House Affirms Collective Bargaining

A day after deciding not to fundamentally alter labor relations between school boards and local teachers, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly put the issue to rest by rejecting any calls to change the nearly 50-year collective bargaining process. The vote against the final version of H. 76 – 104-43 – came only after nearly a month of your telephone calls, email messages and conversations with nearly every member of the House. In fact, nearly 900 of you reached out to your representatives, telling them that stripping away teachers’ collective bargaining rights will do nothing to improve our schools and would place Vermont, sadly, on the bandwagon of anti-labor states.

The Speaker also got a phone call from a fellow member who was watching the proceedings because of its potential impact on collective bargaining nationwide. NEA President Lily Eskelsen-Garcia called Speaker Smith and told him that H.76 was a very bad idea because, if passed, it would signal that even very-blue Vermont can’t be relied on to protect unions and their members. continued on p. 7

Addison NE: No Confidence in Superintendent

After years of watching Superintendent David Adams destroy morale, alienate parents and even disappoint members of school boards throughout the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union, the faculty and staff decided enough was enough.

But instead of doing something quick – and fleeting – they planned, organized and carried out an effective strategy that is making waves in their schools, their communities and throughout the state.

You already know the punchline: By a vote of 163-1, members of the Addison Northeast Education Association said they had no confidence in Adams’ ability to run the school system. A day after taking that vote, they presented the results of a meticulously conducted school climate survey to the supervisory union board.

“Given the experiences of faculty and staff over the past three years coupled with the overwhelming results of the survey based upon the AOE Administrator Competency Standards, the Addison Northeast Education Association believes that Superintendent Adams is no longer the right fit for our community, our schools and our kids,” said Mikaela Frank, a teacher at Lincoln Community School who is president of the local association.

The survey was administered in March, and was available for all faculty and staff: members and non-members, as well as administrators, were invited to participate. Of the district’s 358 employees, 251 – or 70 percent – took the survey. The results were overwhelmingly clear: people who work for Adams disapprove of the job he’s doing.

“Before this survey, we suspected that Superintendent Adams wasn’t making the grade with educators, students or the community,” Frank said. “But this survey made it crystal clear. David Adams has lost the support, trust and faith of nearly everyone who works for him. What this survey shows is that there is no way that David Adams can regain the trust and faith of the district’s educators. We have no confidence in his ability to share our vision of a district that puts students and their education first.”

The Agency of Education’s General Competencies for School Administrators were used in developing the survey questions. Out of the 63 competencies, the survey used 19 arrayed over seven areas:

- Visionary Planning
- Interpersonal Skills
- Collaborative Skills
- Partnerships
- Personnel
- Fiscal Planning and Budget Management
- Safe and Effective Learning Environments

The percentages of respondents who replied they disagree or disagreed strongly in Adams’ performance on the 19 measures were unprecedented: the best Adams did – 72 percent disagreement – was on his ability to understand the implications of labor relations, negotiations and contracts on administration. In other words, only 28 percent agreed or had no knowledge about his competency in the area of labor negotiations.

The average result hovered close to 90 percent disagreement (see sidebar with results). “We weren’t surprised that most faculty and staff disapprove of the job he’s doing,” Frank said. “But were floored when we saw the level of dissatisfaction with Adams’ job performance. It’s a real affirmation of what we’ve all seen over the last three years.”

At the same time the local’s leaders were conducting the survey, they were organizing members building-by-building, leading up to the March 23 vote of no confidence. Through emails, one-on-one interviews and 10-minute standing meetings, members began to galvanize around a single goal: vote no confidence in Adams and work to let the boards know that he is a distraction who gets in the way of educating the district’s children.

The vote of no confidence took place in the small, cramped media center at Bristol Elementary School. Nearly 80 percent of the membership showed up – or cast their ballots during an extended voting period to allow members who had other conflicts to show up and have their voice heard.

The mood was somber, yet determined. Frank revealed the results of the survey. After each result was announced, members could be heard gasping. Some clapped. Others remained silent, shocked with each new result.

The resolution was introduced – and very little debate ensued.

“The Addison Northeast Supervisory Union faculty and staff, represented by the Addison Northeast Education Association, hereby continued on p. 5
(This is an excerpt of President Martha Allen’s speech to the delegates during the 2015 Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly)

The assault on public schools and labor is not something we simply read about in other states, anymore. A few years ago, we predicted that our state would face these attacks at some point. We have said it was not if, but when. It feels as though when is now. Across the nation, voting rights, racism, huge corporations putting millions into charters to privatize our public schools, and high stakes testing are just some issues that have been on the front lines of NEA’s battleground. Here in Vermont, we faced the loss of labor support in the 2014 election. We have received minimal support from our Governor. His continued rhetoric on the education “spending problem” has not helped our students or our members.

What is confounding to me is that NEA looks to Vermont as one of the few states that has its act together legislatively and educationally. We also have a great reputation as a very effective state affiliate. For the most part, when I travel the state and county, I am so proud to represent you as some of the best educators in the country. My responsibility to bring our concerns and achievements to other entities is usually a great honor and pleasure. But things are a bit different this year.

We are no longer an island of reason amidst the sea of crazy governors and legislators. We are a part of the strange state of affairs in the nation.

Today in Vermont, collective bargaining is the foundation of our union. You currently enjoy the benefits of years of hard work at the bargaining table. We must never diminish or relinquish this right. Our schools are filled with professionals who know that in order to do your work well, you must have good working conditions. Your students, in turn, may thrive because they have good learning conditions. Your collective bargaining agreement protects these working and learning conditions. Never give up this work.

We must stay strong, and you must keep your local association healthy and proactive. How might you do that?

Invite new, less experienced members into leadership positions. Move forward, welcoming millennials and their opinions. Work together, seasoned, and green. You seasoned folks: Let go a bit. Think of your association and where it will be in ten years. Will your president have retired? Who will be in that position then? It is time to make sure that you have a transition plan in place. Let go before you retire so that you may mentor our millennials. What an exciting time this is!

Bargain for your wages, benefits and working conditions, but add something to the mix: Professional autonomy. Your administrators should be looking to you, the professionals, when making decisions that will improve learning conditions for your students.

Poverty, drug addiction, homelessness, pressure for career and college, the demise of the middle class, and, a dysfunctional national political scene present huge challenges for our kids across the state. Work with your community to help your students and their families. Have your local join forces with community groups and reach beyond the classroom. Let’s help our students to find their way, and with hard work, improve the living conditions of their families and other Vermonters.

Most Vermonters enjoy many of the benefits of living in such a beautiful state filled with things as quintessential New England villages, extraordinary views, family farms, farm to table restaurants, artists, musicians, colleges, theaters, incredible skiing, maple syrup, and an excellent public school system.

If we invest in our schools and our communities, dividends will result. Our state is the best. It is! Well, maybe when it was below zero for what seemed an eternity, many of us had our doubts, but now, spring has sprung!

When you return to your communities, speak out about our excellent schools and the people who work there. Show your community that our members reach all of our students, so they may become happy and productive citizens. We are not among the best in the nation, and the world for that matter, by luck.
Your Profession

8 Ways to Energize Your Classroom Right Now

By NEA Member Benefits

Keeping students’ enthusiasm for school alive in the second half of the year can be a struggle, particularly as snow days, standardized testing and spring fever begin to take their toll. First-grade teacher Jessica Meacham knows this scene, and notes that it’s not just students who start to lose their fire—educators, too, begin to slump as the year pushes on. But she also knows she can’t afford to slack off. “It is essential that I show my energy and enthusiasm for every part of our day,” says the Door County, Wisconsin, teacher. “If I lose my excitement and energy, students may lose theirs, too.”

Little things can go a long way toward boosting your students’ interest in school. To help you keep things fresh through the second half of the school year, we gathered eight teacher-tested tips for rebooting your classroom:

1. Get student buy-in. To help students stay excited about learning, consider a thematic integrated unit on a topic that your students will grab on to, says Deanna Jump, an education blogger and kindergarten teacher. “Brainstorm a list of topics as a class and then take a class vote on the ones that seem to get the most interest,” she says. “When students are excited about what they are learning the amount of time spent on behavioral disruptions goes down and student learning goes way up.”

2. Hand over responsibilities. Starting mid-year, Wisconsin first-grade teacher Lisa Mattes puts her first-graders in charge of handing out daily warm-up materials, changing the daily and monthly calendar, and delivering items to other teachers as needed. “They feel so official and grown up when put in charge,” she says. “They start looking for more things they can be responsible for and it is win-win.”

3. Mix up the routines. Think about your routines and how they might be changed up a bit, Meacham says. Her students receive a new format for their independent reading recording sheets in January, switching from paper to postcard. “The change keeps their interest and might even spark a renewed sense of purpose for the activity,” she says. You can also change seat assignments or the way students line up for lunch.

4. Offer brain breaks. Incorporate yoga type stretches, jogging in place or jumping jacks when you have a minute to spare, Mattes advises. If you have 3-5 minutes, use a brain break video. “They’ve been so helpful during the Polar Vortex we’ve had in Wisconsin,” Mattes says.

5. Introduce new books. Make time to read aloud to students and introduce new books. Each January, the American Library Association announces its Newbery, Caldecott, Siebert and other literary awards. Jump advises teachers to think about how they can incorporate such high-quality literature into their core lessons to keep things fresh.

6. Redecorate and rearrange. Meacham likes to shift the classroom around mid-year. She advises teachers to think about flipping the layout of two classroom areas, such as the classroom library and the guided reading area, or introducing some new design elements, such as a plant or a new lamp. Students will notice the changes. And get students involved in the design decisions. “Let them have some input into the changes that are made,” Jump says. “If there is often a traffic jam at the cubbies, have the kids help brainstorm ways that this problem can be alleviated.”

7. Clean up your space. By mid-year, your classroom clutter has likely piled up. Meacham has a dusting, purging and organization “party” over winter break. “Afterward, I feel more prepared and ready for the second half of the year, and I am less prone to be distracted by paper piles and dust,” she says.

8. Find a PLN. Turn to Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and education blogs to find a personal learning network (PLN). These platforms allow you to stay current and find best practices in educational technology and instruction, Meacham says.

Your Benefits

INVEST EAP Offers Resources, Advice When You Need It

INVEST EAP (Employee Assistance Program) provides “employees and households with in-person, confidential, short-term counseling, assessment, resource and referral information on a broad range of life and work issues.”

The EAP is free for school employees to use. Membership is included with the districts’ membership in the Vermont Education Health Initiative, the insurance trust that provides districts and their employees with health, dental and LTD benefits. There is no charge to employees who take advantage of these confidential services.

EAP chiefly provides short-term counseling that assesses problems and identifies resources to deal with them. It does not supplant the mental health and substance abuse services available to you through your VEH/BCBSVT insurance.

For members that would benefit from longer-term care, EAP counselors will assist clients in accessing that care through their health insurance. For members that do not have health insurance, the EAP counselor will assist that member in finding other helpful resources such as a counselor in the area who offers a sliding scale.

In other words, EAP will provide appropriate short-term interventions to identify and to help resolve personal, financial, work or family issues that are troubling you, and, if necessary, they will refer you to another clinician who can help if longer-term care is warranted.

Go to www.investeap.org, and create your unique member log-in. The organization password is: vsbit. You can call directly for personal assistance at 1-800-287-2173.

Everybody needs help at one point or other in life. INVEST EAP is there for you. Please share this information with colleagues and household members.
Hundreds of state workers, educators and other working people gathered in front of the Statehouse April 11 to fight back against cuts in public services that are essential to all Vermonters.

The Fight Back! Rally, organized by the Vermont State Employees Association and co-sponsored by Vermont-NEA, culminated with a raucous march through the streets of Montpelier, where the nearly 500 rally participants were met with cheers and honks of support.

Ed Olsen, a VSEA member who drives a snowplow and earns about $37,000, said he is tired of lawmakers and the governor looking to take more and more out of the pockets of hard-working, middle-class Vermonters. Noting that working Vermonters pay an average of 10 percent of their incomes in state taxes while wealthy people pay less than 8 percent, he said it was time to change course. “That ain’t right. It pisses me off. That’s the biggest reason why I came here today,” he said. “Vermont has a budget deficit and they always want to balance the budget on the backs of hard-working, middle-class citizens of Vermont.”

It isn’t just state workers who see the effects of budget cuts – Vermont’s teachers see what happens to their students when essential services are slashed. Alison Sylvester, Vermont-NEA’s vice president, told the crowd of the heartbreak she experienced when some of her elementary school students drew pictures depicting suicide. “This is the real picture of what happens when we do more with less,” she told the crowd. “Together, all of us, are stronger.”

With the Statehouse steps – and a giant rat behind him, Vermont-NEA Secretary/Treasurer Steve Owens explained why the era austerity must stop if Vermont is to remain a great place to live, work and raise a family.

“Luckily in Vermont we have funded public education at a rate of about 5 percent of gross state product for decades, a rate whose steadiness meets the very definition of the word sustainable,” he said.

“And the fact that the number of students is declining is actually a good thing, because with the needs and trauma students now bring to school, education may be one area where our state is even minimally meeting its obligation to our most vulnerable citizens. But that’s not good enough for the denizens of the golden dome where austerity group-think has found a target: children.”

Owens also talked about the glaring disconnect between Montpelier and actual local voters, parents and residents. “Local people, year after year, willingly vote to tax themselves heavily for the privilege of preserving the integrity of their local schools. That’s because when you are close to a problem you make decisions differently,” he said.

“No legislative gimmick has been able to manipulate local people making local decisions. So we’ll take the decision away from the local people through consolidation. Maybe if districts were bigger, and decision makers become more remote from communities we’ll get different decisions.

“Well we’re sick and tired of the game playing. It’s time our elected leaders end the gimmicks, suck it up and do the job we sent them here to do: run the damn government and find the revenue to do it.”
Your Union

By the Numbers: No Confidence

The workplace climate survey conducted by the Addison Northeast Education Association last month used criteria from the Vermont Agency of Education General Competencies for School Administrators. Of the 63 questions spread over seven categories, the association surveyed supervisory union employees on 19. Here is a sampling of the results; the numbers reported indicate participants who either disagree or strongly disagree with David Adams’ fulfillment of the competencies. 91 percent of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that Adams helps define and articulate a vision to the school community.

- 92 percent of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that Adams understands and effectively uses skills and strategies of problem solving, consensus building, conflict resolution, stress management, and crisis management.
- 93 percent disagree or strongly disagree that Adams works with others to define problems, examine alternatives and find solutions.
- 86 percent disagree or strongly disagree that Adams promotes and models effective collaboration and partnerships with parents, community, social service agencies, state agencies, higher education institutions, business, and industry to support student learning.
- 95 percent disagree or strongly disagree that Adams models respect, understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for all people and balances the rights of multiple and diverse groups.
- 94 percent disagree or strongly disagree that Adams creates a learning atmosphere to encourage respect for self and others, positive social interaction, positive self and group esteem, and personal wellness.

The full results and more information can be found at vtnea.org/addisonnortheast

In ‘No Confidence’ Vote, Addison NE Members Band Together for Faculty, Staff, Students

from p. 1

registers a vote of no confidence in the Superintendent of Schools, David Adams," the resolution read. “For the past three years, ANEDA and the faculty and staff in the supervisory union have been subjected to a workplace climate that discourages dialogue due to deficiencies in leadership, poor communication, interpersonal skills related to management, and professionalism that discouraged collaboration.... We formally request that the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union Board take appropriate actions regarding Superintendent Adams, and make necessary changes to ensure that this school system is led by a superintendent who meets or exceeds the licensing standards for administrators as defined by the Agency of Education.”

The next night, more than 200 teachers, staff, and community members jammed the Lincoln Community School gymnasium. People – some of whom rode a chartered bus to get there – were left in the hallways and outside.

It was a strong statement against a leader who has lost the faith of his employees and, ultimately, many of his employers: A petition seeking his dismissal with the signatures of more than 500 community members was presented to the board after Frank delivered the results of the no-confidence vote and the survey.

"As the men and women who teach the communities' children, we all strive to create an atmosphere that allows our students to learn and thrive," Frank said. "It is vitally important that everyone – from support professionals to administrators – share that goal. We don’t believe Dave Adams shares our commitment to students and the community.”

News of the local's actions spread – on social media and through television and newspaper stories, The Addison Independent and Burlington Free Press ran prominent stories; and other media outlets were lined up to interview Frank and community members.

The local was going to continue to apply pressure to the boards until they do the right thing: replace Adams with a superintendent who will restore a sense of trust and respect so that everyone can focus on what's most important: students.
Vermont-NEA will provide a $1,000 grant to pay dues for student memberships in the association.

The delegation also approved a resolution—which was immensely helpful in last month’s fight against H. 76—that said “in the current political climate, Vermont-NEA opposes any change regarding the right to strike.”

Of course, it wasn’t all business and politics at Saturday’s Representative Assembly at the Lake Morey Resort. As we do every year, we celebrated our very best. Sharon Davison, a kindergarten teacher and member of the Chittenden South EA, was named the 2015 Angelo J. Dorta Teaching Excellence Award winner. Speaking of the importance of connectivity, Davison said she was humbled by the award. She will represent Vermont in the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence competition, which honors the winner with $25,000.

Christopher Halpin, a member of the Essex Jct.-Westford EA, was named ESP of the Year. He talked about the importance of our union in making it possible for educators to concentrate on educating the whole child.

The afternoon also featured some of the 10 recipients of the Maida F. Townsend Scholarships, which are awarded to children of Vermont-NEA members. The winners are: Kathleen Ambrose, daughter of ANIA member Nancy Ambrose, from Vergennes Union High School; Jordan Godfrey, son of PTA member Sarah Godfrey, of Rutland High School; Ethan Illingworth, son of WNEA member Jean Illingworth, of Bellows Falls Union High School; Nina Lam, daughter of GMNEA member Ariane Ehtesham, from Mount Mansfield Union High School; and Phoebe Martell-Crawford, daughter of CSEA member Rebecca Martell, from Bellow Free Academy-St. Albans.

Also, Katharine May, daughter of TEA member Tracey Witherspoon, of Twinfield Union High School; Jack O’Sullivan-Griffith, son of BEA member Maureen O’Sullivan, of Burlington High School; and Madison Wood, daughter of Essex/ Caledonia EA member Jennifer Wood, of St. Johnsbury Academy.

Also, Merrill Woodruff, daughter of GMEA member Darcy Woodruff, of Harwood Union High School; and Brendan Wright, son of RSSA member Richard Wright, of Rutland High School. Congrats to all!

Scenes from this year’s Vermont-NEA RA, clockwise from top: members pore over the details; Martha Allen delivers the president’s address; new member Patricia Pomereau listens to resolutions; members enjoy awards ceremony; President Martha Allen presents Angelo J. Dorta Award to Sharon Davison with Chris Hood.

Check out the Vermont-NEA election results online at www.vtnnea.org/ra2015
Your Power

House Kills H.76, Preserves Rights

from p. 1

As you'll recall, the House the day before stripped the anti-labor provisions from H. 76 and replaced them with the formation of a task force charged with examining the teacher collective bargaining process.

That version was far better than the original, in that it prevented tearing apart decades of labor relations. It was a tortuous day of parliamentary maneuvering that transformed one of the most anti-labor, anti-teacher, anti-union measures in the country into a bill that called for teachers and school boards to sit down over the summer and examine Vermont’s teacher bargaining process. And, in the meantime, makes no changes to a process that has served teachers and school boards well for nearly half a century.

A day later, by an overwhelming vote rarely so lopsided, even the task force was rejected.

“The narrative of our votes here today shows that there is not a clear consensus on whether or how to change the way labor disputes are settled here in Vermont,” House Majority Leader Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, D-Bradford, said. “It is clear that there is deep respect for our teachers and their right to collectively bargain — as well as for the diligent work done on our behalf by the men and women who serve on our local school boards. I trust they can answer future questions of whether and how to change how they settle disputes.”

The vote was important because, according to Rep. Topper McFaurn, R-Barre Town, it was an affirmation of a simple fact: collective bargaining works.

“In a speech on Labor Day in 1980, Ronald Reagan said, when referring to the brave workers in Poland, ‘where free unions and collective bargaining are forbidden freedom is lost.’ I vote ‘no’ on this bill to ensure that we leave the collective bargaining process alone to let local people work out their differences. It works now and will work in the future.”

Make no mistake: the Democratic leadership of the House heard you, and we thank them for giving this issue a fair hearing — in fact, the most extensive hearing this issue has ever had. In the end, they and pro-labor members of the House voted to preserve a system that works the vast majority of the time, and, in the rare instances where contract negotiations break down, contains tools that help bring about resolution.

“We look forward to working with everyone who wants to focus on what’s important: making Vermont’s schools even better for our state’s children,” said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “We thank you for your activism, and we celebrate, along with you, the House’s affirmation of labor rights in Vermont.”

---

Your Union

Our Position on Teacher Strikes

Your union has a nearly two-decade stance on changing the right of teachers to strike.

The most important point to remember is that Vermont-NEA fully supports the state’s collective bargaining law, and sees strikes as an important check on the ability of school boards to impose working conditions.

That said, the 1996 Representative Assembly approved a resolution on the issue:

Vermont-NEA supports the use of mandatory binding interest arbitration for final settlement of contract disputes between local Associations and school boards if the parties cannot mutually resolve their differing positions within the legally mandated time limits.

Furthermore, the Association believes that mandatory binding interest arbitration should replace the legal right of teachers to strike only if the right of school boards to impose terms and conditions of employment is eliminated.

In other words, while the union does not support eliminating the right to strike, it has staked out a very narrow path through which that can occur.

In various attempts since then, lawmakers have drafted bills that would fall far short of pairing the elimination of strikes and impositions with binding arbitration as the means to finality.

This year, the issue went further than it ever has. But, as usual, the Vermont School Boards Association made clear their vehement opposition to binding arbitration. At the end of the discussion, reason prevailed in the Vermont House.

---

CoverVantage

SPRING into SAVINGS on your Auto & Home Insurance!

With CoverVantage, powered by USI Affinity, Vermont-NEA members can enjoy the convenience of having someone on your team help find you the best insurance deals. That’s right—we’ll shop the market for you to find the best home and auto coverage and price for your situation. And because CoverVantage is Your Personal Protection Advantage and not an insurance carrier, you’ll receive a completely unbiased recommendation for your insurance needs.

- We quote your policy needs with multiple carriers to ensure you always receive maximum savings
- Discounted rates available for Vermont-NEA members
- All the services of a large company, delivered with the personal touch you deserve
- Experienced staff advocating for you to ensure your policies continue to fit your needs

No need to wait until your next renewal to see how much you could be saving!

Call 1-877-584-8140 or visit www.covervantage.com/utnea today for a FREE, no-obligation quote!
Buoyed by the addition of 1,000 new members over the last year, Vermont-NEA was able to propose – and the delegates to last month’s Representative Assembly approved – the smallest dues increase in years.

By a unanimous vote, the nearly 100 delegates at the March 28 gathering approved an increase that is $3 or less across all membership categories. President Martha Allen said that the board was careful to craft a budget that allowed for modest dues increases, a boosting of the Association’s reserves, and prudent fiscal management that will ensure the long-term finances of our union.

“As we continue to fight assaults to public education, public school employees and working people across Vermont, we are prepared to do what needs to be done,” Allen said. “I am grateful that delegates are on board for what will surely be another tough year protecting our state’s outstanding local public schools.

Aside from dues, the delegates voted on several new business items that seek to make the Association’s voice even louder. Among the items approved by delegates are:

- Vermont-NEA will promote a statewide safety mandate regarding student behavior
- Vermont-NEA will offer professional development training for all ESP job categories, and provide a professional newsletter to ESP and teachers about professional opportunities
- Vermont-NEA will organize a second Teacher Lobby Day during February
- Vermont-NEA will honor former Rep. John Moran for his unwavering support of labor
- Vermont-NEA will develop an annual award recognizing labor friendly political leaders
- Vermont-NEA will support the Vermont State Employees Association in their quest to raise revenue instead of taking money from state employees

Calling All ESPs!

It’s time to nominate an outstanding education support professional for the 2016 Vermont-NEA ESP of the Year Award. The winner gets $1,000 and is our national nominee for the NEA ESP Award. Learn more and make nominations at: www.vtnea.org/esp-award