Your Power
Your Influence Obvious in Legislature

We knew going into the 2015 legislative session public schools and Vermont-NEA had targets pinned on them. Correct or not, leading public officials interpreted the recent election as a call for them to "do something about property taxes." We also knew the loss of serious health care reform deprived us of an opportunity actually to help do something about property taxes. Into that context, we held our own and, in some ways, actually got good policy enacted. We can expect more consideration of school spending next year. Here's a summary of what occurred this winter and spring:

School Governance
H.361 calls on most school districts in the state to merge with others over the next four years or so. The twin underlying theories are that small schools are inherently "inefficient" and, therefore, add unnecessary costs to public education and that they are also somehow often unable to offer sufficient education opportunities to their students. To fix that: form larger governing units than town-based school districts, manage more "flexibly" and somehow costs will go down and education quality will go continued on p. 7

Your Profession
Summer Time for Professional Development

It's summer, so you know what that means... that's right, time to brush up on professional development. Your union is proud to offer a wide array of programs and seminars all summer long.

When Vermont-NEA Professional Programs Director Julie Longchamp spoke with a former teacher recently, he described the "summer" for an educator using a weekend analogy.

June is Friday night, where we celebrate a wonderful year.

July is Saturday, when we are outside enjoying all that Vermont summer has to offer, without thinking too much about school.

August is Sunday, when the school year is creeping up and thoughts quickly go from relax mode to planning mode.

Vermont-NEA has professional learning opportunities for you the entire "weekend" of summer. For complete descriptions, registration information and downloadable flyers visit: www.vtnea.org/your-profession

June 22-26: Math and Science Training From the NJ Center for Teaching and Learning (NJ/CTL) - Barre Town School Library.

NJ/CTL has developed open source units in math and science for teachers of grades k-12, which are aligned to the CCSS and NGSS. This free material is smartboard ready and is available to any teacher. Each day during the week of June 22nd will be a different focus and you can sign up for one day, or all five. Cost: Free – Thanks to a NEA GPS Fund Grant Class Limit: 30

July 23-24: Chromebooks for Education -Vermont-NEA Conference Room, Montpelier

This workshop is for educators using Chromebooks and Google Apps for Education. Participants will learn the basics and more advanced features of Chromebooks and Google Apps for Education. Cost: Members $600 with Chromebook, $400 without Chromebook. Register: https://goo.gl/siqZGD Class Limit: 15

July 29-31: Measuring Student Growth through Student Learning Objectives, Champlain College

Vermont-NEA has been the recipient of a Great Public Schools (GPS) Fund Grant from the NEA to develop expertise in the state on Student Learning Objectives. SLOs are student learning goals that teachers set in the beginning of the year for a class or group of students. Rick Wormell will be our keynote speaker. Register for free (including food, rooming): http://goo.gl/6Y6kbY

August 5-6: Chromebooks for Education, Champlain College

This is a repeat of the class offered in July. Register: https:// goo.gl/siqZGD

August 7: Mentor Coordinator Training- The Heart of a Teacher-Led Mentoring Program, Vermont-NEA Conference Room

In a growing number of schools, Mentor Coordinators work with the district's Curriculum Director in implementing a strong Mentoring Program. This workshop, specifically designed for mentor coordinators, will review the introduction to the Framework for new teachers, discuss mentoring expectation, plan for mentor training meetings, and discuss the successes and challenges of the role of mentor coordinator and plan for the 15-16 school year. Registration Link: https://goo.gl/1 Aczal

August 10-14  Mentoring Matters – Mentor Training

Champlain Valley Union High School
August 10th -12th
Otter Valley Union High School
August 12th-14th
Vermont-NEA Conference Room-Montpelier
August 12th-14th

Mentoring Matters is Vermont-NEA's mentor training program. This 3-day program covers a wealth of information about the role of a mentor in supporting new teachers. See the Vermont-NEA website for information about each day's focus. Cost: $350 per person (includes materials) Registration Link: http://goo.gl/2TRL5w
Through the long, dark winter, you persisted

Martha Allen

Over the last few weeks, Vermont has transformed from a gray, dreary, muddy landscape to one of incredible beauty and promise. When traveling to schools around the state I am always impressed by the breathtaking views and scenic villages; but, this time of year always reminds me of why those long winters are worth it. Vermont is gorgeous! Now, don’t get me wrong, I love all of our seasons, even mud season.

Spring, however, is the time when not only our natural surroundings explode into multiple visual delights, but Vermont’s children also find an energy and spirit unlike other times of the year. They are finishing the school year and have summer break and a new grade at school ahead of them. Some of these students are graduating and look forward to furthering their educations at another school in the fall.

It is your work that has made this possible for your students. If it wasn’t for the work that Vermont-NEA members do, our students wouldn’t have the opportunity to progress along their educational path, demonstrating skills and abilities they may not have known they had. Your mentoring, encouragement, consistency, discipline, and caring has helped our young Vermonter to grow academically, physically, and emotionally.

Through the long, dark winter you persisted, nurtured, and kept the momentum going so that your students would blossom in the spring. That long wait is over. Look around you - in your schools, in your classrooms, your libraries, gymnasiums, cafeterias, buses, recreational fields, and theaters. The young Vermonters filling those spaces are growing in multiple ways and you provide the nutrients. You facilitate their learning and make sure that each individual is getting his or her specific needs met. The yield is tremendous. We have another bumper crop of citizen Vermonter ready to make their way in the world!

When I think of the complexity of what is needed to provide a Vermont public education to our children, it often frustrates me. I know that the best work is done when educators develop personal relationships with students. But that takes much research. You need to understand everything about those students - where they live, who their families are, what excites them about learning, how they learn, the challenges they may be facing, and, you must be cognizant of those forces beyond your control, both positive and negative.

Once you know your students, you then use your pedagogical and developmental knowledge and experience to provide the appropriate learning environment for each and every child with whom you work. On top of all of this, you must contend with local, state, and national mandates and laws coming from school boards right up to the United States Department of Education. Oftentimes, these outside forces stifle your ability to innovate and create.

Working in the public school system has changed in multiple ways. The influence of anti-public school forces, education “reformers” and even union busters have put undue pressure on you as you do your daily work. It may seem at times that the job couldn’t be tougher. Many of the obstacles in your path may seem insurmountable. But, for some reason, you persevered. You and your colleagues know what matters most: your students. You were able to block out the distractions and stay focused on your prize, the success of the children in your school. Thank you for that.

Thank you for the work you do, day in and day out. I truly mean it. You aren’t looking for praise, I know that. It isn’t what you do this work for, that’s for sure. I also know you aren’t in this for the glory and the money! If I asked you why you do this work, many of you would say you want to make a difference for kids. However worn out that response may be, it never loses its value.

Many, many, young Vermonters found a purpose because of their relationships with the adults in their lives, oftentimes, you. For that I am grateful.

Have a terrific summer filled with relaxation and fun with those you love. You deserve it!
6 Ways to Start Next Year Right by Getting Ready Now

By NEA Member Benefits

Make the end of the school year a time for celebration, not chaos. The secret? Having a classroom pack-up plan.

When Jessica Hoyle started teaching, she inherited the classroom of a 20-year veteran, complete with old handouts, books and other materials.

Packing up at the end of the year, she says, was a “disaster.”

“I had no idea how to pack, where to put things,” says Hoyle, a third-grade teacher in Plainville, Massachusetts. “I didn’t know what to throw away and what to keep. By the end of the year, it looked like a bomb had gone off. I told myself, I would never have an end-of-year pack-up go like that again.”

And she didn’t. Now in her sixth year, Hoyle has come up with systems that help her pack up without panicking. These tips can help you do the same.

Take (and Purge) Inventory

“I usually start by making lists of things I have and things I need,” says Hoyle. “If I have 1,001 folders in my closet, I know I don’t need to order them again.”

“That’s also a good time to get rid of the things you don’t need anymore,” she adds. “Unless you can find a use for broken crayons and dried-out markers, there’s no sense keeping them, because it’s just more stuff.”

Kathy Jenkins, a certified professional organizer in Virginia who works with teachers and students (theorganizingtutor.com), recommends purging with a purpose. When discarding student work, for example, teachers should remember to pull out the best examples to show future classes or for their recertification or tenure processes. But don’t just store the examples in a general “student work” folder, she says.

“If you’re keeping the work to show your future students, that gets filed in one place,” Jenkins says. “If you’re keeping it for tenure, that gets filed another place.”

Have more glue sticks, construction paper or colored pencils than you can use? Jenkins recommends leaving surplus materials in the teachers’ lounge for colleagues to take. “Your excess is going to be somebody else’s treasure.”

Take Snapshots

“Take pictures of your classroom before you take it all apart,” recommends Lori Rosenberg, an elementary teacher in Coral Springs, Florida. “Everything that was on walls, where the furniture is, what bins were where—you tend to forget.”

Do a Little Each Day

“I break my room into sections and say, ‘Today after school, I’m just going to work in my library,’ or ‘I’m just going to work on the closet,’” Hoyle says. “To tackle it as a whole classroom can be overwhelming.”

“I pack a little bit each day—things that nobody will miss, so that I’m not frantic,” says Rosenberg. The first things to go into boxes are books from the early part of the year and her knick-knacks, which she wipes clean before packing. “I’m one of the first ones out every year.”

Enlist Your Students

Especially in the early grades, students are eager to help teachers pack up their rooms.

“We’ll organize the classroom library and reset all the table caddies with the pencils and the crayons and the glue,” says Tiffani Mugurussa, a kindergarten teacher in Roehlert Park, California. “They feel really proud to help prepare the classroom for the incoming kids.”

Have a ‘Bin System’

There are a million ways to organize your boxes. Pick one and stick to it, or else your scissors will end up at the bottom of a bin, buried beneath an ocean of paper clips.

Rosenberg likes to number each of her boxes, and she keeps a master list where she writes down each item that goes into each box. “You start adding things and lose track,” she says. “With a master list, you always know where something is, no matter how small.”

A Wisconsin first-grade teacher who blogs under the pseudonym CaseyJane Cooper at wigglingteachers.com, prefers to segregate boxes by academic subject—one box for reading, one for math, etc. “I avoid packing by area,” she says. “I pack by concept. That way, if I need something later, I’m not thinking, ‘Where was it last year?’ I’m thinking, ‘It must be in my math box.’”

Keep (a Few) Mementos

Cooper recommends avoiding hoarding, but she still tucks away a few sentimental keepsakes in a special place. “There are certain notes that touch your heart, and I keep those in my memory box,” she says. “For everything else, it’s had its time to be loved and cherished, and then you send it on its way.”
Your Union

Spend Some Sweet Summer Nights Enjoying Free Ball!

Vermont-NEA members will once again have the opportunity to take in some great baseball this summer.

We are continuing our years-long relationship with the Vermont Mountaineers, the Montpelier-based New England Collegiate Baseball League affiliate. Vermont-NEA members have access to free tickets all season long.

And, on June 16, come watch President Martha Allen throw out the first pitch for Vermont-NEA night at Montpelier’s Recreation Field. All members and their families will be admitted free if they show their membership card. For free tickets to other games, drop us a line at adarby@vtnea.org.

And, for the second year in a row, there will be a Vermont-NEA night at Centennial Field as your Vermont Lake Monsters take on the West Virginia Black Bears on July 12. We’ll give you details soon on how you can snag free tickets for that game.

Summer’s almost here, everyone!

Vermont-NEA Secretary/Treasurer Steve Owens, right, helps a student of his throw the opening pitch at a Vermont-NEA night at the Mountaineers. Members get free admission on June 16.

Now your NEA Member Benefits travel discounts can travel with you.

Keep this wallet card handy to make sure you save on every trip.

1. Cut
2. Fold
3. Done!

Book your next trip at neamb.com/clickandsave
The following editorial appeared in editions of the Times Argus and Rutland Herald last month. It is reprinted here, with permission, so that members can see what one long-time media organization -- long in the forefront of education issues -- thinks of the school consolidation bill.

Taxpayers and local school boards might have thought that legislators intended this year to take action to reduce property taxes. They would have been wrong. The Legislature showed its two primary aims were, first, to shift school costs to property tax payers, and, second, to protect legislators from the charge that they were doing nothing to curb property taxes.

The school reform bill passed by the Legislature was a massive fraud. It could have been worse if the Senate had not eliminated some of the mandatory provisions of the bill passed by the House. But the bill puts in place penalties that will add to the property tax burden of many towns. Thus, the Legislature has fallen for the strange strategy attempted by former Gov. James Douglas and rejected by previous legislatures: Raising property taxes in order to lower them.

It sets up years of rancorous fighting between local school boards and state officials eager to pursue an agenda generated in Montpelier.

The education elite believes that voters need to be saved from themselves. This was evident at a grand education summit last fall that was in fact a sham designed to further an agenda while creating the impression that “stakeholders” were being heard. It was really designed to grease the skids for unnecessary and destructive reforms.

As the system exists today, the voters have an excellent method for controlling school costs and containing property taxes: vote down their school budgets and force school boards to reduce spending. It’s a system that works, as occurred in 2014 when some three dozen school budgets fell afoot of voters.

The law already contains measures to penalize high-spending districts, but the new law makes it more complicated. Each school district would have its own threshold beyond which it would face added tax penalties. The threshold is keyed to spending in the district with the highest per-pupil spending. The hitch that school boards are soon to discover is that in more than half of the districts, there will be penalties merely for keeping up with inflation.

It is inevitable that many districts will face expenses driving up costs into penalty territory; for a new computer lab, a refurbished chemistry lab, contracted salaries, health care costs. Thus, school boards will be faced with the duty of confronting voters and explaining that the higher tax burden is because of decisions by the Legislature. Voters dedicated to the high quality of education may shoulder the higher burdens. Others who conclude they are unable to do so will slash programs.

This is the logic of the Legislature and Gov. Peter Shumlin: Make it hurt. If it hurts badly enough, school districts will try to alleviate the pain by seeking new efficiencies through consolidation of school districts. Abundant testimony has failed to reveal how consolidation would save significant money. Instead, in an example of shameless rhetorical igerdermain, supporters of the bill have shifted away from the promise of saving money to the alleged need to close small schools. Except they are eager to pay lip service to the value of Vermont’s many small schools. Instead they focus on micro-schools. Again, they fail to trust the voters, who have taken action in recent years to close and merge schools when they see fit.

Taxpayers upset by the higher taxes engineered by the Legislature and Shumlin are likely to blame their school boards, which will be fine with the legislators and with Shumlin. It lets them off the hook, which was part of the point. They could have alleviated the property tax burden without all the hypocrisy if they had fulfilled past commitments to the education fund, or even gone further by appropriating general fund revenue. Of course, it is a tough budget year, and they have not wanted to own up to the reality that they are not in a position to help the property tax payer.

The Senate averted what could have been one of the greatest policy disasters in decades; instead the Legislature and the governor have created a hornet’s nest of contention and years of distraction from the real issues having to do with education.
kindergartens. Parents are obviously stressed. But there's a price to be paid by their children for this stress. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University reports that one-third of their students have tried to hurt themselves with almost 14% having experienced suicidal thoughts.

Canada also has consistently scored well in international rankings. But it's worth noting that they didn't do it through obsessive test drills, pay-by-test-scores, or a culture of parents distraught over their child's kindergarten report card. They did it with a systems-approach to the whole child, including fostering safe and accepting schools; physical activity and nutrition; and a program of "open minds, healthy minds" making mental health an education issue.

Our Canadian friends know that school climate impacts academic results, but it also impacts that child's resilience when things don't go well; it impacts how that child interacts with others when he's angry or disappointed; it impacts all the things that it takes to be a successful member of society.

Canadian children are given grade-span tests in elementary, middle and high school, but not for high-stakes. "Standardized tests are only a small portion of the Canadian student's educational experience and are used with other sources of information to guide us in a way that we can further help our students," says Dawn Imada Chan, a teacher and education consultant from Toronto.

And finally, there's Finland. Save me your, "Finland isn't anything like the U.S." argument. Here's the thing. They weren't always where they are. Thirty years ago they decided on a plan. They worked the plan. And the plan had nothing to do with test scores or merit pay or privatized public schools or fast-track teachers. Their secret sauce has three ingredients: (1) Equitable, adequate resources in every school so that every public school is as good as their best public schools; (2) Highly trained, trusted, career professionals; (3) Authority for those trusted professionals to use their professional judgment to collaborate and make instructional decisions best-suited for their students.

But for me, the important part of the Finnish plan is the purpose of the plan, the purpose of education: Building a good society. We talk a good game about public schools being vital to our democracy; to ethical citizens, but the talk doesn't wash with the "rank, punish, reward" standardized testing cult. I've never heard anyone try to argue that higher test scores are essential to a better community. The argument is almost always an economic one. And we know how to build a billionnaire. On the Forbes list of Countries by Billionaires, U.S. is number #1 with $36. Canada is #10 with 39. Finland doesn't make the list.

Finnish educator and author, Pasi Sahlberg, holds his head high because getting rich isn't the purpose of Finnish education. "Becoming a member of any community means that an individual needs to have adequate interpersonal skills, understanding of different cultures and good understanding of moral responsibilities in life. It's character and mind that matter in competitive labor markets today, not being among winners in knowledge tests."

Researchers Dennis Shirley and Andy Hargreaves explain, "The Finns build their future by wedding education to economic development, without sacrificing culture and creativity. They promote a broad and enriching curriculum, rather than obsessing only about literacy and math; they raise standards by lifting the many, rather than pushing a privileged few. And they morally inspire, rather than financially incentivize, a high-status profession."

I spoke with a Finnish teacher in January during a tour of her school. I had a million questions. She had only one for me. "What do they think all that testing in your country will get you if the students grow up and they aren't happy with their lives?"

Our global competition does not come in a standardized form. Test scores do tell something. That Hong Kong scores well and their students are suicidal tells us something else. That Canada scores well and it supports mental health services in schools tells something else. That Finland scores well and teachers are given board decision-making authority to design and deliver instruction with nary a prize nor a punishment nor a standardized test, for that matter, in sight tells something else again.

I don't mind looking at rankings from time to time. When it tells something. On the 2010 rankings by the Gallup World Poll and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Finland was found to be the second Happiest Place on Earth. I'm not making this up. They say it's their high literacy rate, access to health care, low levels of corruption, little income inequality and healthy work-life balance. In a Post-Standardized-Test World, which I hope we are moving towards with all due and happy speed, maybe this is the ranking worthy of our obsession.

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On May 20, David Letterman said goodbye to 33 years of irreverent, inventive and, ultimately, transformative television. While the listicle may seem ubiquitous today, Letterman’s Top 10 Countdowns were viral before, well, before there was viral.

We looked around to see if he ever dedicated one of those nearly 6,000 Top 10 lists to education. Low and behold, we found one from May 2013. After saying that teachers have one of the most thankless jobs in America (the audience roared its approval), Letterman said, “Thankless is the wrong word. We are all, and should be, grateful, eternally grateful, for the hard work these people do.”

Here is that list. (Remember, it’s David Letterman. He means this all as a testament to the hard work you do every day!)

The Top 10 Reasons I Became a Teacher

1. I hope to live up to the teachers who inspired me... like Ms. What’s Her Name.
2. It’s no fun saying the Pledge of Allegiance every day by myself.
3. Honesty, I didn’t pay much attention the first time through school.
4. Kids need to know the moon landing was faked.
5. I could make a difference in just one student’s life... well, that wouldn’t be a very good average.

School’s out for summer. And so are we.

Vermont-NEA TODAY will be back in mid-August.

vtnea.org
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Your Power 2015 Legislature

up. Fears about this forcing small schools to close was so rampant that legislators inserted in the bill several provisions making plain that doing so is not their intent. Nevertheless, the entire bill is built on the assumption that fewer, larger governing structures will lead to naturally declining annual cost increases.

Employees in governance transitions
When an employee’s employer changes, the employee needs protection. Current law provides that protection in very few circumstances. H.361 extends this protection – extending to job security and union representation – to school employees in virtually any form of “governance” change.

School spending
For a couple of years (FY 2017 and 2018) before all this change is to take place, H.361 tries to tamp down school spending directly. It does so by assigning each district an “allowable growth” percentage (between 0% and 5.5%), inversely related to its per pupil spending, and taxing each dollar above that level as though it were two.

If a district spends about, say, $14,000 per pupil, and its “allowable growth” percentage is 2%, and it budgets to spend above the resulting $14,280 level by, say $100, it will spend $14,380 but its taxpayers will pay as though it is spending $14,480. The tax “penalty” for that extra $100/ pupil will be something on the order of $2.00/ pupil.

Right to strike
In the midst of all the attacks on school costs, we also had to contend with a major legislative hiccup in the form of a direct attack on the right of Vermont teachers to strike. While the Association has long been willing, if there is legislative insistence, to cede the right to strike if school boards lose their right to impose “finality” and if both rights are replaced by actual arbitration, the school boards’ and superintendents’ associations chose to take the fight further. While they were hardly consistent in their efforts to diminish your rights, it boiled down to a plan to remove strikes and impositions and replace them with...nothing, leaving it to the parties somehow to resolve their differences...or not. It took effort, but we did succeed in inducing the House to defeat any intrusion into the right of teachers in Vermont to strike.

Fact-finding
There was a smaller skirmish over school boards’ interest in tilting the fact-finding process in their favor by, in essence, requiring a fact-finder to consider matters that fact-finders typically consider anyway without being told to do so. One particular proposal, which no fact-finder in his or her right mind would consider, is recent behavior by a local district’s electorate in the immediately prior two budget votes, as though budget votes somehow reflect only the voters’ willingness to pay and the voters’ willingness to pay, rather than ability to pay, should govern. In any event, after hearing from redundant school board retained attorneys, this proposal went nowhere.

Small schools funding
While the attacks on special funding for small schools were unrelenting early in the session, a February public opinion survey showed support for it is more than triple opposition to it. The rhetoric changed so that special funding, totaling more than $7 million, is largely preserved for districts that engage in merger activity, or are “geographically isolated,” or provide sufficient “academic excellence” and “operational efficiency.”

Municipal employees’ retirement
More than 200 school districts are members of the Vermont Municipal Employees Retirement System, which provides retirement benefits for more than 2,000 current non-teacher school employees. Their benefits and participation in that retirement system, without more, would be disrupted or eliminated in most governance changes. H.361 provides the “more” by ensuring that the retirement benefits of these school employees subject to a change in governance will not be jeopardized.

‘Remove strikes and impositions, and replace them with...nothing’

Teachers’ retirement
Apart from the “governance” legislation, the administration and legislature, for about the 8th consecutive year now, have fulfilled the obligation to fully fund the State Teachers Retirement System. Vermont-NEA, on your behalf, has reached several agreements with the state about how that system is funded and what benefits it provides. Teachers have been paying more into that system to keep it stable, and the state has followed suit now for a lengthy, unbroken period.

Vaccinations
Vermont-NEA joined with many other organizations seeking to eliminate the so-called parental “philosophical exemption” as a basis for a child not to be immunized against basic, preventable diseases. Vermont has among the lowest percentage of immunized children and, therefore, among the largest percentage of children, including those whose medical condition prevents them from being immunized, exposed. We were all successful in having the “philosophical exemption” eliminated.

Mandatory abuse reporting
Longstanding law requires mandatory reporters of child abuse (including all school employees) with reason to believe a child is subject to abuse to “report or cause a report to be made” to the Department for Children and Families. The “cause a report to be made” provision has been a cause of confusion, some poor school policies, and several high profile prosecutions. Vermont-NEA suggested removal of that clause from the reporting law, and the legislature has done so.

From now on, a mandatory reporter’s obligation will be clear and singular: if there is reason to believe abuse has occurred, the mandatory reporter’s obligation will be to report it directly.

Confidentiality of abuse reports
This same bill makes helpful changes in DCF confidentiality rules. Last summer, the Association submitted this statement about those rules: “[W]hatever other steps you may wish to take in this context, the most important is to facilitate, even require, greater coordinated local efforts involving DCF and other helping agencies to address the welfare of children subject to reports of abuse or neglect. This extends to addressing the important matter of confidentiality in ways that focus on protecting children more than on protecting information.”

The legislature responded to this sentiment by requiring DCF to provide the reporter relevant information in its records if the reporter “is engaged in an ongoing working relationship with the child or family” involved.

“Failure to protect a child”
In the same legislation addressing reports of child abuse, the legislature gave serious consideration to creating a new felony of “failure to protect a child.” It would have subjected a person having the care or custody of a child who knew or “reasonably should have known” the child was subject to forms of serious abuse to criminal prosecution and a potential, 10-year prison term and $20,000 fine; but not if the reporter had what amounts to good cause for the “failure.” Our testimony took the following form:

“These provisions were written by lawyers for lawyers: they completely fail to take into account the circumstances under which school employees, and adults in virtually any walk of life in which they have the care of someone else’s child, actually function. In particular, the mere whiff of accusation of wrongdoing by a school employee almost guarantees a career-ending spiral of process, as well as emotional and monetary cost, whether or not that process results in a criminal conviction. Of course, we should protect our children. We should not, however, needlessly expose educators, clergy, camp counselors, coaches, scoutmasters, health professionals, even school crossing guards, social services, and caseworkers, to such extreme consequence for not knowing what they ‘reasonably should have known.”

This potential new crime was removed from the child protection legislation.

Social services and our schools
Vermont-NEA has long advocated for closer collaboration between social service providers and schools. Not only could that be good for our children, it could make fuller use of some school facilities and, in particular, make even plainer the connection showing the effect of decreased funding for social services on increasing school costs. H.361 doesn’t solve this issue, but it does set in motion a close examination by both the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services of ways to collaborate and improve the quality of services to children.
NEA’s Lily Eskelsen Garcia: ‘The Dots Do Not Connect’

NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia writes a regular blog called "Lily’s Blackboard." This May entry is particularly timely, given the pilot roll-out of Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium testing in Vermont this year.

I always find it ironic if not a little silly when someone (especially someone who’s never taught actual children) suggests that the answer to every question regarding improving American education is to offer prizes or punishments based on standardized test scores. The rationale behind such misguided “motivators” is often a panicked “Our Kids Aren’t Prepared for Their Global Competition!” Put aside for a moment that this statement may or may not be true, the premise is that (1) prizes and punishments will produce higher test scores; and (2) higher test scores will in fact prepare U.S. students to compete globally; and (3) high test scores are the purpose of education,

My point is that these dots do not connect. Yes, indeed, we have global economic competition. Most of the world’s creative thought-work can be done regardless of borders. Writers, Researchers, Architects, Engineers, Designers, it’s not just cheap labor from a foreign factory taking U.S. jobs. More and more folks live in a world where their work can be outsourced, and they want something to offer to that global employer. But I would quickly add that the goal of a good education isn’t solely a better chance for a good job (although I certainly have no problem with our students getting good jobs). The goal of good education is to give our students a better chance at a good life.

Which begs the question; do good scores mean a good life? Asians now occupy the top five slots in PISA Math and Reading rankings. But Google “Singapore” and “Stress”. There are 16 million hits. The New York Times reports that Singapore will stop releasing the names of top-performing students who are often bombarded by offers from companies to endorse commercial products that they can claim boost scores (like chicken soup – I am not making this up) so that panicked parents will rush out and buy. In Hong Kong parents begin the fierce competition to get their children into elite high schools by making sure they get the right test scores in elite

...continued on p. 6

Runoff Election 2015

Be on the lookout for an email from runoff2015@vtnea.org so you can vote in a runoff election between Don Tinney and Molly Pratt for NEA Director. It’s our first electronic election -- and your vote is important.

Voting begins on June 12 and ends June 19. See vtnea.org/runoff2015 for more.

Free Baseball? Yes, Please, p. 4

President’s View: Your Hard Work Pays Off for Vermont’s Students, p. 2

Six Ways to Get Next Year Off to a Good Start Right Now, p. 3

Windsor Southeast EA’s Patricia Pomerleau at the 2014 Leadership Conference. Will we see you at this year’s edition? See if there is still room by visiting vtnea.org/leadership2015