



## **Candidate Questionnaire - 2016**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on what's important to Vermont-NEA's 12,000 members and their families. In this brief survey, we will outline key issues, followed by our position on them.

We ask you whether you agree or disagree with (or don't know about) our position on nine issues: paid family leave; expanding Dr. Dynasaur; school finance; co-location of services; student and staff safety; para-educators; retirement security; public Pre-K; and good cause employment. You must register your opinion on each issue to move forward in the survey.

Again, thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will be available to the men and women of Vermont-NEA. Together with our communities, we strive to make our local public schools Vermont's most important resource.

## **Candidate Information**

First Name: [Phil](#)

Office you are seeking: [Governor](#)

Last Name: [Scott](#)

Party: [Republican](#)

Email: [Phil@philscott.org](mailto:Phil@philscott.org)

Phone Number: [\\_802-279-2266](#)

## Paid Family Leave

The United States of America is virtually unique in the industrialized world in not guaranteeing paid family leave to its citizens. Paid family leave is a basic right that may be used for the birth or adoption of a child or to help take care of a sick or, perhaps, dying family member. Paid family leave helps ensure that new parents are able to bond with a new child and support other family members in times of significant or terminal illness. Several states, recently including Rhode Island and New York, have taken the initiative by creating state based paid family leave programs, built upon state sponsored long-term disability programs. These state-based programs have been employee funded while also protecting the rights of workers to return to their jobs at the end of the leave. Vermont has been a leader on pro-family policies for all working Vermonters and ensuring access to paid family leave is an important next step. **Vermont-NEA believes that all employees should be entitled – in law – to paid family leave for the birth or adoption of a child or care for an ailing family member.**

**On paid family leave, do you**

Disagree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on paid family leave?**

No

**Anything you want to add on paid family leave?**

No parent should have to choose between taking care of their child and providing for their family. I put my trust in Vermont businesses and Vermont business owners to put the right protocols in place understanding, as business owner myself, that there is an important balance that needs to be struck between employees and employers. I would not support a mandate however – I would leave it to business owners and their employees to work out arrangements that work for them and allow them flexibility. I feel employers should use paid family leave as a recruitment tool but it should not be a business mandate from Montpelier.

## Dr. Dynasaur 2.0 – A New Path Forward for Health Care Reform

Vermont-NEA has been and remains a leading advocate of health care reform. Affordable health care is still out of reach for many Vermonters and only getting more expensive. Though the state is no longer moving forward with Green Mountain Care, reform of our health care system remains as important as ever. Dr. Dynasaur has provided high quality, low cost health insurance to many of Vermont’s children for over 25 years while also delivering strong health outcomes for children and youth. In order to create a strong economy that supports working parents, young adults, and small business while also providing reduced costs for workers and their employees, the state should explore expanding Dr. Dynansaur to all Vermont children and youth, regardless of income, up to age 26. **Vermont-NEA believes if the current legislative study of expanding Dr. Dynasaur shows cost savings and economic benefits for workers and employers, the state should move forward with this systemic change to provide more care to more Vermonters.**

On Dr. Dynasaur 2.0, do you

Disagree

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on Dr. Dynasaur 2.0?

No

**Anything you want to add on Dr. Dynasaur 2.0?**

I am interested to see the results of the study and if it finds that expanding Dr. Dynasaur will yield savings. However, having read the language, it calls for a review of new revenue sources, including a payroll tax, a gross receipts tax, and a business enterprise tax. This part of the study does not align with my pledge to oppose any new taxes and concerns me about what the study will find.

## School Finance: Adjust, Don't Discard Current System

Together with our communities, Vermont-NEA members are leading the charge in making our already great public schools even better, equipping our students with the tools they need to live happy, productive and fulfilling lives, no matter what path they choose to pursue. The state's constitutional obligation is to ensure access to a substantially equal amount of funding for each student, regardless of community. A related purpose of the original Act 60 was to enable low wealth communities to level up. It was a striking success, but that leveling up fed a public misperception that, coupled with our state's decline in school-aged children, we are spending "too much" on education. The state is paying no more on schoolchildren now as a percentage of the state's economy than it has for decades dating back to well before the enactment of Act 60. In recent years, the total number of school employees in Vermont has declined by nearly 1,000, as school districts continue to acknowledge enrollment declines. It is not possible to cut costs in lockstep with enrollment declines. Increased costs stem largely from matters outside the control of schools themselves, such as necessary technology changes, health care, and state and federal initiatives. Additionally, despite having fewer students in our schools, the students we do have are coming to school with more complex needs related to poverty and trauma. **Vermont-NEA believes the current school funding system is fundamentally and constitutionally sound, but that it can and should be made more overtly related to taxpayer ability to pay.**

On school finance, do you

- Agree
- Disagree

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on school finance?

- No

**Anything you want to add on school finance?**

I know a lot of people believe the funding formula is outdated and I don't mind having the conversation about how to update it but it should be alongside a conversation on how to bring down education costs.

## Co-location of Services: Meeting the Needs of All Children

Vermont's student population is changing. More and more children, especially in the early grades, are coming to school unprepared to learn because of adverse childhood experience. These experiences can be related to physical and emotional trauma, the impacts of poverty and related economic uncertainties, or caretakers dealing with drug addiction. Whatever the cause, very young children are bringing those experiences – sometimes traumatic – with them to school. This affects not only their individual ability to learn but also that of their peers to learn and their teachers to teach. In order to meet the needs of not only all children, but that of struggling families, there should be efforts to expand essential social services to children and families in a school based setting. Schools are already the center of many Vermont communities and it is logical to provide other essential services to students and families in this setting. This could include access to mental health services, dental care, health care and other state social services. By helping families struggling with poverty (including homelessness, food insecurity and lack of transportation), mental health services, health care, and other social supports, we can ensure both that all students are ready to learn when they come to school, and also that their families are positioned to succeed. Some schools in Vermont have already begun this work. **Vermont-NEA believes at a time when young students are coming to school unable to learn due to complex family circumstances, we should move toward the co-location of essential support services for all students and families inside our community schools.**

On co-location of services, do you

Agree

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on co-location of services?

Yes

**Anything you want to add on co-location of services?**

Co-locating services between schools and state agencies would break down silos across institutions and could potentially yield savings to school districts and taxpayers. But more importantly, I think there is great opportunity to improve the services we provide to Vermont's children. The only concern I would have around this initiative, and it is something we would have to get right, is the potential stigmatization that could come with it. For a lot of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, school is a safe space and should remain one.

## Student and Staff Safety – Support for Training

With the changing student population, there are more students who exhibit challenging and at times violent behavior toward themselves, fellow students and school staff. The students exhibiting these behaviors are often very young – including some in kindergarten and the early grades – and are coming to school from home circumstances marked by complex challenges related to poverty, drug addiction and other traumas. These adverse childhood experiences can result in dangerous and violent situations that make learning conditions for fellow students and working conditions for teachers and school support staff challenging and at times unsafe. Students exhibiting these behaviors need supports, and school staff and leaders are working to provide them; however, more training and capacity are needed to meet these safety and learning challenges. **Vermont-NEA believes the state of Vermont should invest in providing training to all school personnel on how to deal with these challenging student behaviors while also ensuring staff the time and capacity to properly implement these strategies properly.**

**On student and staff safety, do you**

Agree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on student and staff safety?**

Yes

**Anything you want to add on student and staff safety?**

Teacher and staff safety should be a priority and a part of the trainings personnel go through on an annual basis. But we should work hard to make sure it does not come at additional expense to taxpayers. I think this part of a larger conversation around prioritizing the funds we already have to the areas where they serve the highest utility. As Governor I would work with the VT NEA to make sure school personnel are properly trained to deal with the more and more challenging behaviors we are seeing.

## Paraeducators – Essential to Student Success

Providing equal educational opportunities to all Vermont students is not only essential, it is constitutionally required. Students come to school with varying needs that must be met to help them learn and be successful. Vermont teachers go far beyond teaching our students reading, writing and arithmetic, but include critical thinking, artistic expression and essential social skills often tailored to the individual student's ability and interests. What is often not acknowledged is that paraeducators are a critical component of making Vermont schools and our students thrive and learn. Paraeducators provide critical one-on-one support to students, while also supporting teachers' ability to deliver detailed direct instruction to a diverse spectrum of students. Whether it is in special education, general education or other school support functions, paraeducators are essential to ensure our schools meet all students' needs. **Vermont-NEA believes that any decisions about the use of paraeducators and other support staff in Vermont schools should be made at the local level, where school leaders and teachers know best what essential education supports are needed ensure all students succeed.**

On para-educators, do you

Agree

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on para-educators?

Yes

**Anything you want to add on para-educators?**

I think decisions about para-educators should be made at the local level with coordination from the supervisory union or supervisory district. Together they can more strategically allocate scarce resources. I think the relationships between local districts and supervisory unions/districts are important to bringing down education costs.

## Retirement Security

More than one-third of American retirees lived in poverty as recently as a half-century ago. Social Security and Medicare, along with pensions, dramatically reduced that horrifying statistic. State policy has become an increasingly important tool to address the retirement security of its citizens.

**a. Policy Commitment to Teachers.** In 2010 and 2014, Vermont-NEA reached historic agreements with the State protecting the fiscal security of the State Teachers' Retirement System, saving taxpayers more than \$1 billion over the course of the next couple of decades or so (Vermont-NEA and the State reached quieter agreements protecting the Municipal Employees' Retirement System.) Vermont's teachers are paying more and working longer for their retirement benefits. During the prior two decades, the State annually and routinely underfunded the Teachers' Retirement System by millions, sometimes tens of millions, of dollars. The State has met its full funding commitment to this system for each of the past 9 years. **Vermont-NEA believes the State must continue to meet its annual funding commitment to the State Teachers' Retirement System.**

**On retirement security for teachers, do you**

Agree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on retirement security for teachers?**

Yes

### **Anything you want to add on retirement security for teachers?**

The state has to fund the agreements it has already made. Going forward, a practical approach would be to phase teachers' retirement costs to the education fund in concert with a series of pension reforms to curb unfunded liabilities. That said, this cannot be accomplished overnight without significant reform to state employee and teacher pensions, and a Legislature committed to returning general fund money to taxpayers in the form of lower taxes. The nightmare scenario is that we simply push an unfunded pension monster onto the property tax and allow the Legislature to spend the unallocated funds -- that's exactly the wrong approach and the type of policy that has created Vermont's growing crisis of affordability

## Retirement Security

**b. Policy Commitment to All Vermonters.** The retirement security of all workers is a major public policy imperative. 401(k) and similar financial devices were originally designed to supplement both Social Security and pensions. In recent years, many employers have merely abandoned offering pensions as part of employees' compensation, leaving employees to their own devices, thereby increasing rather than addressing the insecurity so many feel as they approach retirement. **Vermont-NEA believes the State should develop ways to improve retirement security for all Vermonters.**

**On retirement security for all Vermonters, do you**

Agree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on retirement security for all Vermonters?**

Yes

**Anything you want to add on retirement security for teachers?**

I agree. According to the state Treasurer, nearly half of Vermonters work at jobs in which they do not have an opportunity to save for retirement. I know state Treasurer is looking into a change at the federal level that would allow individuals to invest in group retirement plans to increase financial security. I will work with the Treasurer to facilitate the flexibility that state will need at the federal level to offer group retirement funds provided that it would not come with a significant spending requirement.

## Expanding Pre-K: Public Investment in our Future

In the 1980's, Vermont was a leader in requiring all school districts to offer kindergarten to our state's youngest children. Over the past several decades, research has proven that early learning is essential to child brain development and the earlier that children gain access to these opportunities the better prepared they are to learn as they grow and develop. Recognizing the importance of prekindergarten education (pre-K), the Legislature in 2014 passed Act 166, which provides families up to 10 hours of public money, through a voucher, to use toward qualified Pre-K programs. While an important step in acknowledging the needs of our youngest children, Act 166's funding mechanism – vouchers – has, perversely, made it harder for our state's most vulnerable children – those in poverty and with special needs. Since Act 166 only provides funding for 10 hours, families unable to pay for the additional portion of the privately provided child care can't access this public benefit. We already know that children who come from families on the margins are at a disadvantage when they enter public schools. Additionally, Act 166 presumes that vouchers for privately provided high quality pre-K ensure its availability, and that just is not so. As the state looks appropriately to expand public Pre-K, it is essential that policy decisions don't disadvantage children with special needs or those from poorer families. Vermont's local public schools meet the needs of all students and families, while ensuring high-quality education is provided equitably across the state. Many public schools already provide public Pre-K for all children in their community, and all others should follow their lead. **Vermont-NEA believes that high quality universal Pre-K is essential to the development of our children, especially those in less advantaged households, and that any additional state investment in public Pre-K should ensure equity for all children by having local school districts provide this early education directly.**

**On public funded and provided Pre-K, do you**

- Disagree
- Agree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on public funded and provided Pre-K?**

- No

**Anything you want to add on public funded and provided Pre-K?**

The studies on brain development in the early years of life show that early education has a tremendous benefit on an individual's life and career and I believe it should be priority. I am a proponent of Act 166. As Governor, I will partner with the legislature to alleviate issues around equity that may arise once Act 166 is fully implemented. Every eligible Vermont family should have access to quality early education for their children. But I feel we need to be realistic and acknowledge that resources are scarce and public/private partnerships are a cost-effective way to administer this benefit. I understand the agency of education has a system in place to oversee and rate public and private providers to ensure quality standards are met. My concern about mandating Pre-K at the local district level is that it would put

additional pressure on property taxes, beyond the cost the state has already incurred through this laudable program. Vermonters have been clear for over a decade that they need property tax relief and I do not think this proposal addresses the crisis of affordability that Vermonters feeling.

## Making Vermont attractive to workers: "Good cause," not "at will"

Vermont is a wonderful place to live and raise a family. It should be an equally wonderful place to work. For many Vermonters, it is: they enjoy protections from many forms of arbitrary or discriminatory treatment by employers and, if accused of some form of misconduct or incompetence, they have a way to present their perspective and have a neutral decision-maker conclude who is right. Other Vermont employees, however, do not, beyond prohibited forms of discrimination, have any state-protected job security at all. Their employer may treat them as "at will" employees, which means an employee may be terminated, at any time, for any reason not prohibited by law, or for no reason at all. "At will" employment makes job-taking risky and job retention fortuitous. It makes employees insecure because their employment is not protected. Vermont needs to attract more people of working and family-rearing age. Doing so is an ongoing state imperative. Providing job security that distinguishes Vermont from other states will make Vermont comparatively attractive. **Vermont-NEA believes the state should enact legislation that enables employers, of course, to fire employees, but only if they have a good faith reason related to the employer's business and not trivial, arbitrary, capricious, or unrelated to business needs or goals.**

**On good cause employment, do you**

Disagree

**Do you wish to sponsor legislation on good cause employment?**

No

**Anything you want to add on good cause employment?**

We agree that we need to attract working families of child rearing age to Vermont. I have stated that I want to work to increase the population of this state to 700,000 over the next 15 years. We differ in our approach to achieving this end. I feel that a healthy economy is the key to attracting working families and people from all walks of life. We need to be able to offer jobs that pay a decent wage and show that Vermont is a place with upward economic opportunity. But if we inhibit employers from being able to respond to economic ebb and flow or make important business decisions due to inflexible regulations, we will not have a competitive economy that creates jobs.