### Vermont NEA Today

**Your Power**

**Allen Leaves 9-Year Legacy**

*Donald Tinney becomes next president July 1*

After nine years at the helm, Vermont NEA President Martha Allen will leave office on June 30 having served the maximum three terms. On July 1, Don Tinney, a teacher of English at BFA St. Albans, will become the association’s 115th president.

Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan, served during one of the most exciting – and challenging – periods in the union’s 168-year history. Over the last nine years, membership has grown annually, up to nearly 14,000 from the fewer than 12,000 when she began. The union’s voice – at the local, regional and state levels – has never been louder.

Gains at the table in salary and working conditions were a hallmark of her tenure and her empowerment of local associations to assert their rights and their power. Over the last nine years, four locals have waged strikes that put important teaching and learning – and economic – issues in the forefront.

And while each of those strikes resulted in better wages, benefits, working conditions, and protections, they were met with a large measure of union-bashing, sometimes by the state’s highest officials. Martha addressed those threats and badmouthing forcefully. During the South Burlington... (continued on p. 7)

### Your Union

**Statewide Approach to Health Care Floated**

As of press time, the status of the union’s proposal was undetermined. One version that was passed by the Senate Education Committee would establish parity on VEHI and establish a statewide bargaining panel with equal membership of employees and of school board representatives.

To learn the very latest, visit vtnea.org/healthcare2018.

MONTPELIER – The state’s largest union is pushing for the creation of a statewide health care commission to design and administer health benefits for all of Vermont’s public school employees.

After a unanimous vote by delegates to Vermont NEA’s annual meeting April 7, the union is advocating for a return of equity, predictability, affordability, and transparency in the health insurance covering nearly 40,000 Vermonters.

“Vermont NEA’s members and their families must no longer be denied an equal voice in the determination of benefits so vital to their welfare and economic security as health insurance, including, critically, the matter of plan design and cost-sharing,” said Martha Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan who serves as president of the 14,000-member union.

“Nor can we accept any longer the widespread and harmful disparities in health insurance coverage and costs among public school employees.”

Since 2015, Vermont NEA members have been afforded a minority – now a single seat – on the board of the Vermont Education Health Initiative board of directors, leaving the once consensus-driven entity now completely employer-dominated.

Vermont NEA wants an equal voice at the health insurance table, in part to ensure that this year’s chaos with the implementation of new plans is avoided in the future.

Coupled with last year’s proposal by the Vermont School Boards Association and Gov. Phil Scott to strip local school boards of their ability to negotiate directly with their local educators over health insurance, Vermont NEA has taken this step to give school employees a greater voice in their health care.

“We recognize the fundamental shift a statewide health care commission is in our relationship with local school boards,” Allen said.

“But it is clear that unless our members have the opportunity to work as equals with school boards in determining their health benefits, and unless strong reform measures are pursued and achieved by school employees and school boards to bring down the irrationally high costs of health care, Vermont’s public school employees will continue to see health care become less affordable.”

In the measure passed by delegates to the union’s annual meeting, a statewide health benefits commission will ensure that the following objectives are achieved:

- It will design, manage, and offer to all school employees a health benefit plan that is comprehensive, affordable, equitable, and based on an employee’s ability to pay.
- It will establish full equality in its governance structures and operational procedures between representatives of school boards and Vermont NEA representatives of school employees.
- It will facilitate the transition of school employees’ health benefits to a new system in such a manner that avoids further chaos in the system, is fully transparent, and responds immediately and effectively to concerns or problems arising from the transition.

- It will vigorously research and foster the implementation of rational health care cost control opportunities and ways to achieve a more efficient, patient-centric, health care system.
- It will recognize that the majority of school employees are women and not exacerbate the already unacceptable compensation gap between educational employees and other more male-dominated professions.

“We encourage legislative leaders and the governor to work with us in establishing this commission over the coming weeks,” Allen said.

“The governor has said he wants health insurance for public school employees determined at the state level, and we hope he will see this proposal as the right way to design and implement plans that do right by the women and men who teach our state’s children.”

This decision didn’t happen in a vacuum, and it didn’t happen suddenly.

In 2016, more than 1,500 of you signed a petition asking your Vermont-NEA board to insist that VEHI give school employees and their families an equal voice on VEHI’s Board of Directors. At the least, the petition urged VEHI to adopt consensus decision-making.

VEHI’s board majority refused to do either. The petition further said if “VEHI is not responsive to this request or its efforts to achieve them fail” Vermont-NEA should “explore alternative ways of obtaining health coverage for its active members, retired teachers, and their families.”

Hundreds show love of public education, unions. See page 4.
Legislators. The governor. School boards. The business community. Parents. Community members. The media. Everyone is an expert in public education. Is it because they all went to school? We hear complaints about our schools from many diverse groups and often it boils down to property taxes vs. quality schools. I maintain that the people who really know what is needed in our schools are those who work in them every day. It is you who know what makes an excellent school system. You know what your students need. You know what you need.

We all hear about declining enrollment. I am tired of that line. I wonder why Vermont isn’t making a concerted effort to increase enrollment everywhere in the state, rather than crying about our state getting older and our student population getting smaller. It is such a defeatist attitude. We don’t want this state to fold up, and if you listen to some of our politicians, that is exactly what they are implying. We must cut education funding because we are losing students every day. We must close small schools. We must expand choice. We must, we must, we must… Oh, they also say we want the best schools in the nation! Do more for less! Bring young families into the state to live in our rural communities! These proclamations seem contradictory and we still have no credible plan for the future of Vermont. But I do:

Keep our small schools open and expand them to full-day, full-year community centers. Offer childcare starting with infants. Let parents bring children of all ages to the community center each morning. Let families access health services right there, too, like the dentist and primary care doctors. Bring in school-based family mental health centers. Bring in CCV in the evenings. Let seniors participate in meals and activities. Our schools can become THE place for “one stop shopping,” especially in our small communities.

If we want to keep the fabric of our state together, we must support our small communities. Small towns are quintessential Vermont. These villages are the ones you see on calendars and notecards and even in movies. Yes, this involves some spending up front. Yes, it requires that various state agencies work together. If we really want our state to thrive, its schools and communities must thrive. High speed internet is needed everywhere. I don’t think there are many young families in other states who want to move to a Vermont town with no internet. We must make this investment and it is a huge investment. If we don’t, our state will not only lose the young people who are raised here, but it won’t attract young people from out of state. Plain and simple.

Healthcare for all. Why not? We only have about 600,000 people in this state. We are small enough to have a Medicare for All system. We can do this. We even have some of the structure already in place. We can do this. So many people love Vermont. They love the idea of a close-knit community and town meeting, and a town common, and a small school that treats each student as an individual with a future. What is keeping us from doing this? Imagination? Courage? I think not. I think it is all about the high taxes narrative that permeates most all conversations these days. Well, if property taxes are the problem, let’s develop a new tax structure. Wait a minute, that has been done! There are plans out there that make taxes fair and Vermonters are asked to pay what they can afford. Ok. That is all set.

We must raise all boats, not sink all ships. Let’s work together to make Vermont the lighthouse state, setting the example for other states. If we truly care about our children and our state, it is time for bold moves and investment in the future.

We know our schools are supported because most of our budgets pass at town meeting each year. We know people take pride in their communities, whether they are from Burlington or Brookline or Barre or Bakersfield. It is time to speak up, Vermont-NEA members! It is time to speak out and stand up for our state. Let’s change the narrative. Let’s work together as one big Vermont community and take pride in our schools and communities.

After nine years as Vermont-NEA president, I could not be prouder to represent you, the teachers and supporters and mentors of Vermont’s children. Despite the odds, you persevere. Thank you so much for making my job such an honor. I am a true believer in unions and public education because I see it benefiting working people and their children, every day. Keep up the amazing work, Vermont-NEA. You most definitely are, the union of professional educators.
8 Ways to Combat Summer Brain Drain

It’s a fact: Kids forget a lot over the summer. Try these clever methods your colleagues use to keep kids sharp on summer vacation.

Teachers often feel like they send their students off on the last day of school equipped with all of the skills they’ll need to succeed the following school year, only to see those same kids forget half of what they learned by the time they return in September.

They’re not imagining it.

Research shows that most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer, while low-income students lose about the same amount in reading (middle-class students make slight literacy gains in July and August).

The situation isn’t hopeless, however. Some experts say that reading just four books over the summer can help prevent a reading slide for kids. And, one imagines, if it’s that simple to hold onto literacy skills, a little math here and there would have a similar effect.

Teachers can’t follow their students around all summer with books and math manipulatives, but they can give students and their families access to resources, opportunities and information. Here’s how to encourage kids to keep learning once school is out (while still enjoying their summer vacations).)

1. Book Baskets. Tracie Pueschel, an elementary teacher in Sturgis, Michigan, asks local businesses and residents to donate money and books for “book baskets.” At the end of the school year, each child takes home a basket with 12 to 15 books, along with some poems and word searches. “It’s been huge in getting books in our kids’ homes,” says Pueschel. “I run into them in the store, and they say, ‘I’ve been reading the books in the basket!’”

2. Lit Night. Pueschel invites students and parents to attend her school’s “Summer Literary Night,” which features stations that provide information on summer enrichment programs, as well as informal learning tools such as sidewalk chalk.

3. Open Library Hours. To make sure that kids have a quiet place to read, Pueschel’s school keeps its library open to students during the summertime. The school also serves breakfast and lunch, giving parents a “free babysitting” opportunity each morning. The school librarian makes sure that kids rotate between activities—including reading, playing on the computer and building puzzles—and teachers come in to lead special activities. “We have teachers that will sign in and do string art or iron-on crafts, so that we can pull more kids in,” Pueschel says.

4. The Great Outdoors. The summer months naturally lend themselves to informal science projects like damming up creeks, exploring the woods and digging in the dirt. Teachers can give students an extra push outside by giving them the tools to start a garden, says Susan Roser, an education consultant and former elementary teacher. “You can start seedlings in the spring, and then the project can be completed in the summer as the plants grow,” she says.

5. Scavenger Hunts. Instead of handing out worksheet packets, consider asking students to complete as many items as possible on a checklist of fun activities—such as going to a museum and looking at the stars through a telescope. Or, you can ask students to keep their eyes peeled for real-world examples of the things they’ve learned in math class. “How many places in your summer travels can you find math concepts—at the grocery store or at the laundromat?” Roser says. “Where can you find the biggest number, where can you find the smallest number? Where can you find shapes?” Roser says teachers might ask older students to interview someone in a career field that interests them.

6. Digital Resources. Many students today have access to websites and mobile apps that attempt to make learning and math fun. Rosen’s own children have used Khan Academy to brush up on their math skills. “They definitely learned from it,” she says. “It’s engaging, because it’s online, and they were able to measure their accomplishments.” Teachers can help out by giving parents lists of age-appropriate, research-backed resources.

7. Journaling. Toward the end of the school year, Natalie Simms, an elementary teacher in Oakland, has her students decorate journals, and then asks them to write in the books once or twice a week during the summer. “We brainstorm a list of topics they can write about—an adventure you go on, or the day you went swimming, or a friend you finally got to see who lives far away,” she says. “Some of them bring it back to me next year and say, ‘Look what I did over the summer!’”

8. High-Interest Reading Lists. Instead of handing out an endless list of classics for kids to wrestle with over the summer, ask students to create their own summer reading lists, based on their interests or upcoming events. “If a book is becoming a movie, or an author is coming to town, the kids get a little bit more excited than if you just say, ‘Go read a couple of books over the summer,’” Simms says.
Your Power

Time to Power UP! Against Attacks on Unions, Schools

The drumbeat of assaults on unions and public education remains as loud as ever, in Vermont as well as across the nation. But educators aren’t standing still — they are standing up. In deep-red states like West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Kentucky, educators have walked off the job and descended upon state capitals to protest low wages and years of public school neglect.

In Vermont, we know all too well that the governor wants to eliminate 4,000 education jobs, slash programs for students, and weaken the investment Vermonters make in their public schools. That’s why it’s especially important for all of us to Power UP!

You have the power to lead your union. You have the power to lead your profession. And, most importantly, you have the power to shape the future.

For the first time, your union is providing an exciting opportunity to gather with fellow members for three days of building and using your power.

For your union.

For your profession.

For your students.

Formerly the Leadership and Learning Conference, this year’s summer offering is now called Power UP! and we’re excited to have you join us in Burlington to learn how to use your power for each other, our schools and our students.

Register now for this free conference — which runs from August 7 through August 9 with a professional development pre-conference August 6 — at vteaa.org/powerup. Housing is at Champlain College, and is also free.

Here’s a summary of the conference

Day 1: Tuesday, August 7th
Put the Power in Power Up! Spend the day with labor leaders from around the state and country for an inspiring day. Together we will learn how to organize, mobilize, and energize our union and our movement.

Day 2: Wednesday, August 8th
Taking what we learned on day 1, we will start to drill down on how to build our power local by local. On this day we will meet with other from our regions, focusing on harnessing political action. The day will feature a mix of general sessions and hands on ways to build power.

Day 3: Thursday, August 9th
We will hear some amazing stories from students drawing on their efforts at organizing to make change. We will continue exploring how to grow power in our schools, our communities and our state.

Your Power

Bernie Shows Love for Public Schools, Unions

On May 19, hundreds of educators, parents, students, and others came to Montpelier to rally because they love our local public schools. Halfway through the rally — which showcased breadth of support for public education — a familiar voice boomed out.

“I want to thank teachers not just in Vermont, but teachers all across the country in states like West Virginia and Oklahoma and in Kentucky who are standing up and demanding that instead of giving huge tax breaks to billionaires, we get our priorities right and we invest in our children,” said Sen. Bernie Sanders. In addition to reiterating his support of public schools, he gave a shout out to unions.

“Thank you for understanding that working people in this country will do well unless we are able to engage in collective bargaining and unless workers have a strong union behind them.”

He wasn’t the only one to electrify the crowd: Beth Fialko-Casey, a Burlington High School teacher, closed with this observation: “Our schools are the foundation of our future. These are future doctors, plumbers, electricians, owners, farmers, and people in jobs we can’t even yet envision. When you cut spending to education, you are cutting our communities off at the knees.”
NBCT Achievers Feted by National Board Leader

By Juliette Longchamp, Vermont-NEA Director of Professional Learning

On February 15th, Vermont-NEA hosted the first annual Accomplished Teacher Reception to recognize and honor Vermont’s new National Board-Certified Teachers and newly renewed NBCTs.

National Board Certification is a voluntary certification that includes the completion of four components (Component 1 is an assessment and Components 2-3 are portfolio entries). The National Board process has gone through revisions and is now more flexible, with candidates having up to three years to complete all four components and two years following that to redo components if they do not achieve. Last year, Vermont had an achieve rate of 72% due to the network of candidate support available.

The Accomplished Teacher Reception included some wonderful speakers who all spoke to the theme of the importance of accomplished teaching to improve outcomes for our students.

Included in the lineup were Peggy Brookins, NBCT, the CEO and President of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; Lieutenant Governor David Zuckerman; Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen; and former Secretary of Education, Rebecca Holcombe. Additionally, Dick Forman, the husband of the 2001 Vermont and National Teacher of the Year, Michele Forman, who died this past fall, and whose influence in and belief of National Board Certification as part of the career continuum for teachers is still felt in NBCTs today.

Vermont-NEA honored the first recipient of the Michele Forman Accomplished Teaching Award, awarded to the newly certified NBCT who has demonstrated exemplary commitment to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the certification process, and strong leadership in their school, district, state, and union for accomplished teaching - all leading to strong student learning.

Kelly Robinson, NBCT, of Hazen Union High School is the first recipient of this award. Kelly was part of Kate McCann’s Central Vermont Cohort. She spent three years working through the four components, attended every “writing day” Vermont-NEA hosted, continually commented how her practice evolved as a result of Board Certification, presented to the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Peggy Brookins addresses NBCT achievers

Teaching Standards to recognize NBC as proof of accomplished teaching and therefore recognized as the only needed document for VT license renewal, and recruited and facilitated a group of nine Vermont-NEA members from Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union this past year.

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A Look Back at Martha Allen’s 9 Years as President
Educators’ Association strike in 2014, then-Gov. Peter Shumlin – a Democrat – openly questioned the right of teachers to strike. Martha responded to the governor in clear terms:

“When our members are walking the picket lines, the last thing they want to hear is the governor blaming them for exercising their legal rights,” Allen said. “Instead of the support I and my fellow members expect from this governor, we got a lecture. That’s not how people treat their friends, and our members have taken notice. As the head of the Democratic Governors Association, Shumlin doesn’t need to be reminded of how important union support has been to building and supporting a strong middle class. My union and especially my 225 fellow members who were on strike last week deserve better from their governor. Right now, many of our 12,000 members are questioning the governor’s commitment to them.”

Political headwinds

At the same time members were able to flex their union muscles, powerful forces aligned in a seemingly endless attack on unions, on educators, and on public education. Governors – and lawmakers – from all corners have perpetuated the mantra that Vermont spends too much on its children. Numerous efforts were made – and thwarted – to take away the right to strike and the right to maintain direct bargaining rights with local school boards. This fight against unions intensified with the 2016 election, and, as of this writing, shows no signs of abating.

Indeed, one of the biggest union victories in the country – when Vermont passed its fair share fee law – is about to be ripped away, meaning that nonmembers who receive the benefits of collective bargaining won’t be required to pay. Of course, Martha has seen this as an opportunity.

“We know that when we reach out – one-on-one in our local and in our schools, we can make the case for membership,” she said. “I am extremely proud that thousands of new members were gained by local associations making the argument with their colleagues that together we are stronger.”

Systemic Racism

Over the last three years, Martha’s been laser-focused on eradicating institutional racism and systemic bias. Two years ago, she called together a panel of educators, students, activists, academics, lawmakers, former union officials, and community members that is now the Vermont-NEA Racial Justice Task Force. One of the first state presidents to embrace this soul-searching and very important work, Martha has had the full support of NEA and our national president Lily Eskelsen Garcia. One of Martha’s proudest moments was earlier this year when Montpelier High School students raised the Black Lives Matter flag – the first public high school in the country to do so.

“The first step in rooting out systemic racism is to acknowledge that it exists. I am humbled by and proud of the work done by Montpelier High School’s student-led Racial Justice Alliance for beginning this conversation among students, teachers, staff, parents, and the community. The students who are leading this effort are changing perspectives among their peers, reiterating that students of color face a far different world than their white counterparts.

“Systemic racism and implicit bias have plagued our nation for centuries, making a mockery of the American assertion that all people are created equal. Yes, we are all human, but, for hundreds of years, Americans of color have suffered greatly because of the ravages of racism that are long-standing and systemic.

“In flying the Black Lives Matter flag, Montpelier High School is officially saying that bias exists. I am encouraged by this step, and am glad to see that school officials are actively addressing with teachers, students, and staff the experiences of students of color who uniquely bear the brunt of our nation’s systemic racism.”

Bernie

Another highlight of Martha’s tenure was Vermont-NEA’s being the very first union to support Bernie Sanders’ bid for the presidency. In fact, it was a move that pitted her against the national union as it had decided on Hillary Clinton. The national union was so concerned with Martha and the Vermont-NEA board that they held email conversations with the Clinton camp shortly before that year’s RA, according to a WikiLeaks dump of campaign emails.

“In Vermont, we’re very fortunate to have a senator who represents the middle class over the titans of Wall Street. We believe that we can’t have Bernie in the White House. America’s working families will be able to flourish and grow. His ideas around banking reform, student debt, and public education are refreshing and exciting. Everywhere Bernie goes, he attracts over-capacity crowds. His message – the same one he has had for decades – is resonating far from Vermont’s borders.”

Personal Loss

In addition to the ups and downs of the union’s last nine years, Martha’s tenure was rocked when she unexpectedly lost her partner of many decades (and fellow member) Scott McKibben. His death shook Martha and her family, especially her sons, Cody and Wyatt, leaving a huge hole for all of them. Despite not having her best friend and partner to ride into retirement with, Martha is looking forward to spending more time with her sons, both of whom are engaged to be married. She also will continue working with the racial justice task force. She is also contemplating a run for the legislature, representing Canaan.

And, unsurprisingly, she will always be an outspoken advocate for the union, for her fellow members, and for Vermont’s students.
Vermont-NEA joined with the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals Association and several other groups May 19 to demand an end to back-room, end-of-session deal making when it comes to our local public schools.

Acknowledging that there are differences between each other, each group made it clear to lawmakers and the governor that when it comes to what's best for our schools and our kids, we're all on the same page.

Here's what Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen had to say:

For the last few years we have heard more and more about the challenges our students are facing in their homes and communities. Poverty and the opiate crisis have gotten a grip on many families making it difficult for many of our students to come to school ready to learn.

Because of these challenges today's students have, our schools have assumed the responsibility of providing social services in order to support these students. Educating students in Vermont looks very different today than it did even just ten years ago.

Each community finds itself in a unique situation and is looking to the schools to provide relief. Just as we expect our educators to not take a one-size-fits-all approach to educating children, so too should our elected officials recognize that the solutions to our demographic and fiscal challenges require attention to the varying needs of Vermont's school communities.

When the conversation is all about dollars and cents, the focus on our children is lost and this is unacceptable, especially when we see the growing needs of our youngest, most vulnerable students.

The mental health concerns of our students and their families continue and we don't see an end to this crisis any time soon. Our communities take pride in their schools and want to see them supported so that they may respond to the needs of all students.

Policy decisions must focus on the children in our public schools and the adults who have dedicated their professional lives to their students.

Happy Summer Everyone!

Congratulations on another fantastic school year. Whatever the season has in store, remember that you can always stay up-to-date with your union at vtnea.org; facebook.com/vermontnea; twitter.com/vermontnea; and instagram.com/vermont_nea

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Sen. Anthony Pollina is the 2018 Vermont-NEA Friend of Public Education for his years of support of our schools, students, and educators.