



# TODAY

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*“Tim Comolli has changed lives in ways we mere mortal teachers only dream of.”*

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse



Tim Comolli is retiring, but he hopes to create more opportunities for youngsters by establishing a small firm, Comolli Consulting.

## Tim Comolli to retire after remarkable 40-year career

SOUTH BURLINGTON—As the school year closes, we greet with mixed emotion the news that some of our colleagues are retiring. Of course, we wish our friends a happy, secure retirement. But we feel the loss when a terrific teacher leaves school.

South Burlington is one place feeling that loss. Tim Comolli is retiring this year after a truly remarkable 40-year career teaching English and technology courses in South Bur-

lington. His Imaging Lab—a 3D modeling and animation computer facility that specializes in Hollywood and industry-standard graphics programs—is the base for the Electronic Arts Career Academy. It has a national reputation.

“If Tim Comolli were a movie star instead of a teacher, he’d be Paul Newman or Jimmy Stewart. If he were a singer, he’d be Frank Sinatra. Tim is the teacher who is uni-

versally respected and admired as the best of the best,” declares South Burlington Educators’ Association President Rich Wise, who is a long-time colleague.

After 40 successful years in the classroom, Tim Comolli has acquired some insight, along with the respect of his fellow teachers. Here, he reflects on his career, offers advice to new teachers and shares his views about kids and education.

**Q: What makes a great teacher?**

**Tim:** I believe that a great teacher inspires. Cliché?, yes, but I know that as I look back over my career the truly important influence for me came from a teacher who inspired me to be my best, to love learning and to share that enthusiasm with others. I am certain that Dr. Frank Manchell at UVM would probably never understand his affect upon me, and I wished that I

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# Smaller Classes, Bigger Gains

By Angelo J. Dorta, President

The Vermont Department of Education wants to dump class size guidelines from current School Quality Standards. It's a terrible idea, made worse since there apparently wasn't any organized effort to first solicit the viewpoints of working teachers and education support staff.

Greater "flexibility" for school districts is the Department's rationale for its proposal. However, the "on average" language in the existing regulation already exempts schools from strict classroom-by-classroom adherence. It requires, *on average*, fewer than 20 students in grades K-3, less than 25 students in grades 4-8, not more than 100 students overall per high school English/language arts teacher, and average class rolls of 150 or less for other high school core disciplines.

lower achieving students with better opportunities for individual tutoring and attention.

- Smaller classes are likely to have an immediate, positive impact on student and teacher morale.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, the benefits don't stop at grades two and three. The Boyd-Zaharis and Pate-Bain study published in 2000 reveals important additional payoffs in student achievement and school success during later years. They found that students assigned to small classes in early grades:

- Attained high school honors diplomas more often (45%) than students from other earlier classrooms (29%), even including earlier classrooms with instructional aides (31%);
- Graduated on-time from high school at a higher rate (76%) than students from other earlier classrooms

## *The Vermont Department of Education wants to dump class size guidelines from current School Quality Standards. It's a terrible idea...*

Class size is one of American education's best understood and most thoroughly researched conditions of teaching and learning. The major studies are—or should be—well known to Department of Education officials. Started 20 years ago, their findings still have defied significant dispute in the past decade and therefore are widely accepted today.

That's why Vermont-NEA has serious concerns about the proposed elimination of class size guidelines. And, that's why it urged its members to voice their own professional opinions at several public hearings around the state in early May. Soon, we'll see whether or not the final decision rendered by Vermont's Department of Education and State Board respects and heeds the advice of teachers and ESPs.

Tennessee's extensive Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) report remains the premier study of the impact of small classes on student learning and on other positive student outcomes. It was commissioned in 1985 and included approximately 7,000 students from 79 elementary schools. Researcher Frederick Mostellar highlighted several key results in 1995:

- Children in the early elementary school achieve at a significantly higher level in classes of 15 than they do in classes of 25.
- Smaller class sizes allow teachers and ESPs to spend more time with individual students.
- Smaller class sizes provide

(64%), even including earlier classrooms with instructional aides (70%);

- Became high school dropouts less often (15%) than students from other earlier classrooms (24%), even including earlier classrooms with instructional assistants (20%).

Biddle and Berliner found other advantages in high school for students from small classes in the primary grades. On average, those students earned better grades. Fewer of them had to be retained in grade. More students from smaller classes chose advanced courses and foreign languages in high school. More finished in the top 25% of their graduation class.

Furthermore, smaller classes in kindergarten through third grade also apparently are beneficial for adolescent sub-groups as well, both academically and socially. According to the Krueger and Whitmore 2001 data analysis, the increase of African-American students taking the SAT or ACT college entrance exams was much greater (32% to 41%) than the increase of white students from the same smaller classes (45% to 46%). Consequently, if all grade K-3 students were assigned to small classes, Krueger and Whitmore estimate that the gap between numbers of African-American and Caucasian students taking college entrance exams would be slashed by more than half.

Finally, teen pregnancy rates for white females was 33% less and teen fatherhood rates for African-American males was 40% less than the rates for peers who started school in larger

classes.

State and federal education policies don't encourage schools to aim for average results, so it's especially difficult to see the wisdom of abandoning class size guidelines in the No Child Left Behind era of high standards for all students and demands for continuous school improvement. Expectations for ever-increasing student testing results only have grown stronger. The variable of classroom teaching and learning conditions only has become more crucial to effective differentiated instruction, to student achievement gains, and to safer and more respectful schools.

Precision teaching, especially in middle and high schools, becomes more difficult as students are added to classrooms. In fact, the Department's proposal to void class size guidelines contradicts its own support for "personalized learning" school environments as described in its *High Schools on the Move* initiative.

Large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms limit contact time between teachers and individual students and small groups, while also hampering successful use of valuable academic activities such as hands-on science and lab work, writing assignments generally and teacher conferences with young writers, team projects and presentations, community-based investigations and field trips, etc.

Vermont educators have supported and implemented special education laws that have made our state a national leader in appropriate, regular classroom inclusion of special needs students. How might larger class sizes change the level of service for this mainstreamed group? How will special educators and parents of those students respond to changes that might expand IEP caseloads and decrease educational services?

Innovative teaching methods are more likely to be shunted aside because of practical concerns about possible disorderliness and safety risks in larger classes. Concentration and on-task behavior are diminished by inevitable increases in classroom noise and visual distractions, and simply maintaining basic order sometimes is more difficult. School-wide logistics—reasonably scheduled lunch periods, holding school assemblies, sharing of instructional space—also usually are compromised when school populations are too large.

There's an old morose joke about large classes: "You have to be able to find the student to teach him/her." Sadly, in the end, the joke may be on Vermont students, educators, and parents, if the Department of Education and State Board of Education succeed in discarding class size guidelines that have worked well for several decades. ■

Vermont-NEA Photo by Suzanne Dirmaier



Alburg teachers and supporters from throughout Grand Isle picketed in April. Angelo is 4th from the left.

## Local Associations, north and south, demonstrate to settle contracts

ALBURG—In the weeks leading to April vacation this year, 25 teachers in Alburg made plans for a strike. They had been nearly two years without a contract, the only unit of the Grand Isle Supervisory Union-NEA not paid the same as other teachers in the SU.

A strike vote in mid-April and an informational picket one morning before school changed everything. Negotiations began again and a settlement was reached on the Friday for school break. Alburg teachers won wage parity with the rest of the SU.

Vermont-NEA UniServ Director Suzanne Dirmaier credits the Local Association's decisive action for turning around the failed negotiations. Alburg chief negotiators Tracy Giroux and Carolyn Robertson deserve congratulations, along with the stalwart members of the Alburg unit.

BENNINGTON—The work winning a contract settlement is still ongoing for some 350 teachers represented by the Southwest Vermont Education Association. Teachers have been without a contract since July 2004.

Teachers from Mt. Anthony HS, Mt. Anthony MS, Bennington Elementary, Catamount, Molly Stark, Monument, Pownal, North Bennington, Shaftsbury and the Career Development Center set up an informational picket line on April 11 at 7 in the morning, before the start of school. They made an impressive show at the heavily travelled intersection of Routes 7 and 9 in downtown Bennington.

Now, the teachers of SWVEA continue with the organizing activity which they began in December. ■

Vermont-NEA Photo by Tom Walters



SWVEA teachers hold informational picket on April 11 in downtown Bennington.

## Orleans Central Education Assn. votes to strike

The Orleans Central Education Association (OCEA), representing 138 teachers in Albany, Barton, Brownington, Glover, Irasburg, Orleans and Lake Region High School voted overwhelmingly on May 12 to go on strike on Thursday, May 19. (This issue of Vermont-NEA Today goes to press on April 17.)

“Teachers are committed to reaching parity around health insurance and salary with other teachers in the surrounding districts and within the state,” said OCEA Chief Negotiator Cindy Smith in a press release issued the day after the strike vote.

The contract between the Orleans Central Supervisory Union and OCEA requires the employer to pay fixed dollar amounts for teachers' health insurance premiums. In other districts in the state, the employer pays a percentage of the health insurance premium. “Where a percentage is paid, the teachers and school boards assume shared responsibility for health insurance cost increases,” explains Cindy. “Under the current contract, when there is an increase in health insurance costs, teachers assume all responsibility for the increase.”

The OCEA has been working for the past seven years to resolve the health insurance issue. The Local Association says the lack of a salary/health insurance package comparable with the surrounding districts is compromising the district's ability to hire and retain teachers.

Rather than agreeing to fix the contract shortcomings causing a teacher shortage in Orleans Central, the school board is demanding a contract provision that would allow the board to place teachers in certain teaching positions anywhere on the salary schedule that the board deems necessary to attract teachers to the region. This would, of course, undermine the salary schedule that pays all teachers equally and free the board from its responsibility to treat teachers equitably.

Though the Orleans Central support staff already have agreed to a contract, their health insurance is tied to the teacher settlement. They are, therefore, invested in the teachers' effort to reach a health care settlement that is equitable.

Cindy Smith says: “The future welfare of the district and its children depends on a fair contract that respects teachers and establishes parity with teachers in the surrounding region.”

# Legislative Report: Health care and then some

By Joel D. Cook, Executive Director

The Legislature continues its session at this writing, in mid-May. The Senate is poised to pass its approach to health care reform, and the House is waiting for it. The two bodies have taken different approaches to this major social policy and, behind the scene, discussions regarding blending the different approaches are taking place.

Even as the health care debate plays out, however, there are many other matters of interest to the Association and its members seeing activity in the State House. The most significant, at least regarding this Legislature's receptiveness to the Association's requests, is the passage of a bill permitting teacher locals to negotiate with their school boards for agency fee provisions in their contracts. In addition, there are ongoing—almost traditional—struggles to safeguard Education Fund money from being diverted to other causes, even if they are otherwise worthy, as they typically are. We expect activity next year to bring some of this year's education policy discussions into legislative decisions, particularly under the headings of early education and what goes by the name "public high school choice." Some other matters under consideration now include:

- Resolving the retirement investment committee issue, which was the subject of Governor Douglas's ill-advised veto in late winter;
- How to approach the funding of the Teachers' Retirement System generally;
- Whether and, if so, how to change the composition of the Vermont Labor Relations Board, which, among other things, considers which employees are to be covered by collective bargaining agreements and charges of unfair labor practices;
- How, if at all, to lend support to the national lawsuit to which Vermont-NEA has lent its support challenging the funding level of the so-called No Child Left Behind law.

## Health care

Health care is front and center. There are two related factors driving the issue. First and foremost is cost. The cost of high quality coverage has risen far more over the decades than the rate of inflation generally would indicate. Within the Association, we measure the cost in multiple ways. Some examples: the percentage by which premiums have been increasing—roughly 15% per year over the past five years; the extent—not readily quantifiable but there nonetheless—to which local salary and wage increases have been muted because of our members' interest in obtaining and retaining financial access to high quality health care; the extent to which costs of insurance are inflated by the extent to which government underpays for Medicare and Medicaid and

the extent to which free care is of necessity provided to people with no coverage. Indeed, the extent to which Medicaid itself is operating in the red—largely attributable to increasingly stingy federal payments—is the major financial issue facing this Legislature as it develops next year's budget. Related to this last is the second driver in the issue: finding ways to extend health coverage to all members of the population.

To guide its advocacy, the Asso-

ciation adopted a set of principles a year ago—printed several times in recent *Vermont-NEA Today* editions and posted at [www.vtnea.org](http://www.vtnea.org)—and we have been using those principles successfully in a variety of settings. Indeed, the same principles, with slight variations, are now found within the House bill (H.524) and the bill being developed in the Senate. To the extent any emerging plan actually adheres to these principles, we believe both that the population of the state will be well-served and our members will be well-protected.

There is nothing certain in this debate, and divergent views abound. The touchstone for the Association, however, throughout the process is the extent to which our members who have access to high quality health care would be able to retain it and the extent to which our members who do not have that access would be able to obtain it. Beyond that, we have much in common with those at the center of the debate, and we will continue working as much in concert with them as adherence to our formal principles permits. It is very likely there will be many opportunities during the next half-year for Association members and members of the public generally to weigh in on this debate in more local venues. We'll keep members posted about them.

## Agency fee

The agency fee bill (H.299), designed to enable teacher locals and school boards to negotiate over the inclusion of agency fee provisions in local teachers contracts, was introduced on February 18 by some 41 sponsors, chief among them Association members Dave Sharpe, D. Bristol, and Donna Sweaney, D. Windsor. It was passed by the House General Affairs Committee (Chaired by Francis Brooks, D. Montpelier) unanimously on April 19, and passed by the full House on a voice vote on April 26. The Senate General Affairs Committee (Chaired by Vince Illuzzi, R. Essex-Orleans) considered the bill on May 3 and 4, and passed it by a 4-0-2 (the last referring to absentees) vote. The Senate Education Committee (Chaired by Don Collins, D. Fran-

klin) considered it the next day and passed it 3-1-0. The full Senate passed the bill by a 21 – 5 vote. All that remains is for the Governor to sign it into law—a small bill that will elevate the rights of teachers to the same level as is enjoyed by every other group of organized employees in the state. We owe gratitude to sponsors and committees that considered it.

## Retirement

Retirement investment committee. In February, after nearly a year of

compromise by the Association, the State Employees' Association, and the three public pension retirement boards, the Legislature passed a bill (S.74) to create an investment committee to facilitate investment decisions for all three boards. The Governor vetoed it in March, claiming violation of the principle of "one person, one vote" regarding how members of the committee would be selected, although we have reason to believe he just doesn't want employees to have as many representatives (4 or 5 out of 9) as the bill calls for.

Since then, the Legislature was unable to "override" the veto—to do so requires a two-thirds majority in each House, and that simply wasn't attainable in the House of Representatives—and was left with either developing an alternative approach or letting the idea die for now.

We have been involved in all levels of that discussion and have made two suggestions. The first would take the method of choosing the employee representatives on the committee and applying it as well to how government representatives would be selected. That addresses the stated "one person, one vote objection," but the administration has rejected that approach anyway. We've also suggested simply forming a committee of the whole—making all members of the three pension boards members of one investment committee. That finesses all controversy about the selection process and probably eliminates any basis for objection. What we won't do is agree to a loss of employee representation or a process permitting non-employees to select who represents them. That's where things stand now.

Retirement under-funding. But for the Medicaid deficit, the extent to which the Teachers' Retirement System is under-funded would be the dominant fiscal issue of this session. Under the heading of cold comfort, it has attracted far more, and more sympathetic attention this year than any in recent memory. The Governor has included millions more in the proposed budget than in recent years, and the Legislature appears interested in adding millions more.

The problem is that the shorting of funding in each of the last 15 or so years has now had the cumulative effect of making it nearly impossible, without some altered approach, to provide enough funding to meet what the actuaries for the system say it needs. In addition, an accounting obligation being placed on all public pensions nationally beginning in FY 2008—to treat as an express liability the extent to which future benefits are not presently funded—will make the funding situation look worse.

So, while no one's pension is in jeopardy, we have legislative attention on the issue, and we are looking at two steps right now.

The first is a tried and true one: study the problem. We're working with Treasurer Jeb Spaulding in establishing a group to examine what ought to be done and to make recommendations accordingly.

The second is a bit narrower and esoteric. In 1992, the Legislature took note of the Governor's habit of not including the full recommended amount in the budget, and it decided to cut him (or her) some slack by permitting the submission of a so-called "retirement funds integrity report" instead. Well, providing that option simply has made it easier for a governor not to worry about the recommended amount and, instead, to submit a report. That report, not surprisingly, has been submitted every year since 1993, and it consists, every year, largely of boilerplate language about how the actuaries' assumptions of system costs are too high and about how stock market performance will correct for any under-funding. Nonsense.

So, we have recommended a bill (H.133) that would repeal the governor's option to submit this report, reinstating the obligation only to include in the proposed budget what the actuaries recommend. Regardless of its prospects for enactment, it's been a good conversation starter.

## Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB)

For public sector labor groups, the VLRB is the most important administrative body in state government. It actually decides contract disputes for employees of the State, UVM, and State Colleges, and it serves as arbitrator at the end of the state contract grievance procedure. It also oversees their organizing elections and those of municipal employees (including school support staff), decides which job positions belong in bargaining units, and, perhaps most importantly for this Association, it is the body that considers charges of unfair labor practice. Among other of its decisions, the

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*All that remains is for the Governor to sign the Agency Fee Bill into law—a small bill that will elevate the rights of teachers to the same level as is enjoyed by every other group of organized employees in the state.*

Vermont-NEA Photo by Tom Walters



Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta (second from left) speaks at a State House health care reform news conference on April 20. Also participating were (L-R) Dan Brush, President of Vermont AFL-CIO, Ed Stanak, President of the Vermont State Employees Association, Don Mayer, owner of Small Dog Electronics and President of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Greg Marchildon, State Director of AARP Vermont, and Phil Mamber, Organizer for the Association of Retired Americans.

## Vermont workers, business people and seniors support health care reform

MONTPELIER—At a news conference April 20, Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta, AARP Vermont State Director Greg Marchildon, and President Don Mayer of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility proclaimed their support for the efforts of the House Committee on Health Care.

“To this early point in the conversation, we wholly agree with the principles, general vision and scope found in the Committee’s proposal,” said Dorta. “We believe that all Vermonters—all Vermonters, not just union members—should have a right to high quality, accessible, affordable, and comprehensive health care.”

“We are here to state our strong support for Green Mountain Health and the work that has been done by the House Health Committee on this very difficult issue,” said Marchildon. “Too many Vermonters are one paycheck away from losing their health insurance.”

“I am here today to declare Vermont Businesses for Social

Responsibility’s strong support for H.524,” said Mayer. “We believe this bill will move Vermont in a direction that is good for our citizens and good for the economy of the state. We believe that a program of this type will make Vermont a more desirable place to do business, and will foster job creation.”

Angelo spoke for Working Vermont, The Coalition of Vermont Labor Organizations that includes the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, United Nurses and Allied Professionals, Vermont Alliance of Retired Americans, Vermont State Employees Association, United Electrical Workers, Vermont AFL-CIO, and Vermont-NEA.

Other groups supporting the message were the Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council, Coalition for Disability Rights and COVE (Coalition Of Vermont Elders). Working Vermont, AARP Vermont, and Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility represent more than 200,000 Vermonters. ■

## Vermont-NEA and Vermont school districts are plaintiffs in first-ever national lawsuit against Administration for not paying for education regulations

MONTPELIER—On April 20, a diverse network of school districts, the National Education Association (NEA) and several state education associations filed the first-ever national lawsuit to force the Bush Administration to pay the costs of its own rules and regulations under the No Child Left Behind law.

Vermont-NEA and these Vermont school districts are among the plaintiffs: Leicester Town, Neshobe Elementary, Otter Valley Union High School, Pittsford Town, Sudbury Town, Whiting Town, and the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union.

“These school districts are representative of districts throughout Vermont whose resources are being drained away to meet a one-size-fits-all federal standard that is wrong for Vermont,” said Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta. “The federal government is supposed to pay for the paperwork, bureaucracy, and testing necessary to meet their regulations. Instead Vermont received \$26.7 million less in 2005 than it would have if No Child Left Behind was funded at the level Congress authorized. Under President Bush’s proposed budget for 2006, Vermont would receive \$42.4 million less than the authorized funding level.”

The plaintiffs also include school districts in Texas and Michigan, as well as the nation’s largest teachers’ organization. All the plaintiffs say they are filing the suit because the

Administration has not heeded its own demands of accountability which states:

*“Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize an officer or employee of the Federal Government to mandate, direct, or control a State, local education agency, or school’s curriculum, program of instruction, or allocation of State or local resources, or mandate a State or any subdivision thereof to spend any funds or incur any costs not paid for under this Act.”*

The suit, Pontiac School District v. Spellings, was filed today in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

Since the law’s enactment in 2002, there has been a \$27 billion funding shortfall in what Congress was supposed to provide schools to meet the law’s regulations and what has been funded. Cost studies in Ohio and Texas estimate that the price of the regulations to state taxpayers could run as high as \$1.5 and \$1.2 billion, respectively.

For more information about the lawsuit, visit: [www.nea.org/lawsuit](http://www.nea.org/lawsuit)

Rutland Northeast Superintendent Bill Mathis travelled to Washington to participate in the NEA press conference announcing the lawsuit. Mathis is also a star on the NEA website, where his photograph and an article he wrote are featured. ■

### Continued from page 4...

VLRB is the body responsible for school employees’ entitlement to step increases even if they are working “without a contract,” for the prohibition against employer subcontracting in the absence of express contract language permitting it, and for limiting, where there is no contract agreement, the duration of a school board’s “imposition of finality” to one year.

The manner of VLRB composition has remained unchanged for more than a quarter century. Its membership is five people, “no more than three from the same political party,” appointed by the governor for terms of six years.

The Association has teamed with the State Employees Association and others in requesting changes in this

archaic approach (S.88). We are supporting a method through which the governor would appoint two members from a list of persons submitted by labor organizations, two members from a list submitted by employers of the employees represented by those labor organizations, and two members from a list submitted by the other four.

### NCLB lawsuit

The National Education Association has taken the lead in suing the United States Department of Education regarding the government’s asserted right to withhold funds from states and school districts it finds not in compliance with provisions of the so-called No Child Left Behind law. Vermont-NEA and the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union, along with a number of other state NEA affiliates

and school districts elsewhere around the nation, have agreed to act as plaintiffs. The basis of the lawsuit is a provision in NCLB that reads: “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize an officer or employee of the Federal government to...mandate a state or any subdivision thereof to spend any funds or incur any costs not paid for under this Act.” In short, the lawsuit is designed to have the courts decide if this clause, in combination with inadequate funding of the law, insulates states and districts from losing federal funds if they don’t comply with it.

House Education Committee Chair George Cross (D. Winooski) has introduced a resolution (J.R.H. 37) that “strongly urges the governor, the state board of education, the attorney

general, and the commissioner of education to support and cooperate fully with the plaintiffs in the lawsuit.” He has obtained more than 80 sponsors for this in the House of Representatives. The committee has conducted one hearing to date, to hear from both Vermont-NEA and the National Education Association. This resolution is a wonderful device to focus public attention on what are, to us, too obvious shortcomings of this law and its inordinate use of money and human resources in its implementation, resources that could be far better spent on educating children. Learn more about the NCLB lawsuit at [www.nea.org/lawsuit](http://www.nea.org/lawsuit).

Please send us questions or comments about these or other legislative issues. ■

## Register online for August Membership Seminars

Vermont-NEA invites each Local Association to find ONE PERSON FROM EACH BUILDING IN YOUR ASSOCIATION to attend our new AUGUST MEMBERSHIP SEMINAR. It is our hope that these individuals will become "Membership Reps" who will help you build your Association and keep it vibrant.

At the Seminar, you will pick up your membership bags, materials and new goodies, learn about resources and assistance available to you, get prepared to talk knowledgeably and confidently about the accomplishments of your Local Association, and more!

Go to [www.vtnea.org](http://www.vtnea.org) (Click on Membership Seminars) to register online for any location. All sessions run from 9:00 am – 12:00 noon. Continental breakfast provided

### Monday, August 1st

St. Albans - The Old Foundry  
Randolph - Three Stallion Inn

### Tuesday, August 2nd

Essex Junction - Lincoln Inn  
Putney - Putney Inn

### Wednesday, August 3rd

Morrisville - Hilary's Restaurant

### Thursday, August 4th

White River Jct - Hotel Coolidge

### Tuesday, August 9th

Lyndon - Lyndon State College  
Middlebury - Middlebury Inn

### Wednesday, August 10th

Rutland - South Station  
Montpelier - Vermont-NEA

Preregistration is required. Contact Sheree Parker if you have questions: [sparker@vtnea.org](mailto:sparker@vtnea.org) or 1-800-649-6375

## A new plan for training

Vermont-NEA is offering new training opportunities this year:

- A conference for ESP at the October Educators' Exposition
- A Professional Issues Conference in January
- A New Teachers Conference in February
- Training for Mentors
- I Can Do It Training
- A new, expanded Convention, renamed the Vermont-NEA Educators' Exposition, that will include Association advocacy training once offered in the summer.

These changes, all under the direction of Professional Programs Director Sherry Gile, are data driven and based on member needs surveys.

Continued from page 1...

## Tim Comolli to retire

had spent more time letting him know that fact; but he, like most intensely committed teachers, has untold influence on others. Almost any teacher can train kids in an academic arena but the great ones inspire the kids toward their own personal greatness.

**Q: What are the big differences between teaching your first year and your last?**

**Tim:** Besides the fact that I no longer rank "ridding gum-chewing in class" as a priority, I, frankly, don't see much change at all. Yes, we have the technology and the research to deliver better instruction and, yes, the kids are better educated—but the human equation has changed very little. Kids are still making discoveries that

the end of my career and as I cleared out my desk, I found my first contract. It was for \$4,500 a year. The valiant fight, the long negotiations sessions, the give, the take, and the honorable outcomes for teachers has been the direct result of the mission of the South Burlington Educators' Association. It is totally through their efforts that that original contract has expanded, and ultimately insured, that I will be able to retire with dignity.

**Q: What advice would you give new teachers?**

**Tim:** Unless you have a calling to this profession—get out and get out now. There is no more important profession and no greater need for a significant calling then in this decade. In

ments with different learning styles could find their niche in school. Tim is a paradigm pioneer and has opened the doors of success for many youngsters by developing the Imaging Lab."

**Q: What moment in your career was most fulfilling?**

**Tim:** The evening, in Washington, DC, when Christa McAuliffe's mother handed me the national award named in honor of her daughter was a defining moment in my professional career.

It was closely followed by a flash in time when one of my former film students called to tell me that he had been nominated for an Academy Award.

**Q: What are you going to miss the most? And what are you looking forward to?**

**Tim:** I'll miss the kids, my colleagues, and probably even the constant confusion and chaos of teaching. I won't miss the politics and the constant need to create funds to support a program.

I am looking forward to being "in charge" and hopefully creating more opportunities for youngsters by establishing a small firm, Comolli Consulting.

**Q: Tim, please answer any question you wish I'd asked...**

**Tim:** Wow, how many times have I asked this over the years and now that I am faced with it myself—I am at a loss. This is really a comprehensive overview of me and it is difficult to be your own cheerleader. I would, however, like to see an era return when administrators realized that their main job is to make a teacher's job easier.

Rich Wise is not shy about cheerleading. He says: "Tim always makes it look easy... While he always understates his talents and the influence he has had over his students throughout the years, make no mistake—Tim Comolli has changed lives in ways we mere mortal teachers only dream of. He's a legend, and deserves every accolade that has come his way." —LBH

*Beginning teachers should also understand that kids don't need 25-year-old friends—they need a mentor, a person that they can rely on and a person willing to go to bat for them on the important issues in life. Kids need role models that they can emulate in their futures.*

will change their lives, they are still making the same mistakes, and they are still finding their way with the help of good parents and great teachers.

I suppose that most people would say that the continuing dissolving of the family unit has made for more difficult times—and that would be true. But, essentially, kids are resilient, adaptable and continue to search for a fulfilling life much as they did in 1965 when I started.

**Q: If you had the power, what change would you make to improve public education?**

**Tim:** On an ethereal level, I would require that every dollar spent on the military be replicated for education. It would be part of a law that also stated that every mandated federal and state initiative have adequate funding attached to the scheme.

On the practical plain, I would universally insure "common planning time" for teachers. It takes a team of teachers to insure every kid's success and only people with myopic views would object to seeing that happen.

We have such a wealth of diversity and skill levels among teachers that it is a shame that no one can seem to find the method by which they might share that repository on behalf of kids.

**Q: What has it meant to you to belong to the South Burlington Educators' Association?**

**Tim:** In a word, Dignity. As I reach

an era when a teacher is called upon to be a surrogate member of the student's family, when the teacher may see the student more often than a parent, the need to be committed to kids has never been more important.

Beginning teachers should also understand that kids don't need 25-year-old friends—they need a mentor, a person that they can rely on and a person willing to go to bat for them on the important issues in life. Kids need role models that they can emulate in their futures.

**Q: What has been your greatest contribution as a teacher?**

**Tim:** According to Dr. Janet Bossange, my colleague for over a decade: "Tim's greatest contribution to education has been in developing a learning environment in which stu-

## Tim Comolli's Awards & Honors

ING *Unsung Heroes* National Award 2004

Christa McAuliffe National Award winner (NEA) —2003

Distinguished Alumni Award – Johnson State College – 2000

Honored by the Vermont State Legislature with House Bill #JRH 162—January 19, 2000

Honored by the United States Senate of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress (*Congressional Record* — April 25, 2000)

National Technology Teacher of the Year — 1999 (*Technology and Learning Magazine*)  
Community Excellence Award – The Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce — 1998

Excellence in Education Award — National Foundation for the Improvement of Education 1998

Regional Technology Teacher of the Year (New England) – 1997 (Microsoft)

International Who's Who of Professionals — 1997

Regional Technology Teacher of the Year (New England) —1996 (*Technology and Learning Magazine*)

University of Vermont Teacher of the Year – 1995

South Burlington School District Teacher of the Year – 1995

Winner of the Bill Gates "The Road Ahead" Grant – 1995

## Vermont-NEA Election Results

# Dorta and Gallagher re-elected

MONTPELIER—Incumbent Angelo Dorta won a sixth 2-year term as President in Vermont-NEA April elections, defeating Bonnie Tuscany of Morristown. Incumbent Tom Gallagher won a second 2-year term as Vice President, defeating Terri Vest of Twinfield School. Jeff Isham ran unopposed for Secretary-Treasurer.

Mary Ann Barnes of Colchester won the Board seat representing Chittenden District, Area 1, as a write-in candidate.

Here are other results, plus the numbers, unanimously verified by the Elections Committee.

**Total ballots mailed: 10,683**

- Active members: 9606
- Retired members: 1015
- Student members: 62

**Ballots returned: 2208**

- Active members: 1860
- Retired members: 339
- Student members: 9

**Invalid ballots: 90**

- Unsigned envelopes 88
- Invalid membership 2

**President**

- Angelo Dorta 1090
- Bonnie Tuscany 651
- Write-in 4

**Vice-President**

- Thomas Gallagher 916
- Terri Vest 655
- Write-in 8

**Secretary/Treasurer**

- Jeff Isham 1538
- Write-in 7

**Vermont-NEA Board Directors**

**Chittenden, Area 1 586 ballots**

- Write-in:
- Mary Ann Barnes 32
- Others 10



**Angelo Dorta**

**Chittenden, Area 2 854 ballots**

- Richard Wise 226
- Write-in 0

**NE Kingdom, Area 2 551 ballots**

- Martha Allen 76
- Write-in 0

**NW Vermont, Area 2 676 ballots**

- Ann Lavery 134
- Write-in 1

**Southern VT, Area 1 611 ballots**

- Sue Rusten 113
- Write-in 3

**Southern VT, Area 3 631 ballots**

- Dennis Ladd 93
- Write-in 1

**Upper Valley, Area 1 466 ballots**

- Cherrie Torrey 69
- Write-in 0

**Upper Valley, Area 2 464 ballots**

- Lisa Champagne 83
- Write-in 0

**State Delegate to the NEA-RA**

- 1. \*Martha Allen 1182
- 2. \*Marie Benway 1061
- 3. \*Jay Burnell 1153



**Tom Gallagher**

4. \*Lisa Champagne 1152

5. Natasha Chiuchiolo 1011

6. \*Sally Conway 1120

7. \*Thomas Gallagher 1132

8. \*Linda Howard 1105

9. \*Jeff Isham 1167

10. \*Kim Kimler 1092

11. \*Cynthia Knowles 1128

12. Dennis Ladd 961

13. Marge Ladd 1000

14. \*Alison Sylvester 1175

15. \*Bonnie Tuscany 1267

16. \*Terri Vest 1146

17. \*Eric Weiss 1152

18. \*Rose Wenzel 1115

Write-in 25

\*Elected

**Retired Delegate to the NEA-RA**

Jay Kaplan 225

Robert Chaffee 84

John Goodrich 28

Write-in 2

**Student Delegate to the NEA-RA**

Chad Disorda 8

Write-in 1

## NEA Director's Report

# NEA launches salary campaign

The NCLB Lawsuit was the centerpiece of NEA Attorney Bob Chanin's report to the Board of Directors at our May meeting. Bob underscored the purpose of this lawsuit: to challenge the underfunding of NCLB.

As one of the plaintiffs in this lawsuit, Vermont represents rural school populations. Pontiac, Michigan and Laredo, Texas represent school districts with primarily African-American and Hispanic student populations. The other ten state affiliate plaintiffs have already done studies that demonstrate the effects of the underfunding of this law. A major concern is that money that would otherwise be used for improvements in students' education, such as closing the achievement gaps, is being diverted to testing costs.

NEA Board members from states who are plaintiffs in the lawsuit were invited by President Weaver to speak to the Board about their state's par-

ticipation. President Weaver noted that Bill Mathis, the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent, had been fantastic.

At the conclusion of these comments, numerous Board members went to the microphone to thank NEA for moving forward with the lawsuit on behalf of all students and education employees across the nation.

Executive Director John Wilson announced a salary campaign being promoted by NEA. NEA proposes a minimum salary for teachers of \$40,000 and a livable wage for ESP members. At the NEA-RA in Los Angeles, information about this campaign will be disseminated to 10,000 delegates and there will also be a symposium offered on the salary campaign.

When questioned about the disparity of salaries which already occurs in many states, John declared "...\$40,000 and a livable wage no matter where you live!"



**Joyce Sullivan**

The Board members also took positions on the NEA budget, standing rule amendment proposals, and bylaw proposals, which will be acted on by the delegates at the representative assembly in July.

Joyce Sullivan, NEA Director  
jas3@sover.net

# Letters

**Thanks for support**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many Vermont-NEA members and friends who helped me in my successful bid for re-election as Vice President. In addition, thank you to all who voted for me. I am looking forward to serving you for the next two years.

Being an officer involves many hours, and a great deal of effort, and I will try to succeed at the tasks that are ahead of me.

I would also like to thank Terri Vest for the energy she expends for Educators throughout Vermont, and hope she will continue to do so.

I am still puzzled that many members choose not to vote, and would be interested in finding the reasons. If you did not return your ballot; feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail, and I would be glad to discuss any issues that you may have.

Educators have always faced difficult issues and times. Now is no different. If we all work together at achieving our goals, we can succeed.

Thanks again!

**Tom Gallagher**  
Lamoille UHS TA

**Thank you for assisting all candidates**

The Vermont-NEA '05 election campaign season is over. Many local Association leaders, individual members, and groups hosted candidates' appearances at Executive Board, Representative Council, and Regional Bargaining Council meetings. They also accepted telephone calls at home and at work, received campaign letters and fliers, and helped distribute information to inform colleagues about the issues and the candidates. Thank you for your willingness to assist all candidates and for your graciousness in these many instances.

All former candidates now return themselves solely to the vital task of strengthening our local and state Associations and to the difficult issues facing all teachers and ESP. No Child Left Behind, salaries and working conditions, retirement security, health benefits, and instructional and professional support must remain as top priorities. Together, we'll strive to work with each other and with all members to create high-performance Association advocacy. I'm eager to fulfill my share of responsibility for this effort as Vermont-NEA President for another two years.

**Angelo Dorta**  
Vermont-NEA

# Terry Buehner of Burlington High School named Vermont-NEA History Day Educator of the Year

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse

BURLINGTON—BHS History teacher Terry Buehner won the Vermont-NEA History Day Educator of the Year Award—and a \$250 prize—at the annual Vermont History Day competition, held on Saturday, April 9, in Barre. The award is presented each year to the teacher who has demonstrated superb guidance of History Day students and who is committed to the growth and betterment of the National History Day program.

Terry meets those criteria, and then some. She is a History Day stalwart. Thirty-two of 195 students entering this year's History Day contest were from BHS; nine of those students won awards; and three are eligible for the national competition.

Terry is quick to point to three colleagues who coached the BHS student competitors: Nick Molander, Fran Brock and Ron MacNeil.

The Vermont History Day Competition, sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society, asks students in grades 6-12 to enter the competition with papers, projects, displays, performances or documentaries on a particular theme. This year's theme was "Communication in History: The Key to Understanding." ■



*She's an award winner herself, but Terry Buehner is most proud of award-winning students from BHS.*

1/2 page AIG ad