



TODAY

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Vermont-NEA provides training for new teachers at first annual conference

SOUTH BURLINGTON – Over 100 new Vermont teachers – those in the first three years of their careers – came to Vermont-NEA’s first-ever New Teacher Conference in February to get training in classroom management strategies, managing instructional time, Vermont’s re-licensing process, communicating effectively with parents, legal and ethical issues, and understanding evaluation processes.

The Conference quickly filled to capacity, and some new teachers, unfortunately, had to be turned away. Vermont-NEA is making plans for more training to accommodate the demand for training that supports new teachers.

Sherry Gile, Vermont-NEA’s Director of Professional Programs, is gratified about the level of interest in the training opportunities she is organizing. “This sort of professional development is Vermont-NEA’s newest service to Association members,” she points out, “and it is wonderful that our first conference for new teachers has struck a chord. Our mission is to deliver professional programs that our members really want and need.”

Vermont-NEA workshop trainers all are veteran classroom teachers and Vermont-NEA members. Sherry says successful teachers are ideal role models and instructors for new teachers.

Kathy Buley, a 26-year veteran teacher from South Burlington, presented the session on Communicating with Parents. She said the new teachers she met were wonderful. “They’re totally motivated and have lots of ideas and creative suggestions. They’re communicating beautifully with each other,” she said, “so I’m sure they do with parents, as well.”

The Hot Topic

The conference session on classroom management strategies attracted the largest number of new teachers. In fact, two extra classes had to be scheduled to meet the demand.



Jim Hagerl of Barre Town attended “Communicating Effectively with Parents.”



Vermont-NEA photos by Art Huse

Julie Goraj (L), librarian at Mt. Holly Elementary, says she came to the conference “to get a lot of good advice.” Laurie Palmer (R) of Black River High School came looking for support - lots of support - and information about relicensing procedures.

“I’m not at all surprised by the response the workshop has received,” commented Judy Steffens, a Vermont-NEA trainer who retired recently after a 34-year teaching career. She elaborated: “I think that successful classroom management (what Charlotte Danielson calls the Classroom Environment) is essential to all the other components of the teaching process. ...new teachers express their frustration and fears related to classroom management. They know the curriculum and content, but they are struggling with day-to-day classroom management ‘challenges’ from students who sense they’re dealing with ‘novices.’ Also, the increasing number of high needs students in classrooms presents even greater challenges. Unfortunately, too, many begin teaching without a mentor and they soon become overwhelmed. The stories they tell are truly heart-

wrenching.”

The stories the new teachers told after the Vermont-NEA conference were grateful:

■ Thank you. This was a wonderful, helpful, informative day!

■ Well organized. Useful content. Good relevant materials. Thank you.

■ Thank you for the wonderful treatment.

■ Great job! Thank you for this conference.

■ Wish I could come back next year... I will have too many years teaching.

■ Thanks for a great day! Very worthwhile...Extremely helpful.

■ Was an absolute pleasure being with colleagues for a day who share in my successes and understand my frustrations. Thank you for this opportunity! -LBH

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

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

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Welcome to Our Profession

These are excerpts from President Angelo Dorta's welcoming address at Vermont-NEA's February 4 New Teacher Conference.

...You've entered our professional ranks and public schools at a time when many challenges face all teachers. But, there's also many potential triumphs and joys waiting to be experienced individually and collegially. What's important is that we're here today, together. We're together today for our students, for our schools and communities, and for public education.

What a privilege! What an honor! Entrusting you with these young minds, with the citizens and leaders of tomorrow...And what an honor for me to be here today with you, knowing that you'll receive useful training and feel a spirit of camaraderie with peers.

Yes, what's really important is that we're all here in the same place, at the same time, and with the same purpose: to improve our interactions with students and their parents and to improve the quality of our professional lives! We're here in the same place, at the same time, and with the same purpose despite different roads that led us here. Often, one becomes a teacher due to one or more of several common reasons:

- We love working with young people of a particular age and believe we can have a positive impact on their lives. Thus, we're called to service.
- Or, we simply love a specific academic subject or an aspect of the arts. We want to share that love of academic content or artistic expression with young people.
- Or, someone in our families of origin was a teacher — or perhaps there was a long line of teachers in our extended families — and the notion of becoming teachers ourselves was almost a natural outcome of our personal development. In contrast, my father was a street-sweeper with only an 8th grade education. My mother finished high school and was a school cook for most of her working life.

• Or, we liked school very much and were successful in school during our own student days. Who doesn't like to re-visit a place and time filled with successful experiences and positive emotions?

• Or, perhaps there was a significant "other," not a blood relative, someone outside of our families, who awakened in us the possibility of becoming teachers ourselves. Often, these "significant others" can be our own teachers from the past. Sometimes, they are close friends, acquaintances, or accidental mentors.

For me, my personal journey into the classroom was spurred by a beginning teacher like you, a young woman whom I met in 1970. I had just returned to civilian life from two years of military service. I still had 1½ years remaining for my college B.A.

We began to date. Our relationship developed during the year while I



Angelo speaks with new teacher Michelle Jackson of Jericho Elementary.

was finishing my college coursework in English and journalism. I began to notice and appreciate her enthusiasm and zeal, her expertise and sense of adventure, for her 4th grade classroom: the Greek myths that her students invented; the way she tried to individualize instruction for students; the integration of crafts, music, drama, and graphic arts into her teaching repertoire; her genuine friendliness with students and her cultivation of respectful personal relationships with them...

I had always enjoyed school and children and had been involved in Big Brother outreach programs in college, both prior to and after military service. But the idea of actually becoming a teacher myself never had occurred to me. I had never envisioned before what teaching could be like.

But this young woman sparked in me a hopeful excitement. I began to think that perhaps my own fondness for children, my desire to positively influence young lives, my own happy and successful school experiences and my strong desire to work in an occupation that benefits society could all be satisfactorily melded into a career as a public school teacher.

I graduated in May, 1971 with my English and journalism degree, but instead decided to test the waters of public education employment in Connecticut. I accepted a job as a kindergarten paraeducator in a federal Right-to-Read Program. I enjoyed the work and public school setting and subsequently enrolled in additional post-graduate coursework at Ohio State to obtain my license as an elementary teacher.

Two years later, in 1973, for the first time, I had my own classroom... composed of 34 third graders! I went on to get a master's degree in special education a few years after, and later moved to Vermont to teach in Essex Town schools for almost two more decades so far.

Oh yes, and that fine young woman who first caught my eye and showed me what teaching could be... We were married in 1971 and have raised three children ages 21 to 30... Peggy is an accomplished teacher currently in her 34th year of teaching and still loves her profession just as much as she did three decades ago...

That's my own personal pathway into teaching and public schools. Each of you has your own unique story, too, and many of you still are writing the earliest chapters. But what's really important is that we're all here now, not necessarily how we got here.

Because the simple truth is that public education needs you. Teaching has become increasingly difficult and often been unfairly criticized. Public schools continue to be the focus of intense, organized attacks by private, profit-driven economic interests and political ideologues willing to risk the right of all children to attend high performance schools and willing to disregard the fact of our democracy's dependence on an educated citizenry.

Furthermore, your colleagues need you because national research studies affirm a common sense conclusion: Well-trained, competent, and caring teachers are the most important school ingredient for boosting and sustaining student academic achievement and proficiency in the arts.

I also must congratulate many of you for your decision to join the Association. Vermont-NEA and your local associations are advocacy partners for Vermont students and schools and for the future of this noble profession. We work to provide proper fiscal and human resources and quality of instruction for an excellent 21st century public education. We raise one common voice for fair employment contracts, professional working conditions, appropriate decision-making authority in our classrooms and schools, and supportive public policies. When necessary, we ensure the legal rights of educators to challenge wrongful actions by school districts and state officials.

Collaborative Association advocacy begins with high levels of membership. Over 2.7 million of your nationwide professional colleagues already have drawn the same conclusion: Membership in the Association is an investment in the success of your teaching career in public schools.

Vermont-NEA wishes you a long and accomplished career and thankfully anticipates your continued membership. We still have important work to do together to strengthen public education for the future well-being of our students and our society... ■

VEHI Health Care Initiatives for 2005-06

By Mark Hage and
Joseph Zimmerman
VEHI Trust Administrators

For 15 years, the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI) has implemented innovative strategies, from benefit design to preventive health measures to administrative streamlining, to keep high-quality health insurance affordable for Vermont school employees and districts. VEHI's primary focus has been to educate its members to make informed decisions about their choice of insurance options and their utilization of medical care. The Trust has worked hard to instill a "wellness" ethic in each member with its publications and website resources, and by offering cutting-edge, school-based programs that demonstrate the link between personal behavior and good health.

VEHI has never been content merely to report on or react to cost trends in health care. It has tried to do something positive and effective to help control costs, often in collaboration with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont, and without compromising the quality of insurance coverage provided by its plans.

Over the next several months, VEHI will be introducing programs aimed squarely at improving the health of its members and controlling costs. These initiatives address health and cost issues in two general areas:

Prescription Medication

Managing Chronic Illness

Prescription Medication

Prescription medications are a major driver of increased costs as re-

flected in rising insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses. An analysis of medication purchasing trends confirms that VEHI members are consuming *above-average* amounts of more expensive brand-name drugs. There is nothing wrong with taking a brand-name or "non-preferred" drug when absolutely necessary. But we believe some members are paying more out of pocket than they need to and imposing unnecessary costs on their insurance plans for these drugs *when there are less expensive and just as effective generic or preferred alternatives available*. In other words, the more we use generic drugs when medically appropriate, the more we save personally and the less cost is incurred by our insurance plans.

VEHI is aware that members' decisions about which drugs to ask their doctor about or for are influenced by very powerful, "direct-to-consumer" advertisements created by the pharmaceutical industry. These advertisements arouse demand for drugs that are often no more effective than generics, but are certainly more expensive and come wrapped in slogans and promises that are hard for consumers to resist.

Battling a multi-billion dollar industry is no easy matter, but VEHI is going to do what it can to counteract advertising messages that are responsible in part for driving up costs without necessarily improving health outcomes.

To help members understand how to use prescription drugs more effectively, and to educate them on how to

talk with their doctors about medications in general, VEHI will develop with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont a multi-media educational campaign that will unfold in stages during the 2005-06 school year. We will also partner with the Blues in 2005-06 to implement programs that improve communication between doctors, pharmacists and patients about drug dosage and quantity limits, in order to help our members avoid risks to their health and cut costs.

Additionally, VEHI will consider design and co-pay changes to its Three-tier Pharmacy Benefits Program with the objective of instituting incentives that encourage members to weigh more seriously the medical and financial advantages of generic and preferred drugs over their brand-name variants.

Any benefit changes implemented by VEHI will be effective no sooner than **July 1, 2006**.

Managing Chronic Illness

In Vermont, as is true everywhere in the country, roughly 80% of health care costs are generated by 20% of the population, and most individuals in this relatively small population suffer from acute or chronic conditions that require long-term and generally expensive care. The VEHI community is no exception; in fact, on average, 200 VEHI members with acute or chronic illnesses account for \$18 to \$20 million in claims annually. The most common chronic illnesses are cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, serious mental health conditions, respiratory diseases and asthma.

Those afflicted with chronic con-

ditions require more sophisticated medical care and support services. They must be extremely vigilant about taking care of themselves and following doctors' orders. If they are, medical data shows they have a much greater chance of living longer and healthier lives, and of avoiding unnecessary care.

In order to provide more appropriate and specialized support for members with chronic diseases and to maximize the benefits of the care they receive, VEHI and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont will implement on July 1, 2004, a state-of-the-art *Chronic Care Management Program*. It will include disease, medical case and prescription drug management, as well as individual member support, to aid them with their health care decisions.

This comprehensive program will improve the quality of our members' lives and help reduce unnecessary medical costs that arise when people with chronic conditions don't get the right care when they need it.

Together, we can improve the quality of medical care and help control health costs.

VEHI is confident that the initiatives discussed here will improve the health of its members and contribute to efforts to reduce costs. The Trust, in concert with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont, takes seriously its obligation to make sure its members get the health care they need at a cost they can afford. We look forward to serving and working with you in the months ahead to ensure that these initiatives are successful. ■

She honored educators with her example

Evanne Weirich, founder of Newark Balkan Chorus, dies

Vermont-NEA members in the Northeastern Vermont are mourning the loss of their colleague, Evanne Weirich, teacher at Newark School and founder of the Newark Balkan Chorus. Evanne, who was 50, died in January after a battle with cancer.

Evanne started the girls chorus -- an a cappella group -- in 1994 at Newark School. They met and practiced after school. The Chorus sang songs from Balkan countries and became nationally recognized after performing in 1997 on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion." They were featured in Yankee Magazine in 1998, sang at Carnegie Hall, and produced two CDs.

Evanne brought the Chorus to the Vermont-NEA Educators' Convention in 1998 and brought the General Assembly to its feet. It was a wonderful performance.

Evanne Weirich was a devoted teacher who enriched the lives of young people, brought national admiration to her community, and honored the teaching profession with her example.



The Newark Balkan Chorus in 2004

NEA's Read Across America: Here's how Vermont is celebrating

In exchange for a free red striped cat hat from Vermont-NEA, Association members posted on the NEA website their plans for celebrating Dr. Seuss' March 2 birthday and Read Across America.

Essex Junction

We are planning to invite local high school students to come to our elementary school to read their favorite Dr. Seuss books...

Sara Hennessey Desilets
Essex Elementary School

Milton

At Milton Elementary School we will be celebrating "Read Across America" and Dr. Seuss's birthday on March 2-4...

Jane Phillips
Milton Elementary School

Jericho

Our elementary school will host a schoolwide read-aloud with the local high school students reading to classes on March 2nd.

Betty Rendino
Jericho Elementary School

Fair Haven

My first-grade students will be learning about Dr. Seuss from various biographical sources...

Kathleen M. Foley
Fair Haven Grade School

Bennington

My sixth-grade students and I will make a pledge to share our reading with younger students...

Mrs. Donna L. Stone
Monument Elementary School

Pownal

We are planning a month-long celebration. Beginning March 2...

Becky Gijanto
Karel Holcomb
Donna Jones
Pownal Elementary School

More at www.nea.org/readacross

Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System plays fundamental role in retirement security

By Mark L. Hage, Director of Member Benefits

Vermont-NEA members, like workers everywhere, endured the financial consequences of the big stock market downturn in the late 1990s and the first few years of this new century. Several teachers have commented to me that the plunge in value of their private investments has forced them to postpone retirement or to give the option serious consideration. These comments and the general level of economic insecurity in our ranks has compelled me to write this article.

Until recently, some teachers were convinced that their retirement planning efforts should be grounded primarily in a 403(b) plan. The economic boom period that began in the '80s and ran for most of the '90s seemed to confirm this strategy. For its part, Vermont-NEA, through its 403(b) endorsed program, encouraged members to invest in a 403(b) plan, and we still stand behind that advice. Judicious, well-managed investments can provide a substantial measure of economic security after retirement. But this is not the entire story. Vermont-NEA has always stressed that teachers take into consideration the fundamental role of the Vermont State Teachers Retirement System when planning for retirement.

Traditional pension systems—and VSTRS is one kind—are conservatively managed, are guaranteed by private companies or by the government, and, most notably, pay out a fixed benefit. It became fashionable during the '80s and '90s for some workers and their employers, largely in the private sector, to abandon or modify these pension plans. Many corporations actually began scaling back on traditional pensions beginning in the 1970s. Their goal was to transfer as much risk as possible from company coffers to their employees through 401(k) plans. Where this approach was adopted, employers were released from the obligation of guaranteeing a fixed lifetime benefit—they only had to make retirement contributions—and employees were exhorted to take control of their money. While the market was soaring, this seemed to many to be wise. Some public sector employees grumbled loudly about the paucity of return from their traditional pension plans compared to what they were told or believed was possible in the private market via a 401(k) or 403(b).

Interestingly, while many workers in the private sector were persuaded (or pressured) to take their chances on a 401(k), top corporate executives often stayed with their guaranteed pensions. *The reason for this is simple: even when traditional pension plans take a hard hit as the market declines, the losses suffered by those plans generally don't af-*

fect guaranteed payments.

The case of Philip Fier and his spouse, retired teachers in New York, illuminates just how vital a traditional pension system can be. Fier taught for 32 years and earns an annual pension of \$47,000; his wife's annual pension is \$23,000. The Fiers aren't living like millionaires, but they also didn't have to amass a million dollars in private

VSTRS: Educators can count on it in the best and worst of times.

investments to earn their pensions. According to Financial Engines, Inc., a California firm that advises employees in 401(k)s, the Fiers would have needed *\$1.2 million dollars in a 401(k)* to buy an annuity equivalent in value to their pensions.

There is an important place in a retirement portfolio for 401(k) or 403(b) investments. Just the same, teachers should not overlook the contributions and oversight responsibilities of the VSTRS in providing for a secure retirement.

Financial planners generally advise workers to plan to receive during retirement 70% to 80% of their pre-retirement earnings. Teachers in the VSTRS who teach at least 30 years will receive between 42.5% and 50% of their pre-retirement earnings—and Social Security benefits added on top of that. *Pre-retirement earnings here means the average of the three highest consecutive salary years.*

Teachers enrolled in **Group C** of the VSTRS, which was established in 1991, contribute to the system 3.54% or so of their pay, in exchange for which they receive, during retirement, as much as 50% of their pre-retirement pay if they taught at least 30 years. Between 1981 and 1991, however, most teachers (including me) were in **Group B**, which required no contribution from teachers, but also required teachers to be active for 40 years before receiving 50% of their pre-retirement pay. Because of the up to 10 years during which most current teachers did not "contribute" to the retirement system, they will receive from the system less than 50% of pre-retirement pay, unless they teach as many as 37.5 years. Here is how that translates:

■ A current teacher who started teaching prior to 1981, became a Group B member and retires with 30 years service will receive about 42.5% of pre-retirement pay.

■ A current teacher who started teaching sometime between 1981 and 1991 was initially a Group B member. Upon retiring (now in Group C) with 30 years service, he or she will receive between 42.5% and 50% of pre-retirement pay.

■ A teacher who began his or

her teaching career since 1991 was never in Group B. Upon retiring in Group C with 30 years service, he or she will receive 50% of pre-retirement pay.

So, a current 30-year teacher who was in Group B until 1991 and whose three highest consecutive years of salary averaged \$50,000 will receive an annual pension benefit at 42.5% of

that amount, or \$21,250. If she teaches longer than that, the benefit will grow to 50% (of her three highest consecutive years of salary) by about the middle of her 38th year.

In addition to their VSTRS pension, Vermont teachers will receive Social Security benefits upon retirement. This is not the case for teachers in all states. SS benefits vary between workers, of course, but let's assume that the teacher in our example receives, conservatively, a Social Security benefit of about \$1,250 per month or \$15,000 per year. Her combined retirement income of \$36,250, therefore, will be 72.5% of her pre-retirement earnings. Each retirement benefit, by the way, increases with CPI (although the VSTRS increase is just ½ that amount).

For any teacher who began teaching more recently than 1991, upon retiring with 30 years service, using the same \$50,000 pre-retirement earnings level, he or she would get 50% of that, or \$25,000, which, when combined with the \$15,000 Social Security benefit, would bring his or her retirement income to \$40,000 or 80% of pre-retirement earnings.

Here are other points to keep in mind when assessing the value of the VSTRS to teachers in Vermont:

1. Given how the work experience/income formula in VSTRS is structured, collective bargaining is a powerful means to improve the retirement fortunes of teachers in the system. In other words, the more successful local Associations are at improving salaries and professional development benefits, the more they can count on VSTRS to satisfy their members' retirement needs.

As a former local leader and UniServ Director, I stressed the importance of professional development and column movement on the salary schedule, because it strengthened the profession, improved classroom instruction, elevated the living standards of teachers, and provided for a more stable workforce. But I also reminded people that the income formula in VSTRS yielded a higher benefit if teachers earned more for their labor, which boils down to bargaining good salaries, acquiring more education

credits during the course of a career to maximize the benefits provided by the salary schedule, and working long enough to take full advantage of what the retirement system offers to vested educators. These factors need to be articulated more frequently, especially to younger teachers who are not inclined to see the linkage immediately between professional development, column movement on the salary schedule and a VSTRS annuity, or, for that matter, between income growth and a future Social Security benefit.

2. The VSTRS also pays for 80% of single health insurance coverage for retired teachers. Clearly, this benefit needs to be improved, particularly in relation to spousal coverage. In fact, prior to July 2001, this benefit was just 50% of a single plan, and it was through the direct lobbying efforts of Vermont-NEA that it was increased to the present level. Your Association will continue to work to improve this benefit.

3. *Nobody on Wall Street is looking out for Vermont teachers.* But on the VSTRS Board of Directors, three Vermont-NEA members are making sure your retirement needs get top priority. They are: **Jay Kaplan**, a retired teacher from Essex Junction, **Jon Harris**, a teacher at Mount Mansfield High School, and **Joe Mackey**, a teacher at Essex Junction and the current chair of the Board. These gentlemen are knowledgeable and savvy, and they work hard to make sure VSTRS runs efficiently, that its investments are sound, and that the collective voice of Vermont educators is not lost in the din of a falling stock market.

Any pension system can be improved, of course. This is true of VSTRS. But at present, VSTRS provides most teachers with a respectable, if not wholly sufficient, guaranteed income and health insurance benefit after they retire. It won't make you rich, but that is not what it is designed to do. Yes, it is affected by declines in the stock market; but the system's conservative and diverse investment portfolio has made it possible to date to honor the commitments it has made to Vermont's teaching profession. To be fair, we recognize that it does not provide enough of a retirement benefit for all who need it—and that's one reason why Vermont teachers have the opportunity to invest in a 403(b) plan, on their own or in collaboration with our endorsed 403(b) providers, and why your State Association is working to make the system better. Just the same, VSTRS is well managed and fiscally transparent, accountable to the public and to the teaching profession. Most importantly, it has proven that educators can count on it in the best and worst of times. ■

Meet your Vermont-NEA candidates

MONTPELIER — With terms expiring at the end of June, several important positions within the Vermont-NEA governance structure are up for election this year, including:

✓ Vermont-NEA President, Vice President and Secretary Treasurer.

✓ Six seats on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors — each a three-year position. No candidate petitioned to appear on the ballot to represent Chittenden, Area 1 (Burlington, Colchester and Winooski). Write-ins are permitted.

✓ 15 State Delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, plus a Retired Delegate and a Student Delegate — all one-event positions.

The NEA RA meets in Los Angeles this year. Each delegate will receive a stipend to offset the cost of

travel and accommodations.

The election is held over a two-week period in April, with ballots mailed to the home of every Vermont-NEA member. Candidates who win election will assume their positions on July 1, 2005.

For Vermont-NEA President

Angelo J. Dorta is seeking a sixth two-year term as President of Vermont-NEA. He taught grades 3-4 at Founders School in Essex Town.

Statement

"...experience, professionalism, leadership...serving members"

It's a great honor to serve as Vermont-NEA President. Thank you for the opportunity and for your frequent words of encouragement and gratitude.

Members must elect the best prepared, hardest working candidate available. Your President must skillfully articulate traditional bread-and-butter union issues, while also advancing members' professional interests and strengthening public education.

Therefore, members deserve clear and specific leadership goals from responsible Association candidates. For me, Vermont-NEA must:

1. Seek teacher agency fee, boost membership, energize local affiliates for better advocacy
2. Promote professional salaries and high quality, affordable health insurance
3. Achieve a legislative plan/commitment for full teacher retirement system funding
4. Gain 100% ESP municipal employee pensions with improved retiree health insurance
5. Survey school working conditions to increase teacher/ESP professional support
6. Defend against false educator misconduct charges and irresponsible allegations
7. Oppose/modify specific No Child Left Behind provisions to best serve Vermont
8. Extend Association media to highlight successful Vermont



educators/public schools

9. Expand Association-sponsored professional development for new and veteran educators

10. Organize/help sustain NEA Student Program chapters at more Vermont colleges

11. Aid school anti-racism, equity, diversity, anti-harassment/anti-bullying efforts

12. Develop broader pro-public education coalitions and parent involvement

I still possess the passion and energy, commitment and knowledge, vision and judgement, communication skills, and new ideas for this work. That's why the Vermont ESP Association, UVM NEA Student Program, and several Retirement System Trustees have publicly endorsed me.

I also ask for your vote and strong recommendation to colleagues.

www.re-electAngelo.com

Bonnie P. Tuscany is seeking a first term as President of Vermont-NEA. She teaches fifth grade at Morrystown Elementary School.

Statement

"Is Bonnie Tuscany qualified to be Vermont-NEA President?"

The answer, clearly, is yes. My Association experience locally, statewide and nationally has prepared me. Combined with my professional experience, I am ready to represent all members of the Association.

Please visit my web site to view my credentials. My prime objective has always been to be a *voice for the members*.

It is imperative to be aware of the needs and concerns of our members throughout Vermont. All members -- ESP and teachers -- must be treated with *dignity and respect*.

Vermont is small and unique. I have a deep-rooted understanding of Vermont schools and communities.

I grew up in Chittenden and graduated from Winooski High School.

I started my teaching career in Westford and now I teach in Lamoille South, a district that includes Elmore's one room schoolhouse, Morrystown and Stowe.

As a VISMT Teacher Associate, I have visited and worked in schools in nearly every region of Vermont.

All this experience aids me in my quest to be a *clear voice to advocate for ESP and teachers*.

I have witnessed, firsthand:



■ How standards and NCLB affect teachers and ESP

■ Reactions of administrators to AYP status and test scores

■ Misperceptions by community members about ESEA and NCLB

■ New teachers on the job and mentoring

■ Educators waiting to hear their HQT status.

I intend to revise and institute formats that will ensure *more communication between members and Vermont-NEA*.

The voice of the members needs to be heard.

www.bonnieptuscany.com

For Vermont-NEA Secretary Treasurer

Jeff Isham, candidate for Vermont-NEA Secretary-Treasurer, is a special educator at Moretown Elementary School.

Statement

As a vocal advocate for greater participation and involvement by local Associations and by local leaders in Vermont-NEA decisions and policy matters, you will find me at most Vermont-NEA meetings around the state. My accomplishments include many facets of the Association rarely seen by the membership. I have led many of the internal changes of the Association. I have served on the VEHI Board of Directors since its inception. Other duties include being a member

of the Vermont-NEA Elections Committee, Executive Committee, Budget Committee and other assorted assignments. My energy and commitment to the Association continues to include professional development activities. I work with pre-service teachers in preparing them for the Praxis I exam. My first three-year term on the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators is coming to completion.

You can see that I don't just ask members to become involved; I myself continue to become involved in all of our Association's advocacies. Please vote for me, Jeff Isham, for another term as your Vermont-NEA Secretary -Treasurer.

Mail in your ballot

VOTE

April 4-18



ELECTIONS

For Vermont-NEA Vice President

Thomas J. Gallagher is seeking a second term as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. He is pre-technology instructor at Green Mountain Technology and Career Center in Hyde Park.

Statement

During my career in education, I have been fortunate to witness the unending work of many association members, officers and staff members. Their efforts have made our organization one that we all can be proud of. I have no doubt that this dedication will continue in the future.

In my last two years as Vice-President, I have been introduced to another aspect of our organization; the workings of the NEA. I have met and networked with Vice-Presidents from across the country, and have communicated about challenges we have faced. We all have problems, some may be different, but many are similar. The training and interaction I have experienced has been valuable for me as I continue to serve the members of Vermont-NEA.

Being a leader sometimes requires taking a position that might not be popular with some others. My deci-



sions have been based on my beliefs as to what would be best for our members. I have seen countless local members across the state who could be leaders at Vermont-NEA, if given the opportunity. This is one of the reasons I support term limits for officers and members of the Board of Directors.

I would like to continue to do the job I have started, and would appreciate your support. Please be sure to return your ballot in April when it arrives. In addition, ask your colleagues to send in theirs. Thank you.

Terri Vest is seeking a first term as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. She teaches High School English and Social Studies at Twinfield School in Plainfield.

Statement

I'm Terri Vest and I'd like to be your Vice President. I have experience at all levels of our organization: I have been a local president for eight years; I am currently on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors and have been both a member and chair of several Vermont-NEA committees, including chair of the Teaching/Learning Steering Committee; I have been a delegate to the national RA for eight years and am currently serving on the NEA Human and Civil Rights Committee and the NEA Boards of Teaching Advisory Committee.

Many issues face Vermont educators today. I presented a workshop at the Northeast Regional Leadership Conference in 2005 to inform members about some of these issues. I believe I have the knowledge and experience to help Vermont-NEA represent educators in these difficult times.



I have always been an advocate for ESP. I helped my own ESP at Twinfield School negotiate a new contract. I helped construct and implement workshops at the NEA ESP Conference and in Vermont to assist paraeducators in dealing with NCLB. I have served as a member of the Paraeducator Task Force and have worked with ESP in living wage campaigns.

PLEASE VOTE!!
IN-VEST IN YOUR FUTURE!!

For Vermont-NEA Board of Directors

Lisa Champagne

Lisa Champagne, candidate for Board Director representing Upper Valley, Area 2, is a special educator at Windsor High School.

Statement

It has been a privilege to meet and work with many dedicated members from the Upper Valley, from around the state, and from across the country during my first two terms on the Board of Directors. I have learned so much.

I incorporate that knowledge to serve to the best of my ability by listening; by making sure questions, concerns, and feedback are heard at board meetings; and by serving on several committees, including Resolutions (chair), Constitution and Bylaws, Policy Review, Health, and Executive Director Evaluation.

It would be an honor to continue to represent the members of Upper Valley, Area 2.

Ann Lavery

Ann Lavery, candidate for Board Director representing Northwestern Vermont, Area 2, is a fifth grade educator at Richford Elementary School.

Statement

What will be the role of public education in the future? What are the effects of NCLB? These two questions conjure up many ideas. Vermont-



NEA must shape and influence these ideas so the education community is best served. I'd like to be a part of those decisions as a member of the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors.

Susan Rusten

Sue Rusten, candidate for Board Director representing Southern Vermont, Area 1, is registrar/guidance secretary at Brattleboro Area Middle School.

Statement

In seeking re-election to the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors I renew my pledge to members to listen to your concerns, to represent your interests, and to communicate with you about relevant Board activities. As a regular member of our area bargaining council, I am available to all the local associations in Area 1 and see this as a valuable arena for discussions of issues that concern us all.

Because of tight financial circumstances, Vermont-NEA is facing tough decisions about limiting expenditures and will need to boost membership to avoid eliminating important member services. If re-elected, I will work hard to meet these challenges in a thoughtful and energetic manner - keeping in mind the concerns of both support staff and teachers. I welcome your comments and suggestions and can be reached at suerust@sover.net

Cherrie Torrey

Cherrie Torrey, candidate for Board Director representing Upper



Valley, Area 1, is a teacher at Dothan Brook School in Hartford.

Statement

I am a fourth grade teacher at the Dothan Brook School in the Hartford School District. I have been a member for the past 25 years. I have served in many roles at the local level and have been on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors for the past several years. I enjoy representing the Upper Valley at the state level. There are many issues facing education today. I urge local associations to become more active in order to keep up with our ever changing system.

I look forward to serving our area again. PLEASE VOTE!

Martha Allen

Martha Allen, candidate for Board Director representing the Northeast Kingdom, Area 2, is library media specialist for Canaan Memorial Schools.

Statement

I am a huge supporter of Vermont-NEA. After 27 years in the public education field, I have experienced the ups and downs of the educational system, and Vermont-NEA has always provided me with the expertise and perseverance needed to fight for children and public education. In the 1980's I served as secretary-treasurer when Maida Townsend was president. I have also served in many capacities locally. I am currently the president of the ENEA, and I sit on the negotiations team. I am active in the NEK regional council. My teaching experience includes



grade 1, grade 3, language arts in grades 7 & 8, and K-12 library media specialist. I believe that I can bring my Association and teaching experiences to the boardroom to work to make Vermont-NEA an even better organization. I look forward to representing the terrific educators from the Northeast Kingdom! Thank you for your support.

Dennis Ladd

Dennis Ladd, candidate for Board Director representing Southern Vermont, Area 3, teaches writing at Bellows Falls Middle School.

Statement

Having nearly completed my rookie term on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors, I feel that I have merely begun to fully understand the workings of the Board and the role that I am capable



of playing as an experienced member of that Board. The knowledge that I have gained as a member of both the finance and budget committee and the staff negotiations committee has made me realize how important it is to continue to be involved in my Association and to grapple at the table with the issues that we all face as educators in Vermont. I am especially proud to represent the southern part of our unique state with its complex issues. I hope that I have shown that I am capable of representing you well and that you feel I deserve your vote at election time.

*Running for Vermont-NEA Board :
Rich Wise, Chittenden, Area 2*

ELECTIONS

For NEA Representative Assembly Delegate from Vermont

The National Education Association's Annual Meeting convenes every July, this year in Los Angeles. The first two days are devoted to discussions, conferences, and exhibits, but the highlight is the four-day Representative Assembly or "RA." The RA is the Association's highest decision-making body. In addition, with over 9,000 delegates, the RA is also the

Eric Weiss **Lamoille North EA**

As a past member of the Vermont NEA Board of Directors and as a previous delegate to the NEA-RA, I feel well qualified for the position of Delegate to the NEA-RA. My commitment to Vermont-NEA is a matter of record based on my work in both of these state level elected positions. I have also served many years as a local officer (President, Negotiator, Treasurer, Secretary, Grievance Chair) and through those positions feel that I have a good understanding of the interrelationships among the various levels of the Association. I would be honored to represent you as a delegate to the 2005 NEA-RA.

Jeff Isham **Valley EA**

The NEA Representative Assembly is the single most important event for the association each year. The large gathering of NEA members from around the country decides the direction of the association. Every year issues concerning education and our Association are debated in a large Town Meeting like setting. As an experienced Delegate, I wish to return to the 2005 RA in Los Angeles and engage in the debate and decision making of this body of well-informed educators. Please remember to ask your delegates to discuss with you what transpires at the RA. Vote Jeff Isham for 2005 NEA RA Delegate!

Kim Kimler **Addison Central EA**

I teach kindergarten at Salisbury Community School in Addison County. I'm a hard worker. At this time, I'm president of a merged Association (six elementary schools) and the chief negotiator.

I went to the RA in 2003 and brought back ideas, issues and new perspectives. I want to learn more as I work, statewide and locally, on the issues we face, such as student performance, health care, membership, and the newly re-introduced statewide teachers' contract. I ask for your vote so I can attend this summer and bring back to Vermont new ideas and energy. I'd be delighted to serve.

Margery N. Ladd **Windham Northeast EA**

My numerous years of involvement in the Windham Northeast Education Association, serving in many capacities ranging from building rep to co-president, have prepared me to represent the educators of Vermont well at the NEA Representative assembly. My 30 years of teaching and learning experience make me extremely aware of the issues facing us as educators today. With public education constantly under attack, we must be prepared to voice our con-

cerns and uphold our ideals. I assure you that if you honor me with your support, I will do my best to make sure our issues as Vermont educators are heard.

Thomas J. Gallagher **Lamoille Union EA**

I have attended eleven Representative Assemblies in the past, and still marvel at the operation of our national organization. The RA sets the policies that the NEA will follow. I have been able to use contacts that I have made during the years to present issues that are important to Vermont educators. I hope that with your vote, you will allow me to represent you again in 2005. Thank you.

Rose Wenzel **Addison Northwest TA** **Vergennes UES Parapro EA**

I am a proactive leader of Vermont-NEA and am pleased to have a unique job in education. I work as 50% paraeducator and 50% classroom teacher. This alone gives me opportunity to realize the many needs of Vermont educators. I would like to attend the RA to participate in the debate and conversation at the national level. I will advocate making certain support staff and teacher concerns are heard at the 2005 Representative Assembly. I have worked hard in Vermont raising awareness of concerns and will do so in Los Angeles. It would be a privilege to represent Vermont-NEA!

Lisa Champagne **Windsor Southeast EA**

I have been a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly since 1996. I also serve as Vermont's elected representative on the NEA Resolutions Committee. I will use my experience and knowledge to represent Vermont during this challenging time in public education. It would be an honor to again serve you.

Alison Sylvester **Green Mountain NEA**

I've been honored to serve you as a Vermont delegate to the Representative Assembly for the past 4 years. I've been an active member of Vermont-NEA as both a teacher and student. I believe it is essential for new members to actively participate in our Association. As a delegate I have been able to represent the needs and concerns of Vermont teachers. My experience has enabled me to advocate for Vermont's unique needs and goals. I have also been able to see and participate in the NEA's decision-making process first hand. I would greatly appreciate your continued support and vote.

Martha Allen **Essex North EA**

The last few years have demonstrated to me that we need to work harder than ever to keep our public

schools alive. The current administration is not as education-friendly as it said it would be. If elected as a delegate to the Representative Assembly, I will vote for new business items and resolutions that show our resolve to keep public education available for all of the children in the United States. I will also participate in the Peace and Justice Caucus, in hopes of promoting a peaceful resolution to the situation in Iraq. Thank you for your support.

RA Delegates debate issues that impact American public education, elect top officers, and set policy for our 2.7 million-member Association. Vermont sends 15 elected delegates, plus the state president, student delegates and a retired delegate.

Natasha Chiuchiolo
Washington South EA

I am a third grade teacher in my second year at Northfield Elementary. Before that, I taught in Pittsburgh. I serve as the building rep for my local, WSEA. Besides teaching, I am involved in the World of Difference program which trains schools on issues of diversity.

I have attended the Minority Teachers Leadership and Women's Leadership programs offered by NEA.

Along with teaching third grade, I also teach an African Studies class at SUNY Plattsburgh.

My experience in diversity issues, as well as my various teaching experiences makes me an excellent delegate to represent Vermont at the national conference.

Marie Benway **Windham Northeast EA**

I am running again for Representative Assembly and ask for your vote. Last year, I had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. to meet with other paraeducators from other states. I learned that they face the same things we do, especially the No Child Left Behind act. It was a great learning experience and I would like to go back again to continue to have a strong voice for paraeducators.

Dennis M. Ladd **Windham Northeast EA**

It would be my pleasure and honor to represent Vermont-NEA members as a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. I believe that my many years of service in my local Association, as well as my current Board of Directors position have prepared me well to take on this new challenge. I am proud of my 30 years of service to the children of the state of Vermont and pledge to do my best to represent all Vermont educators and our concerns, including NCLB, retirement, new teacher preparation and health care. I'd greatly appreciate your support.

Other RA candidates:
Jay Burnell, Southwest Vermont EA
Sally Conway, Addison NW TA
Linda Howard, Twinfield Staff A
Terri Vest, Twinfield EA
Cynthia Knowles, Chester EA
Bonnie Tuscany, Morristown EA

Candidates for NEA RA **Retired Delegate**

Bob Chaffee is running for Retired Delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. He is retired from South Burlington after a 34-year teaching career.

Statement

Having attended 16 Representative Assemblies as South Burlington Delegate, and having served as member of the NEA Resolutions Committee, Board Director, and Chair of the Constitution Bylaws and Rules Committee, I feel particularly qualified to represent the retired members, especially since I have kept current with Vermont-NEA while serving as RA Parliamentarian.

John Goodrich is running for Retired Delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. He is retired from Montpelier after a 31-year teaching career.

Statement

I retired from teaching in the Montpelier Schools in 2001 after 29 years there and two years teaching in Indiana Schools. I have since busied myself in the Alburg and North Hero Schools as a teaching assistant, board member, mentor, yearbook volunteer and part-time teacher. I have remained an active member in Vermont-NEA after serving as Building Representative, Negotiator, Grievance Chair and events volunteer from 1972 to 2001. I am keenly aware of current issues facing retired and active teachers and wish to lend my voice to their interests.

Jay Kaplan is running for Retired Delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. He is retired from Essex Junction after a 30-year teaching career.

Statement

For the past 6 years I have had the honor of representing retired teachers at the Representative Assembly. As many of you know I have been on the state retirement board for the past 16 years. I have used my time at the RA to strengthen our retirement security. I have successfully introduced legislative items and numerous new business items that have helped to insure and protect retirement benefits. I have some new business items to introduce this year that will strengthen retirement benefits. Please let me have the honor of representing you again.

LETTERS

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

Cast a vote for Tom Gallagher

It is with pleasure that I write this letter of support for Tom Gallagher.

Tom's openness and willingness to represent all members speaks for itself. Tom has served as Vice President for the last one and a half years. Tom has seen the time as a learning experience. He has attended National meetings and met many new colleagues, counterparts. It is important to allow Tom to continue his work.

Tom has been a strong vocal union member for many years. Some of the time has been teaching and some during his bus driving years. He never let his drive and commitment to the union falter. He is fully aware of the union's importance. It needs to advocate for members' rights and working conditions. Tom will always be an outspoken advocate.

Vermont NEA needs voices from the people who are in the buildings each day facing the demands of public education. Tom is a voice for the members.

Please remember to vote in April and cast a vote for Tom Gallagher, Vice President of Vermont-NEA.

Bonnie P. Tuscany
Morristown EA

I am happy to support Angelo

I support Angelo Dorta for re-election as Vermont-NEA President. Many times when I have been to a conference, either statewide or national, conversation about our state Presidents comes up. In a large state, it seems to be hard to get to know the President. In a smaller state, the President may even know the person's name and Association and can directly give the information and assistance needed.

I have always found that true with Angelo. He always keeps us informed, as far as I can tell, and includes us in his missions so we may choose to help. For instance, it was great to be a part of getting the 40% increase in NEA Small States Grant for Vermont-NEA on the agenda when we were at the NEA Northeast Regional Conference last January and helping this item to be pushed through.

For myself and my Local Association, I know I can call him up, and he will get back to me in a timely fashion, if not with the answer, a solution with a direction towards the answer. He always tries to look out for Teachers and ESPs.

I am happy to support Angelo for another term!

Cynthia Knowles
Chester EA

It's time for a change

I urge you to support Bonnie Tuscany in this year's election for Vermont-NEA president. I have worked with Bonnie on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors and have seen firsthand her determination, work ethic, and accessibility. She has worked countless hours, attended innumerable meetings, and pursued many issues on behalf of Vermont-NEA members. She is available, has a genuine listening ear, and will work hard for the benefit of all.

She is very much in touch with the circumstances and concerns of those in the trenches, as only someone recently involved in a classroom can be. I left classroom teaching in 2002 and, even though I still work part time in education, I am aware of a different perspective on the day-to-day reality of the job. Bonnie combines the classroom perspective with extensive Board experience.

"It's time for a change" is an oft-repeated campaign slogan, but it has an element of truth that's beneficial for an organization. In order for an organization to remain current and vital, there should

be a continuous change in leadership at the top, even if that leadership has been effective. A change in leadership brings new purpose and priorities, along with new energy and focus.

Lucinda Clark
Proctor EA - Retired

A vote for Angelo is a vote for your own retirement interests

I have been a Trustee on the Retirement Board for the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System for 16 years. My Trustee colleagues and I take very seriously our responsibility to make the right investment decisions for Vermont's teachers. In the upcoming election for Vermont-NEA President, I support Angelo Dorta.

As a classroom teacher himself for more than 20 years, Angelo understands the top importance of retirement issues for Vermont-NEA members. He attends many of our meetings, despite difficult worktime constraints. He helps ensure that Vermont-NEA and Board Trustees consult together as closely as possible, without violating our distinct roles and responsibilities, to represent teachers' retirement interests. Retirement System gains — such as increases in the retiree health benefit and allowable yearly income limits — have occurred during his tenure.

Angelo has helped me at NEA's annual meetings to gain national support for Association actions strengthening defined benefit teacher pension systems and fighting off privatization and defined contribution schemes. He understands the chronic underfunding of the Retirement System by Vermont's Governors and Legislatures. He helps publicize the seriousness of the underfunding and wants to assist with possible solutions.

A vote for Angelo is a vote for your own teacher retirement interests.

Jay Kaplan
Essex Junction EA - Retired
VT State Teachers Retirement Board

Angelo cares deeply

It is with pleasure that I write this letter in support of Angelo Dorta for Vermont-NEA President. As co-advisors to the South Burlington High School Chapter of Future Educators of America, we have benefited from Angelo's continuing support. Three years ago when we started the Chapter, Angelo provided direction and support for our start-up. In the three years since its inception, Angelo has been an avid supporter of our organization. He has attended every member induction ceremony held at the University of Vermont and has provided us with resources in order to grow our organization. Angelo cares deeply about current and future teachers. We are happy to endorse his candidacy.

Miki H. Grady
Thomas R. Stowell
South Burlington EA

Please avoid negative campaigning

Vermont-NEA's election for President normally focuses on important issues for members. Customarily, it's civil and respectful of candidates and Vermont-NEA employees. I openly ask Bonnie and her advisors and public supporters to also accept and observe those traditions.

One recent letter alleged that "it sometimes seems Wheelock Street operates above and around classroom teachers and the local branches." Several people at Vermont-NEA were rightly offended by the charge. Everyone at Vermont-NEA, including me, works diligently to know and satisfy the needs and wants of members and to strengthen our local affiliates.

Moreover, not one Association decision or example of such behavior was cited. The writer simply leveled an unsubstantiated charge. Similar letters im-

plying or stating that I'm "so removed" and can "lose sight" of members' well-being also offer no evidence, just empty allegations.

Finally, please stop demeaning my past service. My 22 years of successful teaching so far, plus my role in 10 years of Vermont-NEA accomplishments, constitutes a substantial public education commitment and career. They deserve respect. I may not be in the classroom right now, but the classroom still is in me.

Please be responsible, avoid additional negative campaigning, and stay with issues. Vermont-NEA members want better.

Angelo Dorta
Vermont-NEA President

Bonnie has worked diligently

I am writing in support of Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for President of Vermont-NEA. I have worked with Bonnie for the past 20 years as a classroom teacher at Morristown Elementary School. I have known Bonnie to be a creative and caring teacher. She has been a strong leader in our school, serving as President and Vice President of our local association and serving as a member of our Leadership Team. Bonnie has worked diligently as a teacher leader on both the math and science curriculum committees, helping our school to create engaging, standards-based programs for our students.

Bonnie has not only worked hard at serving the students and teachers of our school, she has also found time to serve Vermont Educators in many capacities as a former Vermont-NEA Vice President and committee member. She is an experienced and knowledgeable leader, and most importantly, understands the demands of being a classroom teacher.

I encourage you to vote for Bonnie Tuscany as Vermont-NEA President.

Chantal Bingnot
Morristown EA

Asking for your vote

I am asking for your vote to represent Vermont at the NEA Representative Assembly. I currently teach grade 3 at Vergennes Union Elementary School, but prior to that was an Instructional Assistant, giving me at least 15 years in public education. For much of that time I have been a Vermont-NEA member.

Currently, I am the Vice President of the Addison Northwest Teachers Association. I have also been a negotiator for the Vergennes Union Elementary School support staff contract. I have attended several of the summer leadership trainings that Vermont-NEA has offered in the past.

I would like the opportunity to participate in discussions concerning Education today. I will use my knowledge and experience to ensure that issues concerning Vermont schools are heard. It would be an honor to represent Vermont at the National Assembly! Thank you for your consideration!

Sally Conway
Addison Northwest TA

Experience and dedication will make Bonnie an excellent president

I support Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for President of Vermont-NEA. Bonnie and I have taught together at Morristown Elementary School for past 19 years. During that time she has been our school's Teacher of the Year. She took part in a Star Schools grant, which brought many technological advances to our school. She was a VISMT Associate for two years (now Vermont Institutes). In 1991 she became an Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow teacher. For several years she has been teaching graduate courses as an adjunct professor at UVM. Most recently, she has been teaching a math and science methods course at Johnson

State College for graduate-level pre-service teachers.

Bonnie's other significant contribution to our district has been her work as a negotiator. She has always put forward constructive and realistic ideas which meet the needs of all sides. As a result, we have had years of peaceful and speedy negotiations. Bonnie has devoted endless hours as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. She has just finished another successful negotiation which has resulted in a contract which both sides see as fair and equitable.

Her experience and dedication will make her an excellent Vermont-NEA President. I strongly urge you to give her your vote.

Marilyn May
Morristown EA

Support Terri Vest for VP

I am writing today in support of Terri Vest as Vice President of our association. I have worked with Terri on the Vermont-NEA Human and Civil Rights Committee and am impressed with her clear thinking and strong commitment to the organization. Terri has been involved for a number of years at the local, state, and national level. As both an active member of the Association and a National Board Certified educator, Terri understands the issues facing current educators and has considerable energy and enthusiasm to bring to finding solutions.

Mary Ann Barnes
Colchester EA

Bonnie deserves support

I am writing a letter of support for Bonnie Tuscany for the presidency of the Vermont-NEA. I have worked with Bonnie for the past five years at Morristown Elementary School in Morrisville, Vermont.

Being a newer teacher to the field, I have looked to Bonnie often as a veteran and mentor teacher at my school. She has always been a huge support to our faculty as a whole as well as to the Morristown Educator's Association. Her understanding of education and the individual needs of students as well as teachers has encouraged me to continue in the field, knowing that I am making a difference.

Bonnie's experiences with the Vermont-NEA coupled with her over 30 years in the field have allowed her to better understand the true needs of teachers. She has been an active member in her local association as well as with the Vermont-NEA. Her knowledge and skills in the area of negotiating have proven beneficial to all of the teachers at Morristown Elementary School.

I can't think of a better candidate to represent all teachers from the state of Vermont. As the election nears, I will be wishing Bonnie all of the luck and support she deserves.

Stephanie Baranyay, M.Ed.
Morristown EA

Make Bonnie your next president

I am writing in support of Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for President of Vermont-NEA. I first met Bonnie when I joined the Board of Directors of Vermont-NEA in 1999. She was very helpful to me in my new role as a board member.

I believe Bonnie has the qualities necessary to lead our association. Her tenure as vice-president has given her the knowledge and insight into the workings of this association. Her negotiation experience is an invaluable asset. Her dedication to the profession and to Vermont-NEA is evident in all that she does. What impresses me most about Bonnie, though, is her organizational skills and her ability to get things done efficiently and quickly.

Please make Bonnie Tuscany your next Vermont-NEA president.

Pat Vana
North Country Union EA

LETTERS

Vote for Tom Gallagher

Please support Vice President Tom Gallagher in his bid for reelection. Tom has long been a committed and active supporter of teachers and education support personnel alike. He has great experience in our organization on the local, state and national level. Tom's experience is what we want working for us for at least another two years. Please join me in voting for Tom Gallagher for Vice President of Vermont-NEA.

Terri Szymanski
Green Mountain NEA

I am writing in support of Bonnie Tuscany as president of Vermont-NEA. I have known Bonnie since 1982 as a colleague and now as the teacher of my youngest daughter.

Bonnie strives to understand the position of both teacher and administration. She has many years of experience as a teacher and head negotiator for MEA (Morristown Educators Association). This experience guides her beliefs, but she is always open to hearing new ideas and concerns.

Bonnie understands the challenges that face educators today and will continue to listen and work with others to be an active voice for her colleagues around Vermont.

Sara Pennock
Morristown EA

Angelo has promoted respect

Angelo Dorta has the energy, drive and vision to carry the Vermont-NEA well through another tenure as President. I first worked with Angelo at Founders School in Essex. Angelo was a 3-4 multi-age teacher. His strong work ethic and knowledge of children and their needs created an enriching experience for his students. As a fellow staff member at that time, I worked with him on many joint projects. Angelo's approach to problem-solving, as well as details and collaboration was extreme helpful in accomplishing the projects.

Since then I have seen Angelo's professionalism and true sense of caring for others' wellbeing carry over into his work as the president of the Vermont-NEA. His support for Vermont educators, their rights, and educational responsibilities is reflected in his many accomplishments over his past terms. He has especially promoted respect for our profession, gains towards affordable health insurance and related issues, as well as promoting a realistic approach to the demands for better education for all by the current governmental policies.

Angelo has the steadfast attitude and approach to support what the association needs.

Georgette Huffman
BFA-Fairfax EA

Bonnie is a strong, decisive leader

I am writing to support Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for Vermont-NEA president. I know Bonnie through colleagues at the Vermont Mathematics Initiative. She is a strong, decisive leader that will build solid working relationships with board, staff and members.

Bonnie will build capacity for leadership in Vermont-NEA by both recognizing existing leaders and encouraging new leadership. Bonnie promises to be a hands-on president who understands the pressures and responsibilities of educators. She has pledged to visit schools around the state to understand the working conditions in respective schools.

Bonnie is a hard worker with the skills necessary to lead us forward. As president, Bonnie will be an outstanding representative for the members of Vermont-NEA.

Linda Gilbert
Hartford EA

Changing the leadership of Vermont-

NEA at this time would be unwise

Every democratically oriented organization needs to make changes to remain healthy and relevant. Decisions to change are governed by timing and issues. The issues proposed by the current political leaders of our nation and Vermont dictate that changing the leadership of Vermont-NEA at this time would be unwise.

President Angelo Dorta has been with us for several years. He is an effective, and able leader. He understands the process and is willing to speak out in print, electronically, and be a constant, continuing force in the State Legislature. Also, he does the tedious bit well, one-on-one, local-by-local, personal appearance, to say, "Hi!"

Angelo has shown me that he has courage. When he takes a position, he researches it, and presents it intelligently. Angelo has my vote.

Arnold Shields
Orange East EA

Bonnie will bring a fresh outlook

I am proud to write this letter of support for Bonnie Tuscany for President of Vermont-NEA. I have had the pleasure of knowing Bonnie for the past 10 years and have attended many NEA functions where Bonnie has spoken.

Bonnie is extremely knowledgeable of what goes on in the classroom on a day to day basis. This is a very important fact to consider especially in today's times when there are so many changes. Bonnie's goal is to be a "highly visible" President, which is something that we as educators need. We need to know and be reminded that our leaders are aware of what goes on each and every day, not just when a problem arises.

Change is a positive thing most of the time. In this case, Bonnie Tuscany becoming President of Vermont-NEA is a VERY POSITIVE thing. Bonnie will be good for Vermont-NEA!! She will bring a fresh outlook to the office of President and will do the best job that she can.

I urge all Para educators and support staff to join me in voting for Bonnie Tuscany for President of Vermont-NEA!!!! You'll be glad you did!!!

Shelley W. Jones
Lamoille Union EA

Tom Gallagher is the right choice

I endorse Tom Gallagher in his bid for a second term as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. I have had the privilege of working with Tom for the past eight years. I have also seen how his knowledge of the Association has helped many members get the answers to questions they have, as well as the direction they need to be successful in their own local association.

Tom is a very visible Vice President and is extremely aware of what we all face in the classroom everyday. He gives equal time to the Paraeducators and we are treated as equals, which is very important to us. No matter how busy he is, Tom will always find time to get an answer or help solve a problem.

I am proud and it is with great honor that I support Tom Gallagher for a second term as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. As a member of Vermont-NEA, I urge all Paraeducators to join me in supporting Tom Gallagher. He is the right choice, the only choice!!!!!!

Cheryl A. Mercia
Lamoille Union EA

Vote for Bonnie

I am writing this letter in support of Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for President. I have known Bonnie for over 25 years. During that time I have witnessed her dedication to children and their personal and academic achievement. She has advocated for academic programs that enhance success for all.

Her union commitment during that

time has been strong and she has led the local association to ongoing successful negotiations for the past fifteen years. Her ongoing dialogue with administration at the local level and her ability to know the community at large and their concerns has allowed an atmosphere of respect for the educational professionals to evolve both in the community at large and in the school environment. Her work with Vermont NEA has always been one of ongoing commitment and professionalism. These skills that have been exhibited over and over are what Vermont NEA needs at this time. I encourage you to vote for Bonnie and the skills she brings to this organization.

Dot Reeve
Morristown EA

Angelo gives a lot of himself

I have known Angelo Dorta for a long time and I am very glad that he is our State Association president. Angelo is a professional in every aspect of the word and his priorities start with the most important people in our profession: children. Angelo gives a lot of himself for the sake of children. He always makes time to speak with teachers/members, and is an excellent communicator.

I will be voting for Angelo Dorta this election.

Tom Roberge
Barre EA

Join me in supporting Bonnie Tuscany

Bonnie Tuscany is a strong leader for Vermont teachers. I support Bonnie in her run for president of Vermont-NEA. Her active involvement and leadership will lead us forward. During her 30 years of teaching at Morristown Elementary School, Bonnie has been an active leader in the Association.

Bonnie has been involved on the national, state, and local level. She currently serves on the Vermont board and as a national delegate. She was vice president of Vermont-NEA for five years and a member of the executive committee. She has also served at the local level as building representative, treasurer, vice president for four years, president for four years, and has been the chief negotiator for fourteen years which includes their agreement for the next three years.

Bonnie has been a leader in Vermont-NEA while teaching. She knows what demands are placed on teachers today. Her current teaching experience, understanding of economic and budget issues, along with her leadership role in the association gives her a clear picture of educators' needs. Join me in supporting Bonnie Tuscany for President of Vermont-NEA.

James Forde
Stowe TA

Bonnie will make an ideal leader

In this letter of support for Bonnie Tuscany I am pleased to highlight qualities which will make Bonnie an ideal leader for Vermont-NEA. I have worked with Bonnie at Morristown Elementary School for over 20 years. The qualities that she demonstrates daily through respectful interactions with students and adults are those that will serve Vermont-NEA well.

Members of our local organization rely on Bonnie when they have questions about the contract or state mandates and regulations. She has a wonderful way of presenting information clearly and helping people understand the details. Bonnie facilitates a good working relationship between faculty and administration and as the Vermont-NEA leader she would skillfully weave relationships among people.

As a very experienced and skilled classroom teacher, Bonnie understands how professional development can

make a difference in the classroom. She is a strong advocate for teachers and educational support staff in every area. Bonnie brings clarity to difficult situations in a calm and purposeful manner.

We have an opportunity to elect a strong, committed leader who truly understands the important issues. We can only move forward with Bonnie as our president. I urge you to support Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President

Linda Hunter
Morristown EA

Angelo has marched for a livable wage

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for another term for Angelo Dorta. I have been an ESP member since 1993, and have seen huge improvements in the NEA's commitment to support staff concerns.

I know that the push to assess proportional dues for ESPs has made a difference, not only in the increase in support staff membership, but in the feeling that we are important to the Association. I have long been aware that Angelo is a leader in these concerns, and I have been one of the ESP's with whom Angelo has marched for a livable wage. Angelo truly "gets" what it is like for us, and has worked hard to help us improve our working lives.

Please think about this when you cast your ballot for Angelo Dorta.

Mary Lehner
Harwood Union EA Support Staff Unit

Angelo has worked tirelessly

It is with pleasure that I write this letter, endorsing Angelo Dorta's candidacy for the presidency of Vermont-NEA.

Throughout the ten years that Angelo has served as our President, he has worked tirelessly as an advocate for Vermont's students, support staff, and teachers. I'd like to specifically mention a few of his accomplishments that I have either benefited from and/or have been impressed with:

Professional Development. The Mentor Training/PATHWISE Induction Program was brought to our state a few years ago with Vermont-NEA as one of its co-sponsors. Angelo attended parts of many of the days of the weeklong training, and he has continued to be a strong supporter of this tool for inducting our new teachers into the profession and supporting them through their first few years.

He has started the "I Can Do It!" training for new teachers and has helped to provide training to prepare for the PRAXIS II Teacher Test and PARAPRO ESP Test.

Competitive teacher salaries, fair benefits, and ESP Livable Wage statewide campaigns

Please join me in voting for Angelo Dorta to serve another term as our Vermont-NEA President. His experience, commitment, and leadership abilities will continue to serve us well.

Nancy Perkins
Blue Mountain EA

Angelo has experience

Please join me in supporting Angelo Dorta in his continued role as President of the Vermont-NEA. As a long time member of the Vermont-NEA and the Colchester Education Association and past co-president of our local association, I have always been impressed with Angelo's leadership qualities. Angelo has shown that he has the experience, knowledge, and communication skills that are necessary to advance the interests of the members of the association as well as strengthen public education in our state.

In my opinion, one of Angelo's many strengths is his knowledge of the issues that affect not only statewide issues, but also local concerns. I appreciate the hard work and leadership that Angelo has

more...

NEA Director's Report

At the February NEA Board of Directors meeting, the Board voted in favor of a by-law amendment which will go to the Representative Assembly for approval this summer. Currently the standards of affiliation with NEA include 8-11b "The affiliate shall conduct elections with open nominations and a secret ballot." This bylaw applies to all states currently affiliated with NEA and merged NEA/AFT affiliates. The bylaw proposal allows the Executive Committee to waive this requirement for NEA-NY due to its membership size in relationship to AFT. (NYSUT(AFT) currently has 500,000 members and NEA-NY has 40,000.) The bylaw also allows local affiliates the option of voting by secret ballot.

Discussions on Capitol Hill focused on President Bush's Budget and proposed existing social security changes. The President's budget calls for the termination of 48 "ineffective" programs. Some of these programs include Arts Education, Educational Technology Grants, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, the National Writing Project, Teacher Quality Enhancement, TRIO Upward Bound, Federal Perkins Loans Cancellations as well as several Vocational and Tech Prep grants. The termination of the 48 programs will free up \$4.3 billion dollars for reallocation to more effective and higher priority activities. According to the rating sheet, provided to a director from Senator Kennedy's office, there were only two effective programs: the National Center on Education Statistics and National Assessment. Our senatorial staff members believe that there will be some restoration of funds for Career and Technical Programs but the degree of restoration is questionable.

NEA lobbyists are urging congressmen to oppose privatization of social security and mandatory coverage. Mandy Plucker, student NEA leader, urged us to spread the word among student NEA members and younger teachers who may be thinking that social security won't be there for them, so privatization sounds like something is better than nothing. However, in a volatile market that something could be quickly lost. It's better to strengthen the current system.

Your concerns can be directed to Joyce Sullivan via e-mail at jas3@sover.net. Legislative concerns should be directly expressed via e-mail to Senators Leahy and Jeffords and Congressman Sanders.

given to promoting professional salaries and benefits as well as being a public spokesperson for the impact of educational issues affecting schools in Vermont, such as the No Child Left Behind Act.

I look forward to having Angelo Dorta serve as president of the Vermont-NEA for another term!

Peggy Rogers
Colchester EA

Angelo hasn't been afraid to speak up
Angelo Dorta has my endorsement for the upcoming election for President of Vermont-NEA.

The issues beyond the bread and butter type that most concern me—human rights, health care finance reform, and international solidarity with teachers—are what Angelo has always supported.

As a president he has always been more than accessible. He even comes after me to follow up on the calls I have made to him. In an organization like ours a president could make lip service to issues that people like me want him to support. Angelo hasn't been afraid to speak up for those who don't have a voice or who feel powerless. He has been a constant encourager to me and others working on these difficult problems.

Please vote for Angelo Dorta for President!

Tom Luce
Barre EA

Angelo displays the tenacity, intelligence, and professionalism required

I wholeheartedly support Angelo Dorta's bid for re-election to another two-year term as Vermont-NEA President. Angelo has served us well as our primary advocate. We are very fortunate to have as our leader a person who so ably articulates the needs of the membership and displays the tenacity, intelligence, and professionalism required to address our concerns.

Angelo has developed through his experiences at the local, state, and national levels, the knowledge and ability required, meeting the challenges put before him. Angelo has worked as a leader with vision, promoting the correction of inconsistencies involving No Child Left Behind, and addressing concerns such as school choice, teacher misconduct, and school safety. He stands up for our professional and economic interests and the important role of public education. Angelo has built strong relationships that promote respect for our profession. I admire Angelo's ability to encourage, support, and represent the membership so well. It is important to remember that Vermont-NEA has experienced many accomplishments under Angelo's watch.

We are fortunate to have such a caring, dedicated person serve as our Vermont-NEA President. There is more that needs to be done. Please join me in supporting Angelo Dorta for Vermont NEA President.

Deb Gurwicz
South Burlington EA

Bonnie = Vision & Experience

I'm writing to endorse Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President. I've known Bonnie for many years, since being a student at Morrystown Elementary School. Now, as a second-year teacher in the same school, I consistently see Bonnie's commitment to her students, her colleagues, and her profession.

Bonnie will approach the office of Vermont-NEA President with a fresh vision. Not, however, one that is radical and risky, but one that is soundly backed by 30+ years of classroom experience. Combine her vision and experience with her strong leadership skills, resourcefulness, and dedication, and you have a truly strong candidate who deserves a chance to

bring about positive change.

I fully believe that Bonnie Tuscany is the best choice for Vermont-NEA members. You will not be disappointed with the energy she brings to the office. As she has done locally and in other Vermont-NEA capacities through the years, she will dedicate herself to make sure that Vermont educators are treated fairly and that our needs are met.

Please cast your Vermont-NEA President vote for Bonnie P. Tuscany!

Shaun Bryer
Morrystown EA

Terri Vest for Vice President

I am honored to enthusiastically endorse the candidacy of Terri Vest as Vice President of Vermont-NEA. Terri is a passionately committed professional who brings a wealth of experience and expertise to our organization. Terri's service is impressive. As member of the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors, Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee, and past Co-Chair of the Human and Civil Rights Committee she has worked tirelessly for all in our profession.

Of particular note is her advocacy for paraeducators as a co-designer and trainer for portfolio development. On the national front, Terri has represented Vermont in the NEA Representative Assembly for the past eight years, and has served as a member of the Teaching/Learning Steering Committee. Terri is truly a dedicated and accomplished educator who will help to navigate the waters of professional integrity with passion and conviction.

Maggie Eaton
Washington Central TA

Bonnie has more experience in the current realities

I am writing this letter to urge you to support the candidacy of Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President.

I have had the pleasure of working with Bonnie the last eight years at Morrystown Elementary School and respect her as an educator and teacher leader. Bonnie has held several important posts within our local union, such as lead negotiator and MEA President, as well as state union posts, such as Vice President and NEA Delegate. Bonnie has the experience necessary to be our Vermont-NEA President. The type of experience that I think is important in an NEA President is sharing the experience of his or her constituents. Bonnie knows first hand what it is like to be a current classroom teacher and has seen the impact of changes in education.

I have been reading the letters in our Vermont-NEA newsletter supporting Angelo Dorta and I agree that he has tremendous experience. So does Bonnie. To me, Bonnie has more experience in the current realities of being a teacher. We need fresh ideas and a new voice! Please support Bonnie Tuscany as our next Vermont-NEA President.

Robb Wells
Morrystown EA

Angelo is consistently responsive

Angelo has been by "our side" as school nurses worked for the past 2 years with Commissioner Cate, the State Standards Board and the Board of Education to ensure quality health services for ALL of Vermont's schools. He is consistently responsive to phone calls and requests for guidance.

Over the seven years I have known him his grasp of issues at the local, state and national levels has proven to be strong, intelligent and in depth. Angelo's advocacy for the school professionals that work to "grow" our children strong in mind and body is thoughtful and clear. We need him for another two years to help us survive "No Child Left Behind" and to move us forward in the world of

public education.

Sharonlee Trefry RN, NCSN
Addison Northeast EA

Bonnie's experience and dedication will benefit all

I am writing to express my sincere support of Bonnie Tuscany's candidacy for President of Vermont-NEA. Bonnie and I have been colleagues in the Morrystown School District for the past 15 years. Her total commitment to our association as chief negotiator for 12 years has been obvious to all of us who have benefited from her skills and efforts. Bonnie's understanding of local, state and national issues make her the clear choice for this office.

With 27 years in the classroom, Bonnie has a deep and heartfelt understanding of what members care about. She has a genuine love, commitment, and respect for public education, teachers and support personnel. Bonnie's experience and dedication will benefit all members. I encourage you to vote for Bonnie as Vermont-NEA president.

Linda M. Brady
Morrystown EA

Bonnie isn't afraid to persist

Bonnie Tuscany has been a long-time active member of Vermont-NEA, serving on the Board since 1992. I've known her since 1997 when I first joined the Board and she was vice-president of Vermont-NEA. I have seen her conduct meetings in the absence of the president in a balanced, even manner, as well as ask the right questions at the right time. She is caring, sensitive, and even-handed, but isn't afraid to persist and pin down issues, especially those pertaining to the organization's finances.

Bonnie has been active in the organization on the local and national level as well, serving as her local's president, negotiator, and building rep. She's frequently attended the National RA as well. She keeps her ears open and is well-informed about legislative issues in the Vermont State House.

Bonnie Tuscany has earned our support.

Diane Alberts
Proctor EA

Angelo advocates for ESPs

I am writing in support of Angelo Dorta's candidacy for re-election as President of Vermont-NEA.

In the years that I have known Angelo he has been supportive of ESP and the issues that face ESP today. Angelo advocates for ESPs to have a livable wage, affordable health insurance and a retirement benefit. I believe he understands the challenges we face and is willing to advocate for all ESP

Loriann Darrell
Springfield Support Staff Assn.

Re-Elect Gallagher for Vice President

I encourage Vermont-NEA members to re-elect Tom Gallagher for Vermont-NEA Vice President. As a first term officer, Tom has served the membership well in this position. As with all new leaders, Tom has sought out the information needed to be proficient in his role as an officer. One of his responsibilities is to present the budget to the membership at the annual meeting. Tom clearly understands and explains the budget to the membership and fields questions that are asked. As a seasoned Board member, Tom continues to provide thoughtful responses to concerns brought forward by members and Board members alike. Tom is a patient listener and a competent leader. Please allow Tom to continue to advocate for members in his role as Vice President by voting for him in the upcoming state election.

Joyce Sullivan
Windham Southeast EA

Professional programs, membership recruitment and next year's budget

By Joel D. Cook, Executive Director

"Great workshop! It was very informative and helpful!!! Let's do more." That's how just one new teacher reacted to our first *New Teacher Conference* on February 4. We brought together 100 teachers in their first three years of teaching for workshops on such topics as classroom management, lesson planning, and legal issues for teachers. This was just one event we've been able to present for the first time this year to help meet the professional development needs of our members, thanks to the approval given by the Board of Directors and our annual Representative Assembly.

We at Vermont-NEA have been amazed, although not surprised, at the excitement generated by the addition of professional development activities to our more traditional union work in just this first year of having added to our staff a Director of Professional Programs. While to know that director, Sherry Gile, is to understand the competence, dedication, and value that now characterize the position, it is still quite heartening to have watched her – our – programs develop over such a short span. I mention this to start a discussion of next year's budget for two reasons.

The first is that, by dint of having increased our staff and programs, we of course have increased the size of our budget and, well, your dues, although we've obtained several significant grants to reduce the effect on dues. We continue to offer just about all that we offered before and, now, more. You can get a feel for the range of activities, programs, services, and discounts your membership purchases and supports by looking at the budget pages in "The Call," the insert in this edition of *Today*, announcing the agenda of our annual Representative

Assembly on April 2.

We arrange our services under eight headings, all of which relate directly or – we do have to administer and govern the organization – indirectly to member services. You'll see listed Membership, Member Benefits, Communications, UniServ (our field services with which most of you have at least some basic familiarity), Legal Services, and Public Policy, along with Administration and Governance.

The second reason to have discussed Professional Programs first is membership. We have a several-pronged approach to maintaining – actually to increasing – the size and strength of the Association. One prong is by addressing through this position what we know to be a particularly strong drawing card for new educators to join our ranks. That is the provision of high quality professional programs designed to help them adapt well to their new profession, as well as to provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be part of a union that works hard to obtain and retain for educators good compensation and working conditions and high quality education programs for children. We are doing that quite well and intend to do more as we gain experience, and as word spreads through our ranks and throughout school districts that what we offer is meeting the needs of educators and their employers alike. We also now have a focal point for our regulatory advocacy at the State level around teacher licensing and teacher and para-educator quality.

Beyond our professional programs, though, we are actively engaged in expanding our membership numbers in a variety of ways, both short and long-term. It comes as a surprise to many to learn that, as strong and numerous as this Association's membership is – with some 7,500 teachers and almost 2,500 education

support professionals as our core – there remain 1,000s of school employees who have not yet joined our ranks. In particular, there are some 1,500 teachers around the state who do not belong to this, their profession's Association. We actually have pretty good data that tell us who they are and where they work.

Step number one in recruiting more of them is making sure they are asked to join the Association. We know the basic explanation many non-members give for not having joined is not having been asked. Of course, there are all sorts of individual explanations why individuals choose not to belong to Vermont-NEA – it's a union, it involves itself in political activities, it failed to produce a good enough contract, it did something else that offended – but reason number one is that many prospective members simply have not been asked to join.

We are also seeking from our Legislature permission – otherwise known as a law – to enable local teacher Associations both to negotiate for and enforce agency fee provisions in their contracts. Every group of employees in Vermont but one has the right to do so. That "one" is teachers. "Agency fee" is the term used to describe that portion of a union's dues that may legitimately be assessed bargaining unit members who do not join their union. It is an amount that reflects what their union does for them in compliance with its "duty of fair representation," generally bargaining, grievance processing, and other forms of contract administration.

We are contacting members around the state to help by having them communicate their support for this measure to their representatives and senators. You'll hear more about this in coming weeks, particularly by paying attention to the "pages" of our electronic *Monday* newsletter.

We also have a staff Membership Committee and a Membership Task Force on which sit members from all seven UniServ Districts to help develop longer range approaches to help strengthen local Associations generally, all with a view to improve local capacity to attract new members to their – our – ranks.

Our budget addresses all of this and more, of course. The cost of membership is rising about the same rate for next year as school budgets around the state, about 6%. In fact, annual increases in our dues – your "taxes" to be part of this Association – have averaged about that level over the past quarter-century, sometimes more, sometimes less. Rarely, though, has the Association been able to provide a better explanation for a dues increase than the tremendous expansion of our work and services into the realm of professional development. ■

Upcoming Association events...

March 1

Town Meeting Day.

March 2

Dr. Seuss' Birthday/Read Across America.

March 5

Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier.

March 7

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

March 18

Vermont-NEA Conference for Education Support Professionals at the Inn of the Six Mountains in Killington.

April 2

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

April 3-18

Vermont-NEA elections.

April 18

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

2005 Secretary of State poster and essay contest reminder

The deadline for this year's Secretary of State poster and essay contest entries is April 1st.

The poster and essay contest is open to students at all grade levels. Those in grades K-2 participate in a poster contest on Official Vermont Symbols. Students in grades 3, 4 and 5 are asked to draw posters with a Vermont History Theme. Students in grades 6 to 8 are asked to write on the topic of the Vermont Constitution and students in grades 9 to 12 are asked to write on the topic involving the importance of voting to democracy.

Winners receive a \$100 savings bond, and his or her class is invited to be the Secretary of State's guest for a day in Montpelier to tour the State House, visit the Historical Society Museum and have a rare viewing of the Vermont Constitution, which is kept in the Archives at the Secretary of State's office. This is a particular honor, since the Vermont Constitution is only removed from its special vault on very few occasions.

Visit the kid's page for more information about this year's contest and to view last year's winning entries: www.sec.state.vt.us/Kids/kids_index.htm



Emmanuel Kofiamoh (L) is in his second year teaching math at Burlington High School and Robin Lenz (R) is a first year social studies teacher. They came to the Vermont-NEA New Teacher Conference for support. Robin said, "I'm hoping to learn everything I can about teaching. It's a tough job and I want to be a good teacher."

Vermont poetry slam champ publishes book and DVD

Calais poet Geof Hewitt, who many of us know as writing consultant to the Vermont Department of Education, recently won Vermont's title as 2004 slam champion. Now, a book by Geof has been published: *Hewitt's Guide to Slam Poetry and Poetry Slam*. Complete with a DVD that brings the principles of effective performance poetry to life, the book argues forcefully for poetry slam (a light-hearted competition where members of the audience serve as judges) as an important component of the language arts curriculum. Geof says, "Language arts include more than



reading and writing. With slam poetry, the often neglected elements of listening and public speaking are brought back into the curriculum."

Poetry slam is a growing national phenomenon where poets have three minutes on stage to perform an original poem. Five members of the audience volunteer to serve as judges. "This levels the playing field, and brings poetry out of its traditional settings and into the hands of the people," explains Hewitt. "Each judge scores each performance on a scale of zero to ten, with one decimal point." That decimal point is important, as the recent Vermont slam-off proved: Hewitt won the Vermont title with the tiniest edge possible over Ginger Morawski and Patty Martinez, who tied for second place.

"It was a very close call," says Hewitt, who acknowledges that luck plays as big a part in slam as skill. "Ginger was the final poet, and after her scores were announced, I was sure that she had won. But I was adding the numbers in my head. The official scorekeeper had a calculator. It showed my margin of victory as one-tenth of a point."

What glory in winning Vermont's 2004 Slam Poetry Title? Hewitt has earned the opportunity to represent

Vermont in the 2005 Independent World Poetry Slam Championships, scheduled for February 10-12 in Worcester, MA.

Hewitt is the author of several books of poetry and two books for teachers. "The real glory," he says, "is not in the publishing or even in the occasional victory at poetry slams." Instead, he says, "it's in the writing. The feel of creating something durable, possibly even useful, is the greatest thrill. But I'll admit that I also derive

pleasure from seeing my work in print, and performing my poems in competitive slams." Hewitt also admits that among the belongings he'll pack for his trip to Worcester are several copies of his Guide. "You never know," he says, "someone there might buy a copy."

Contact Discover Writing Press in Shoreham, Vermont for more information about *Hewitt's Guide to Slam Poetry and Poetry Slam*, book and DVD (\$19.95 on Amazon).

WE SUPPORT -- Bonnie Tuscany for Vermont-NEA President



VOICE FOR THE MEMBERS

Terri Szymanski	Cherrie Torrey	Martha Allen
Lisa Champagne	Cate Lamb	Joyce Sullivan
Corrie Palmer	Carol Hinchey	Jay Burnell

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