four-year-olds.

though low-income and at-risk children tend to make larger gains. Thus, future savings increase as more students enroll in early education.

Also, Barnett advises that targeting three- and four-year-olds for enrollment can be highly imprecise. It assumes a distinct dividing line that identifies most at-risk children, but, in reality, "disadvantage" is a matter of degree, learning problems generally

The battle to strengthen and expand access to first-rate early education in Vermont already is fully underway.

Of course, this outrageous claim is a mischaracterization of legislators' aims and existing policies. The accusation gains some traction, however, in the current environment of near-hysterical concern over rising property taxes spurred largely by booming Vermont property values, rather than alleged school overspending. To supplement their taxation scare tactics, the constant critics also raise the false specters of public school system and "big government" attempts to undermine the economic viability of private pre-schools, or of usurpation of parental responsibilities.

Yet, even the volatile issue of early education costs can be fairly countered by available data, at least by those people who earnestly care about examining commonly accepted facts and figures rather than trying to score ideological points. Again, in the words of Barnett: "...Increased achievement and attainment lead, in turn, to increased employment earnings and tax revenue... Schooling costs are reduced, there are lower social service costs, fewer people need welfare... [and] there are lower crime costs and... lower health care costs." Economist Barnett's assertions are buttressed by multiple, detailed cost-benefit and student gain analyses based on 25 years of professional work. The financial returns on investment in early education programs for disadvantaged children range from \$17 gained in savings for every \$1 invested to ratios of 7:1 and 3:1, according to three major studies.

Some Vermont legislators and State Board of Education members have sharply questioned the desirability of voluntary access to early education programs for youngsters from middle- and upper-income families. They cite "inconclusive" developmental gains for these children and seek to curb program costs by "targeting" only low-income and at-risk pre-schoolers.

They're wrong on both counts. First of all, several valid studies focused on socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity show that all students make significant gains in language, literacy, and mathematics concepts, al-

though low-income and at-risk children tend to make larger gains. Thus, future savings increase as more students enroll in early education.

Keep in mind that short- and long-term positive results are based squarely on the provision of high quality early education. That means caring, well-educated, licensed, and adequately paid teachers and low turnover rates, ongoing teacher training and curriculum development, appropriate academic and developmental assessments, small class sizes, and overall strong parent involvement and supervision and evaluation of programs and employees -- just as in K-12 education.

The battle to strengthen and expand access to first-rate early education in Vermont already is fully underway. Our opponents criticize Vermont-NEA as solely interested in membership growth. They're willing to stoop low to castigate our advocacy partners, too. They harshly blame public schooling for gaps in student achievement, they prefer continual tax cuts, and disdain potent education programs proven to equalize student learning opportunities at the earliest ages.

In contrast, Vermont-NEA is very aware of the abundant, compelling scientific evidence that brain development in the first few years of life is rapid, expansive, vulnerable to many environmental influences, and critically important to scholastic success and lifelong learning. We see that family demographics continue to change, sometimes requiring new kinds of support. We understand the research proving the cost-effectiveness of investments in early care and education. And, we believe that all children deserve the best that our state and country can offer.

That's why access to high quality early education for all students is the right fight for the right reasons at the right time. ■

VEHI Announces Health Insurance Rate Increase for 2007-08

The figure—at 7.5%—is remarkably good, given skyrocketing insurance rates across the state and country...

MONTPELIER—On January 3, the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI)* announced their 2007-08 health insurance rate increase for school districts in Vermont. The number explains why nearly every school district in the state purchases health insurance through VEHI.

According to VEHI, health plan premiums will increase by an average of just 7.5% next year. This figure is remarkable, given skyrocketing insurance rates across the state and country. Plus, it marks the third time in the previous four renewal cycles (2004-08) that VEHI's average premium increase has been less than 10%. It is also lower than VEHI's 8.7% average premium increase over the past

15 years (1992-2007).

Certainly, increases in the cost of health care continue to warrant our attention and concern, but the 2007-08 premium increase for VEHI insurance plans is lower than other state and national trends, which are generally between 10% and 12%.

According to Vermont-NEA Member Benefits Director Mark Hage and Joe Zimmerman of the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust, VEHI's administrative costs continue to be lower than other self-funded groups that purchase insurance from BCBS-VT.

They say VEHI efforts to contain costs at all levels of operation—from administration and plan design to advanced wellness and chronic care management programs—helps explain why VEHI plans are less expensive than comparable plans offered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont (BCBS-VT) to other community-rated associations. Hage and Zimmerman point out that this achievement has come

without sacrificing service or the quality and scope of coverage for which VEHI plans are noted.

The 7.5% figure is based on an annual renewal process

with Blue Cross Blue Shield-VT. The 2007-08 year begins July 1, 2007. (Your district's increase may vary somewhat, depending on the insurance plan selected and additional riders.)

Questions? Contact Mark Hage at Vermont-NEA: mhage@vtnea.org



Mark Hage

**The Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI) is a large, non-profit purchaser of health care plans for Vermont's school employees.*

This self-funded, fully-insured purchasing trust is managed jointly by the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust (VSBIT) and Vermont-NEA.



Updated Vermont Livable Wage Figures Released

Updated livable wage calculations were released January 15 by the Vermont Joint Fiscal Office. The livable wage is the hourly wage or annual income sufficient to meet an individual's or family's basic needs in Vermont, including food, housing, transportation, health care, child care, and personal expenses.

The 2007 Report reflects a combination of data on basic needs expenses from 2005 and 2006. The 2007 livable wage figures, as compared to 2005, increased on average by 8.63% for urban areas and 6.57% for rural.

By comparison, the Consumer Price Index average for 2006 was 3.8%. The CPI measures the national rate of inflation, and was the basis for the recent increase in the Vermont minimum wage, to \$7.53/hour.

Vermont continues to see an increase in the livable wage from year to year that is much larger than the CPI because it is based on the real basic needs that exist in Vermont, according to Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, the director of the Peace and Justice Center's Vermont Livable Wage Campaign (www.vtlivablewage.com). She says many working Vermonters are falling into the gap between minimum wage and livable wage.

Single parents saw the largest increase. In 2007, a single parent with two children will need \$27.41/hour, assuming the employer provides health insurance. This is a 15.9% increase over 2005.

These are the average (rural and urban) 2007 livable wage figures, with employer provided health insurance:

- \$13.86/hr (\$28,826/yr) - single person
- \$11.14/hr each (\$46,321/yr) - two adults
- \$21.27/hr (\$44,234/yr) - single parent, one child
- \$25.44/hr (\$52,920/yr) - single parent, two children
- \$24.33/hr (\$50,391/yr) - two parents, two children, one wage earner
- \$17.01/hr each (\$70,747/yr) - two parents, two children, two wage earners

For workers without health insurance, the livable wage increases \$2-\$6/hr. Forty-five percent of all jobs in Vermont pay less than \$13.86/hr (\$28,826/yr), the livable wage for a single person.

The complete report from the Joint Fiscal Office is posted at www.leg.state.us/jfo. ■

Remembrances

"Music for Hope" Silenced

Stephen Weiburst 1950-2006

On a black draped table stood a solitary horn. Beneath it lay a mound of flowers, placed by a long procession of friends. The mournful sound of "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" filled the air as the Vermont Jazz Ensemble paid tribute to one of their own.

In 2005, we shared a story of a Burlington teacher working in the evacuee shelters of Shreveport, Louisiana. Stephen Weiburst, recently retired Edmunds Middle School fine arts teacher and jazz musician, had gone to Louisiana. He was following his lifelong dream of teaching in New Orleans, the heartland of American Jazz.

Less than a month later, Hurricane Katrina destroyed his school and community and put his dream on hold. An evacuee himself, he was soon in the shelters trying to establish a program that he called "Music for Hope." He worked for months among the survivors of Katrina and Rita, until he finally returned to Vermont just before Christmas of 2005. Within a few months of returning, Stephen was diagnosed with advanced stage cancer, and on Nov. 9, 2006, he died at the age of 56. His dream and his "Music for Hope" were silenced.

At a memorial service held in the auditorium of the school where Stephen and his students had performed for almost 30 years, nearly 400 people came to honor this much loved teacher and musician. A steady stream of former students and families came forward to tell of his involvement in their lives. Many told of his inspiration and his ability to bring diverse groups of people together to sing and to perform. His prowess as a musician and teacher was well known and respected throughout the Burlington community.

But, the most moving tributes were from those who told of the ways Stephen touched their lives in a personal way. Speaker after speaker gave testimony to his sensitivity, his caring, his support, his understanding and his guidance. Yes, he was a good teacher; but more significantly, he was remembered as a good person.

We all hope that at the end of our careers our students will remember us for the things that we taught them. But what impressed so many of us at this memorial service was the common thread that ran through



Stephen Weiburst retired from Burlington schools in June a year ago and traveled to New Orleans to live and work and play music. He died in November.

virtually every tribute to Stephen Weiburst: It was not the "things" he taught us, but rather the major impact he had on our lives, our confidence and our growth as human beings.

What greater tribute to a life of teaching could there be than to be remembered by your students as "the man who changed my life forever." —Larry O'Keefe

Larry O'Keefe retired from Burlington schools seven years ago. Stephen Weiburst was his colleague and friend.

Evelyn D. Springstead 1908-2006

Evelyn D. Springstead died in Greensboro in August at the age of 98. She taught school in Vermont for over 60 years. She was Vermont's first itinerant music and art teacher, and she supervised grade 1-8 music and art in 38 schools. Later, she taught in 16 schools throughout central Vermont, and had a hand in educating some 33,000 Vermont children. From 1965-69, she was the only woman in the United States to serve as All State Music Director.

Evelyn was honored on her 90th birthday by a joint resolution of the Vermont House and Senate for her contributions to the good of society.

She honored the teaching profession with her life of service to children, and until the end of her life, as an outspoken citizen advocate for teachers and education.

NCLB -- Five Years and NOT Working

January 8, 2007 marked the fifth anniversary of the signing of the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB is the eighth reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was enacted in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The current U.S. Congress is considering reauthorizing the law, and educators throughout the nation—including Vermont-NEA members—are weighing in.

Joyce Sullivan, Vermont-NEA's representative on the NEA Board of Directors, and President Angelo Dorta already are working with Vermont's Congressional delegation. Senators Leahy and Sanders and Representative Welch are on record opposing the damaging provisions of NCLB.

The Law Is Flawed

Our NEA has strongly supported ESEA since its inception in 1965, and educators support the laudable goals established by NCLB—improving student achievement for all children, closing achievement gaps, and ensuring all children have a highly qualified teacher. But educators know, firsthand, that the law is fundamentally flawed and presents real obstacles to helping students and strengthening public schools because it:

- ♦ Evaluates school progress based only on a "snapshot"—test scores from two standardized tests, given on one day.
- ♦ Fails to measure individual student progress over time.
- ♦ Fails to allow tailoring of tests to the individual needs of students, particularly those with cognitive disabilities or limited-English proficiency.
- ♦ Puts pressure on educators to spend valuable classroom time solely to prepare students for standardized tests, and results in many schools cutting out arts, music, social studies, for-

eign languages, and recess.

- ♦ Fails to address the dropout crisis. In fact, too much emphasis on meeting adequate yearly progress on test scores results in schools pushing out high school students who do not perform well on tests.
- ♦ Overemphasizes punitive sanctions instead of providing resources to help schools and students to succeed.
- ♦ Fails even to deliver on its stated goal of improving test scores. According to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, "NCLB did not have a significant impact on improving reading and math achievement across the nation and states ... has not helped the nation and states significantly narrow the achievement gap."
- ♦ Places huge financial burdens on state governments and schools.
- ♦ Forces already cash-strapped schools to spend more on the things that do not directly benefit children, such as bureaucratic red tape and standardized tests.

Congress Cuts NCLB Funding

Even as states and local school communities struggle to meet NCLB mandates, Congress has cut funding. Since the law's enactment in 2002, funding has fallen more than \$40 billion short of the amounts authorized in the law. Sixty-two percent of all school districts had their Title I funds cut this year, and the House and Senate education appropriations bills for 2007 would both cut NCLB by an additional \$400-500 million.

The U.S. Department of Education recently admitted that it will take state and local educators almost 6.5 million hours per year to complete the paperwork and bureaucracy required by the law, costing states and schools \$136 million.

NEA was joined by nine school districts, including Vermont's Rutland

Northeast Supervisory Union, in a lawsuit alleging that the U.S. Department of Education has violated the law's unfunded mandates provision, which says that states and school districts are not required to spend their own funds to implement the law. Supporting amicus briefs were filed by seven states (Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin), DC, and the Governor of Pennsylvania.

A Tremendous Opportunity

Congress is scheduled to begin to consider the reauthorization of NCLB this year, and the reauthorization process offers a tremendous opportunity to expose the flaws and make NCLB responsive to the real needs of children.

Both Sen. Kennedy (D-MA), the incoming chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee in the Senate, and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the new chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, intend to hold extensive hearings on the reauthorization, including hearings throughout the country, which will provide opportunities for educators to get on the Congressional record about NCLB.

Plus, NEA has collected hundreds of stories from members across the country, providing personal accounts of how the law is failing students and schools in which they work each day. Terri Vest of Twinfield is the educator speaking for Vermont. See the collection—*It's time for a change*—at www.nea.org/esea/nclbstories/images/classroomvoices.pdf.

NEA's Agenda for Change

Based on solid research and guided by its members, our NEA has developed a "Positive Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization." To see the full Agenda and/or its executive summary, go to www.nea.org/esea/posagendaexecsum.html.

The agenda outlines a range of solutions for the defects in NCLB, as well as programs and policies that will assist states and schools to improve student learning, close achievement gaps, and prepare students with 21st century skills, including:

1) Meaningful Accountability

The NEA agenda recommends aligning NCLB assessment requirements more closely with students' Individualized Education Plans, and establishing accountability systems that provide support and assistance to schools and districts that are most in need of improvement.

NEA is in total support of meaningful accountability, however, NCLB fails to accurately measure student learning and school success. The NCLB adequate yearly progress model bases accountability solely on how many students reach a specific proficiency point, based on one annual standardized test in each of two subjects, math and reading. The model fails to account for a school's results

in improving the achievement of individual students over time. NCLB fails to recognize that although all children *can* learn, all children do not learn in the same way and at the same rate.

2) Quality Educators in Every Classroom

NCLB mandates fail to recognize the diverse nature of schools and teaching assignments. NEA recommends that the definition for "highly qualified" teachers be revised to respect state licensure and certification systems and eliminate requirements that create unnecessary obstacles for talented and skilled teachers.

In addition, ESEA should provide high-quality mentoring and induction programs to support new teachers, and place a priority on helping hard-to-staff schools provide training for administrators and support professionals, including paraeducators, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and clerical staff.

3) Smaller Class Sizes

NCLB eliminated the direct funding stream for class size established during the Clinton administration. The funding stream was intended to help schools hire 100,000 qualified teachers, with the goal of reducing class size in grade 1-3 to a national average of 18 students per class.

Based on research, we know that class size directly influences student achievement. Smaller classes allow more time for teaching and individualized attention for students. NEA's positive agenda supports restoring the Class Size Reduction Program that existed before NCLB.

4) Enhanced Family and Community Involvement

NEA recognizes that creating great public schools for all of our children requires the involvement of the entire community—parents, educators, business leaders and other caring adults. The NEA agenda recommends federal policy that bolsters parent and community engagement through more effective implementation of parent and community engagement requirements.

5) Adequate Resources

States are now facing unfunded mandates, cuts in resources, and no federal funds to turn around low-performing schools. The NEA agenda supports full funding of ESEA programs at their authorized levels.

6) Replacing Punitive Mandates with Positive Support

NEA believes strongly that the current focus on labeling and punishing schools through a flawed, one-size-fits-all accountability system must change. The NEA agenda recommends keeping NCLB's focus on closing achievement gaps, and moving toward a system based on common sense flexibility, whose policies promote improved student learning, reward success, and provide meaningful assistance to students and schools most in need of help.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND - The Football Version

(Hot off the Internet via Bob Raskevitz)

- 1) All teams must make the state playoffs, and all MUST win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, it will be on probation until it is the champion, and coaches will be held accountable. If, after two years, the team has not won the championship, its footballs and equipment will be taken away UNTIL it wins the championship.
- 2) All kids will be expected to have the same football skills at the same time, even if they do not have the same conditions or opportunities to practice. NO exceptions will be made for lack of interest in football, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities.
- 3) ALL KIDS WILL PLAY FOOTBALL AT A PROFICIENT LEVEL!
- 4) Talented players will be asked to workout on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interested in football, have limited athletic ability, or whose parents don't like football.
- 5) Games will be played year round, but statistics will only be kept in the 4th, 8th, and 11th game.
- 6) This law will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child gets left behind.
- 7) If parents do not like this law, they are encouraged to vote for vouchers and support private schools that can screen out the non-athletes and prevent their children from having to go to school with bad football players.

Scientifically Based Research and Research Based Instruction

Vermont-NEA Professional Programs Director Sherry Gile excerpted this article by Rae Ann Knopf from an internal VT Department of Education newsletter. We reprint it here with permission.

There has been a lot of discussion recently around ensuring that instructional practices are research based. Reviewing the research behind curriculum and instructional methodology is a critical step to knowing whether the program is effective with the student population being taught. But the reality is not all research projects are created equal and it can be difficult to know what to look for in examining research claims.

Scientifically based research is founded on the application of testing a hypothesis or method by using consistent assessment and evaluation practices which produce predictable and replicable results.

The principles outlined by The National Institute for Literacy in their guide for teachers, "What is Scientifically Based Research?" published in 2005, emphasize keywords like *investigation, testable problems, replicable methods, formal peer review prior to publication, systematic observation and testing, subjecting data to criticism/support by other scientists, adequate research base to support conclusions and potential for replication.*

For a PDF of this document, go



to www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading, or Vermont-NEA members may email rturner@vtnea.org to get a copy through the mail.

All this translates into looking a little deeper into promotional claims for instructional methods and materials. Find out if research articles from a reputable source exist to support the claims. Consider how widely used the program is and whether or not it truly applies to the developmental and intellectual capacities of the students being taught.

If a research base has not been

established by other scientists, through peer review, it is important to determine if the program developer has conducted an independent evaluation of the program's effectiveness linked to strong evidence based research.

We realize this can be a daunting task... For a jump start in this process, we recommend these websites:

"What Works Clearinghouse"
www.whatworks.ed.gov
www.fcrr.org

Sherry also suggests that you continually check the Vermont-NEA Professional Programs website for recent research articles:

www.vtneaprofessionalprograms.org.

Vermont-NEA members understand how important it is to support our new colleagues as they begin their careers -- no one knows better what a teacher needs than a fellow teacher.

That's why Vermont-NEA offers a statewide program to promote mentoring and train teacher mentors, as well as the annual New Teacher Conference, with veteran teachers as presenters. The Association even provides a desk calendar just for new teachers, packed with good advice for each month. This is the advice offered for February...

Build Professional Relationships

The professional relationships you build in your first years of teaching can ease you into a highly successful career, carry you over difficult times, and sustain you as you master your craft. Some advice:

✓ **Become an active, supportive member of your Local Association.** Learn from more senior members about your new Local's history and accomplishments. Understand that camaraderie among members is the source of all our Association's strength, influence, and ability to serve and protect you. Belonging to the Association is an investment in your security and career.

✓ **Volunteer for Association work.** Get the donuts, keep the minutes, or serve on the negotiating team -- what counts is that you participate along with your colleagues and become part of the group. If you are there for them, they will stand by you.

✓ **Sign up with your subject area affiliate,** the Vermont Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, for example. See a list of Vermont-NEA subject area affiliates at www.vtnea.org.

✓ **Get involved in school activities.** Support your colleagues by attending concerts, pot lucks, and other events they organize at your school.

✓ **Join your colleagues from across the state at the 156th annual Vermont-NEA Educators' Convention,** an institution for educators in Vermont since 1851. This year, the Convention is scheduled for Thursday, October 18 at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Junction. NEA President Reg Weaver will deliver the keynote address.

✓ **The Vermont-NEA New Teachers' Conference** is the place to learn from successful, senior teachers and to meet other new teachers who know exactly what you are experiencing.

A New Workshop Offering from Vermont-NEA:

Prevention and Response to Bullying in Vermont Schools

MONTPELIER -- Vermont-NEA recognizes the importance of assisting its members with the prevention of bullying, as well as with effective response to bullying when it occurs. Vermont-NEA Professional Programs is pleased to announce the addition of this new workshop to its list of professional development offerings available to school districts: **Prevention and Response to Bullying in Vermont Schools.**

The workshop is designed to help both educators and school staff be increasingly aware of bullying and its negative effects, and to understand the law and how to respond when bullying occurs. It will assist educators and school staff in taking a proactive approach in addressing and reporting bullying.

Each workshop will be facilitated by Vermont-NEA's Training Cadre, Association members who are com-

mitted to the cause. These educators are trained to facilitate **Prevention and Response to Bullying** training:

**Carol Alfred
Kathy Buley
Natasha Eckart
Jay Hoffman
Linda Howard
Marty Morris
Linda Radtke
Steve Matush
Linda Streeter
Terri Vest
Susan Weed
Beth Wehner**

Vermont-NEA offers high quality professional development workshops like this one thanks to the dedication and commitment of our trained cadre members. Hats off to each and every one of them!

How to arrange a workshop

To make arrangements for one of Vermont-NEA's professional workshops, contact Vermont-NEA Professional Programs Director Sherry Gile: sgile@vtnea.org or 800-6496375 x123



Jay Hoffman and Susan Weed are Vermont-NEA Training Cadre members.

Discounts for NEA Members

To help Association members save money on classroom materials, NEA Member Benefits has expanded its line of cost-saving products through a partnership with **Classroom Direct**, a deep discount education superstore that stocks thousands of classroom materials and learning tools for educators, including home office supplies. Under the new arrangement, NEA members can obtain an additional 10% off **Classroom Direct**'s already low prices. Members also receive free shipping on orders of any size, with the exception of orders shipped directly from manufacturers. Most orders are processed within 24 hours for three-day delivery.

This exclusive discount is only available www.neamb.com. Order by calling 1-800-248-9171 and providing the discount code listed on the NEA MB Web site page.

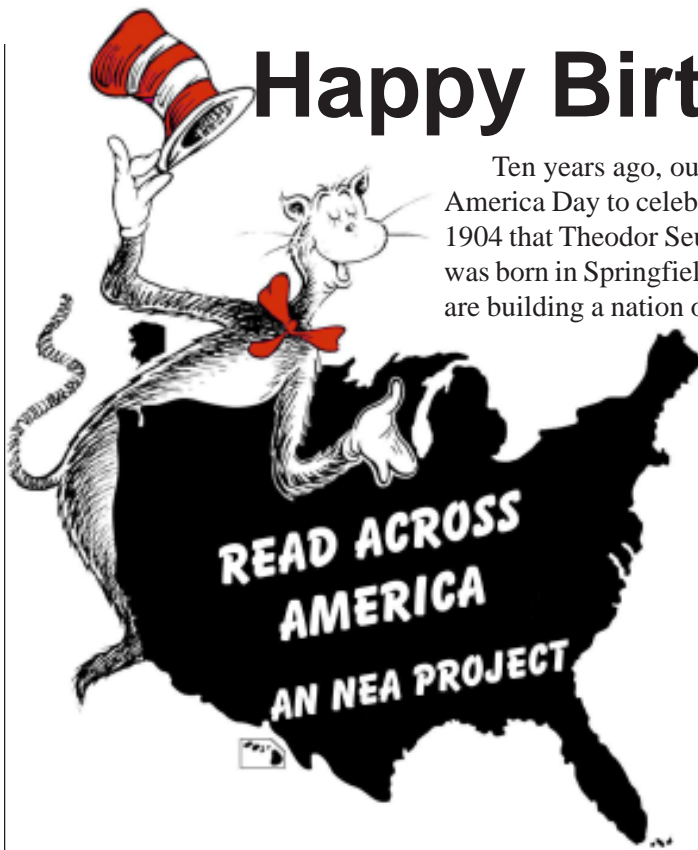
Principal Sought for Lamoille UHS, Hyde Park, VT

The Lamoille Union Board is searching for a dynamic principal for grades 9-12, 600 students. Competitive candidates will have experience in secondary public education, school administration, team teaching, and standards-based curricula, as well as demonstrated success as a facilitative leader, team builder, manager, and effective communicator.

Interested educators who meet these requirements may go to www.schoolspring.com to apply, or mail a letter of interest, resume, proof of certification, three letters of reference, and transcripts to:

Lamoille Union High School
Principal Search
Lamoille North Supervisory Union
95 Cricket Hill Road
Hyde Park, VT 05655

EOE



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Happy Birthday, Dr. Seuss!

Ten years ago, our National Education Association created NEA's Read Across America Day to celebrate the joy and importance of reading on March 2, the day in 1904 that Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known to the world as the beloved Dr. Seuss, was born in Springfield, Massachusetts. Today, more than 45 million kids and adults are building a nation of readers year-round. If you are looking for the latest in ideas,

materials, and partners for your Dr. Seuss birthday and reading events, go to the Read Across Web site (www.nea.org/readacross) to find out 10 ways to celebrate this 10th anniversary, including how you can obtain the **10th Anniversary Resource Kit**, both in print and online. The online version has even more to offer, including downloadable posters, bookmarks, logos, certificates, event tips, and event press releases to help grab the media's attention.

In Vermont, the celebration planning already has begun. **Mary Gemignani at Monkton Central School** "took the pledge" on the NEA Web site: "At Monkton Central School, we are planning a 'Battle of the Books.' Students will spend the six weeks prior to the battle reading a selected set of books. The culminating event is a schoolwide contest with teams from each grade competing to answer questions about the books they have read. The community is invited."

Shirley Fachini at Twin Valley High School in Wilmington posted her plan, as well: "I pledge to challenge the whole student body to write a 'Dr. Seuss' inspired poem by March 2, 2007, and to have each and every student read for half an hour that day."

Some Vermont-NEA members shared their Dr. Seuss birthday plans with us in exchange for the Mean Mr. Grinch mug offered in our MONDAY e-newsletter:

John Peterson at Rutland High School will commemorate Dr. Seuss in an AP US History class by looking at his anti-fascist editorial cartoons from World War II ("Dr. Seuss Goes to War; The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel" by Richard H Minear.)

Craig Davis at Bellows Falls Union High School is on the same track. He says: "In AP European History, a senior class, my students and I will be studying the political cartoons that Dr. Seuss published, especially about the 1920s-1940s. Dr. Seuss published a series of political cartoons satirizing Hitler, Mussolini, Vichy France, and the US and European response to the rise of fascism. Students love seeing this side of Dr. Seuss, and it is a perfect way to connect these cartoons to modern-day political cartoons."

Joyce Valley and Miller's Run will celebrate the whole week long with a large rocking chair placed in the entrance to the library. It will be open to the whole school and community to come and sign up to read in the chair for 15-30 minutes. The chair will never be empty of someone reading—we will have teachers, support staff, parents, students, and community members reading to small groups or simply reading for enjoyment to themselves. Joyce says, "The kids love when they see the principal to the janitor reading."

"The Mountain Review" Seeks Student Manuscripts

The Mountain Review is an annual publication of writing and art by Vermont students, K-12, sponsored by the Vermont Council of Teachers of English Language Arts. VCTELA invites teachers to select and submit quality pieces of student work for possible publication starting now. Manuscripts may be submitted at any time during the school year, as long as VCTELA receives them by May 26. Please do not send anthologies or class sets of a particular assignment. Also, VCTELA asks that teachers review carefully each piece submitted for possible plagiarism. To qualify for publication, all entries must meet these requirements:

- 1) TYPE all entries in a plain, readable print, such as Times New Roman.
 - 2) Double space prose. Single space poetry.
 - 3) Limit poetry to 60 lines maximum and prose to 900 words maximum.
 - 4) Include a title.
 - 5) Edit carefully.
 - 6) Include the author's name, grade, school, teacher, date and word or line count at the end of each entry.
 - 7) Include a parent/guardian permission form or note indicating the student has permission to submit this writing for possible publication.
 - 8) Send each entry in hard copy to: Wayland Cole, Colchester High School, PO Box 900, Laker Lane, Colchester, VT 05446
- Please also submit a copy electronically, either by disk or email to colew@colchester.k12.vt.us

VCTELA suggests you keep copies of manuscripts for yourself because none will be returned. In October, VCTELA will announce those who will be published by sending letters to them and their teachers at their school address. Questions? Call Mountain Review editors Wayland Cole or Katie Lenox at (802) 264-5700. Send orders for copies of The Mountain Review to Katie Lenox at Colchester High School or lenoxk@colchester.k12.vt.us.

Brian Walsh for Vermont-NEA Vice President

*Responsible.
Reliable.
Experienced.
Eager to listen.
Ready to lead.*



(Paid for by the Candidate)

Save the Date!

Vermont-NEA ESP Conference

All Day Conference ♦ Six Workshop Offerings ♦ Time to Network

FRIDAY, March 23, 2007
Double Tree Hotel, South Burlington

Cost: \$35.00-Members ♦ \$150.00 non-members

(Be sure to check you master agreement for possible reimbursement for Professional Development)

ENROLLMENT LIMIT: 100 participants
ON-LINE REGISTRATION

NEW WORKSHOPS:

- ♦ SUPPORTING THE INSTRUCTION PROCESS
- ♦ DISABILITIES AWARENESS

(Appropriate for ALL ESP, including Bus Drivers, Custodians, Secretaries)

Rutland EA team attends *Indoor Air Quality National Symposium*

A team of three Rutland Education Association members, joined by a Rutland Public School administrator and two Vermont-NEA staff members traveled to Washington, D.C. in early December to attend the 7th Annual *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools National Symposium*, a nationwide initiative to help school employees and others assess, resolve, and prevent IAQ problems and reduce exposure to asthma triggers in schools.

The three-day event is sponsored by NEA's Health Information Network and the U.S. Environmental Health Agency. Session topics included: ♦Research linking school IAQ to student health, attendance, and performance; ♦Best practices for launching and maintaining a successful IAQ management program; ♦Managing mold and moisture in schools; ♦Green Cleaning Products and Practices, and more.

The team from Rutland is the first ever to attend from Vermont. They met the EPA director for the Rutland region, as well as the representative of the Vermont Department of Health.

In a simple brochure reporting on their work in Washington, the Rutland



The Rutland team, L-R: Diane Trapeni, UniServ Director Sean Leach, Associate General Council Donna Watts, Ted Lindgren, and REA President Ellen Green. (Administrator Bruce Williams also attended the symposium.)

team said: "Together, we explored what it means to have safe, healthy schools for a better learning environment for our children."

They discovered how simple and low-cost some of the "fixes" can be, and how important it is to "work with the whole learning community and celebrate what we're already doing that's right for our students."

Resources

Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/iaq/schools

EPA Indoor Air Quality Information (Free Resources)
1-800-438-4318 or iaqinfo@aol.com

EPA Energy Star Program
www.energystar.gov
888-782-7937

Letters Welcome!

Vermont-NEA Today welcomes letters to the editor from members of the Association. To be published, letters must be signed and must adhere to the 200 word limit. Email to vtnea@together.net is preferred. Publication deadlines are posted at www.vtnea.org/T-Online.htm.

Letters

Thanks to ESP!

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a huge thank-you to all the ESP members who filled out the Professional Development Needs Assessment, on-line or by mail. We received more than 200 responses! Way to go Paraprofessionals! Let your voices be heard!

Vermont-NEA will be using this data in designing the workshop offerings for the ESP Conference to be held on March 23. Here are some of the survey results:

- ♦ More than 40% have been a paraprofessional for 5-10 years.
- ♦ 33% have been at their present work location for 5-10 years.
- ♦ 60% said they need additional training on legal issues in special education.
- ♦ 60% said they need additional training on instructional strategies.

Respondents prioritized the 12 topics listed in the survey. They were asked to rank the topics, first choice, second choice or third choice. Behavior Management was first, Instructional

Strategies second and Defining Roles or Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals third. Other topics suggested were: Autism, Math and Writing.

Respondents most preferred to receive their professional development on an in-service day.

Once again, thank you for investing time to share your professional development needs with Vermont-NEA.

**Sherry Gile, Director
Professional Programs**

Brian Walsh: A Strong Advocate

It is with pleasure that I write this letter of support for Brian Walsh as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. Brian, a leader at both the local and state level, has been a strong advocate for the betterment of the professions of teachers and support staff.

Brian has been a history teacher at Essex High School since 1991. During this time he has been very active with his local association. He has held the positions of grievance committee member, co-president and president. Brian was also instrumental in the successful merger of the Essex Junction and Westford Education Associations.

At the state level Brian is member of the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors, representing the Essex Educators Association, Essex Junction Westford Education Association and ESP, and Milton Education and Staff Association.

I have worked with Brian for the past four years at the Chittenden

County Regional Bargaining Council. He has had a proactive role as a member of the council advocating for continued health care benefits and salaries for teachers of Chittenden County and the state. With Brian's experience as a leader, I feel he would make an excellent Vice President of Vermont-NEA. I urge you to support him.

**Jon Harris
Green Mountain NEA**

Brian Walsh for Vermont-NEA Vice President

Since Brian Walsh joined the Vermont-NEA Board a few years ago, he has brought new perspectives and positive energy to the board. He is a strong union advocate who brings to the table his experience as a local leader as well as extensive knowledge of the role unions have played historically. He has a good grasp of the issues facing public education and demonstrates a strong commitment to work for positive change. Brian is passionate and articulate in defending his beliefs; however, he is also thoughtful and open-minded about opposing points of view. These are qualities that are essential for an effective leader.

On a personal level, I have found Brian to be a good listener and humble about his strengths. I believe these personal qualities are also important assets for a union leader.

Please join me in voting for Brian Walsh for Vermont-NEA Vice President.

**Sue Rusten
Windham Southeast EA**

Upcoming Association events...

February 1

Deadline for Human & Civil Rights Award

Deadline for Vermont-NEA/Maida F. Townsend Scholarship Applications.

February 2

Vermont-NEA Committee Reports Due.

New Teacher Conference

February 3

Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier.

February 5

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

February 15

Deadline for Vermont-NEA Teaching Excellence Award nomination.

March 2

Building a Nation of Readers: NEA's Read Across America is a reading motivation and awareness program that calls for every child to celebrate reading on March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday.

NEA provides resources and activities to keep children reading year round. Find all you need to celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday at www.nea.org/readacross

March 23

Vermont-NEA ESP Conference at the Double Tree in South Burlington.

Visit Your Professional Programs Website Today!



www.vtneaprofessionalprograms.org

Check this spot each month for information about professional programs!

Vermont's School Harassment Law

The Center for Health & Learning, based in Brattleboro, under a grant from the Vermont Human Rights Commission and in collaboration with Vermont Department of Education, is offering training on the *Definitions and Requirements of Vermont's School Harassment Law - Act 91*. The training is designed to prepare administrators and Designated Employees to meet their responsibilities under the law. Trainers are Kathy Johnson and Ruth Durkee. To register, go to:

www.healthandlearning.org

These are the dates and locations:

Mar 15, 2007	St. Johnsbury, VT
Mar 30, 2007	Waterbury, VT
Apr 3, 2007	St. Albans, VT
May 17, 2007	Killington, VT

OPPORTUNITIES

Scholarships Awarded to Two Outstanding Education Students

For the last five years, the Vermont Teacher Diversity Scholarship Program has brought highly qualified teachers of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds into our public schools. After matriculating at Vermont colleges, obtaining all the necessary licenses for teaching and then committing to teaching in the public school system for one to three years, our Scholars receive up to \$12,000 of their college loans forgiven. Eight of our Scholars are employed in the public schools of Vermont from Bennington to Island Pond.

This fall, six stellar candidates were interviewed by committees in Burlington, Rutland and the Northeast Kingdom. Applicants came from a variety of backgrounds including Costa Rican, Columbian, Filipino and Korean. After extensive review of applications and two rounds of interviews, two Scholars were selected.

Laura Parker's path to Vermont was a circuitous one. She was born in Colombia and spent part of her childhood in Costa Rica. While working for the Costa Rican Department of Tourism she traveled to Japan where she met her Rutland-born husband. She has been happily living in Vermont for the last ten years, reveling in the change of seasons. Ms. Parker attends CCV Rutland where she has a GPA of 3.621. After obtaining her Associate's Degree, she intends to pursue her B.A. at Castleton State College with the goal of becoming a

Spanish teacher. Ms. Parker's experience with children includes teaching Spanish to American children in Costa Rica, working as a nature teacher at the YMCA at Lake George, working at the Northeast Elementary School in Rutland as part of the America Reads program, and tutoring students in Spanish.

Irie Price comes from rural North Carolina but had her first teaching experiences in the urban schools of Durham. She graduated Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Duke University and is currently pursuing her M.A. at St. Michael's College. One of Ms. Price's Duke University professors describes her "easily the most engaged, enthusiastic, and erudite" of all his students.

Although she has been in Vermont for less than a year, Ms. Price has already begun volunteering at the Sara Holbrook Center and has participated in community outreach programs run by Champlain Vocational Services and Dismas House. She has also worked as a substitute teacher at Hunt Elementary School in Burlington. Her goal is to become a high school English teacher.

The Vermont Teacher Diversity Scholarship Program accepts applications twice a year, and the next round is due April 5, 2007. To request an application, go to www.vsc.edu/teacherdiversity or contact Phyl Newbeck at phyl.newbeck@vsc.edu or (802) 241-3379.



Judges needed for Vermont Odyssey of the Mind Tournament

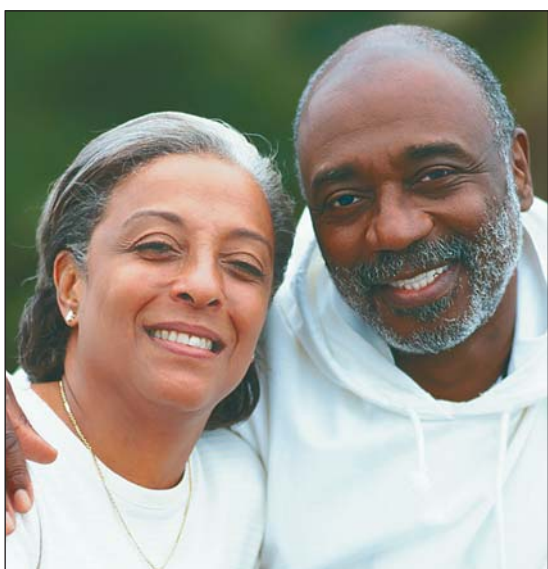
Nearly 100 teams representing 55+ Vermont Schools have been working on the 2006-2007 Odyssey of the Mind problems in Vermont over the past few months. Soon it will be time for them to perform their solutions at the 28th annual Vermont State Odyssey of the Mind Tournament. We need your help to make their efforts a great learning experience.

Over 125 people are needed to make an Odyssey of the Mind tournament happen. We hope that you'll consider volunteering as an Odyssey of the Mind Judge or Official for the State Tournament on March 10th at the University of Vermont.

Judges Training will be held on Saturday, February 10th, at Camels Hump Middle School in Richmond. Those who have NEVER judged, or

have not judged within the past 2 years should plan to arrive, be checked in, and READY TO START at 9:00am. Returning Judges (those who judged in the 2005 and/or 2006 tournaments) can ARRIVE at 10:00am for a brief update on rule changes before splitting into Problem teams. We expect to finish training around 12:30pm.

Make it even more fun...bring a friend. At the tournament, Judges are provided a t-shirt, a pin, lunch, snacks, and the opportunity to see some very creative kids in action. If you like...you are welcome to stay for the Awards Ceremony and participate in the annual Judges & Coaches Hat Contest. Register at vt.odysseyofthemind.org (click on Judge/Official Registration). For more information: 1-800-805-5422 or vtotm@accessvt.com



We're helping make members' lives better— from the first day—right through retirement.

NEA Member Benefits is dedicated to leveraging the strength and size of the Association to help make life better for you and your family. We provide a broad array of exclusive, money-saving products and services designed specifically to meet your ever-changing needs.

To learn more about the many ways NEA Member Benefits can help you and your family get the most out of your membership, just take a moment and call us at 1-800-637-4636 or visit us at neamb.com/betterlife.

Representantes que hablan español están disponibles a pedido.

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