

# Vermont-NEA Today

The official publication of the Vermont-National Education Association - www.vtnea.org Vol. 73, No. 6 - March 2007

## Jonathan Hoffman of Essex wins prestigious NEA Award for Peace and International Understanding

ESSEX JUNCTION – What can just one person do about war and suffering and injustice in our world? Jonathan Hoffman, chef instructor at the Center for Technology Essex, has found a way. Each summer, armed with donations from supporters, he travels alone – except for a translator and, on occasion, a bodyguard – to places deemed too dangerous for travel by many service providers. His mission is to restore a sense of normalcy to people, particularly children, whose lives have been torn apart.

"In the best tradition of Vermont humanitarianism, Jonathan Hoffman is a warrior for international peace and social justice," said Vermont-NEA President Angelo J. Dorta. "He has put his life in danger each summer to personally deliver tangible aid to needy, everyday people in the war-torn countries of Kosova and Afghanistan. He is an extremely worthy winner of the NEA Applegate-Dorros Peace and International Understanding Award."

### He Rolled Up His Sleeves

Hoffman began his personal humanitarian work in 1999 as a volunteer in the refugee camps and orphanages of Kosovo. After that experience, he returned three times on his own, rolled up his sleeves, and started helping people: He acquired firewood for eight families; provided goats and sheep to 10 families; organized a neighborhood cleanup and the leveling of ground for a playing field; paid for x-rays for a girl with cancer; supplied a flute, violin, clarinet, recorders and sheet music to a destitute music school, and more.

Hoffman founded and directs the non-profit 501 (c)-3 "Direct Aid International." DAI has a volunteer board of directors, accepts tax deductible donations that support Hoffman's projects, and in the summers since 2002, has sent him to Afghanistan.

There, DAI and Hoffman have built three school houses – a five room school in Qarnala, a six room school in Garmab, and three room girls school



Photo by "an Afghan male"

*Jonathan Hoffman handing a new notebook to an Afghan girl... The photo was taken in June of 2005 in the Malistan/Jaghori region of Afghanistan's southern Ghazni Province, approximately six hours southwest of Kabul. He was on a four day road trip delivering over 10,000 notebooks w/ pencils and erasers to schools. "The location of the photo is one school whose only shelter was the shade of the poplar trees," he said. He seriously considered coming back in 2006 to build them a small school, but distance and safety were the deciding factors.*

in Yakhshi (which now may become a community library, thanks to USAID construction of a new \$250,000 school.) They have constructed boys' and girls' latrines; built a library in Mir-Bacha-Kot, north of Kabul; obtained rights to a well with clean water for over 1,000 villagers; and distributed toothbrushes, notebooks, pens and soccer balls to children.

### Goals for 2007

Hoffman has two goals for 2007. He says one will certainly be attainable, the second a bit out of reach.

First, he wants to build another six-room school somewhere in the vicinity of Garmab, and support existing

projects. He says: "This we can do."

The second is more ambitious. "If an extra \$15,000.00 were to come into my hands," Hoffman says, "I would purchase and deliver a snowmobile, a sled, and spare parts for winter travel at the Doab Medical Clinic. The Doab Clinic is responsible for 65 villages and over 10,000 people who have no medical attention for six months of the year because of snow cover. If anyone would like to offer their assistance with this project let me know..." (This sounds like a great class project!)

Hoffman is always happy to receive donations, and he is able to do presentations, within the limits of his

teaching schedule. "It would be nice if we did become globally aware of the plight of two-thirds of the human race," he said. "We should also learn to be more charitable. Teaching everyone the reality out there would turn the light bulb on."

Students who hear Hoffman speak are moved. "You helped me open up my mind into a life of another who is less fortunate," wrote one Essex Middle School student. "You helped me realize anyone can do anything to help the world become a better place."

To contact Jonathan Hoffman and to learn more about DAI, go to [www.directaidinternational.org](http://www.directaidinternational.org)

## INSIDE

The School Staffing Question .....	2	New Teacher Conference.....	5
Campaign for Heath Care Security and Catamount Health .....	3	Meet Your Candidates .....	6
VCGE Annual Conference .	4	Letters .....	9
Legislative Report .....	4	ESP Conference .....	11
		Participate in Vermont's Envirothon .....	12

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.  
Vermont-NEA assumes no responsibility for  
claims arising in connection with products or  
services advertised in Vermont-NEA TODAY.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Vice President  
**Thomas J. Gallagher**  
Secretary Treasurer  
**Jeff Isham**  
NEA Director  
**Joyce Sullivan**  
Addison-Rutland, Area 1  
**Rose Wenzel**  
Addison Rutland, Area 2  
**Kirsten Vascik**  
Central Vermont, Area 1  
**Cindy Bubrowski**  
Central Vermont, Area 2  
**Terri Vest**  
Chittenden, Area 1  
**Mary Ann Barnes**  
Chittenden, Area 2  
**Richard Wise**  
Chittenden, Area 3  
**Brian Walsh**  
Northeast Kingdom, Area 1  
**Lydia Alexander**  
Northeast Kingdom, Area 2  
**Martha Allen**  
Southern Vermont, Area 1  
**Susan Rusten**  
Southern Vermont, Area 2  
**Jay Burnell**  
Southern Vermont, Area 3  
**Dennis Ladd**  
Northwestern Vermont, Area 1  
**Bonnie Tuscani**  
Northwestern Vermont, Area 2  
**Ann Lavery**  
Upper Valley, Area 1  
**Cherrie Torrey**  
Upper Valley, Area 2  
**Lisa Champagne**

**STAFF**

Attorneys  
**James "Jeff" Fannon**  
**Donna M. Watts**  
UniServ Field Staff  
**Norman P. Bartlett**  
**David R. Boulanger**  
**Jerry Carruba**  
**Suzanne B. Dirmaier**  
**Joyce E. Foster**  
**Sean Leach**  
**Robert Raskevitz**  
Organizers  
**Ellen David Friedman**  
**Thomas J. Walters**  
Professional Programs  
**Sherry Gile**  
Benefit Programs  
**Mark L. Hage**  
Administrative Assistants  
**Ellie McAndrew**  
**Sheree O. Parker**  
**Sandy Perkins**  
**Yolly Turner**  
Membership/Accounting  
**Teri Leo Drury**  
Business Manager  
**Claua C. Janus**

## The School Staffing Question

Vermont-NEA Photo by Art Huse

By Angelo J. Dorta, President

The same question seems to be on the lips of every agitated taxpayer and every Vermont broadcast news reporter and commentator, as well as being referenced in virtually every newspaper account and editorial: *"If the number of Vermont students in public schools has declined by 9% overall since 1996, then why has the number of teachers risen by 22%?"* Even Vermont Public Radio is using an identical audio clip to hype their award-winning news department.

### Start with Accurate Data

Please, let's first start with accurate data. In fact, the number of "teachers" has not increased by a percentage anywhere near 22% since 1996. Rather, although the size of Vermont's teacher workforce grew by about 10% in the last half of the 1990's, it expanded by only 400 teachers (8,450 to 8,850) – approximately 4% – during the six years from 2000 to 2006 (Vermont Department of Education statistics). The rest of the 22% is comprised of paraeducators – 14% increase since 2000, many of whom work closely with students on IEPs and with medical needs, thus saving many dollars in lieu of expensive out-of-district residential student place-



*Instead of alarm and suspicion over increases in total school staffing, I believe citizens and educators ought to take great pride in how Vermont schools, teachers, and ESPs have tried to respond to the very real needs of every student and to the new expectations and demands placed on us.*

with its re-establishment of a statewide property tax and an "equalized" student population, simply released that pent-up demand. The hiring

of coordinators and "lead" literacy and math resource teachers – often hired from the district's existing classrooms and, in turn, replaced by new hires – were employed to scrutinize curricula breadth and depth, to better align curricula between district grade levels and schools, and to provide professional development for teachers.

Where needed, there was enough work to add special education teachers and paraeducators, since nearly all students with IEPs also had to be "appropriately" assessed and their scores also had to be both included and reported separately in school improvement calculations.

Where needed, schools even were renovated or newly built, such as in Randolph and in Barre.

Between 1996 and 2006, more money was spent on education in Vermont, and more teachers, paraeducators, and administrators were hired.

There is no doubt about that fact. School costs rose at an average annual rate of 5.6%. **It was the proper response to a societal demand for higher performance by all Vermont students and all Vermont public schools.**

Furthermore, the magnitude of the increased spending was not outlandish, given an average annual inflation rate of around 3% and given national data showing approximately 2/3 of any increased school instructional expenses are used to help special needs students.

### Then Came NCLB

On top of the new state standards and assessment systems, the coming of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 only heightened the demand for continuous student and

*Continued on page 3...*

*"Given the high-stakes, continuous improvement expectations placed on our public schools and educators by the Vermont State Board of Education and the Bush Administration, the hiring of new classroom teachers, curriculum coordinators, and special education teachers and paras made – and still makes – eminent sense."*

ments – and, presumably, district- and school-level administrators.

A 4% increase in teachers across the state is not particularly large, even amidst declining student enrollment. After all, when a few students leave a school, they don't all leave from one classroom, or even from the same grade. If they did, then perhaps a teaching position or two per school reasonably might be eliminated through local reduction-in-force policies and contract provisions.

As is, 400 new teachers statewide translates into only slightly more than one additional teacher for each Vermont public school.

### Enter Act 60

One important factor in school hiring and spending was the inception of 1997's Educational Opportunity for All Act. Act 60 allowed school districts to finally hire the numbers and types of teachers they really had wanted for several years. Previously, many districts simply deferred personnel hirings due to the lingering impact of the national recession in the early 1990s and the fear of school budget defeats caused by the growing, inequitable burden of over-reliance on local property taxes instigated by the prior funding formula. Act 60 implementation,

money now became available, and the need already existed.

### The Need

Between 1996 and 1999, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted its *Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* and its *Vermont Student Assessment Program*, an external school accountability system based on local results of student standardized tests in reading/language arts, mathematics, writing, and – to be added later – science.

With the advent of a statewide student testing regimen using New Standards Reference Exams at several grade intervals, and with the addition of the state's "indexed" scale for setting school performance goals, local school boards, district school administrators, and educators quickly learned that the new mission was state-driven "continuous improvement" by students and public schools.

Of course, local school districts responded accordingly. With the help of more equitable post-Act 60 funding, they ramped-up efforts to meet the expectations of a continuous improvement model. Where needed, more teachers were hired to lower class sizes.

Where needed, curriculum coor-

# Health Care Reform Initiative and the Catamount Health Plan

## Helping Our Members and Our Fellow Vermonters

MONTPELIER – In May 2006, the Legislature passed Acts 190 and 191, together the *Health Care Affordability Act*, which among other things created the **Catamount Health Plan**.

Catamount Health will begin on October 1, 2007 and, along with expanded enrollment efforts dedicated toward Vermont's Medicaid programs, will provide an estimated 60,000 uninsured Vermonters access to a comprehensive and affordable health care benefit.

Plan subscribers in Catamount will have access to primary, preventive and acute care, a three-tier drug prescription benefit, mental health and substance abuse treatment, chronic care and hospitalization.

Vermont-NEA is a member of the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security, a 21 member-group coalition that includes AARP-VT, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, and the AFL-CIO. The Campaign was active throughout the past legislative session to make sure a strong health care reform bill passed, and we will continue to work for further reform and to ensure that uninsured Vermonters are quickly and efficiently enrolled in Catamount Health.

For Vermont-NEA members, mostly support staff, who have not been able to bargain affordable health insurance yet, Catamount Health will provide excellent benefits and real security. In fact, some of our ESP members will be eligible for premium assistance from the state.

### Who is Eligible for Enrolling in Catamount Health?

A Vermonter may purchase Catamount Health if s/he is uninsured or has access to insurance that only provides hospital care or doctors' visits (but not both), is 18 or older, and has not had insurance coverage for the past 12 months. The 12-month waiting period is waived if a person loses health insurance for the following reasons:

- Loss of a job
- The death of a household's principle insurance policy holder

- Divorce or dissolution of a civil union
- No longer qualifying as a dependent under the insurance plan of a parent or relative
- No longer qualifying for COBRA, or other state continuation coverage
- College or university-sponsored health insurance no longer available because of graduation, a leave of absence, or the termination of studies.

### How Much Does Catamount Health Cost?

The premium structure for Catamount Health is income sensitive. In other words, you pay based on what you earn.

Vermonters between 150% and 300% of the federal poverty level are eligible for premium subsidies financed by the state.

Uninsured Vermonters with incomes over 300% of the federal poverty guidelines will be able to buy into the plan at cost.

In the box are preliminary figures from the state on what individuals between 150% and 300% would

pay monthly if they enroll in Catamount:

cessful way to educate Vermonters about and enroll them in public health programs like Catamount Health is through an intensive, community-based effort. Such an effort requires one-on-one and small-group contact with eligible citizens and their dependents in a familiar and trusted local context.

To achieve this, the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security plans to hire and train a team of regionally-based field staff, and coordinate their effort. These specially trained individuals will work closely with key population groups, consumer organizations, and state officials to build awareness of and increase enrollment in Catamount and other publicly funded health plans. These field staff will also reach out to health care providers and others who work daily with uninsured Vermonters.

Unlike virtually every other state in the nation, Vermont's elected leaders recognized that in order to make health care more affordable for all, first, the state must guarantee that its uninsured citizens have access to affordable, high-quality health care.

But, as most health care professionals know, getting people enrolled in a public health program like Catamount Health is a daunting task.

Vermont-NEA, as a member organization of the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security, is actively supporting its enrollment efforts because it will benefit thousands of educational employees who don't have or can't afford good health insurance, and because it will help the families of children in our care. We understand

that tens of thousands of Vermonters who send their kids to public school and vote on school budgets, are in desperate need of health care protection.

Mark Hage, Vermont-NEA's Director of Benefit Programs, will be contacting and working with local leaders in the months ahead as we learn more about the details of Catamount and the Campaign's enrollment initiative unfolds.

Go to [www.healthcaresecurityvt.org](http://www.healthcaresecurityvt.org) to learn more about the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security. Find a Catamount Health fact sheet at [www.vtnea.org](http://www.vtnea.org). ■

Annual Income, 1 person	Individual Catamount Monthly Premiums	
<200% FPL	\$19,600	\$60
200-225%	\$19,600-\$22,050	\$90
225-250%	\$22,050-\$24,500	\$110
250-275%	\$24,500-\$26,950	\$125
275-300%	\$26,950-\$29,400	\$135
>300%	\$29,400	Full price (\$340)

pay monthly if they enroll in Catamount:

Catamount Health also limits the annual in-network, maximum out-of-pocket costs (e.g. deductibles and co-insurance) to \$800 for single coverage and \$1,600 for a family plan, and it waives out-of-pocket costs (no deductible, no co-insurance, no co-payments) for patients who need clinically recommended treatment for a chronic condition or disease.

### Next Steps: Getting Our Members & Other Vermonters Enrolled

The experiences with similar programs for the uninsured in other states indicates that the most suc-

## School Staffing – continued from page 2...

school improvement, this time from the federal level. All students must be "proficient" in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-14 school year, so standardized testing is required for many more students and grade levels (3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, and at least once in high school), with student test data disaggregated into low-income, student disability, gender, English language proficiency, and racial/ethnic categories.

"Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) determinations are made for every public school, with harsher sanctions for schools that don't fulfill all 37 measures annually. And federal criteria for "highly qualified teachers" and highly qualified paraeducators" was imposed.

Given the high-stakes, continuous improvement expectations placed on our public schools and educators by the State Board of Education and the

Bush Administration, the hiring of new classroom teachers, curriculum coordinators, and special education teachers and paras made – and still makes – eminent sense. Is it reasonable to expect higher performance and to accomplish more challenging goals with less resources, or even the same level of resources?

### To This, Add Technology & ESL for Immigrants

During the same decade, schools adapted to modern computer technology for teaching and learning. Computer teachers and hardware technicians were needed. Often, just as occurred with literacy and math resource teachers, these positions were filled by currently employed district teachers with an early and strong interest and aptitude for integrating technology into classroom life, while their former class assignments were taken

over by replacement teachers hired by the district. Given the electronic world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I doubt that our communities would have preferred that Vermont schools not incorporate and apply the latest learning technology to school academics.

Also, don't forget that many children fleeing war in Eastern Europe and Africa were re-settled in Vermont communities and became students in our public schools over the past 15 years. Specialized instructional programs had to be created for them, and teachers of English-as-a-Second-Language emerged as crucial professional employees in several Vermont school districts. In Burlington, for instance, a portion of the pending 07-08 school district budget increase is allocated for the hiring of five more ESL teachers.

### We Should Take Great Pride

Certainly, many of these added

school jobs originally were subsidized by the influx of Act 60 money and by the legally flexible use of President Clinton's Goals 2000/Educate All Children Act federal funds. Now, many parents and citizens join educators in viewing these programs and services as fundamental and essential to the educational well-being of Vermont children.

School districts have stepped up to assume the responsibility and to pay the costs. Are our children not worth it? Isn't our common goal education excellence and equity for *all* students? Instead of alarm and suspicion over increases in total school staffing, I believe citizens and educators ought to take great pride in how Vermont schools, teachers, and ESPs have tried to respond to the very real needs of every student and to the new expectations and demands placed on us. ■

**Vermont Council  
for Gifted  
Education  
presents  
Differentiated  
Instruction  
Workshop**

BURLINGTON – The Vermont Council for Gifted Education will present its Annual Conference on April 16, 2007, from 8:30 am – 3:00 pm at The First Unitarian Universalist Society, 152 Pearl Street, Burlington. **Cindy Strickland will speak on “Challenging Gifted Students Through Differentiated Instruction.”**

Cindy Strickland is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Psychology with an Emphasis in Gifted at the University of Virginia. In the past six years, Cindy has provided hundreds of workshops on topics relating to differentiation, the Parallel Curriculum Model, and gifted education.

Cindy’s publications in differentiation include *Tools for High Quality Differentiation: An ASCD Toolkit* (April 2007); the ASCD online course *Success with Differentiation*; the book *“Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 9-12”* (with Carol Ann Tomlinson); and a unit in the book *“Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum.”* She also wrote *“In Search of the Dream: Designing Schools and Classrooms that Work for High Potential Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds.”*

Additional workshops will include an introduction to Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted, a SENG program, Differentiated Instruction in the High School presented by two teachers from Colchester High School, and a panel of Teachers of the Gifted discussing Differentiated Instruction and Gifted Students.

Fees for the conference are \$125 per person including lunch with a \$10 discount for members of VCGE. There is also a \$25 per person discount for schools sending four or more teachers.

In addition to the daytime program, Ms. Strickland will speak at Colchester High School from 6:00-8:00 pm. Colchester High School is located at 131 Laker Lane, Colchester. The fee for the evening program is \$20 per person with a \$10 discount for VCGE members. Parents and educators are invited to attend.

To register, download a form at [www.vcge.org](http://www.vcge.org) or email [vcgetreas@vcge.org](mailto:vcgetreas@vcge.org) to request a form.

## Legislative Report: To date, a lot of discussion about a lot of education policy

February 19, 2007

Joel D. Cook, Executive  
Director/General Counsel

The Legislature is in early mid-stride – the major issues it intends to address this year have been identified, and the process of putting them in bill form is now underway. Here are four education issues that are dominant, either because of public demand or, more simply, because they have been given significant consideration already.

### School Costs:

#### School Governance

Most legislators seem to agree that, while schools cost a lot of money, there are good reasons for it. They also seem to agree, however, that the public expects them to produce legislation designed to curtail those costs – or at least the rate at which they increase. This is particularly the case, right now, with the House Education Committee, which has been charged by House Speaker Gaye Symington with producing the broad outlines of a bill by the beginning of March.

After soliciting testimony from a wide range of sources – including five Association members who provided different perspectives on the incredible expectations placed on schools – the Committee seems genuinely convinced that resorting to gimmicks, like artificially capping school budget increases, simply would not be good policy. Neither would diminishing the curriculum getting our children ready for citizenship and participation in the economy. Nor do they appear interested in curtailing the social services so many children need to help them learn. Sooner or later, it becomes obvious that our schools are doing pretty much what we as a society are asking of them, and doing so in our rural environment costs a lot.

Why is it, though, that costs per pupil have to rise so fast? Vermont’s school-aged population is in the midst of a decade long decline, but, apparently until last or this year, our schools increased their teaching, paraeducator, and administrative staffs. Some of the major reasons are pretty apparent: pent-up demand left in the wake of the recession of the early 1990’s; related substantial expanded curricular offerings; an explosion, for example, in the number of diagnosed autistic children in the context of an integrative service model; ever-increasing numbers of children with substantial social needs that schools have to address; an actual shift in the source of payment for school-based social services from the state to local school taxpayers; and substantial increased demands from the state for more and more administrative tasks and documentation. But, staff numbers have

peaked and are now on an obvious decline.

So, if the Committee doesn’t want to resort to gimmicks or otherwise damage the array of services schools offer our children, and it can’t wait to see the cost effects of a declining workforce size, what can it do? It can provide the public with better explanations for school costs. It can sing the praises of what educators do every day. It – and the rest of the Legislature – can make it easier for taxpayers to see the connection between their school tax bill and the related reduction in their income taxes. And, they can focus on “efficiency.”

Under that heading, the Committee hopes to find relief in the pending “governance” discussion, spawned by the Commissioner of Education’s recycled suggestion that our 285 or so school districts be consolidated into some 60, reflecting our supervisory union boundaries. That, in turn, goes the theory, might lead to more creative uses of our school buildings and – not incidentally – to shutting some of those with the smallest enrollments. There are process problems with this: every time a similar proposal has been floated from “Montpelier,” it has been rejected by the public, and there is no apparent substantial difference in the process being used this time. Nevertheless, there may be more public support for governance change this time, since it is being tied more closely to the cost issue and since the absence of good alternative approaches lead in its direction. Vermont-NEA has suggested that, while the proposal to shrink the number of school districts may have educational and/or financial merit, the process used to enact it must be respectful of the apprehensions many communities – especially the relatively small ones within supervisory unions – bring into the mix.

We have suggested that the Committee focus on several administrative functions that supervisory unions could manage without actually intruding into the decision-making authority of local school boards. Chief among those functions would be conducting collective bargaining on a supervisory union-wide basis, as is already being done voluntarily in a dozen parts of the state.

There will be much more to discuss and report as the Committee formulates its bill.

### School Costs: School Taxes

Act 60 and, now, its successor, “Act 68,” are under scrutiny for ways to improve how the system we use to pay for schools. Is it the case that requiring tax rates to reflect the fair market value of residential properties could be bad policy? Is it at least logi-

cal, if not politically viable, for school taxes to be more directly attached to a household’s ability to pay? Is there some fundamental flaw in our school funding methodology? These are some of the questions with which the House Ways and Means Committee must struggle.

The primary focus has been on the so-called “CLA problem.” The CLA – common level of appraisal – is the method through which the state tries to smooth out the sometimes sizable differences in approach to local property appraisals. That’s important since Vermont has a statewide – not just a local – property tax and tax rate, and to make sure the tax rate is applied fairly to all of us, the appraisal method needs to be reasonably similar from town to town. The basic “problem” is that property values have gone up much faster than incomes, much faster than school budgets, and faster than local lists typically acknowledge. The state adjusts the tax burden by changing the tax rate applied to a community’s locally determined property values. Generally, therefore, many taxpayers end up paying taxes at a higher rate than they might, and that feels somehow “wrong,” although if local appraisers used the same standard as one another, there would be no discrepant property valuations. The result is one of perception, with taxpayers assessed at tax rates higher than they expect. This problem would resolve itself if the steep increase in property values slows, as appears to be occurring.

### School Policy: Early Education

A special legislative committee has suggested ways for the state to extend the reach of early education for 3- and 4-year olds, by making state funds available for school-based or private programs that meet standards. It would authorize the state board of education to make rules for communities to follow if they are interested in obtaining state funds and, among other things, for parents and providers to follow in requesting funds from the child’s resident school district.

### School calendar

The House Education Committee approved H.15, would have the commissioner of education implement a uniform school calendar, to include common days in all school districts to provide 175 student attendance days, five “in-service” days (with the local capacity to schedule more of each), and statewide assessment and holidays to maximize “uninterrupted periods of instructional time.” The bill does not state if the school year will begin before or after Labor Day or by when in June it will end. ■



## New Teacher Conference: Another Great Success

**SOUTH BURLINGTON --** Teachers in their first four years of service from every corner of the state gathered early in February for Vermont-NEA's annual New Teacher Conference.

The special day-long event, now in its third year, was a great

success, providing important training and networking opportunities available nowhere else. Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta delivered opening remarks. Workshops dealt with Safe Schools, Instructional Decision Making, Legal and Ethical Issues, Vermont's Re-Licensing Process, and basic classroom management skills.

Key to the excellent experience new teachers enjoy at this conference is the format that places some of Vermont's most experienced and celebrated teachers in charge of instruction, including: **Judith Allard**, a former Vermont Teacher of the Year; **Debra Gardner-Baasch**, a district coordinator for gifted and talented education; and **Linda Radtke**,

a mentor coordinator.

Olga Bletmeva is a new teacher at Spaulding High School in Barre. She teaches English as a second language. Asked why she came to the conference, she said: "Because I am a new teacher in Vermont. This is my first year and I really need some support. I would like to meet other people and see whether they are in the same situations as me and find out how they deal with them."

We found Lisa Sedore, a second grade teacher from Danville, sitting at the same table as Olga, and wishing for the same thing. She said she was looking to meet other people in similar situations to share ideas and strategies. Perfect. ■

Vermont-NEA Photos by Art Huse



*Top Left: L-R Olga Bletmeva of Spaulding High School; Gerry Reymore of Randolph Technical Career Center; Christina Meirelles of Rivendell Academy in Orford, NH; Vermont-NEA UniServ Director Bob Raskevitz; and Chuck Lyman of Randolph Technical Career Center.*

*Bottom Left: L-R Anna Kilmer, third year third grade teacher in Colchester; Kim Chittenden, fourth grade teacher at Mallets Bay School; and Kim Burroughs, librarian at Jericho Elementary.*

*Bottom Right: Lisa Sedore, second grade, Danville.*

*Top Right: Mohamdou Ndione, French teacher at Warren Elementary School and Stowe Middle School, with his mentor, Linda Radtke of Washington West..*



# 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. These are the candidates; their statements appear on pages 4, 5 and 6:

- ✓ President  
**Angelo J. Dorta**
- ✓ Vice President  
**Lisa Champagne**
- ✓ Secretary-Treasurer  
**Brian Walsh**
- ✓ Secretary-Treasurer  
**Jeff Isham**
- ✓ Six seats on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors:
  - Addison-Rutland, Area 1 (Addison Central, Addison Northeast,

- Addison Northwest, Addison-Rutland)
- Rose Wenzel**
  - Chittenden, Area 1 (Burlington, Colchester, Winooski)
- Mary Ann Barnes**
  - Central Vermont, Area 2 (Orange North, Orange Southwest, Washington Central, Washington Northeast, Washington South)
- Wes Gibbs**
- Terry Vest**
  - Northeast Kingdom, Area 1 (Caledonia Central, Caledonia North, Essex-Caledonia, St. Johnsbury)
- Lydia Alexander**
  - Northwestern Vermont, Area 1 (Franklin West, Lamoille North, Lamoille South, Orleans Southwest)

- Bonnie Tuscany**
  - Southern Vermont, Area 2 (Bennington-Rutland, Southwestern Vermont)
- no petitions submitted*
- ✓ Fifteen Vermont-NEA Delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, plus a Retired Delegate – one-vote positions.
- Martha Allen**-Essex North EA
- Marie Benway**-Windham NE EA
- Lisa Champagne**-Windsor SE EA
- Natasha Eckart**-Washington So EA
- Linda Howard**-Twinfield Staff Assn
- Cynthia Howarth**-Windham NE EA
- Jeff Isham**-Washington West EA
- Kim Kimler**-Addison Central EA
- Cathy Knight**-Reading EA

- Alison Sylvester**-Springfield TA
  - Bonnie Tuscany**-Morristown EA
  - Terri Vest**-Twinfield EA
  - Brian Walsh**-Essex Jct/Westford EA
  - Eric Weiss**-Lamoille UHS EA
  - Rose Wenzel**-Addison NW TA
  - Jay Kaplan**-Retired
- The RA meets in Philadelphia this year, from June 30 through July 5. Each delegate is elected for one year and 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, 2007.

## For Vermont-NEA President



**Angelo J. Dorta** seeks an eighth 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”**

Dear Association Members:

This is my final campaign for re-election. It's been a great honor and a great responsibility to serve as your Vermont-NEA President. I thank all of you for the opportunity to support and represent Vermont's teachers, ESPs, and public schools during my years as your democratically elected leader. I especially appreciate your frequent words of encouragement and gratitude.

I seek two final years as President to help pursue several clear, specific goals on your behalf:

- 1) **Significant improvements during federal re-authorization of**

**the No Child Left Behind Act that best serve Vermont**

- 2) **School working conditions surveys to increase teacher/ESP professional support**

- 3) **Association capacity to deliver harassment/bullying prevention training**

- 4) **Broader and more effective pro-public education messages and coalitions**

- 5) **Sustained legislative commitment for full teacher retirement system funding.**

- 6) **100% ESP participation in municipal employee pensions, with improved retiree health insurance**

- 7) **Membership growth that energizes local affiliates and strengthens advocacy for professional salaries and high quality, affordable health insurance**

- 8) **Voluntary access to high quality, publicly funded early edu-**

### cation for all pre-schoolers

Your welfare and that of your students, schools, profession, and Association are the most significant considerations in any Vermont-NEA election. I've always worked very hard and strived to serve you well. I'll continue to do so until my final day in office.

Such challenging work requires *passion and energy, commitment and knowledge, vision and judgement, effective communication skills, and new advocacy ideas.* I still possess these same qualities that mark my 35 years as a classroom teacher and Association leader. You know me, and there's abundant information with which to assess Vermont-NEA's accomplishments during my tenure as your Vermont-NEA President.

Thus, I ask for your vote and strong recommendation to colleagues. Please vote by April 16<sup>th</sup>.

## For Secretary-Treasurer

**Jeff Isham** of Moretown seeks election as Vermont-NEA Secretary-Treasurer.

### 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 second three-year term on the Vermont Standards Board for Profes-



sional 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.

**You will receive the Vermont-NEA Election Ballot through the mail at your home...**

**Mark and Return It During Election Weeks: April 2-16, 2007**

For Vermont-NEA Vice President

**Lisa Champagne** of Windsor seeks election as Vermont-NEA Vice President.

**Statement**

As we all know, education works in cycles. This spring, Vermont-NEA is entering its own new cycle. Our members are faced with choices that will provide leadership for the next couple of years.

Many of the initiatives and issues that were of concern in the past are again working their way to the forefront – the statewide teaching contract, consolidation of supervisory unions, larger class sizes. Added to these are many issues that are seeing new life: the ramifications of NCLB, better and safer working conditions, health benefits, retirement concerns, recruitment of student members, the effect of legislators and other public officials on public education and our profession.

Vermont-NEA, through its leadership, must take a very active role in determining the direction public education will take in our state and beyond. We must continue to address change and improvement for students and teachers at the same time we protect the gains we have made through decades of hard work.

Through such varied roles as local negotiator and president, state board member, and national resolutions committee member, I have worked for years on teams that support these goals



and work to foment change. Without individuals working together to shape a unified voice, we cannot gain ground. I would like to be that unified voice.

It is my sincere desire to continue to advocate for you, for students, and for high-quality public schools. As vice president of Vermont-NEA, I will be able to bring my experience and expertise to bear in yet another capacity. I look forward to bringing you my ideas and hearing your concerns on the campaign trail. It has been a privilege to serve you in the leadership roles I have thus far been honored to hold. I appreciate your vote in the upcoming election. Thank you for your support. ■

**Brian Walsh** of Essex Junction seeks election as Vermont-NEA Vice President.

**Statement**

My name is Brian Walsh and I want to be your next Vermont-NEA Vice President. A history teacher for 24 years, I am proud to be a member of Vermont-NEA. Our union serves us well, both as a professional association that enhances our vocation, and as a labor organization that provides the assistance and support we need to achieve fair salaries, benefits and working conditions.

As we know, these are challenging times for educators and education support professionals. We are continually asked to do more; legislation often increases the difficulty of our jobs, our health care system is in crisis, and many teachers and nearly all support staff are making less than a livable wage.

As the demands on us increase, and we struggle to maintain what we have earned at bargaining tables and picket lines, we often get the feeling that there is little we can do to improve our situation. But rather than accept that pessimistic assessment, I believe it is important to remember Robert F. Kennedy's words: "Some people see things and ask 'why?' I see things and ask 'Why not?'"

As members of the largest union in the state, maybe it's time we ask "Why not?" We belong to a powerful



organization with many resources, and therefore we are capable of making an even greater positive difference than we already do. By being involved, informed and empowered, Vermont-NEA members can bring progress for teachers, support staff, students and our communities.

As your next Vermont-NEA Vice President, my goal, with your support, will be to help Angelo Dorta, Jeff Isham, your Board and all of us realize Vermont-NEA's potential. As your next Vice President, I am committed to helping Vermont-NEA – a great organization – become even better. ■

For Vermont-NEA Board of Directors

**Rose Wenzel** of Vergennes seeks election to the Vermont-NEA Board seat representing Addison-Rutland, Area 1.

**Statement**

There are several reasons why I want to continue to serve on the Board of Directors for the Addison-Rutland Area 1. I have enthusiasm and motivation, which provides me with a passion for every challenge that a board member tackles. Leadership skills are important to me and being a board member provides these skills and helps me gain confidence with each new challenge and skill learned.

It is essential for me to increase my awareness of the issues concerning our union. I have an opportunity to assure progress and to see the direct outcome of my specific efforts. The Vermont NEA has given me a great deal; being a board member allows me a chance to give back to the organization. Thank you for your support.



**Mary Ann Barnes** of Colchester seeks election to the Vermont-NEA Board seat representing Chittenden, Area 1.

**Statement**

Dear Colleagues,  
I have completed two years on the Board representing Chittenden Area 1 and I would like the chance to serve for another term. I feel as if I have learned a great deal about Vermont-NEA and how it works and I am now in a position to provide our membership with even more experience and knowledge. Thank you!



**Wesley D. Gibbs** of Randolph seeks election to the Vermont-NEA Board seat representing Central Vermont, Area 2.

**Statement**

Hello. I'm Wesley Gibbs from Randolph. I have been in the School system for 10 years and have been an Association Member for nine of those years. I have been on the negotiation team for both ESP and Teachers Bargaining. I was a part of Vermont-NEA's ESP Retirement Research Committee. I have been President of the ESP portion of our local Association for the past two years.

I have been an active member of the Regional Bargaining for Central Vermont. I have dedicated a tremendous amount of time for my local and now feel it is time to expand my services to serve all of Central Vermont. I think it is important that we get and keep ESP involved in all aspects of Vermont-NEA.

Thanks for your consideration, and please remember to vote.



**Terri Vest** of Twinfield seeks election to the Vermont-NEA Board seat representing Central Vermont, Area 2.

**Statement**

I'm Terri Vest and I'd like to continue to represent you as the Central Vermont Area 2 Board director. You may have met me at workshops or trainings around the state; I attend most state-wide and area trainings because I believe I should be present and available to members. I've been a regular, active member of the Central Vermont RBC since its beginning. I'm on various NEA and Vermont-NEA committees including chairing the Teaching and Learning Steering Committee, working to bring important opportunities to our members. For example, I assisted Sherry Gile in writing a grant which is currently funding our latest offering of Anti-bullying Trainings and have trained to help deliver those trainings. I have been an outspoken advocate for educational concerns in state discussions about NCLB and its impact on our schools. I hope you will consider my experience and vote for me in the upcoming election.



For NEA Representative Assembly Delegate from Vermont

*The National Education Association's 145th Annual Meeting and 86th Representative Assembly convenes this year, June 30 through July 5, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. The first two days are devoted to discussions, conferences, and exhibits, but the highlight is the four-day Representative Assembly or "RA." Our national RA is the Association's highest decision-making body and, with over 9,000 delegates,*

*it is the world's largest democratic, deliberative body.*

*RA Delegates debate issues that impact American public education, elect top officers, and set policy for our 3.2 million-member Association.*

*Vermont-NEA will send 15 elected delegates to the RA, plus a retired delegate and our NEA Director, all led by Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta. These are the 2007 candidates for RA delegate:*

**Martha Allen** is a member of the Essex North Education Association.

**Statement**

Public education advocacy is larger than the local and state affiliates. As I advocate at both the local and state levels, I feel the obligation to bring my energy into the national arena. The NEA Representative Assembly is a very real reminder that everyone must work to preserve public education. If elected, I will also attend the Peace and Justice Caucus meetings. With your support, I will represent you in a thoughtful, responsible manner.



**Marie Benway** is a member of the Windham Northeast Education Association.

**Statement**

Once again it is time to ask for your support. This year I am proud to run as a candidate for delegate to the Representative Assembly. It is an amazing experience, one that I have had the opportunity to enjoy for the past three years...



I thank you in advance for your support in these trying times, where boards are trying to bully Association members to take less than what they are really worth.

**Lisa Champagne** is a member of the Windsor Southeast Education Association.

**Statement**

I have been a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly since 1996. This is also the sixth (and last) year I have been elected as Vermont's only representative on the NEA Resolutions Committee. I will continue to use my experience and knowledge to represent Vermont during this challenging time in public education. Please remember me when you vote in April. It would be an honor to serve as a delegate and Resolutions Committee member in July.



**Linda Howard** is a member of the Twinfield Staff Association.

**Statement**

I am a candidate for the NEA Representative Assembly. I am a local president and serve on several

Vermont-NEA committees, including Professional Development, By-laws, and ESP of the Year. I am a diversity trainer for the NEA and on the Vermont-NEA anti-bullying cadre. I have also served on the NEA Elections Committee. I am proud of all the great work Vermont does at the RA and ask for your vote.



**Cynthia Howarth** is a member of the Windham Northeast Education Association.

**Statement**

It is time to ask for your support as I run for the Representative Assembly. I went last year for the first time: what a fabulous experience. I met with people from other states around the nation. They struggle with the same problems we do. I am active in my local Association as co-vic president. I serve on the resolutions committee and attend regional bargaining, in my area. I thank you in advance for your support.



**Jeff Isham** is a member of the Washington West Education Association.

**Statement**

The NEA Representative Assembly is the single most important event for the Association each year. Issues concerning education and our Association are debated in a large Town Meeting like setting. As an experienced NEA Delegate, I wish to return to the 2007 RA in Philadelphia and engage in the debate and decision making. Please remember to ask your delegates to discuss with you what transpires at the RA. Vote Jeff Isham for NEA RA Delegate!



**Kim Kimler** is a member of the Addison Central Education Association.

**Statement**

I'm asking for support as an Addison County teacher who has worn many hats over my 20 plus years. I'm currently the president



of my Association, the regional bargaining representative, and have negotiated several times. The national Representative Assembly provides me with energy, knowledge and insight into issues from around the nation, Northeast and Vermont. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to serve you all in these capacities.

**Alison Sylvester** is a member of the Springfield Teachers Association.

**Statement**

I've been honored to serve as a Vermont delegate to the Representative Assembly for the past seven years. I've been an active member of NEA at the local and state level. As a delegate, I've been able to represent the concerns of Vermont teachers. My experience has enabled me to advocate for Vermont's unique needs and goals and participate in the NEA's decision-making process first hand. I would greatly appreciate your continued support and vote.



**Terri Vest** is a member of the Twinfield Education Association.

**Statement**

I have had the privilege of representing Vermont at the NEA Representative Assembly for the past 10 years. In that time, I have been an active participant, have attended meetings of the Budget, Legislative, and Resolutions Committees, and have successfully lobbied the national organization to increase its support for Vermont initiatives. Your vote is important to me - please let me represent you once again this summer.



**Eric Weiss** is a member of the Lamoille Union Education Association.

**Statement**

The task of the NEA RA, a meeting of 10,000 NEA representatives from around the country, is to set the agenda for NEA programs for the upcoming year. As we look forward to the reauthorization of ESEA, and the impact NCLB has had on our profession, it would be an honor to represent you in setting the correct course for this vital legislation. Let's put education back in the hands of educators.



**Rose Wenzel** is a member of the Addison Northwest Teachers and Vergennes Paraeducator Education Associations.

**Statement**

I am a proactive leader of Vermont-NEA serving several positions at the local and state levels. I have a unique job: 50% classroom teacher and 50% paraeducator. This gives me the opportunity to recognize the many needs of all educators. It would be an honor to advocate for Vermont educators at the National Representative Assembly. I will raise awareness to the challenging issues we are facing in education in Vermont. I greatly appreciate your support!



For Retired Delegate

**Jay Kaplan** is retired from Essex High School after a 30-year teaching career.

**Statement**

For the past eight years I have represented retired teachers at the NEA Representative Assembly, and I have been on the state teachers' retirement system board for the past 18 years. I have used my time at the RA to strengthen our retirement security. I have introduced successful legislative items and new business items that have helped to insure and protect retirement benefits. Please let me have the honor of representing you again.



**Letters Welcome!**

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

**LETTERS**

**Lisa Champagne: No Better Person for the Job**

For four years, I have worked with Lisa Champagne as a teaching colleague and union activist.

As chief negotiator during a contentious year, Lisa continually proved herself a clever strategist and contractual expert. Facing a lawyer and a board who often seemed to pick fights, she was unflappable. Watching Lisa in negotiations is like a crash course in professionalism and poker.

This year, I asked Lisa to serve as grievance chair. Lisa's analyses are thorough and dispassionate, and her tenacity and professionalism in meetings with administrators are beyond admirable.

Perhaps most importantly, she is the consummate team player. She listens carefully to all and works to build a consensus and a united front. I continue to be impressed with her ability to draw value from all comments, even those with which I know she does not agree.

Lisa has a strong analytical mind, a profound knowledge of Association and professional matters, and an unerring sense of what's appropriate in the professional setting.

As vice president, Lisa Champagne would be wise and tenacious, professional and open. I can think of no better person for the job.

**Ben Boyington**  
Windsor Southeast EA

**Terri Vest Has a Great Deal to Offer**

I write in support of Terri Vest as a candidate for the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors for Central Vermont, Area 2. I have served on the Board with Terri for the past two years and have also known her through work with the Human and Civil Rights Committee. I know Terri to be highly knowledgeable, very experienced, and truly dedicated to representing the members in her Area. I think Terri has a great deal to offer Central Vermont educators and I hope they will vote for her. Thank you!

**Mary Ann Barnes**  
Colchester EA

**Brian Walsh Really "Walks the Walk"**

I hope you will join me in supporting Brian Walsh for Vermont-NEA Vice President.

Brian is a bright, hardworking, knowledgeable and very committed member of Vermont-NEA. He has served on the Vermont-NEA Board

of Directors since 2005, representing Essex, Essex Junction, Westford and Milton. I have gotten to know Brian in that capacity and also through his role as the President of the EJWEA. In both roles, Brian has always operated from a position of high integrity. He really "walks the walk"—as I saw quite literally last fall, when Brian organized a strong turnout of teachers from his association to join the Colchester strike line!

I value Brian's ability to listen to others and to thoughtfully consider their views, as well as his openness in sharing his own convictions. It is my belief that Brian can bring perspective, energy, and conscientiousness to the position of Vice President of Vermont-NEA. Please consider supporting him!

**Mary Ann Barnes**  
Colchester EA

**You Will Be Impressed by Brian Walsh**

Brian Walsh is running for Vermont-NEA vice president and, from what I have observed, he is a candidate who merits serious consideration.

I met Brian at our bargaining council in Chittenden County. He is intensely loyal to Vermont-NEA, in terms of both the membership and the organization. Enhancing the work environment for school employees and the learning environment for students are what he is all about. He has no false pride or bravado. He checks his information before acting, and he has no fear of pursuing what's right and fair. He understands the importance of political action. He understands the importance of both talking the talk and walking the walk... be it peace rallies, marches for workers' rights, activism for health care reform... be it serving as a local, county, and state voice within Vermont-NEA.

I encourage you to get to know Brian. I believe that you will be impressed by his intelligence, his credentials, and his energetic commitment to making our world better for his having been in it.

**Maida F. Townsend**  
Winooski Education Association

**Brian Is Our Man**

Brian Walsh would be outstanding as Vermont-NEA Vice President.

Brian's energy, diligence, and passion in the service of students, schools, and the people who make schools work for students are evident at every level.

In his classroom he was just featured in the *Burlington Free Press* helping students understand the history of the Vietnam War in the context of recent and current events in Iraq. In his local Association, in the Chittenden District, and beyond, Brian is known well for listening and leading with equal fervor.

And when slugging it out in the trenches—even after the ranks have thinned—Brian is still there.

When Colchester's teachers walked the line in 2005, the support of

colleagues from near and far was the bedrock of our fortitude and inspiration: so many pitched in their support, encouragement, and good will—so many came and walked some miles beside us.

Brian was with us and then some. I'd see him picketing in the afternoon, I'd read his letter in newspaper in the morning, and then he'd show up again at a nearly impromptu crisis-in-the-community meeting in the evening when half of us were home soaking our feet.

How did he even *know* about these things? Believe me, Brian is our man.

**Michael Long**  
Colchester EA

**Brian Walsh: Leadership We Want in the VP Position**

I am writing to support the candidacy of Brian Walsh for Vice President of Vermont-NEA.

I have worked with Brian for the last three years on the Chittenden County Regional Bargaining Council, and have come to know him as a dedicated Association member and hard-working leader. His skills would serve us well in Vermont-NEA.

Brian is the type of leader who shows up on the picket line when your local is on strike and brings issues regarding your local to the Board of Directors, even when he does not "officially" represent you. He looks out for all members of Vermont-NEA, and that is the leadership we want in the Vice President's position. Please join me in supporting Brian's candidacy.

**Terri Szymanski**  
Green Mountain-NEA

**Lisa Champagne Is a Natural Leader**

I write this letter to support the candidacy of Lisa Champagne, my colleague and friend. I have had the honor and pleasure of working with and learning from this extraordinary woman for over ten years. She is a true role model for professional educators in Vermont; one whose clarity of vision, knowledge of procedure and planning, and willingness to serve tirelessly and unstintingly make her invaluable to our district, our community and to our state.

Lisa's wisdom, experience and generosity are always evident at school, whether advocating for students with special needs, advising colleagues on relicensure, or facilitating student council events. Lisa implements the solutions to challenges and works with tact and kindness to unite students, parents and administrators. Her remarkable contributions as a union representative have enlightened and encouraged all of us.

Lisa has meticulously prepared other faculty members to maintain her high standards for service. She is a natural leader; one who is instinctively at ease with and courteous to everyone. I believe that Vermont-NEA will be best served by Lisa Champagne.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

aylhsjul@windsork12.vt.us  
**Julie Aylward**  
Windsor Southeast EA

**I Support Brian Walsh**

I have had the opportunity to work with Brian Walsh during his tenure on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors. He has come to the Board with enthusiasm and a willingness to listen to all points of view. He has volunteered to work on various committees, was elected to represent Vermont as a delegate to the 2006 NEA Representative Assembly, and participated in the 2007 Northeast Leadership Conference.

He is passionate about civil rights and works diligently on the NEA Human and Civil Rights Committee. As a strong local leader, he has brought valuable leadership skills to Vermont-NEA.

It is with pleasure that I support Brian Walsh in his candidacy for Vice President. I urge all members to exercise their right to vote. Please fill out and return your ballot as soon as it is received.

**Tom Gallagher**  
Lamoille Union EA

**Lisa Takes Time to See All Sides**

I would like to ask you to vote for Lisa Champagne for Vermont NEA Vice President. I have worked with Lisa as a member of the Resolutions Committee, which she chairs. Lisa is a thorough, careful educator who looks for common ground with her committee members. She is strong minded and willing to take the time to see all sides of issues. I have seen Lisa work at the NEA RA and other functions and find her informed and articulate.

Please vote Lisa Champagne  
**Linda Howard**  
Twinfield Staff Association

**Terri Has Done a Great Job for Us**

Please consider voting to re-elect Terri Vest for the Board of Director seat Central Vermont Area 2. Terri is an NEA diversity training cadre and human and civil rights committee member. She wrote the handbook for the Portfolio for Paraeducator workshops offered by Vermont-NEA and NEA ESP conferences.

Terri involves her Area 2 members at regional bargaining and regularly asks for our input. She has done a great job for us.

**Linda Howard**  
Twinfield Staff Association

**We Need a Person with Brian's Integrity**

I am writing this letter in support of Brian Walsh for Vermont-NEA Vice President.

Brian was raised in a working class family, his upbringing and edu-

*Continued on page 10...*

*Continued from page 9...*

cation have made him committed to labor issues.

Brian is a very dedicated, enthusiastic, and good humored. These qualities alone are necessary for the vice president because when things get tough, we need someone who can look at the situation seriously, but yet realize it is all right to have a sense of humor. Brian strives to make sure the Union enforces the democratic process.

Brian is considerate and understanding to the needs of the membership of Vermont-NEA. He works diligently at the Board level trying to encourage goals and objectives for the future of the organization. It is people like Brian who make our organization excel with pride. Brian identifies with the needs of teachers and support staff in Vermont.

We need a person with Brian's integrity and stamina representing Vermont-NEA in such an important office. I urge you to support Brian Walsh for vice president of Vermont NEA!

**Rose Wenzel**

Addison Northwest TA  
Vergennes ESP EA

**Lisa Champagne Would Serve Us Well as VP**

The person who fills the role of Vermont-NEA Vice President needs to have the willingness to assist the President and the ability to focus on details. Lisa Champagne is the person who has both of these qualities.

As Chair of the Vermont-NEA Resolutions Committee, she has led this very important committee through the arduous job of reviewing our resolutions on a yearly basis. She continuously ensures that our resolutions are up to date and coincide with the NEA Resolutions, as it is appropriate.

Lisa has stepped up to the plate many times in the last few years to serve on Vermont-NEA committees and also in her own local, always elevating the Association to higher levels. She would serve the Association well as its next vice president.

**Jeff Isham**

Washington West EA

**Lisa Is the Best Candidate**

I'm writing to encourage all Vermont-NEA members to vote for Lisa Champagne in the upcoming election for vice president.

Lisa has many years of successful experience at the national level as an NEA delegate and Vermont's sole representative on the NEA Resolutions Committee. As the chair of the Vermont-NEA Resolutions Committee, Lisa brought the training, knowledge, and experiences she gained at the national level home to Vermont. This has prepared her for a larger role as one of our state leaders.

As a member of the Vermont-NEA Board, Lisa has represented her area members with passion. Her first thoughts are always about her mem-

bers; her awareness of herself as a representative, not as a single voice, is another quality that makes Lisa the best candidate for the position of vice president.

Educators continue to engage in responding to unfunded mandates, increased standardized testing, teacher retirement, ESP salaries, health care concerns and other important topics. Experience and passion combine to make Lisa the ideal person for the position as vice president in these difficult times. We need someone with extensive experience at the national, state and local levels to advocate for Vermont and for Vermont educators. I urge you to vote for Lisa.

**Terri Vest**

Twinfield EA

**I Support Terri Vest for Board Director**

I am writing in support of Terri Vest for Director, Central Vermont, Area 2. Terri is an experienced, thoughtful, committed, very successful local leader who understands the importance of strong local associations. She believes in taking a proactive stance in the area educational reform, addressing the many issues in a considered, logical manner suggesting solutions.

Terri has worn many hats in her advocacy for the educators of Vermont. She brings this expertise to the state level as a member of the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors where she works not only for members in her area, but for all members in all areas of the state.

I believe that Terri will continue to strengthen Vermont-NEA for all members. I know that she will work tirelessly on our behalf to improve our public image and defend public education. Therefore, I urge you to vote for her in April.

**Lisa Champagne**

Windsor Southeast EA

**Brian: Dedicated to Justice, Fairness, and Honesty**

My name is Joel Lagrow, and I am serving my third year as the vice-president of the Essex Junction Westford Education Association. I am writing in support of Brian Walsh as he campaigns for the position of vice-president of Vermont-NEA.

Brian has served as our president for the past six years, and I have worked closely with Brian as we have dealt with the daily operations of our large (about 400 members) local Association, which is composed of both teachers and support staff. I have always been deeply impressed by his commitment to his members' welfare, and by his dedication to the principles of justice, fairness, and honesty.

Brian believes strongly in the democratic process, and has worked tirelessly to get more of our members involved in the daily affairs of our union. This has resulted in a strong, healthy organization with a large group of dedicated people in leadership po-

sitions.

I am certain that all members of Vermont-NEA will be well served if he is elected to this position. Please join me in supporting Brian when it is time to cast your votes in April.

**Joel Lagrow**

Essex Junction Westford EA

**Lisa Has the Experience to Lead Vermont-NEA**

I am writing in support of Lisa Champagne for the position of Vice President of the Vermont NEA. I have worked with Lisa since 1996, and believe that she is a strong advocate for teachers.

Last year, the WSEA was involved in a difficult contract negotiation. Rather than get into a defensive posture with the school board, as the chief negotiator, Lisa initiated a pro-active approach. We established a "settle the contract" committee, emphasizing positive interactions between teachers, students and the community. Instead of "work to rule," we engaged in activities such as "walk-ins." We wore buttons with positive messages.

Lisa and I have worked closely together over the years. Whenever I work with students on Lisa's caseload, I know that she will be clear, direct and supportive to all parties. It is imperative that young teachers get the mentoring they need to succeed in education; Lisa will work to ensure that young people feel the encouragement of their colleagues.

At a time when the profession of teaching in Vermont is in transition and under increasing demands, I believe that Lisa Champagne has the experience and dedication to lead Vermont-NEA in new, positive directions.

**Beth Houde**

Windsor Southeast EA

**Lisa, Our Resolution Gal**

I am writing in support of Lisa Champagne as a candidate for Vice President of Vermont-NEA. Lisa has served at the local, state, and national levels of the association in many capacities.

I have worked with Lisa on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors, as representatives at the Upper Valley Regional Bargaining council, and on ad-hoc committees. I find Lisa to be knowledgeable and dedicated to our profession. She has worked tirelessly on the Resolution Committee in Vermont and at the national level.

I urge you to VOTE for Lisa Champagne for vice president.

**Cherrie Torrey**

Hartford Education Association

**ESP: Support Brian Walsh**

I would like to encourage all ESP members to support Brian Walsh's candidacy for Vice President of the Vermont-NEA.

Brian's dedication to the issues facing support staff makes him a valuable voice in advocating for change. As the president of the EJWEA, Brian has worked to increase support staff

membership, taking the time to reach out to individuals, listening to their concerns, and educating them on the benefits in joining.

As membership has increased, Brian has encouraged new members to take active roles in the EJWEA and to take advantage of the resources that Vermont-NEA offers to ESP members. He has been instrumental in changes in EJWEA that have resulted in a stronger voice for all support staff members.

Individually, he takes the concerns of the paraprofessionals to heart, making sure that when there is a concern or grievance, the ESP member receives the support that they need to resolve the issue.

Brian's commitment to the ESP staff in the EJWEA comes through loud and clear. I urge all support staff members to vote for Brian Walsh. I believe that he would bring this same commitment to the role of Vermont-NEA Vice President.

**Narda McKeen LaClair**

Essex Junction Westford EA

**Brian Walsh Is Right for the Job**

The position of vice president is one of great importance in the Association and Brian Walsh is the right candidate for the job.

I have had the privilege of working with Brian for almost two years as Vermont-NEA Board Directors. His dedication to the Association is manifest in contributions of both his time and his thoughtful participation. He diligently works well with other board members for the good of the Association.

Brian is an energetic candidate, looking toward what we, as leaders in education, can do to improve education opportunities for Vermont's children and the working conditions of all school employees. These are difficult times for labor unions, including our NEA, and we must remain united in our efforts. Brian has substantial knowledge of the history and importance of the labor movement in the United States. His respect for our union is evident in his active support for workers' rights. With your support, Brian will be able to put his dedication and energy to work for you.

Vote Brian Walsh for vice president of Vermont-NEA.

**Martha Allen**

Essex North EA

**March 12 is the deadline for letters**

**for the April issue of Vermont-NEA Today.**

**Please respect the 200-word limit, and send only one letter.**

**Thank you.**



**What a way to spend a Saturday!**

*This is how elected Vermont-NEA Board members spend a lot of Saturdays! Here's Board Director Ann Lavery at the February Board meeting in Montpelier, where auditors presented their report, the Association's 2007-08 budget was finalized, and a new Vermont-NEA Partnership was approved for "Children Gather Round." Board members are volunteers who serve 3-year terms.*

**Vermont-NEA  
Conference  
for  
Education  
Support  
Professionals**

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

**FREE for Vermont-NEA members  
Information & Registration at [www.vtnea.org](http://www.vtnea.org)**

**Upcoming  
Association  
events...**

**March 2**

Celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday and NEA's Read Across America

**March 9**

*Bedtime Storytime* in Doris Perry's kindergarten class at Mount Holly School.

"We will come to school in our pajamas (optional for parents) and read, read, read with the children," says Doris. "The Storytime will be in the early evening for one hour. I encourage the parents to bring their favorite read-alouds. We have the students read, the parents read, and I will read. We'll serve hot chocolate and cookies."



Doris won a *Mean Mr. Grinch* mug from Vermont-NEA for this great plan!

**March 12**

Deadline for the April issue of Vermont-NEA Today.

**March 23**

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

The Conference offers a diverse selection of workshops and a keynote address by Laurel Tobiason, Vermont-NEA ESP of the Year. These are the workshop offerings:

- POSITIVE ACTIONS FOR SAFE SCHOOLS
- SUPPORTING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS
- THE PUZZLE OF AUTISM
- TRUE COLORS
- DISABILITY AWARENESS
- TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS
- LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES
- HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING
- READING FLUENCY AS A MODEL: IMPROVING READING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

**March 31**

The Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly convenes at the Rutland Holiday Inn and Conference Center.

RA Delegates: Treat yourself to an overnight at the Rutland Holiday Inn! Vermont-NEA's Annual Meeting Convenes on Saturday morning. Delegates who want to arrive Friday evening to enjoy dinner and overnight accommodations can call the Inn at 1-800-462-4810 to reserve a room at a special rate of \$99.95. March 16 is the deadline for reservations.

## New Identify Theft Protection from California Casualty

If you have car and home insurance through California Casualty, a company endorsed by NEA Member Benefits to manage the A+ NEA Members Auto & Home Insurance Program, you now have access to a new kind of protection. It's called Identity Theft Resolution Service.

Every day, 19,000 people discover their "identity" has been stolen. Educational employees are among the victims. California Casualty's Identity Theft Resolution Service is a new benefit available to their auto and home policyholders. It comes at no extra cost, and gives Vermont-NEA members enrolled in the program immediate access to resolution services should they fall victim to identity theft.

Here are some of the ways Identity Theft Resolution Service can make your life easier:

- A fraud specialist serving as your personal advocate through the entire resolution process and taking the guesswork out of restoring your identity.
- Direct assistance with agency notifications, report filings and paperwork to save you time and frustration.
- One full year of credit and fraud monitoring to protect your good name and help prevent future fraud attempts.
- Assistance replacing documents destroyed in a home disaster to allow you to focus on the recovery process.

Again, there is no extra cost for this service, if you are a member of Vermont-NEA and a policy holder with California Casualty.

For complete service details, please visit [www.aplus.com/idtheft.html](http://www.aplus.com/idtheft.html). If you are shopping for a home or auto insurance policy, call one of California Casualty's sales representatives at 1-877-999-8952 from 8:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m. EST.

## Unique Natural Resources Education Opportunity for Vermont High Schoolers

Vermont's Envirothon is seeking high school aged teams from public and private schools, home school groups, and youth groups throughout the state to participate in the 2007 program. The Envirothon is a hands-on educational program designed specifically for high school students, focusing on natural resources. It focuses on wildlife forestry, water resources, soils, and a special topic current issue. This year's current issue is Alternative/Renewable Energy. Each of the Envirothon's five areas contains a variety of activities with content addressed in the Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities for both fields of Knowledge and Vital Results using multiple learning opportunities.

Envirothon teams receive an information-filled resource guide and a training day on April 3. The Envirothon challenge will be held on May 16th. The team with the highest scores in all areas will receive an all-expense paid trip to the Canon North American Envirothon held in late July.

Schools and organizations can have 2 teams officially participating in the event. The cost for the first team is \$50. The second team costs \$30. Additional students can attend both the training day and the event day as al-



ternates. Envirothon information can be found on the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts website at [www.vacd.org](http://www.vacd.org) or by contacting Carrie Riker, Vermont Envirothon coordinator, at [carrie.riker@vt.nacdnet.net](mailto:carrie.riker@vt.nacdnet.net).

## Add [neamb.com](http://neamb.com) to your list of favorites.

The screenshot shows a web browser's Favorites menu. The menu is open, and 'neamb.com' is selected. Other items in the menu include 'Add to Favorites...', 'Organize Favorites...', 'cnn.com', 'discovery.com', 'ebay.com', 'google.com', 'nea.org', 'pbs.org', and 'weather.com'. The background of the screenshot shows the neamb.com website, which features the NEA Member Benefits logo and the slogan 'We're helping make members' lives better - from the first day - right through retirement.' Below the slogan, there is a small text block: 'There are many ways that NEA Member Benefits can help you provide a better life for your family. Thanks to the buying power of 2.8 million members, you can save with exclusive Insurance Programs, Financial Services and Member Discounts designed to meet your ever-changing needs. Don't forget to also visit our helpful Tools and Tips and Free Monthly Giveaways section.' At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a button that says 'Click here for information in Spanish about NEA Member Benefits products and services.' and the slogan 'HELPING MAKE MEMBERS' LIVES BETTER'.

**nea** Member Benefits  
neamb.com

**HELPING MAKE MEMBERS' LIVES BETTER<sup>SM</sup>**

For more information, call 1-800-637-4636  
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
(or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET.  
Representantes que hablan español  
están disponibles a pedido.

Neamb.com is the Web Site built exclusively for you and your family. It's the one site to visit for great rates on insurance, mortgages, credit cards, travel and more.

Neamb.com offers a wealth of consumer information, articles, and ideas relevant to your life—plus tips and tools for helping you make the best decisions for your family. Check out an exclusive array of quality products and discounts you won't find anywhere else.

Bookmark [neamb.com](http://neamb.com) and be sure to visit us often to get the most from your NEA membership.