



TODAY

Website:
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The official publication of the Vermont-National Education Association - Vol. 69, No. 10 - May 2003

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse



Debra Gurwicz, winner of the 2003 Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence, shared her commemorative plaque with her students at Orchard School in South Burlington. The kids were very proud of their teacher.

Debra Gurwicz wins 2003 Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence

MONTPELIER — Debra Gurwicz, a grade 4-5 loop elementary school teacher at Orchard School and member of the South Burlington Education Association, is winner of the prestigious Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence.

A teacher since 1984, Debra Gurwicz is well-known and respected

for her commitment to professional development, her leadership in technology, her ability to include family and community in school activities, and her creative energy in the classroom.

Debra Gurwicz was nominated for the Teaching Excellence Award by Robert Gurwicz of Shelburne Community School, who wrote: "I believe

Deb epitomizes the excellence that all educators should aspire to... Deb is a tireless educator who puts in many, many hours going above and beyond to provide excellent learning opportunities for her students. She enriches the lives of everyone she comes in contact with."

South Burlington parent Carol

Caldwell-Edmonds supported the nomination: "Deb is an innovative teacher, a leader in our school community, and a professional who gets to know her students individually in order to guide and challenge them."

Darlene Worth, Director of Curriculum for the South Burlington

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

Vermont-NEA
TODAY

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

President

Angelo J. Dorta
Executive Director

Joel D. Cook

Communications Director

Laurie B. Huse

Subscription Price: \$6.00 per year.

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Salary, school working conditions, and teacher turnover

By **Angelo J. Dorta, President**

No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children, the long-awaited and recently released follow-up report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, boldly proclaimed the existence of a "teacher retention crisis," rather than a true shortage of teachers:

"Our inability to support high quality teaching in many schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs." The dilemma of high teacher turnover then often is compounded by the hiring of under-prepared and unqualified replacements who leave the profession at very high rates within their first few years.

What's the problem here? Exactly what working conditions are driving teachers from our classrooms? And what strategies are needed to counteract this troublesome trend that threatens student achievement and undermines public school success?

Although several factors most often combine to influence teachers' reasons for leaving a school, the report's thorough research reveals primary causes that are not surprising: poor salaries and school working conditions. The relative importance of these reasons varies, however, based on the job setting and experiences of each teacher.

According to a 2001 study by Dr. Richard Ingersoll, leading national expert on dissatisfaction-related teacher turnover, 51% of teachers from suburban public schools cited inadequate salaries, followed at 30% by poor administrative support. Teachers from high poverty, urban public schools reversed the factors of salary and school working conditions: 50% of urban educators blamed poor administrative support and 27% named inferior pay, while also mentioning lack of faculty influence (42%), classroom intrusions (40%), inadequate time (31%), and student discipline problems (26%) as important reasons for their departure. Interestingly, unmotivated students were twice as likely to be a reason for teacher turnover in the suburban schools (20%) compared to the urban schools (9%), and class size was a minor consideration in both urban (less than 8%) and suburban (2%) schools.

Let's start with compensation. According to the *Education Week Quality Counts 2000* report, new teachers begin their careers earning about 25% less than their college graduate peers who accept non-education jobs. The gap increases to more than 40% for teachers with master's degrees and a decade or more of experience because graduate studies yield only half the payback for teachers as for individuals in other occupations. Clearly, opting to become a teacher costs individuals one million

dollars or more in lifetime career earnings, relative to other professions requiring a college degree.

Despite the mighty economic boom of the '90's, the \$43,250 national average teacher salary in 2001 was only \$827 above the 1992-93 figure and just \$2,900 more than the average in 1971-72, after adjusting for inflation. The salary comparisons reveal a shockingly low real increase of only about \$100 per year using either the 10-year or 30-year reference point.

And that's using the *U.S.* average salary data for teachers. Thirty-six states fell below the national average pay, including Vermont at \$38,254. It ranked 28th in the nation, nearly 12% off the pace to attain the modest national salary mark.

Truly professional compensation for all licensed teachers means boosting salaries to entry- and career-level earnings comparable to other professions and occupations with similar college preparation and responsibilities. That's why Vermont-NEA recommends a starting salary of \$35,000, approximately \$56,000 for an experienced teachers with a master's degree or 30 credits beyond a bachelor's, and \$70,000 or more per year for our most experienced and highly trained educators. It also means additional pay for more time spent on extra duties over and above classroom teaching, such as for the teacher leadership tasks listed a few paragraphs below.

The report sums up the challenge of school working conditions like this: "If we want professional educators in our schools, we must make our schools professional workplaces." Reform begins with an explicit school mission, goals, and expectations shared by the entire faculty and staff. Unnecessary and redundant paperwork is eliminated, interminable and marginally productive weekly staff meetings are overhauled, and multiple committee assignments are curtailed and reduced to only the most manageable and meaningful professional chores. Appropriate, professional decision-making authority and accountability resides and is supported at the classroom level.

Educators work in teams to collectively focus on the quality of instruction and the learning and social/emotional development of every student. Working together requires sufficient, flexible, regularly scheduled common time for collegial lesson-planning, assessment and evaluation of student work and instructional practices, and professional development that both deepens teachers' content knowledge and builds their pedagogical skills. Every team member has a professional voice in decision-making and feels empowered to use it. Educators are strongly accountable to their school colleagues and recognize their interdependence based on mutual profes-

sional perspectives.

The emphasis on intensive collaboration and successful teaching and learning can create "learning communities" at each school, whereby human, social, and technical resources are harnessed to maximize student achievement, school performance, and parent/citizen satisfaction. The ethos of teamwork and camaraderie in a school learning community often lifts intermittently sagging adult morale and helps educators to consistently find meaning and satisfaction in their work. Such professional solidarity enhances the job satisfaction of new and experienced teachers and reinvigorates faculty and staff efforts to increase overall student learning in the school and to erase persistent achievement gaps among student sub-groups.

Firm establishment of school-based learning communities, however, also demands re-defining the concept of school leadership and the post of principal, while validating and tapping new sources of continuing school-wide and role-specific leadership. According to the report, "Classical top-down leadership, designed for factory-era schools, collides with the needs of 21st century learning places. Single-person leadership conceals and ultimately wastes the leadership talents of teachers. More seriously, when teacher leadership remains undeveloped, reform withers...and teacher turnover is aggravated."

Giving some teachers different kinds of voluntary leadership responsibilities based on their expertise and experiences — with the additional time, compensation, and training needed — will break the predominant one teacher/one class staffing design of our schools and enhance job satisfaction. Some possible teacher leadership roles include mentors of new teachers, instructional team leaders, technology resource teachers, assessment coordinators, curriculum specialists, local professional standards board and hiring committee members, and peer assistance/professional development providers. Such changes in staffing structure can reinforce the culture of a school learning community, while also helping to sustain school improvement initiatives by retaining highly dedicated and involved teachers.

There can be no higher priority than bringing the most knowledgeable, skilled, creative, hard working, and dedicated people possible into the teaching profession — and keeping them in our classrooms. Unless teacher compensation and school working conditions are truly professionalized, problems with teacher recruitment and unnecessarily high levels of teacher turnover will continue to haunt student dreams of academic achievement and to undermine public school success. ■

Milton Teachers avert strike, settle four excellent years

MILTON — A settlement came for the 130 teachers represented by the Milton Education and Support Association at 4:00 in the morning on March 13, just hours before a strike was scheduled to begin.

Teachers had voted two days earlier to strike if the contract did not settle at mediation. Their build up to the strike vote included weeks activity aimed at informing their community and convincing the school board to compromise. They held coffee hours, rallied parents to speak up at school board meetings, and put up informational picket lines.

The teachers' steadfast work paid off. The contract provides new money increases of 6.11% this year (retroactive), 5.36% in 2003-04, 5.16% in

2004-05, and 5.59% in 2005-06.

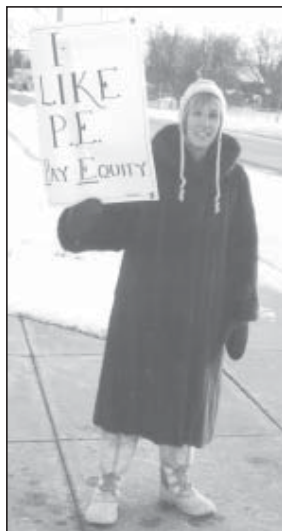
These percentages, according to Vermont-NEA UniServ Director David Boulanger, amount to \$1,507,421 in salary increases for Milton teachers over the life of the contract.

Next year, BA, step 1 on the Milton salary schedule will pay \$30,050; and at the end of the contract, the top salary will be \$60,060.

These are important numbers in Milton, where teachers had been the lowest paid in Chittenden County.

Congratulations to all the Milton teachers for sticking to a demanding crisis build-up, and to their president, Karen Vallancourt, and chief negotiator, Noble Francoeur, for leading the way. -LBH

Vermont-NEA Photos by Jason Winston



Milton negotiator Marie Froeschl teaches physical education. Her sign reads: I LIKE P.E. Pay Equity



Above: Milton picketers faced sub-zero temperatures in March. Right: Eighth grade teacher Jessica Howell borrowed this sign, but as a third-year teacher, agrees with the message.



Lamoille Union Paras bargain three big years, PLUS agency fee

HYDE PARK — Vermont-NEA UniServ Director Suzanne Dirmaier reports that Lamoille Union paraeducators have bargained a three-year deal that includes a 21% new money figure for the first year and 4.5% for the second and third year, before any horizontal movement. The starting wage goes from \$8.55 per hour for employees with a high school diploma, \$9.76 for those with an associate's degree, and \$11.13 for those with a bachelor's degree, to a top wage of \$18.33 per hour. With the new wage rates, some paras are getting a \$6 raise. The smallest raise is a dollar an hour in the first year.

In addition, the new salary schedule gives paras a bump in pay for every three credit course they take. The contract provides for a three credit course per employee per year.

The paras' negotiators -- Darcy Fletcher, Shelly Jones and Rita Graves -- also convinced their school board to give them agency fee, a provision which requires non-members of the Association to pay a fair share of certain Association costs. Association membership among paras at Lamoille Union is better than 80%, a fact which, according to Dirmaier, helped convince the board that the paras' agency fee proposal was a reasonable.

"I was only there the last night to help them wrap up the contract," explained Dirmaier, adding: "The paras did all the work including working with the business office on money... They are fearless and did such an amazing job!" -LBH

Barre teachers petition against portfolios

BARRE — Some 85 teachers at Barre Town and Barre City elementary schools have had enough of the portfolio process for relicensure. They are petitioning the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators to make portfolios voluntary.

The current portfolio system is tedious and not beneficial, according to petition organizers Mary Janus and Edie Clompus. They asked that their petition be printed in *Vermont-NEA Today*.

"We're looking for support from other teachers to help us put an end to this busy work," explains Edie. "We hope others will help us make a case. We encourage other teachers to use our petition, or write their own, and send it, filled with signatures, to the Chair of the Professional Standards Board." The address: Judie Jones, Chair, Vermont Standards Board for

Professional Educator, 120 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

PETITION Portfolios -- An Exercise in Redundancy

We feel the need to address the issue of producing portfolios for relicensure. We hold dear the article written by Peter Berger: "Portfolios Don't Make Better Teachers" (Times Argus, May 15, 2002). We think it is time to simplify in an educational world that has run amok with new standards, initiatives and testing. We must express our concerns.

Portfolios are not empowering us as teachers. They are a labor intensive exercise in which we see no benefit to our teaching practices. We ask that you trust us to be professionals who are interested enough in our jobs to continue our education. We do so through our staff development process

each year. Why is this not enough? Some people are great test takers, some are great writers, and some are more flamboyant than others. It is a fact that none of these talents is proven to predict good teaching ability. The fact is that the IPDP portfolio process has become another unnecessary task that we must perform, which is used to determine whether or not we can do our jobs. Direct observation and student outcomes are the real pieces of evidence -- not a fancy portfolio.

Berger states that other professionals do not have to jump through the "Portfolio Hoop." Dentists pay a license fee. Physicians don't need to take any courses. Lawyers just have to complete 10 workshop hours a year. None of these professionals are required to spend hours compiling a portfolio. This time could be better spent

planning daily lessons and adapting curriculum to meet the needs of our students. This is a priority, and one for which there is never enough time!

Also important to consider is that we face a severe teacher shortage. Does it seem reasonable to expect that we are going to draw more people into the teaching profession given the present relicensure demands that are on top of the inherent demands of teaching in a public school?

We, the undersigned, propose that people do portfolios as a choice, or as part of their National certification process. Otherwise, we feel that the staff development process, our documentation of that, and the nine credit hour requirement are more than adequate for relicensure.

**Edie M. Clompus and
Mary Janus, Barre Town EA
and 85 others**

Teachers can count on their retirement system

By Mark Hage, Vermont-NEA Director of Member Benefits

Vermont-NEA members, like workers everywhere, are enduring the financial consequences of the biggest stock market downturn in a generation. Several teachers have commented to me that the precipitous plunge in the value of their investments has forced them to postpone retirement or to give the option serious consideration. These comments and the general level of economic insecurity in the ranks of our members has compelled me to write this article.

Prior to the recent evaporation of retirement savings and the high-profile corporate scandals of last year, 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 and its 403(b) endorsed providers have always stressed that teachers take into consideration the fundamental role of the *Vermont State Teachers Retirement System* (VSTRS) 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 pen-*

sion plans take a hard hit as the market declines, the losses suffered by those plans generally don't affect 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.

The Vermont State Teachers Retirement System is well managed and fiscally transparent, accountable to the public and to the teaching profession, and, most important, it has proven that educators can count on it in the best and worst of times.

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 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. Vermont-NEA's 403(b) endorsed provider program was established to help teachers meet retirement goals that can not be met solely by their VSTRS pension. 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 3.7% or so of their pay, in exchange for which they receive, during retirement, as much as 50% of their pre-retirement pay if they teach at least 30 years. Between 1981 and 1991, however, most teachers 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 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. Yes, it is affected by declines in the stock market; but the system's conservative and diversified investment portfolio has made it possible to date to honor the commitments it has made to Vermont's teaching profession. We recognize that the retirement system 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 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, and, most important, it has proven that educators can count on it in the best and worst of times. ■

Rep Assembly delegates approve budget, new business, additional staff position

Vermont-NEA Photos by Art Huse

RUTLAND — Delegates attending the Association's Representative Assembly March 28-29 at the Rutland Holiday Inn approved at 2003-04 Vermont-NEA budget that calls for a \$7 dues increase. Discussion about the budget began on Friday evening with a presentation by Vermont-NEA Vice President Bonnie Tuscan. Delegates examined the complete budget, asked questions about line items showing change from the previous year, and learned that the Vermont-NEA Board was able to reduce the originally proposed \$9 dues increase thanks to a recent influx of new members.

The 2003-04 budget provides for the addition of a new Association staff position, starting in January. The "Educator Quality Advocate" will have formal responsibility for:

- monitoring regulatory and other developments at the state and federal level regarding qualifications and professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals;
- advocating for state and local school district fulfillment of their obligations to provide and pay for high quality professional development; and
- assisting and advising other Vermont-NEA staff in advocating on behalf of members regarding educator quality, licensing, certification, and professional development.

Resolutions

Delegates approved eight Association Resolutions as proposed or amended in the "Call" to the RA, which every Association member received. Three other Resolutions were amended by delegates.

New C. Gender Equity in Co-Curricular Programs was amended to read "co-curricular" rather than "athletic" programs.

New F. Comprehensive Health Care Policy was amended to read "The Association supports the adoption of a universal health care plan for

all residents of Vermont," rather than "...single payer health care plan..."

New I. Use of Prejudicial Terms and Symbols was amended to read "Vermont-NEA deplors negative and pejorative prejudice..." rather than "...deplors prejudice..."

New Business Items

Delegates defeated New Business Item 1, which would have required that dues be pro-rated based on percent of full-time worked.

Delegates passed New Business Item 2, Healthcare, as amended by substitution. It reads:

Vermont-NEA will work with other organizations and individuals to develop a draft healthcare system proposal that will protect the quality of our health care while providing a universal healthcare system for the state of Vermont, one that includes all Vermonters, pays for all necessary healthcare out of public funds, retains private delivery of healthcare, and has a publicly accountable budget process to ensure adequate capacity to meet healthcare needs of all Vermonters.

Furthermore, Vermont-NEA will provide information about the benefits of such a system to our members and the families we serve.

Delegates passed New Business Item 3, ESP Retirement, as amended. It reads:

Vermont-NEA will establish an ESP Retirement Study Committee to include one ESP member from each UniServ District and at least one board director for the purpose of recommending improvements to or establishment of retirement benefits, including retiree health insurance for its ESP members, and this committee will report its findings and recommendations to the 2004 Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly.

Delegates approved New Business Item 5, Political Action, as amended. It reads:



Ellen Green, Co-President of the Rutland Education Association, and Kirsten Vascik, REA Association Rep at Rutland High School, listen to discussion at the RA morning session over proposed changes to Vermont-NEA Resolutions.

The delegates direct the Association to ensure that the Vermont-NEA political action program is provided sufficient resources to ensure that the program functions in a way that fully involves members in both the recommendation and education process. This action is contingent upon adequate NEA funding.

Delegates postponed indefinitely New Business Item 6, the War on Iraq.

Delegates approved New Business Item 7, Sister Unions in Guatemala, as amended. The item supports unions in Guatemala, The Union of Education Workers of Guatemala (STEG), and The College of Teachers of Guatemala (CMG), and authorizes Barre Education Association member Tom Luce, who will visit Guatemala in April as part of a human rights delegation, to carry Vermont-NEA's New Business Item 7 to the educational unions there and express sup-

port for their struggle.

Awards

Vermont-NEA presented awards at the banquet before the start of the Representative Assembly on Friday evening, including:

- Human and Civil Rights awards for Robert Peebles, a member of the Windham Southeast Education Association, and "Child Labor Education Action," a student organization at Brattleboro Union High School

▪ The ESP Award and \$1,000 for Beverly Klandl of the Chittenden South Education Association

- ESP Honorable Mentions and \$100 each for Cecile Dyke of the Hazen Union Staff Organization and Rose Wenzel of the Vergennes Elementary ESP Unit

- The Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence and \$1,000 for Debra Gurwicz of the South Burlington Educators' Association ■

Brattleboro sweeps HCR Awards

RUTLAND — Vermont-NEA members in the Brattleboro area can be particularly proud this year that projects and individuals from their high school and middle school have been honored by Vermont-NEA for work protecting and enhancing civil rights.

Robert Peebles won a Vermont-NEA Human and Civil Rights Award for his work on behalf of minority students through the Multicultural Awareness Association at Brattleboro Area Middle School, his key role supporting the district's Diversity Committee, and his leadership helping students deal with issues around school violence.

Tim Kipp is faculty advisor to CLEA (Child Labor Education Action), winner of a Vermont-NEA Human and Civil Rights Award. This student organization is dedicated to exposing and eradicating abusive child labor practices around the world. Go to clea.sit.edu to learn more about their good works. ■



Bob Peebles, guidance counselor at Brattleboro Area Middle School, paused for a photo with his son and Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta before accepting a Human and Civil Rights Award for his work with students.



Brattleboro Union High School students Ariel Poster, Elisar Hares, Diana Butler and Elizabeth Krasner accepted a Vermont-NEA Human and Civil Rights Award for Child Labor Education Action, a student organization at BUHS.

Winning students accept Vermont-NEA/ Maida F. Townsend Scholarship Awards

RUTLAND — A highlight of the Vermont-NEA Awards Banquet that kicks off the Association's Representative Assembly each year is the presentation of scholarships. At that time, the children of Vermont-NEA members receive \$1,000 awards, and Association members get a glimpse of some of the finest young people in Vermont. Congratulations to these students:

- **Kelsey Ballard** of Woodstock Union High School, daughter of Vermont-NEA ESP member Doreen Ballard, ranks first in her senior class. She was the driving force behind the local teen center, and she is a top tennis player.

- **Maria Ann Benoit** of Vergennes Union High School, granddaughter of Vermont-NEA ESP member Ernest Benoit, managed to balance her high school life and shoulder the main responsibility for providing daily care and support for her younger sister. She has received high honors throughout her academic career and now hopes to become an elementary school teacher.

- **Carlin Hebert** of Mt. Anthony Union High School, son of Vermont-NEA member Neva Hebert, ranks number one in his class of 305. He is active in the National Honor Society, Student Senate, and Scholars' Bowl. He contributes to his community as a junior firefighter, serves in his church youth ministry, and tutors a homebound student. In the fall, Carlin plans to study computer science and civil engineering at Notre Dame.

- **Andrea Jette** of Missisquoi Valley Union High School, daughter of Vermont-NEA member Beth Jette, plays basketball, hockey, softball and soccer, plus she works with young children as a soccer and softball coach. She volunteers at her church for auctions, craft shows, and the food shelf. She is pursuing a career in education.

- **Kristin Weibust**, daughter of Vermont-NEA member Stephen Weibust, is a sophomore at Skidmore College. Her sociology professor says, "Kristy has a unique, happy combination of organi-

zational skills and intelligence which enable her to thrive as an academic leader." Kristin is a graduate of South Burlington High School, where she especially enjoyed music, dramatic arts and dance. Her goal is to graduate from Skidmore with honors in the social sciences.

Ann Lavery chairs the Vermont-NEA / Maida F. Townsend Scholarship Committee. She and committee member Corrie Palmer presented scholarship checks and framed certificates at the Awards Banquet. Go to www.vtnea.org/scholar.htm to see a full list of past recipients. -LBH

Vermont-NEA Photos by Art Huse



Kelsey Ballard of Woodstock Union High School, daughter of Vermont-NEA ESP member Doreen Ballard



Kristin Weibust, a sophomore at Skidmore College, is the daughter of Vermont-NEA member Stephen Weibust.



Maria Ann Benoit of Vergennes Union High School, granddaughter of Vermont-NEA ESP member Ernest Benoit



Carlin Hebert of Mount Anthony Union High School, son of Vermont-NEA member Neva Hebert



Andrea Jette of Missisquoi Valley Union High School, daughter of Vermont-NEA member Beth Jette

REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse



Bev Klandl spends a lot of time kneeling at small tables helping third graders. Here, she's helping students build model long houses for a unit on native Americans.

Bev Klandl wins 2003 Vermont-NEA ESP Award

WILLISTON — Beverly (Bev) Klandl, 22-year veteran classroom assistant at Allen Brook School and member of the Chittenden South Education Association, is winner of the 2003 Vermont-NEA ESP Award.

"Beverly Klandl is the epitome of professionalism as a paraprofessional, and her 22 years of dedication and commitment deserve recognition," wrote teacher Jeanne Desilets in her letter nominating Bev for the award. Jeanne continued: "She not only excels in her job, but she is a mentor and inspiration to her peers, she is wonderful with children and they love and look up to her, and she is a caring, kind, and loving individual."

Bev Klandl's nomination came with lots of letters supporting her. Lisa Fischer, a parent, wrote this story about Ms. Klandl: "My son has a bit of a problem with separation from his mom at school. At home one day my husband was rubbing his back and he told us that it felt different then when Ms. Klandl rubbed his back. I asked him, 'When does Ms. Klandl rub your back?' and he replied, 'Sometimes when you leave school and I am sad, Ms. Klandl rubs my back until I feel better.'

Lisa Fischer concludes: "In times like these, it is heartwarming to know that there is someone at school that cares as much as that."

There also are wonderful letters from teachers, administrators, co-workers, past and present. But the letter Bev mentions first is printed carefully on lined paper and signed by the children she cares for. Bev says the children kept their letter completely secret so that she would be surprised.

"We nominate Mrs. Klandl to be the TA of the year," says the letter. "She is not just a TA. She helps with everything. Anything that she sees that needs to be done, she does it."

The letter continues: "She helps us make projects. She doesn't scream and she doesn't say things in an angry voice and she helps us when we need help... She helps you when you have

problems on the playground and she'll always point to the most non-aggressive solution. She helps in the cafeteria, too, and with her around, no wonder there are no bullies in Allen Brook."

And no wonder Bev Klandl was honored at a banquet on Friday, March 28, in Rutland at Vermont-NEA's annual Representative Assembly. She now will represent Vermont in the competition for the National Education Association ESP Award.

This special award for ESP was established in Vermont in 1992 to recognize the important role of Education Support Professionals within the Association, and to honor their outstanding contributions. -LBH

Past Winners of the Vermont-NEA ESP Award

1993 Janice Sicard, Paraeducator - Orleans Central Education Association	1998 Alfa Gautreau, Secretary - Orange East Education Association
1994 Christine Allard, Paraeducator - Chittenden South Education Association	1999 Lynnca Perkins, Paraeducator - Fairfield Education Association
1995 Mary Smokoski, Cook - Orange Southwest Education Association	2000 Karen Greene, Paraeducator - Winooski Education Association
1996 Ron Watts, Custodian - Woodstock Elementary Education Association	2001 Cheryl Currier, AV Coordinator - North Country Union Education Association
1997 Mary Hobbs, Library Assistant - Blue Mountain Education Association	2002 Carolyn Godbout, Paraeducator - Rutland School Staff Association

Legislative Report: How high will this swing of the pendulum be?

By Joel D. Cook, Vermont-NEA Executive Director/General Counsel

The secondary discussion around public education this year, just behind how we fund our schools, is how much schools are funded. These twin issues respond to the motion of the pendulum imparted in 1997 by Act 60, itself a response to earlier school funding laws that were inequitable and inadequate. Will this Legislature swing the pendulum too far again, or will it provide the State, our schools, our kids, all of us really, much needed equilibrium?

Many legislators understand that Vermont school costs reflect such facts of Vermont life as how central our schools are to our communities, how valuable a high quality education program for our children is to Vermonters, how important to them social as well as academic aspects of public schooling here are. That doesn't lead them to conclude school districts should simply spend what they want, but neither does it lead them to any quick "fixes," like penalizing districts that spend amounts arbitrarily labeled "too much," or penalizing school employees for obtaining, with the collaboration of their school districts, comparatively efficient health insurance.

Some legislators, and certain editorial writers, on the other hand, assert our schools are simply spending too much money on our children, citing major increases in school spending over the past six years, increases in the number of educators during the same period, and decreases in student enrollment. Well, all three things have occurred.

Schools statewide have increased program offerings, particularly since Act 60 was enacted. Like it or hate it, this law imposed major administrative requirements and higher standards of quality on every school district in the state, and through its equitable funding mechanism it has provided the capacity for many lower wealth districts to upgrade their school facilities and programs for children. It has also provided special funds to sustain the capacity of many of our smallest schools to continue to operate locally. In addition, certain federal programs contributed to the capacity of states, including Vermont, to establish lower student-teacher ratios during this same period. And, with the exception of high growth communities dotting the landscape, it is true that we are in the midst of about a decade-long decline in our overall population of children here in Vermont.

A thankless bind

So, school districts are caught in the thankless bind of having conformed



Vermont-NEA Executive Director Joel Cook and Staff Attorney Jeff Fannon check the legislative agenda online to plan the Association's lobbying schedule.

to policy established by the Legislature, spending more to provide broader and deeper schooling for Vermont children, and facing criticism just six years later for having done so. If the Legislature reacts with a heavy hand, then, undoubtedly, some 5 to 7 years from now, the next reaction will set in that permits school districts to play catch-up again, and the pendulum will continue to swing wildly.

Our hope and efforts right now, beyond finding equitable ways to reduce overall system reliance on the property tax, are to help focus legislative attention on cost elements that rationally can be addressed without compromising the quality of our schools or our community life.

Right now, however, in early April, the funding proposal making the rounds in the House, despite some very promising features, would penalize local districts that make the decision to spend just a bit more than average. And, while its \$7000 block grant looks quite large next to the one in current law, it is slated to rise more slowly than rational increases in spending. If enacted that way, it will be only a few years before we all face the same dilemma we do now: school taxes driven higher

at the local level because the State doesn't keep up its share.

What school spending is "too much"?

At this writing, we simply don't know how the Legislature will answer that question.

Some beliefs appear dictated more by political philosophy than factual analysis. For example, some think more of the fiscal pie should go to private schools, whether that includes or excludes sectarian schools. Others believe schools should be offering much narrower programs, a stance with implicit support in the exhaustive testing provisions of the so-called "No Child Left Behind" Act. Some legislators would like to define "education" itself narrowly, as a way of limiting the range of the State's funding obligations, and implicitly suggesting that school boards do likewise – this is really what is behind calls to determine what an "adequate" education would look like, and cost.

The two most often discussed spending items are health insurance and special education, described as major "drivers" of "runaway" education costs. Also in the running, of course, are salaries and wages, con-

tract settlements that "exceed the rate of inflation," too many teachers and/or paraeducators for "too few" students, and "top-heavy" administration.

The result is a great deal of interest in addressing ways to "contain" school costs alongside, or just behind, the larger discussion of ways to change the taxing system through which school funds are raised.

What's our take?

Here is how the Association is attempting to contribute to the consideration of school costs. There are four prongs:

- The first asks, almost rhetorically, if local voters are somehow not doing enough. After all, more than 40 communities have rejected proposed school budgets this year, a bit more than used to be the case annually prior to Act 60. Isn't the budget adoption – or rejection – system working to contain costs? Some legislators have concluded the opposite, that school budget rejections locally somehow require that some act emerge from Montpelier to contain spending. It's a bit anomalous, since when voters say "no" to local budgets, local school boards generally pare down spending.

Continued on page 9...

▪ The second prong is a bit more pointed. It asks the Legislature to meet its own funding commitments to schools before criticizing school boards for asking taxpayers for “too much.” As a matter of taxpayer logic, we have pointed out, taxes raised for schools should be allocated to schools. The primary State House debate under this heading is whether nearly \$25 million in general (not property) taxes earmarked for schools for next year actually will be appropriated to schools. Thus far, the answer has been no. That \$25 million would have the effect of reducing current local school tax rates in virtually every Vermont community by several cents. And that way the State would not itself be contributing directly to school district “over-reliance” on the property tax.

▪ The third prong responds to two assertions made about the so-called cost “drivers:”

Health insurance. Some legislators continue to say the State should purchase all school employees’ health insurance to reduce costs. We have been pointing out for the many legislators who never heard of VEHI what we have been doing for more than a decade now. VEHI provides health insurance to every public school district (and some private schools) in the state. Over the past decade, when double-digit premium increases have been the norm, VEHI’s annual increase has been about 9.25%, even when this coming year’s 19%er is included.

Indeed, actual premiums themselves are generally lower within VEHI’s offerings. We’ve pointed out, for example, the cost of the 2003 CIGNA family plan offered to State employees is \$2682 more expensive than VEHI’s most comparable plan for 2002-03: the CIGNA premium is \$12,060, and VEHI’s is \$9378. A school board that pays 90% of that premium spends less money for its employee health coverage than the State, paying just 80% of a larger premium, does for its own employees. And, VEHI’s administrative costs – at about 5.5% – run about half those of the industry standard.

We have pointed out that school employee health insurance costs are a manifestation, like Medicaid, prescription drugs, overall utilization trends, and more, of a larger health care crisis, not “runaway” education costs. Therefore, we conclude, the State should undertake to address the larger issues in health care rather than, frankly, pretend it is doing something about either school costs or health care costs by, perhaps, assuming “control” of school employee health insurance.

Special education. Special education costs have increased well in excess of inflation, that much is true. A 2000 law addresses that by trying, and succeeding, in “bending the curve” on

annual cost increases. More to that point, we have advocated, accurately, for several years now that the cost of an increasing array of services for children with disabilities has been shifted from social service providers to school districts. This has had the effect of shifting the cost of these services from the State to local property tax payers, cropping up in school budgets. The past decade is replete with examples of IEPs showing where schools have accepted responsibility for services not typical of schools. The State should examine the extent to

...we have advocated, accurately, for several years now that the cost of an increasing array of services for children with disabilities has been shifted from social service providers to school districts. This has had the effect of shifting the cost of these services from the State to local property tax payers, cropping up in school budgets.

which this has occurred and acknowledge that part of the growth in local school taxes stems from this shift in responsibility to schools. It hasn’t been school districts clamoring to spend more on social services.

▪ The fourth prong is an analysis of ways to pare down some school costs. And here I want to be a bit specific, so you’ll know what the Association is saying and why.

Special education. Some school districts defend inappropriately against service demands by parents. If they lose, they’re on the hook for the services and the attorney fees of parents, and they have to pay their own attorney as well. If school districts pooled resources for legal services, they could obtain impartial advice about the advisability of proceeding and, perhaps, save substantial 1000s of dollars in the process.

Collective bargaining. While the Association opposes collapsing the current system into one giant negotiation to cover the state as a whole, we have suggested smaller, still significant, and quite logical approaches that could help districts save both time and money, including providing inducements to school districts (1) to undertake their bargaining responsibilities at the supervisory union level and (2) to pool resources for prepaid collective bargaining advice and direct assistance, pretty much like the Association provides locals.

Governance. There’s a lot of talk about changing the structure of our school system: Vermont’s got more than 280 districts for about 100,000 students, with 60 superintendencies serving between 300 and more than 4000 students each.

We believe the State could undertake a thoughtful, community-based examination of the structure of the

system that, if done right, could lead some communities to consider combining functions. We have suggested care be given to process as well as substance, so that a good substantive proposal is not dismissed because of inadequate attention to the lives of the people and communities it would affect.

School choice. Some legislators have suggested school choice as a cost containment mechanism. This seems to have fallen, appropriately, like a lead weight, since, as we have pointed out, just about any plan of school choice contains higher, not lower spending demands, whether it be for charter schools, public school options across districts, private secular or sectarian school vouchers, or tuition tax credits.

Retirement. We have pointed out that school districts can provide retirement inducements, including “air time” in the State Teachers Retirement System and local early retirement plans.

Student-teacher ratios.

One of the most unsatisfying assertions making the rounds is that class size beyond, say, 5th Grade, is irrelevant to student learning. This is made in the context of Vermont’s standing as having the lowest average student-teacher ratio among the states. We know, nevertheless, that most classes have 20 or so students. We also know of no private school – often the standard of comparison – marketing itself for its large class sizes. All reputable research concludes that small class size promotes individual learning in the lower grades. In addition, State policy has promoted advanced placement offerings in all our high schools, and those classes typically do have fewer students than others. The ongoing viability of small schools, however we define them, is a function of community values, cost, and State policy. Since no one really has data about class size in all Vermont schools and its relationship to such things as student body size, community population, socio-economic issues, curricular offerings, and local district policies, we’ve been suggesting the State undertake an examination of the issue. It should do that before concluding what it should do, if anything, about the issue.

When the Session ends, probably in mid-May, depends in large measure on how politically viable changes in school funding laws are. “Cost containment” has attained mantra status right now, making it probable that the package of changes will contain provisions that address cost. Our continuing role is to help guide the discussion in the direction of equity in approaches to funding and rationality in approaches to cost. That way, the arc traveled in coming years by the pendulum will be less, as will any disruption to schools that accompanies it. ■

Our work toward merged bargaining

Vermont-NEA advocates that teacher and ESP locals in the same district merge their organizations and leadership cadres—and broaden this merger activity to encompass other locals within their supervisory union.

Locals in these districts and supervisory unions have merged or expanded existing mergers in the past year:

Addison Central
Addison Northeast
Addison Rutland
Bristol
Cabot
Essex-Caledonia
Franklin Northwest
Orange Southwest
Orleans Central
Wells/Middletown Springs
Washington West
Washington South

Orleans Central ESP, Addison Central and Washington West accomplished particularly notable mergers in 2002-03. Orleans merged eight contracts and won a single salary schedule for all the districts involved in bargaining. This achievement also included a 9% per year increase for paras until they reached the appropriate step on the salary schedule.

Addison Central merged six teacher contracts in a multi-year bargaining project, and succeeded in cracking a \$30,000 base wage and a \$50,000 maximum salary. A seventh school will be joining the Addison Central local next year.

Washington West is in the process of merging five contracts in six communities — and the locals involved will see significant wage gains and intradistrict cooperation when the current bargaining cycle comes to fruition.

These three locals work closely with their Vermont-NEA UniServ Directors, but each bargained on their own until impasse during the period they were merging. Washington West is still bargaining, but both parties — teachers and school boards — remain committed to a merged contract and a single Association when bargaining ends.

Locals in the districts or supervisory unions below are now discussing or working toward merger, or strengthening existing mergers:

Addison Northwest (ESP)
Bennington-Rutland
Chittenden South
Essex Junction/Westford
Essex Town
Grand Isle
Lamoille North
Orange Southwest
Orleans Southwest
Rutland South
Southwest Vermont
Windsor Northwest

First-ever Presidents-Plus Conference promotes mergers, teacher-ESP communication

Vermont-NEA Photos by Art Huse

SOUTH BURLINGTON — The Vermont-NEA Presidents-Plus Conference in late March, the first of its kind, brought local Association presidents and leaders together to discuss Association mergers and to build bridges between teacher and ESP leaders.

One-hundred leaders from 50 locals participated. They attended workshops to learn and confer about the wisdom of merging with other locals within their supervisory union. Vermont-NEA shared internal data at the conference which reveals that merged locals, generally, enjoy higher salaries and better benefits, and wield power more skillfully at the bargaining table and in crisis situations. In addition, the Association's experience shows that resources of the State Association can be marshaled more effectively and with maximal impact in merged Associations.

Other workshop topics included:

- Bringing together teachers and ESP units
- Presidential training for moderately experienced leaders
- How to recruit and refresh the leadership pool
- Bargaining in merged Associations

The conference will be an annual event, and will be offered early in the school year, before negotiations begin in earnest. ■



UniServ Director Bob Raskevitz brought his son Thornton and wife Mary (far right) to the conference. Here they pose with UniServ Director Joyce Foster (center).



Above: Charlene Patch, a teacher leader at Otter Valley, and Ted Fullard, an ESP leader in Washington South, register for the President-Plus Conference.

Debra Gurwicz continued from page 1...

School District, also supporting Debra's nomination, said: "Throughout her professional career, Deb Gurwicz has demonstrated high standards of service to her students and to the teaching profession. She is a pleasure to have as a colleague and exemplifies teaching excellence every day in her classroom and school."

Barbara Gill, Technology Integration Specialist for the South Burlington School District, wrote that Debra Gurwicz is "an outstanding teacher and a perfect candidate for the Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence... Her continual involvement in staff development and collaboration with colleagues has a huge impact on our profession. She is an inspiration to colleagues and a teacher leader who has transformed the lives of students and faculty in South Burlington. Her passion and commitment are a tribute

to the teaching profession."

According to Debra Gurwicz, the most successful innovation she has introduced in her classroom and shared with her school community and community at large "must be my integration of technology in all areas of study and my use of students' personal interests to enhance and motivate their learning pursuits."

Asked what advice she would give to someone entering the profession on how to attain teaching excellence, Gurwicz said: "Provide an environment where children feel safe to be themselves... Enjoy your time together -- this is your life, too. I have learned that when the kids realize that I'm doing my best to help them be successful, they want to give me their best."

"Learning comes alive and becomes fun for her students when they

create their Living Colonial Museum replete with costumes, food, songs appropriate to the historical period, science projects, and a real-life five-and-drum corps," says Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta in his letter highlighting her work and supporting Debra Gurwicz for the national Teaching Excellence Award. "Similarly, studying the United States westward migration in the 1800's also involves recreating a "day in the life" of a pioneer on the Oregon Trail by dressing as pioneers, receiving 'fate cards' to determine the specifics of their journey, square dancing, baking bread and drying beef for beef jerky, eating 'buffalo stew,' and developing PowerPoint presentations." He concludes: "Her spirit and excellence ennoble the teaching profession and make Deb a wonderful representative of U.S. public school educators everywhere."

The Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence honors an outstanding teacher each year in order to celebrate teaching excellence, public education, and our dedicated school workforce. The Award recognizes, rewards, and promotes excellence in public school teaching and underscores high standards of service to students and to the teaching profession.

Debra was honored at a banquet on Friday, March 28, at Vermont-NEA's annual Representative Assembly. She now will represent Vermont in the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence competition.

The 2002 Teaching Excellence Award winner was Kathryn E.S. Grace, a special educator at Founders Memorial School in Essex Town. The 2001 winner was David S. Ely, a science teacher at Champlain Valley Union High School. - LBH

Call for proposals

Taylor Mali will keynote 2003 Convention

MONTPELIER — “*Making a Difference*” is the theme of the 2003 Vermont-NEA Educators’ Convention on October 22-23, 2003, at the Champlain Valley Exposition Center in Essex Junction. The inspiration for this theme is our keynote speaker: performance poet Taylor Mali, who says in his Biography & Mission Statement:

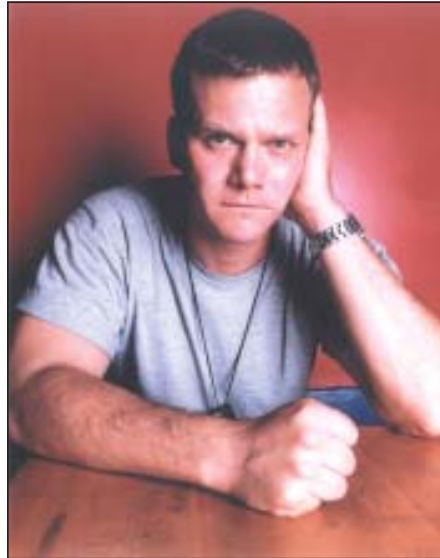
“I want to be the individual responsible for making an entire generation of college graduates consider teaching before business or law school. And while I’m at it, I want to make it easier for smart and successful people in their 30s and older to become teachers as well. I want to be the spokesman for teaching’s nobility, the poet laureate of passion in the classroom.”

Mali was a national poetry slam champion team member four times; twice he appeared on HBO’s Def Poetry Jam; for nine years he taught (college, high school, middle school); he once scored five hundred and eighty-one in a SCRABBLE game; and, (he says) MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, after hearing his work, nine people have told him they will now become teachers.

Go to www.taylormali.com to read Taylor Mali’s Internet classic poem: “What Teachers Make” -- or to hear him read it

Workshop proposals invited

All Vermont-NEA members are eligible to propose a workshop to be included in Vermont-NEA’s Conven-



Performance Poet Taylor Mali will keynote the 2003 Vermont-NEA Educators’ Convention.

tion agenda for either Wednesday evening, October 22, or Thursday, October 23. The Wednesday evening workshop hours are new (5:30 - 7:00 pm), as is the extended Wednesday exhibit time (5:00 - 9:00 pm).

A Workshop Proposal Form can be printed from the Vermont-NEA website; go to www.vtnea.org and click “Present a Convention Workshop.”

Competition will be rigorous for

the 12 workshop slots, so plan your proposal carefully. Among the Convention Planning Committee criteria for workshop selection are:

- high interest topic
- topic that is a benefit to members
- topic related to theme
- well-written proposal
- excellent presenter credentials

Vermont-NEA offers presenters a \$150 honorarium for a 1 1/2 hour workshop selected for the Vermont-

NEA program. The deadline for workshop proposals is June 1st.

These are the members of the Convention Planning Committee: Joan Alexander, special educator from Irasburg, co-chair; Judith Allard, science teacher from Burlington, co-chair; Margaret McNeil, elementary teacher from Hinesburg; Stephanie Keitel, speech pathologist from Montpelier; and Ted Fullard, paraeducator from Washington South. ■

Letters

Vermont-NEA Today welcomes letters to the editor from Vermont-NEA members. Letters must be no more than 200 words in length and may be edited.

Jon Harris seeks election to Vermont State Teachers’ Retirement System Board

Next month, the Vermont State Teachers’ Retirement System will conduct an election for the active teacher trustee position on the Retirement Board, and I am seeking a second four-year term.

I teach at Mt. Mansfield Union High School, where I have served as the co-chief negotiator and member of the Chittenden County Regional Bargaining Council for 22 years, serving as Council Chairperson for six years.

As a member of the Retirement Board over the last four years, including two years as vice-chairperson, I have overseen teachers’ retirement investments. The funds of the system have consistently been performing in the top quartile of their peer investment group, and there have been significant improvements to the system:

the implementation of “air time,” allowing teachers to purchase up to five years of service, an increase of health care coverage from 50% of a single person insurance policy to 80%, and the hiring of a new investment consultant.

With the recent downturn of the economy, the importance of good financial planning and investment is critical for the continued success of the Teachers’ Retirement System. I appreciate your past support, and I look forward to serving another term with your continued support.

Jon Harris
Green Mountain NEA

A sincere election “Thank You”

The Vermont-NEA campaign season is nearly over. Many teachers and ESP throughout Vermont already have marked and mailed their ballots for the candidates of their choice after examining candidate viewpoints, stated organizational goals, and leadership experiences.

With the election results unknown at copy deadline for *Vermont-NEA Today* (April 7), this is an opportune

moment to offer a sincere “Thank You” unaffected by emotions of victory or defeat. Many local Association leaders, individual members, and groups hosted my appearances at their Representative Councils and Regional Bargaining Councils. They also accepted my telephone calls at home and at work, received unexpected letters and candidate fliers, and willingly helped to distribute my campaign materials. I am grateful for your assistance, forbearance, and cordiality in these many instances.

Moreover, the membership of your local affiliate and the entire Vermont-NEA also owes you their gratitude. You’ve helped colleagues learn about the candidates and the issues prior to the election. You’ve encouraged co-workers to vote. You’ve strengthened the most basic element of Association participation and democracy, the right to be informed and to vote.

Regardless of who actually becomes Vermont-NEA President, many thanks for helping to create a successful Association election.

Angelo Dorta
Vermont-NEA

Upcoming Association events...

May 3

Vermont-NEA Board meets in Montpelier. Election results announced.

May 4-10

Teacher Appreciation Week

May 5

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

May 6

National Teacher Day

June 1

Convention workshop proposals due.

CCV offers courses for paras

The Community College of Vermont is offering several classes this summer that lead to a Paraeducator Certificate. Courses are offered in a variety of formats and locations throughout the state. For more information, call your local CCV office or contact Rachael Grossman at 828-4060.

Vermont Humanities Council seeks nominations for first annual Victor R. Swenson Humanities Educator Award

MORRISVILLE — Do you know an excellent Vermont teacher? The Vermont Humanities Council is seeking nominations for the first-annual Victor Swenson Humanities Educator Award. Honoring Dr. Swenson's 28 years of service to the humanities in Vermont, the award will recognize a Vermont educator in grades 6 through 12 who exemplifies excellence in the teaching of the humanities. The recognition includes a \$1,000 award and public recognition at the Council's annual fall conference in November.

"The council, with the support of many past board members, has established this award to recognize the wonderful work Dr. Swenson accomplished in Vermont and to regularly recognize an outstanding Vermont humanities educator," notes Vermont Humanities Council Board Chair Dorothy Bergendhal. "Through this award, we also hope to expand awareness for the humanities and the crucial role they play in the lives of Vermonters."

As executive director, Dr. Swenson guided the council through developing a clear mission and strategic plan and providing leadership to the



Victor Swenson retired as executive director of the Vermont Humanities Council last year.

humanities and literacy with enthusiasm, vitality, and dedication. As the council's first executive director, Swenson pioneered and expanded programming to a level of 2,900 events annually before his retirement in February 2002.

The council is looking for an educator who inspires his or her students and encourages an appreciation for lifelong learning. The teacher should also possess extraordinary passion, knowledge, ability, and accomplishment in the teaching of language, literature, history, social studies, or other humanities fields.

Nominations are due at the council's Morrisville office by July 1, 2003. Individuals may not nominate themselves. Letters of nomination should be limited to two pages and should detail the specific accomplishments that qualify the nominee for the award. Other nomination materials required are a vita and up to four letters of support. (The council suggests one from a school administrator, one to two from co-workers, and one to two from students.) Current members of the VHC board and staff and members of the judging committee are not eligible to receive the award. The award will be announced October 1, 2003.

For more information, contact the Vermont Humanities Council at info@vermonthumanities.org, call 802-888-3183, or visit www.vermonthumanities.org.

The Vermont Humanities Council works to bring the power and the pleasure of the humanities to all Vermonters, and envisions a state in which all citizens read, reflect, and participate in public affairs.

Vermont-NEA and New England Financial end partnership

On January 1, 2003, Vermont-NEA and New England Financial (NEF) officially ended their 403(b) partnership. This was announced at the time to all local leaders.

Recently, some questions have arisen about the current relationship of NEF to Vermont-NEA. So that there is no confusion, we want to reiterate that New England Financial is no longer endorsed by Vermont-NEA for 403(b) investment products, nor for any other insurance products and financial services, including long-term care insurance.

The former partnership with NEF was a very productive one, and the company served our members and the state Association well. However, NEF was interested in expanding its sales operations to teachers and support personnel to include financial products and services that are not covered by the 403(b) endorsed program and over which Vermont-NEA exercises no

oversight. The Association and its Professional Securities Committee believed it was not prudent for an organization of our size and resources to expand the scope or focus of the current 403(b) program. Consequently, NEF and Vermont-NEA terminated their collaboration in this area of member benefits.

The termination of the endorsement relationship with NEF was mutually agreeable to both parties and was arrived at amicably through negotiations. Members who wish to initiate or continue an investment relationship with NEF are free to do so.

If you have any questions about the financial products and services that Vermont-NEA endorses, please contact Mark Hage, Vermont-NEA Director of Member Benefits. Vermont-NEA endorses the 403(b) retirement investment services offered to its members through **VALIC** and **NEA Valuebuilder**. -MH



Josh Kernoff, Nick Landsman-Roos, Aimee Rosata and Lee Varian are varsity runners-up and champions in the State Policy Debate at the Vermont Debate and Forensics League Championships.

Otter Valley UHS debaters win tournament

MONTPELIER — Should the federal government substantially increase public health services for mental health care in the United States? This was the national policy debate question put to Vermont high school students at the Vermont Debate and Forensics League Championships last month at the Vermont State House.

Otter Valley's Lee Varian and Aimee Rosata repeated as varsity policy debate champions by winning a 2-1 decision over the team of Josh Kernoff and Nick Landsman-Roos of Burlington High School.

In the novice division the Otter Valley team of Jack Harrington and Bryan Nakayama defeated Evan Campbell and Dan Kent of Hartford High School for the novice championship.

The Annual Vermont Policy Debate Championships involved six high schools. Nine varsity debates determined that the Burlington High School team would face off against the Otter Valley team. In the novice division it took fifteen debates to decide on the two finalists.

Among the awards presented after the competition at the State House were: Vermont Bar Association Top Varsity Speaker to Lee Varian of Otter Valley, and Top Novice Speaker to Kate Burke of Burlington High School. The Vermont Principals' Association Awards went to the Otter Valley Varsity and Novice teams. The National Life Group State Champions Award and the Lawrence Debate Trophy donated by the Chittenden Bank also went to the Otter Valley debaters. VPA Finalist plaques were awarded

to Burlington High School in the varsity division and Hartford High School in the novice division.

Other speaker awards went to Josh Kernoff and Nick Landsman-Roos in the varsity division and Colleen Noonan (Montpelier High School) and Allister MacMartin (Northfield High School) in the novice competition. David Gale was awarded the Robert B. Huber Outstanding Coaching award. -BH

How to establish a debate or public speaking program

If your school is considering establishing a debate or public speaking program, contact:

The Vermont Debate and Forensics League
c/o Bill Haines
339 Elmore Road
Worcester, VT 05682
(802) 229-9303
bill@mhs.mps.k12.vt.us

The VDFL currently has a grant to promote public speaking in Vermont and is offering training and resources to teachers and schools who are interested. The VDFL is a Vermont-NEA Partner organization.

The national policy debate topic for the 2003-04 season is Resolved that the United States federal government should establish an ocean policy substantially increasing protection of marine natural resources.