Your Power

Addison NE Super Resigns

The educators, parents, community members and students of the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union scored a significant victory for their schools last month when Superintendent David Adams announced his resignation. The resignation follows months of organizing against Adams' top-down approach with his employees and constituents. The members of the Addison Northeast Education Association stood strong with one another in their quest to seek his removal, and took very professional, deliberate and respectful steps to improve the teaching and learning conditions that had deteriorated under Adams' watch.

Local president Mikaela Frank was very proud of the work her colleagues did to bring about a change in superintendent. "With professionalism, discipline and dedication to one another, our union and our students, we started the conversations that lead to this great step forward for our communities' schools," she said. "When hundreds of you - and hundreds of community members - stood up for our students and our profession, the boards continued on p. 5.

Your Union

Rutland NE Paras, Bus Drivers settle 2-year pact

The Rutland Northeast Education Association Paraeducators and Bus Drivers Unit settled a two-year contract with their boards last month. The contract is a significant victory for the nearly 80 members who spent the last two months picketing, phone-banking, and protesting the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union's imposition of working conditions.

"I am so proud of my fellow members for hanging tough and hanging together," said Loretta Johnson, a paraeducator who is president of the local. "Once we got over the shock of our boards - for the first time - imposing instead of staying at the table, we organized and galvanized."

The contract calls for a 3 percent raise and no change in health insurance; and while the second year is already upon us, the settlement allowed both sides to put the imposition behind them. "Our whole goal was to ensure that these boards realize the damage they did by choosing imposition over negotiation," Johnson said.

In the end, the money the district “saved” by imposing working conditions was eaten up by the district’s high-priced Burlington attorney, Steve Sitzel. According to records released by the district, Sitzel’s legal fees amounted to about $19,600. When the boards decided to walk away from the table in June, the two sides were essentially $20,000 apart.

The settlement averted a planned strike. Members overwhelmingly authorized a strike that would have begun on Nov. 16. "I know that our standing up for what is right for us and our students is what prompted the boards to settle with us," she said.

She wasn’t the only one to make that observation. NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia phoned Johnson, and told her:

"I just want you to know how proud your 3 million NEA colleagues are of you and the mighty Rutland Northeast Education Association Paraeducator and Bus Driver Unit! You’re not just famous in Vermont.

"Your president, Martha Allen, has been singing your praises all over the country, and making sure everyone knows how courageous you are for standing up for your members. What makes us powerful is that we stand together.

You’re an example of the good things that can happen with a strong organization. Thank you for being a model of power!"

Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen echoed the sentiment. "I couldn’t be prouder of my fellow members, who bravely stood together not only for themselves, but for all education support professionals in Vermont and the in the rest of the country," Allen said. "This settlement came only because of the solidarity and unity of Loretta and her fellow members."

The road to a settlement was a long one. After the imposition, the boards refused to return to the table.

"The paraprofessionals and bus drivers who care for and transport the students of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union are dedicated to our communities’ children. We are dedicated to our schools, our colleagues and our fellow taxpayers. Unfortunately, the boards and their high-priced Burlington attorney aren’t dedicated to us or to the decades of great labor relations that are, sadly, now a distant memory," Johnson wrote in an opinion piece carried by local media.

"We had been negotiating with the boards for a fair contract that would continue the respectful acknowledgment of our dedication to our jobs. Instead of give and take, the boards decided to fold up their tents, impose working conditions on the least-paid employees of the district, and, essentially, tell us to take it and move on."

After months of organizing activities – including the overwhelming strike authorization vote – the boards expressed a willingness to resume bargaining. The two sides met Nov. 7, an agreement was announced five hours later. The paras and bus drivers will resume negotiating for a successor contract. The district’s teachers are also bargaining for another contract.
Poverty Continues to Persist in Vermont
Martha Allen

Poverty.
It manifests itself in a variety of ways in every Vermont town and therefore, in every school in our state. As Vermonters we should all be working on a long-range plan to eliminate poverty, but as educators we must contend with the effects of this heartbreaking social problem on a daily basis.

Far too many of our students are living in poverty. You well know how these students are masters of disguise. They do not want anyone to know what their home life is like. They don’t want us to pity them. They simply want to be viewed as any other student in the school. To single them out with a handout, or a sympathetic smile just won’t help. Instead, we know to find ways to get around this problem and get support to these kids in one way or another. Someone may manage to get a student some warm winter clothing. Another may quietly wash a filthy jacket or sweatshirt in the family and consumer science room because that is the only warm clothing that student may have. Food may get sent home in a backpack, disguised as something else. Books and school supplies somehow end up in those backpacks, too.

Many educators know the families in their community who are struggling and may provide assistance to ease the constant struggle. School employees are finding ways to help these children whenever possible, and it is something those children will never forget.

It is one thing to provide some food for a hungry student and another to help a family to get a roof over their heads, or get a vehicle up and running, or get a job for an unemployed parent. These challenges are out of the reach of our school systems, even though each of those challenges adds to the trauma and stress of a young person in poverty. Unfortunately, many times the stress of poverty takes its toll and adults find themselves dealing with addiction as a result.

We have been experiencing what opiate addiction does to families, many living in poverty. We know that many of our students come to school with more anxiety and stress than anyone, much less children, should have to contend with. The young Vermonters in these families are forced to make their way, somehow, with virtually no guidance and support — except when they are in school. School is often the only stable, warm, supportive place they know. The younger children don’t understand why they are so angry and anxious. The older children see themselves in a pit so deep they find it virtually impossible to imagine a better life.

What do we, as educators, do for these students that we aren’t already doing?

First of all, I would like to thank you all for the amazing work you do that is far above and beyond your job description. Our schools are often like a family with everyone caring and looking out for one another. The challenge is that when we want to simply do our jobs and teach, these social ills provide a seemingly unending number of obstacles along the way. Our students are the victims in this battle. They did not choose to be in the situation in which they live. But, they must find their way through these difficult times and look toward a brighter future for themselves and their families.

You are key in this quest. We don’t know what the future will bring or where our students will eventually end up, but we must keep the hope alive for these kids. We can’t give up on them because they challenge our authority. We can’t give up on them because they don’t complete their homework. We can’t give up on them because they act as though they don’t care about school or the staff who make the school run. Deep down, we know that each of these children has promise. Each of them, if given the opportunity and support, has the potential to see that light at the end of the tunnel and beat the odds, growing into productive adults.

Work with your administrations to ensure proper supports for these children. Insist upon adequate mental health services. Advocate for support for families who are struggling. Demand that your school become the safe, nurturing place it is designed to be. You are the advocates for the children whose voice is overshadowed by trauma. Speak up collectively on their behalf. Know that Vermont-NEA is fully aware of these challenges and we are here to support your efforts. Thank you for all that you do for every Vermont public school student.
8 Must-Haves for Your Substitute File

By NEA Member Benefits

Your substitute teacher folder should include this key information so your class won’t miss a beat.

When it comes to substitute teaching, knowledge is power, says Rachel Friedrich, an elementary teacher in San Antonio, Texas.

Friedrich should know. She spent four years working as a substitute prior to becoming a full-time teacher in 2011.

“The more information a teacher can give a sub, the less pressure there is on that sub,” says Friedrich, who has created a Pinterest board called Substitute Teaching Ideas. “The sub can then feel confident, knowing they know how to react in any situation.”

Transmitting knowledge

Besides passing along a seating chart, lesson plans, official school rules and a bus schedule, it’s helpful to create a detailed packet of information for your substitute teacher.

“It’s a lot of written instruction,” says Tosin Williams, who has taught ninth- and tenth-grade biology for seven years at Mission View Charter High School in Inglewood, Calif. “Four pages might be overkill, but it breaks everything down minute by minute, hour by hour of what I expect students to be doing at any time.”

Your packet should include:

1. School emergency procedures such as fire drills and lock-downs. “We’ve had some issues at local campuses of sub not having keys to classroom doors so they couldn’t lock them in the case of a lock-down or a drill,” Friedrich says. “Letting subs know how to handle these issues is very important.”

2. Insights into student behavior and past problems. “It’s always good to know which kids are going to be helpful and which kids are going to be the funny kids, the humorous kids who are going to try and tell you their name is George when they are really Bob,” says Bon Crowder, a math teacher at The Monarch School in Houston, which teaches students with neurological differences.

3. Health concerns. For safety, it’s important to include if any student has asthma, diabetes or allergies.

4. Special accommodations. If any student needs special accommodations, say for a learning disability, make sure to include this, too.

5. Map of the school. Let the teacher know where important areas are, such as the office, classrooms, bathrooms, cafeteria, teacher’s lounge, playground and parking lot.

6. Names of helpful associates. “It is also helpful to have a list of others at the school who can help should a problem arise,” Friedrich says. Give names of nearby teachers, along with the principal, vice principal, school nurse and custodian.

7. Extra responsibilities. If the substitute is expected to have lunchroom duty or supervise carpooling, include that too, so the substitute isn’t surprised, Crowder says.

8. Technology tips. Tell substitutes if they can bring their personal laptops, iPads and cell phones, Crowder says. Make sure to include important passwords, like a WiFi password, a substitute might need.

When it comes to classroom procedures and lessons plans, be as specific as possible. “The more details you can leave a sub, the better,” Friedrich says. “Let them know how you want the lessons to be implemented and what to do with the completed activities.”

Include how and when students are allowed to go to the bathroom and if certain parts of the classroom are off-limits. Spell out specific disciplinary procedures so the substitute knows. “Saying ‘the students know how to do this’ is perhaps the worst instruction to leave for a sub,” Friedrich says. “I guarantee you, no student will admit to knowing how to do something if a sub asks.”

Take the pressure off the sub

Substitute teachers need all the help they can get. “The substitute has to supervise, so I try to take away any opportunity for the students to get into an argument with the substitute,” Williams says.

“I try to come up with activities to take the pressure off the sub,” Williams says. “The students will always try to get away with as much as possible.”

A lot of textbooks offer extended learning supplements after each chapter. Crowder recommends holding back those extra assignments for a substitute teacher. “Students can go back to Chapter 1 even though they’ve already mastered it and built on it,” she says. “Usually those things have some of other kind of extra value, like a historical viewpoint or discovery lesson.”

Above all, be as detailed as possible with your instructions for the substitute.

“My biggest problems as a sub came when behavior problems were not made known, plans were missing or lacking or schedule changes were not noted in the plans,” Friedrich says. “So really thinking through your plans and providing as much information as possible is the best plan.”
New Student Chapter Has Big Plans for Future Educators

The National Education Association Student Program is 55,000 student members strong, but just got stronger.

Castleton University has formed the first National Education Association Student Program chapter in the state of Vermont. The Castleton University Student Education Association meets every other week and discusses educational policy, leadership skills, educational politics and opportunities within Castleton, the community and the nation.

On November 14th the Castleton student chapter traveled to Connecticut to attend a student leadership conference. Heather Robinson, Class of 2018 enjoyed her first conference, “I learned so much from the conference about leadership opportunities and the importance of advocacy. I also realized the value of being part of the NEA and the amazing support network that comes with it.”

Castleton University’s Student Education Association was awarded a $500 mini-grant. They plan on using the money to expand the student program and to attract other teaching colleges in Vermont. “This organization is driven by unity and comradery, we all share the same goal of becoming quality educators, and I anticipate seeing the Student Education Association grow in the state of Vermont,” said Allison Dwinell, Vermont’s student representative.

The importance of organizing as students cannot be overstated, said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “When you understand early on how much we all gain from working together as an association, it has a direct, positive impact on your students,” Allen said. “I am so proud of Allison and her fellow student members and wish them years of success in their careers as educators and association leaders.”

For more information on how to become a part of the student program, please contact: Allison, who is the president of the Castleton University Student Education Association, at aed07202@castleton.edu.

Make sure your student educators know the benefits of joining NEA right now. Visit nea.org and click on the ‘Join NEA’ tab.
heard you. And, not only that, they took the issue seriously, setting up a process that was respectful and collaborative. By bringing in a federal mediator, and pledging to abide by the process she recommended, the boards made it clear that no matter what other differences we may have, they wanted a school system where students come first.

“Our only goal in this long process was to create a work environment that feels safe, open, respectful and supportive of the best possible education practices that allow our teachers, staff, and most importantly, students to thrive.”

The boards set up that process after a school climate survey made it clear that Adams had lost the trust and faith of the people who work for him.

The survey – completed by 251 district employees – used questions taken from the Vermont Agency of Education’s General Competencies for School Administrators. The results were unequivocal across the board: the vast majority of survey respondents concluded that Adams fails when it comes to vision, interpersonal skills, collaboration, forming partnerships, fostering a safe and effective learning environment, and in dealing professionally with school personnel.

“Before this survey, we suspected that Superintendent Adams wasn’t making the grade with educators, students or the community,” Frank said at the time.

“But this survey made it crystal clear, David Adams was no longer the right fit.”

Former teacher, principal, superintendent and education secretary Armando Villaseca was named the interim superintendent for the rest of the school year. “We look forward to this new beginning,” Frank said. “When administrators and the association are pulling for the same team, we know that our students and our communities are the real winners.”

Addison NE Education Association President Mikaela Frank explains the climate survey to members as Heather MacDonald works the slide projector. Members voted no-confidence in David Adams.
Colorado Educators, Parents Oust Bad Board

from p. 8

advice of Steve Bell about financing facilities needs and building a school, and many others.

Strong Communication. We developed the Stand Up for All Students brand and a strong message that resonated with the community about the need for Transparency, Accountability, and Respect and delivered that message with discipline. The drafters of the recall petition used our messaging for Election 2015.

Member Engagement. In increasing numbers, educators turned out for Board of Education meetings, marches, rallies, and three Boots on the Blvd. Hundreds of educators circulated petitions and were big supporters of the campaign. We were able to collect three times the number of signatures necessary in a fraction of the time allowed. Almost 1,500 organized walk, knock, and talk shifts were completed by JCEA members and we were able to turn voters into friends, family, neighbors, and members of our community about the need to recall the Board Majority. And of course JCEA members and potential members (and even some administrators) wore blue on Thursdays and Stand Up For All Students buttons everywhere.

Looking ahead in the coming weeks, JCEA will launch a campaign to allow the whole community to begin the healing process in this district and community. We know the Independence Institute and Americans for Prosperity are already planning for Election 2017 and we must be prepared. We will continue to build on what we have accomplished so we can avoid a repeat of these past two years.

We went up against the billionaire Koch brothers and Americans for Prosperity and we WON. Organized people DO INDEED beat organized money. Please take time to enjoy this victory. Many of us have spent time away from our families and loved ones as we worked long hours, so enjoy this moment while resisting the urge to gloat as the professionals we are. Congratulations! This would not have happened without the hard work and dedication of JCEA members.

Everyone Deserves Retirement Security

There was a time when most working Americans could count on an employer-based pension as a primary source of retirement savings. In fact, as recently as 1978, two-thirds of the assets Americans saved for retirement were held in traditional pensions.

Not so anymore: less than one-third of retirement savings are held by pensions, and that’s corresponding to a looming private sector retirement crisis in which more than half of all Americans are not even offered an employer-based plan of any kind.

Twenty-five states, including Vermont, are trying to do something about it. Specifically, Vermont Treasurer Beth Pearce is investigating whether the state should set up a publicly run retirement system that employers can offer to their employees.

The state’s labor community supports the notion that all Vermonters deserve retirement security, and the best way to ensure retirees can live a respected and dignified life is through a defined benefit plan.

“As a public employee, I am very fortunate to have the Vermont State Teachers Retirement System as part of my retirement financial security mix,” said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “As the president of the state’s largest union, I firmly believe that all Vermonters deserve the protections that a pension can provide.”

At a recent meeting of the Public Retirement Study Committee, former Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend sketched out the troubling retirement landscape faced by most private sector workers. As a professor at Georgetown and a founder of that university’s Center for Retirement Initiatives, Townsend studies the risks faced by workers who have no access to a dedicated retirement plan.

According to a recent poll, 86 percent of Americans believe we are facing a retirement crisis; 77 percent are more afraid of outliving their savings than of death, and that rises to 82 percent among married people with children; and more than half of all Americans can’t raise $2,000 in 30 days.

“This is a true crisis,” she said. “People should not be more afraid of running out of money than of dying.”

There are still segments of the American workforce who have access to pensions. According to Townsend, 74 percent of large companies still offer pensions; 82 percent of unions and governments also offer pensions to their employees. By contrast, 17 percent of people who work in companies with 10 or fewer employees – a big chunk of the workforce – have access to a retirement plan of any kind.

“Approximately 68 million US employees do not have access to a retirement savings plan through their employers,” the US Department of Labor said on Nov. 16. “For older Americans, inadequate retirement savings can mean sacrificing or skimping on food, housing, health care, transportation and other necessities, and places stress on social welfare programs as a source of income and economic security for older Americans.”

The study committee Pearce pulled together will hold a few more hearings before issuing its recommendations to the General Assembly on Jan 15.
By Tina Adams

My name is Tina Adams, and I am a school lunch lady in Mansfield, Ohio. Every school day for the past 30 years, I have cooked healthy meals and nutritious treats to feed hundreds of hungry kids. For many of my students, my food is the only food they eat all day. I keep my students’ bellies full so teachers can feed their minds.

I know if my kids are hungry, they aren’t learning. I also know who is eating his vegetables, and which kids need to watch their sugar because of diabetes or other dietary restrictions. From the time the bell rings in the morning to when school lets out in the afternoon, I’m the mom. I care for these kids like my own—and all I want is for them to be happy, healthy and ready to learn.

After more than three decades, my salary is little more than $20,000 a year. At times, I have had to work two, even three jobs, just to make ends meet. In fact, I earn so little money that my family falls under the federal poverty level and, ironically, we qualify for food stamps.

Earlier this year, our school district declared a fiscal emergency and, as a result, the administration closed down a neighborhood school, forcing more than 220 students to bus to other schools and laying off 107 teachers and support professionals, including me.

Even while I wait to be recalled back to my students, I am continuing to pay my union membership dues because I know—and I see—how important it is for all educators to have a collective voice to speak up for our students.

In fact, the state legislature here in Ohio has tried—and failed—to strip public workers like me of our collective bargaining rights. When that didn’t work, the legislature tried to kill our unions by introducing laws with names like “Right to Work.” That’s like calling bologna an artisan meat. We can see beyond their fancy, misleading labels, and we know their motives: They want to weaken our unions so they can cut wages and slash benefits to feed their own bottom lines, even if it hurts our children and communities.

You don’t have to look far to see what happens when states outlaw fair share fees in an effort to weaken unions. The results have been lower wages and worse benefits for working people. In states without full union rights, the average worker makes $1,500 less per year, and workers are much less likely to have health insurance—let alone other benefits that help them support their families.

We need to rebuild the American Dream and our middle class, but there is a Supreme Court case, Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, that hopes to dismantle it. The Friedrichs case, which will be heard by the Court next year, threatens to make it even harder for working people to negotiate for wages, benefits and public services. I have dedicated my whole life to helping my community, to feeding our children and helping them thrive in school, yet that won’t matter if the corporate special interests—who are pushing and bankrolling this case—are successful in convincing the Court, Friedrichs will make it even more difficult for workers to sustain their families, and that’s the goal of these wealthy CEOs who want to continue shifting the balance in their favor.

Like the foods that are bad for you, Friedrichs needs a warning label because if the U.S. Supreme Court decides against fair share fees, I won’t be able to help my students get what they need to succeed—and that’s just wrong.

Tina Adams, a cafeteria worker from Mansfield, Ohio, breaks down exactly what the latest assault on working people actually means.

Your Power
Anti-Fair Share Court Case Needs a Warning Label

(Read commentary appeared on Lily Eskelsen Garcia’s blog, “Lily’s Blackboard” last month.)

Your Union
It’s Time to Scrap Act 46’s Growth Thresholds

Heard the one about how draconian spending caps have reared their ugly heads again? Yeah, we have, too, and it’s not a joke.

Act 46’s passage this year was hailed as a “major” achievement. Politicians told us that it would lead to more opportunity for students; would tamp down costs; and would position Vermont’s public schools to excel in the rest of the 21st Century.

What we all know now, of course, is that the law is simply a heavy-handed way to make school districts merge with one another. It also, through so-called allowable-growth thresholds, is designed to keep costs in check.

Those spending thresholds are modest: let’s say your district spends $15,000 a year per student now, and the state determined that your allowable spending threshold is $15,100. If your district needs to spend $15,200, you will be taxed as if your district is spending $15,300. It’s a penalty, yes, but a far cry from what school boards are telling us at the bargaining table and in our communities. (You’ve no doubt heard cries of “double taxation” from your local administrators.)

Vermont-NEA strongly disagrees with the allowable growth thresholds, especially since districts trying to avoid the extra tax implications most likely would have to gut programs and people serving our children. “Simply put, we need to scrap the allowable growth threshold altogether,” Vermont-NEA Executive Director Joel Cook said. “School districts – boards, employees and voters – can and do reach good judgments about what they have to spend.”

Cook testified last month during a hearing of the House Education Committee.

He wasn’t alone in calling for a scrapping of the thresholds; the Vermont School Boards Association also wants them removed.

And we can see why: artificial, Montpelier-imposed spending targets takes away the ability of school boards, parents, educators and voters to make the decisions they think are in the best interests of their children.

One of the main reasons the thresholds should be removed is that one of the drivers of school costs is out of boards’ and educators’ hands: health care.

“Instead of mandates imposed by the state without funding, it is the inexorable growth in health care costs that is at the root of any ‘excess’ growth in per pupil spending,” Cook testified. “It is simply unfair to punish school districts and their employees, and our children, for necessary spending.”

Cook also called for fully funding mandates on local districts. “It is fundamentally wrong to impose mandates with cost, and then not provide the funds necessary to meet them,” he testified. “It is worse then to turn around and blame school districts for ‘overspending’ and punish their taxpayers for it with higher taxes.”
In one of the most watched local school board races in the country, voters of Jefferson County, Colorado booted a conservative, anti-union majority and replaced them with pre-student, pro-educator board members. We are proud of our brothers and sisters of the Jefferson County Education Association. Here is their story of how they pulled off a victory against very powerful foes.

We are educators because we are passionate about the students that are in our school every day. When we come together with one voice, as the Jefferson County Education Association, we are powerful protectors of our students and our classrooms - and we can support each other as we work to improve our profession and our teaching practice.

On November 3, two years of hard work of thousands of JCEA members, educators, parents, students, and community members paid off in a historic victory for our students, our profession, and public education. From the moment the polls closed in 2013, JCEA leaders and staff have been focused on the plan that delivered tonight's win.

This plan included getting our house in order to build internal strength so we were POWERFUL, PROACTIVE, and PREPARED, and going public to engage the broader community. Our success depended on:

- Community Solidarity. Educators and parents worked together to organize hundreds of house parties where thousands of our friends and neighbors had conversations about our fears and, more importantly, hopes for our schools. The relationships we built allowed us to know about what our opposition was doing and saying throughout the county - remember the Salsa Summit photo that was made possible because a parent texted a JCEA member and that member posted to social media?

We were able to mobilize an increasing number of constituency groups around JeffCo due to board mistakes around issues like curriculum censorship and the student walkouts, anti-LGBTQ Facebook posts, Wheat Ridge Plan B, Fletcher Miller staffing, the refusal to follow the

continued on p. 6