Your Union 

Safety, Quality Top Our Agenda

By the time you read this, Legislators will be back under the Golden Dome for the 2016 legislative session. Here are some of the issues that your team in the Statehouse - President Martha Allen, Executive Director Joel Cook, General Counsel Jeff Fannon and Political Director Colin Robinson - will be working on as they advocate for you and your students.

School Student and Staff Safety: Ensure safe learning and working environment in our schools.

In recent years, our students (and the adults responsible for their education) have experienced nothing short of an epidemic of violent student behavioral outbursts. Not only are students (and adults) being physically injured, but their learning suffers when the adults are diverted to protecting them and entire classes are exposed to the accompanying emotional trauma. The State should begin to address this fundamental issue of protecting its children by developing the capacity for schools to incorporate on-site an array of social services; and proceeding with extreme caution regarding restricting the number of adults serving children in school. continued on p. 4

Your Power

Mandating Ratios Shortchanges Children

As a new legislative session begins, talk about mandating minimum student-staff ratios has begun again in earnest. The most common iteration of this is the notion that we can save $75 million a year by changing our lowest-in-the-nation ratio from 4.7-to-1 to 5-to-1. Unsaid, however, is that doing so will result in the elimination of more than 1,200 jobs – people like you, your fellow educators.

“Sometimes Montpelier forgets that behind numbers are actual Vermonters,” said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “Sure, $75 million in savings sounds great. Until you realize that in exchange for what amounts to a seven cent reduction on the property tax rate, thousands of Vermont children will not get the attention and care they deserve.

No other state, according to education experts, is exploring mandating a minimum staffing ratio. And there’s a good reason why no state would do that: study after study show that one of the most significant factors in student success is the amount of one-on-one attention they get from educators.

“Children thrive when they have one-on-one time with educators,” Allen said. “This arbitrary move by Montpelier will rob thousands of children of that opportunity to work closely with educators.”

In addition to shortchanging our children – and throwing more than 1,200 middle-class taxpayers out of work – mandating minimum ratios would eliminate programs our children depend on.

“Reducing the number of educators means eliminating hundreds of programs our children rely on for their education,” Allen said. “Is it worth gutting programs for Vermont’s children really worth saving the typical residential homeowner less than $3.50 a week?”

Those calling for minimum ratios – and they are both Republicans and Democrats – raise the argument that despite a years-long decline in Vermont’s overall public school enrollment the number of adults in our schools is falling to fail. Unfortunately, that assertion is flawed and inaccurate.

According to Treasurer Beth Pearce, the number of teachers participating in the Vermont State Teachers Retirement System is at its lowest level since 2000. (Every active public school teacher in Vermont MUST participate in the retirement system, so the treasurer’s numbers are probably the most accurate counting of teachers.)

“Vermont’s schools are among the best in the nation, year in and year out,” Allen said. “One of the primary reasons our schools do well is that Vermonters want – and pay for – their children’s ability to get the attention in school they need when they need it.”

Those calling for the firing of 1,200 educators also fail to realize the effect such a move would have on school safety.

Indeed, at time when schools are becoming less safe because of children with special needs, behavioral issues or addiction-related problems, cutting staff will exacerbate the danger. “It makes no sense to slash educators – many of whom work directly with children needing special assistance – at the same time the governor is hiring more social workers and finally investing in programs that can help reverse the scourge of opiate addiction,” Allen said.

Although not the sole cause of school violence, opiate addiction is felt in Vermont’s classrooms. Traumatized students don’t learn. Children acting out in aggressive or violent ways can’t learn, and they make all students in the classroom unable to learn as well. “Students in the middle of a violent episode also can’t learn, and can be a danger to themselves, their fellow students and to educators,” Allen said.

In a state that takes great pride in its schools, dismantling what Vermonters have built up over the decades makes no sense. Everywhere, it seems, someone is calling for closing schools, firing educators and consigning our children to ever-more crowded classrooms. The supposed reason given by politicians is that voters are clamoring for tax-rate decreases.

But we know that actual voters – our fellow residents who show up to vote on school budgets at Town Meeting – routinely and overwhelmingly approve budgets when it comes to educating their children. “We know that to politicians and officials in Montpelier, numbers matter;” Allen said. “Unfortunately, such an analysis always fails to look at the real human impacts behind their budget machinations. Sure, $75 million sounds like a lot of money, and in the abstract, it is. But remember that 1,200 educators will lose their livelihood. And countless Vermont children will miss out on programs they rely on.”
The good news is that the more than a dozen years of the punitive mandates “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) forced on our nation’s public schools is over.

No more will schools be identified as failing or be subjected to annual yearly progress (AYP) restrictions and punishments. Congress has passed the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), the long overdue reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

ESSA was established in order to close the achievement gap, ensuring that all public school students receive a good education and grow into productive citizens. Unfortunately, this challenge was not met. The gap in achievement and opportunity in schools in low socioeconomic areas persists.

NEA worked long and hard to convince the members of Congress in DC to include supports rather than punishments for these schools. And, because of the advocacy of NEA members and NEA staff, many good revisions were made. States will be given more authority about running their public schools. High stakes standardized tests will not be connected to teacher evaluation, indicators of school and student supports (school climate and safety, fine arts, counselors, etc.) must be included in accountability systems in order to address opportunity gaps.

There are many places in this 1000-plus page act that require the voices of both teachers and ESP personnel in educational and instructional decisions. Finally, the expertise of those who work in the schools will be used when important decisions are made about our public school students. And, collective bargaining agreements will be protected, a critical piece of this legislation.

Some of the historic federal protections for our most vulnerable children remain, protecting those in poverty, students with disabilities, and our English language learners.

There are pages and pages of provisions in ESSA, and many states will celebrate the changes and improvements, but here in Vermont, we won’t see a lot of change. Even though this reauthorization is hailed as a huge victory for our country’s public schools, much of what is now offered to states has been in place in Vermont.

Keep in mind that Vermont did not apply for the Race To The Top funds because we didn’t believe that those requirements were good for our children and staff. We withdrew from the SSEA Waiver process once we realized that the Feds weren’t going to allow us to develop our own view of an excellent public education program.

Our Vermont Agency of Education has worked for years to support local communities as they tailor their school programs to meet the needs of the students in their communities. Our local school boards make decisions at the local level. Vermont does not require more testing than what the federal government requires. Teacher evaluation has never been attached to student test scores.

Because Vermont has refused to buckle under federal pressure, we have maintained a sensible and productive school system. Although struggling for funding, the AOE has kept student success in the forefront of its work with respect for our students, staff and local communities.

The country has turned away from punitive and senseless mandates and will move forward to provide a great education for all children regardless of their zip code. Here in Vermont we must also work to provide an excellent education for all of our students, no matter where in the state they live.

This is no easy task and the talk in Montpelier often slips from dialogue about excellent schools and student needs and supports into conversations about how to do more for less. Public education costs a lot of money and there is no way to educate Vermont’s children on the cheap if we truly want every child to excel.

As the education professionals in Vermont, we know what supports our schools need to have healthy, safe, and innovative school community. It is our responsibility to keep our legislators and community informed as we navigate these very challenging times in our society. We will keep you informed as ESSA takes shape in Vermont. Meanwhile, do what you all do best and provide our young Vermonters with the best learning opportunities possible!
20 Teacher-Approved Apps You Really Must Try

By NEA Member Benefits

For lesson planning, communicating with special-needs students, creating polished presentations and more, here are NEA members’ favorite mobile apps.

Mobile apps have become “must have” classroom tools, and students are naturally drawn to their interactivity. Whether you’re looking for an app to help with classroom management, exploring different languages or figuring out tricky geometry problems, there’s an app for anything and everything.

With hundreds of thousands of apps out there, finding the right ones to use can be a challenge. To help you navigate the waters, we asked your fellow NEA members to tell us about apps they find useful in their classrooms. Below are their picks along with some helpful advice.

Math

1. GeoGebra (Free, iOS, Android, Windows). This dynamic mathematics software for all levels joins geometry, algebra, tables, graphing, statistics and calculus in one easy-to-use package. It has received several educational software awards in Europe and the USA.

2. Desmos (Free, iPad). A visually stunning graphic calculator. Instantly plot any equation, from lines and parabolas up through derivatives and Fourier series.

Communication and Organization

3. Edmodo (Free, Android, iPad, iPhone and Windows). Create a free account in a K-12 social learning community where teachers, students and parents can connect safely and securely. “I use many apps on my iPad during my language and social skills classes. In working with Special Education teams, we have employed the use of Edmodo to report student progress and concerns.” — Ellen, speech and language teacher

4. Google Apps for Education (Free, Android). Google Apps for Education is a suite of free, secure tools that includes Gmail, Calendar, Sites & Documents. Use it for collaboration and communication no matter where you are or which device you’re using. “As far as applications that give me the biggest bang for the buck, Google is it for my students. We are able to create websites so they can build their personal educational electronic portfolio. We also use Google for word processing and spreadsheets.” — Jennifer, fourth-grade teacher

5. Remind (Free, iOS, Android). A free, safe way for teachers to text message students and stay in touch with parents. Phone numbers are always kept private so that teacher-student-parent communication is 100% safe and secure.

6. Evernote (Free, all platforms). The ultimate notetaker. Capture notes, organize lesson plans, collaborate on projects, snap photos of whiteboards and more. Sync across multiple devices. “As a teacher, I love Evernote. I am able to access my notes anywhere I am from any device. It keeps everything neatly in a ‘Notebook.’ I also cannot imagine teaching a day without my Notebook software from Smart Technologies. Again, very intuitive software. I am able to create very interactive files and it is free!” — Jennifer, fourth-grade teacher

Student Polling

7. Survey Monkey (Free “Basics,” iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch). Create surveys, send them to anyone and monitor your results on the go.

8. Edmodo polls (Free, Android, iPad, iPhone, and Windows). Edmodo Polls is a simple system that allows you to post polls to your Edmodo groups to get quick anonymous feedback from your students

9. Poll Everywhere (Subscription). Add real-time polls to your lessons with no clickers! Works on any device.

Video and Presentations


11. Prezi (Free and subscription version, all platforms). For interactive classroom sessions or group projects. Collaborate in real time with up to 10 others, whether in the classroom or at home, to brainstorm and create your presentation on one shared virtual whiteboard. Import PowerPoint presentations, create portfolios and more.

12. Animoto (Free for educators, iPhone, iPad, or most modern desktop browsers). Turn your photos and music into stunning video slideshows.

13. Keynote ($9.99, iPhone and iPad). Intuitive, easy-to-use presentation creation, complete with animated charts and transitions and as simple as touching and tapping.

14. Explain Everything ($2.99, iOS, Android, Windows). Interactive whiteboard and screencasting tool that lets you import documents, move and animate objects, record, draw, annotate and then connect and upload to many different cloud services. “On our iPads, we use Explain Everything and Scribble Press for almost everything. They are easy to use—intuitive. They are easy to push out to YouTube which then posts easily on to their Google website portfolio.” — Jennifer, fourth-grade teacher

Special Education

15. TouchChat (Starts at $9.99, iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch). TouchChat is a full-featured communication solution for individuals who have difficulty using their natural voice. TouchChat is designed for individuals with Autism, Down Syndrome, ALS, apraxia, stroke or other conditions that affect the ability to use natural speech. “I use TouchChat as an augmentative communication device for some of my non-verbal students.” — Ellen, speech and language teacher

Language Arts

16. Endless Alphabet (Free for Windows and Android, $6.99 for iOS). Helps young learners with their ABCs and building vocabulary. “For my younger students, I LOVE the Endless Alphabet, Endless Numbers and Endless Readers apps. They are free, and provide students with letter name and sounds while introducing them to new vocabulary words and sight words. In Endless Numbers, students learn number names and one-to-one correspondence. Honestly, all of my elementary school students love these apps.” — Anonymous

17. Scribble Press (Free, iPad or web). Multimedia creativity platform for creating, sharing and publishing stories.

18. VoiceThread (Subscription, starts at $15/ month, desktop version or for use on iOS devices). An interactive collaboration and sharing tool that integrates voice, images, text, video, documents and more. Can be used in the classroom as a storytelling tool. The educator’s version includes privacy controls. The New Jersey Education Association has listed several helpful resources at njea.org.

ESOL

19. Duolingo (Free, iOS, Android). Learn a language using gamification principles. Earn points for correct answers, race against the clock and level up, structured in easy bite-sized lessons.

Study Tools

20. Quizlet (Free, iOS, Android). Create tests and worksheets, study tools, study games and more. Plus, you can collaborate with other educators. “I use Quizlet for vocabulary test preparation/practice. Our Spanish teacher uses Moodle and Quizlet in his classroom. His kids also use their smartphones for listening and speaking quizzes. Those students without phones may borrow from a classmate.” — High school English teacher

This article was published in NEAchevron, NEA Members Benefits monthly newsletter that delivers tips and ideas to your inbox.
School Quality: Help schools do even better

- School staffing.

As school districts shed employees (there are 500-600 fewer public school employees today than in 2009), the State should repeal the allowable growth threshold as painting with too broad a brush, increasing property taxes, and hamstringing districts trying to meet the needs of their students; and refrain from considering imposing staff to student ratios from Montpelier.

- School Leadership.

The State should commission research to assess why there is so much turnover among principals by, among other things, surveying the pool of potential principals about aspirations to become principals, by surveying former principals about why they left, and by surveying school boards for reasons behind retaining or releasing individuals from the position.

Of course, current principals also have important contributions to this research.

- Student loan forgiveness.

The state should establish a student debt forgiveness program designed to induce young adults to teach and to teach in rural and/or high poverty areas.

- AOE capacity.

The State (every state) engages in "enforcement" and "technical assistance" to schools and other public service providers. The ranks of our AOE have been decimated over the past decade. The State should improve the capacity of AOE to do its job.

Community: Maintain direct local community involvement in school districts that get merged

The overall impact of Act 46 will be the elimination of school-based elected governing boards. Their elimination will leave a void in the capacity of a local community to have an official voice in the governance of its school. The State should fill that void by enacting school-based council legislation.

School finance: Increase “fairness” in the funding system

The State should make the school funding system fairer by increasing the income threshold for income sensitivity; increasing the income threshold for maximum local taxes (something that hasn’t been raised in decades); and repealing the allowable growth threshold.

“Choice”: Reduce use of public dollars for private education, without assurance regarding its use

The State should protect its children and its taxpayers’ payments by retaining the obligation of school districts to choose between maintaining a school and tuitioning its students to attend school elsewhere; establishing guidelines for the public use of public education dollars that ensure all its children are treated equitably wherever they attend school; and ceasing the use of public education dollars to enroll children in private schools outside the state.

Health benefits: Find the best way to navigate changes in our health care system

The State should enable VEHI to serve “small” employers; begin to examine whether there is a model approach to providing health benefits to public employees generally that ensures employees and employers work in direct partnership; and commission an actuarial assessment of providing publicly financed health care to all Vermont children.

Retirement: Continue restoring the Teachers Retirement System to good financial health

The State should continue its recent successful practice of providing full funding for the System and refrain from statutory intrusion into the investment procedures of our public pension systems.

Generally support worker friendly legislation

The State should work in concert with Working Vermont, in which Vermont-NEA is a major participant, to enact legislation to protect the interests of Vermont workers and the general economic welfare.

Your Profession

Student Advocacy Never Stops for Millennial Teachers

from p. 8

- the vote effort for a state senatorial and school board election. It’s an untapped power we’re beginning to tap into.

What inspires you most about teaching right now?

One of my favorite things about teaching at Bergenfield High is that it’s one of the most diverse districts in the state. I like being in a school where I can have a classroom of 30 kids and every single one has a different ethnic and social background. America used to be called a melting pot; now it’s a mixed salad. It’s the norm for these students so they don’t think twice about it.

It’s what we’re working towards as a country. Our school district has the second largest population of Filipinos in New Jersey, and as a first-generation Filipino-American, it’s great having that connection to my students. The sweet spot for me is providing working-class and first-generation immigrants with the ladder of opportunity we always talk about.

So opportunity and social justice are still important ideals for millennials educators?

For my generation, social justice is part of our value system. Columbine and 9/11 took place during our formative years. We helped elect Barack Obama, the nation’s first black president. But we also had to juxtapose the promise of that election with the rise of violence in the streets, the growth of the school-to-prison pipeline, and the over-incarceration of black and brown children.

The verdict is still out on what millennials will do when we become the generation in power. We’ll have to step up and solve some of these major problems.

We don’t have the luxury of doing nothing.

Gabriel Tanglao
President Barack Obama last month signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, the latest incarnation of the federal education law. In so doing, he and Congress tossed No Child Left Behind into the bins of history, and along with it the test-and-punish regime that stole precious learning time from millions of children across the country.

Although we’ve been fortunate in Vermont to have governors and education secretaries willing to work with the state’s educators to blunt the worst of NCLB, the new law is a welcomed return to teaching and learning. “We’ve long known that assessing student performance based on high-stakes testing and punishing schools that don’t make the mark leaves many, many children behind,” said Martha Allen, Vermont-NEA president. “The president validated our long-held sentiment that schools should be centers of learning, exploration and excitement and not merely places to fill out standardized tests.”

Hundreds of thousands of educators flooded Congress with calls, emails and personal visits in an effort to pass an education law that would finally end the test-and-punish regime we’ve all lived under for more than a decade. And, in something very rare in Washington, people from both sides of the aisle actually worked together to produce something that will, in the whole, be good for America’s children.

“Students couldn’t afford to live another year under No Child Left Behind,” NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia said. Indeed, the Every Student Succeeds Act is the seventh reauthorization of the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed in 1965. It is the first since 2002, when NCLB became law. This reauthorization has been years in the making and suffered through several false starts, but it picked up steam this year as widespread opposition among educators, experts and parents against high stakes testing swelled.

We are still scouring the law – as are educators and education officials everywhere – to see what it will mean to you in the classroom. With over 1,000 pages, there are sure to be hidden or obscure parts that will take some time to assess. In Vermont, we’re especially cognizant that some of the law’s provisions may seem to move us backwards on some issues, given this state’s commitment to protecting students and educators from the harshest ravages of NCLB. But are starting to get a clearer picture, and here’s what NEA and we can tell you about the new law.

What ESSA sets out to do is strike the right balance between the respective roles of the federal, state and local governments in formulating education policy. The widely-shared consensus over the past few years is that NCLB was tilted toward the federal side but for the wrong reason. The original ESEA’s emphasis on ensuring equity and opportunity was brushed aside while new rigid, punitive mandates to

states and school districts on how students and schools should be evaluated were imposed. Every Student Succeeds goes a long way in defanging NCLB’s grinding test-and-punish regime, lays a path for new flexible pillars of school accountability and reaffirms the original law’s vision that zip code shouldn’t determine the quality of a child’s education.

Throughout the reauthorization process, NEA’s focus has been threefold: decouple standardized testing from high stake decisions, create an “opportunity dashboard” to help close opportunity gaps that shortchange students most in need and elevate the voices of educators in the policymaking process. On these critical measures, ESSA delivers.

Opportunity Gaps in Focus

For the first time, state-designed accountability systems must include at least one indicator of school success or student support to determine where holes should be filled. These indicators could include lack of school counselors, or inadequate access to advanced coursework or a richer curriculum.

Less High Stakes

ESSA will still require annual tests in grades 3-8 and once in high school. However one of the linchpins of NCLB, the so-called Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) mandate, is history. For years, this provision dangled threats of punitive measures, including closure, over struggling schools if they didn’t meet narrow and unrealistic federally-mandated measures of accountability. ESSA provides funding for states to audit and streamline assessment systems, eliminate redundant and inefficient assessments and improve them.

The new law also creates a pilot program for state-designed assessment systems that are driven by teaching and learning. And where states allow, ESSA maintains the right of parents to opt their children out of statewide academic assessments and allows states to limit the amount of time students spend taking annual tests.

Greater Educator Voice

The Every Student Succeeds Act strikes a much more constructive balance between federal and state and local control than the heavy-handed NCLB. For more than ten years, educators’ expertise has been muzzled by unreasonable and unworkable mandates. While ESSA preserves the historic federal role in protecting the most vulnerable students it also recognizes that top-down doesn’t work for everything. The new law prohibits the federal government from mandating teacher evaluations or defining what an “effective” teacher and calls for that many decisions for local schools be determined by collaboration between educators, parents and other community members.

Vermont-NEA’s Board of Directors show their support for legislation that would give more Vermont workers access to paid sick leave. The bill is expected to move this year.
Sara Baker, a special education teacher at Moretown Elementary School, has been teaching in a place far from home.

She is currently making her fourth trip to Malayaka House, an orphanage in Uganda. Relying on volunteers, she is able to bring materials, shoes and other items that are needed by the children. She also trains local Ugandans as tutors for the children and has provided trainings and materials for the local school.

Over the years, Sara's work has also included helping to organize a library at the orphanage. While she pays her airfare to Uganda on her annual trips, she relies on donations for materials she brings.

"Beyond being completely smitten with the children, I am also committed to a larger purpose – one which I intend to continue to pursue indefinitely – that literacy changes lives and that if our intention is to create lasting change, a literate citizenry is necessary to allow Ugandans to lead the way into the bright and prosperous future of their own making," Sara said.

To learn more and see how you can help Sara help the young people in Uganda, head on over the www.gofundme.com and search for "Malayaka House February 2016."
Vermont-NEA Supports Dr. Dynasaur 2.0

Vermont-NEA and a host of other organizations last month announced their support for Dr. Dynasaur 2.0, an innovative and exciting plan that calls for extending the popular public health program to all Vermonters age 26 and younger. Business owners, labor unions, and state officials gathered at the Mule Barn in Winoski to unveil the proposal.

“We are excited by the possibilities for Vermonters by expanding Dr. Dynasaur,” Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen said. “We are confident that the legislature will approve funding for a study of the proposal’s benefits and costs. Vermonters will see lower premiums, better care, and a bright new future where the cost of health insurance doesn’t drive young people and families away from Vermont.

Dr. Dynasaur is one of the most popular public programs in Vermont; in fact, nearly eight out of 10 Vermonters view the program favorably. By expanding coverage from the current age limit of 19 and removing income limits, Dr. Dynasaur 2.0 has the potential to make health insurance truly affordable for thousands of Vermonters.

Among the proponents of the plan is House Speaker Shap Smith, D-Morrisville. He said he wants a bill authorizing a study on the governor’s desk by the end of the session, and he is hopeful that the study will conclude that expanding the popular program makes economic sense.

“It has been incredibly successful, and it has improved the public health of Vermont’s children while being affordable,” he told the Vermont Press Bureau. “We can do better than that. We know that we can expand this program to all Vermonters under 26 and we can make it even better for young Vermonters in this state.”

According to the plan’s proponents, expanding Dr. Dynasaur would make health care in Vermont more accessible and affordable. Dr. Dynasaur 2.0 would:

Reduce the number of uninsured Vermonters

Move roughly 120,000 people from expensive private insurance plans into Dr. Dynasaur, generating a huge decrease in the number of Vermonters with high deductibles and out of pocket health care expenses.

Lower the cost of doing business in Vermont

Relieve employers of the high costs associated with offering family health care plans to their staff. All Vermonters’ employees ages 26 and under would now receive care through Dr. Dynasaur 2.0.

Expand Access to Care

Expand low or no cost coverage for dental care, primary care, mental health treatment and prescription drugs to young Vermonters. Visit www.dr dynasaur 2.0 for more details on what the plan covers.

Help young people stay in Vermont

Provide a financial incentive for young people to live, work and raise families in Vermont. Decrease the uninsured rate of the “young and invincible” aged 19-26.

Vermont-NEA and NEA are the major funders behind the Dr. Dynasaur 2.0 campaign. The union is no stranger to health reform efforts. “We believe that all young Vermonters deserve access to top-quality, affordable health care,” Allen said. “This proposal gives us hope that expensive employer family plans can become a thing of the past, saving Vermont residents, businesses and school districts money.”

Currently the Dr. Dynasaur 2.0 program is in its proposal phase. Its organizers are in the process of requesting that the Vermont State Legislature commission a study to examine the tax and public health implications of expanding Dr. Dynasaur so it may be ready for the 2017 legislative session.

Backers of the proposal have pledged transparency and will seek the involvement of all stakeholders. They also made a pledge: if the study shows that expanding Dr. Dynasaur will cost Vermonters more than it will benefit, the campaign will end.
Millenial Teacher: Student Advocacy Never Stops

by Sabrina Holcomb

NEA Today

In his six years teaching in New Jersey’s Bergenfield Public School district, Gabriel Tanglao has come to realize how much his students’ well-being depends on his activism outside of the classroom. “I’ve learned that I can’t stand up for my students without advocating for the issues that affect them and their families,” says Tanglao, who teaches AP economics and modern world history to high school students in one of the most diverse school districts in the state.

One issue that affects every one of his students is school funding. Tanglao, who is also treasurer and legislative action team chair of the Bergenfield Education Association, helped fight for recent legislative victories on state aid. He spoke to us about it recently in his role as a union activist and leader.

Why did you call it a moral victory when Governor Christie signed a bill prohibiting the withholding of school funding from school districts based on the number of students who took the state exam?

Loss of funds would have hurt the very students who are traditionally underserved—students of color and students in poor school districts. My affiliate helped organize statewide “Take the Test” awareness events where we invited parents to come and take the exam, followed by a countywide screening of the movie “Beyond Measure,” about educators pioneering a fresh vision for America’s schools. We were ultimately successful because of a massive organizing effort and collaborative partnership that rallied parents and educators across the state. This work really feels like a movement.

Are the nation’s educators starting a new movement?

The corporatization of education is turning us into robots. But we’re starting to fight back. I’ve never met so many passionate and committed educators as I have this past year. They understand they have to be active outside as well as inside of the classroom. My local conducted a member-to-member, door-knocking campaign and listening tour this year as a successful get-out-

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Keep Connected

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Your voice matters most when it comes to education. This year, plan on joining us for a lobby day at the Statehouse. We’ve got two dates, February 16 and 23. Look for details at vtnea.org/lobbyday2016. Remember, you are the experts when it comes to public education in Vermont.

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Washington West EA member Sara Baker spreads her teaching far beyond Vermont to an orphanage in Uganda. See page 6.