Your Power
Hartford Organizes, Settles

After a rapid organizing effort involving dozens of members, the Hartford Education Association last month reached a tentative, 2-year contract settlement that calls for raises, improvements to working conditions and no change in health insurance.

In and of itself, news of a settlement is almost routine. Not this time.

Negotiators for the association were, for months, rebuffed by a board that seemed more interested in delay than in making a deal. Dates were pushed back; offers rebuffed; and, at one point, even choosing a fact-finder proved to be a drawn-out and laborious process.

So the members turned to organizing. A small band of leaders – including long-time members and newer ones – decided that the only way to show the board that they were serious was to do so in a unified manner. But the choice of topic to rally around was surprising, and, in the end, effective.

The association’s leaders thought organizing around bargaining-related issues wouldn’t be successful, at least in the short term, because of the looming Town Meeting budget vote. The proposed budget was bad: it called for cutting 14 teaching positions. But the history in Hartford made leaders even continued on p. 7

Your Union
Delegates Approve Dues, Celebrate Profession

D

delegates to the 2016 Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly approved a modest dues increase of less than a dollar a month. Delegates also approved all changes to the bylaws – including instituting instant-runoff voting in officer elections – during the day-long meeting at the Killington Grand Hotel.

"I am extremely proud of the work our members do every day, and I appreciate the fact that so many delegates took time to attend our association’s most important meeting," Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen said. "I am also honored and grateful that delegates ponder some of the most pressing issues facing educators, students and all of Vermont."

To that end, Allen used the gathering to prod delegates to commit to identifying, discussing and eradicating institutional racism.

"Institutional racism is defined as the societal patterns and practices that have the net effect of imposing oppressive conditions and denying rights, opportunities, and equality based on race," she said. "Let me repeat, the societal patterns and practices that have the net effect of imposing oppressive conditions and denying rights, opportunities and equality, based on race.

"It is so insidious that much of what goes on in Vermont on a daily basis can be found to play some part in racist behavior. I am not talking about racial slurs right now. Yes, those people who feel the need to verbalize their racist beliefs are in need of an education, but I am talking about years and years of laws, cultural norms, and day-to-day activities that have been accepted by much of society. Here in Vermont, many white people, such as myself, go through days and weeks, and even years, without much thought about the struggles our students, colleagues and neighbors of color face each and every day. It is time for this to come to an end. It has never been an acceptable course for our society, and when the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s woke our nation, it was then that all of us should have stood together to fight inequities in every part of our culture. But, that didn’t happen. Instead, more laws and norms were enforced that resulted in the creation of what is now called a racial caste system."

And there was some homework, too. In keeping with the unanimous decision made by the 7,500 delegates to the NEA RA last year to commit our union to eradicating institutional racism, all delegates got copies of two important best-selling books. "The New Jim Crow," by Michelle Alexander, is a haunting reminder that the mass-incarceration movement begun in the 1980s and 1990s was an utter failure, especially to communities of color. "Between the World and Me," by Ta-Nehisi Coates, is a "profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son," according to Amazon. The book "offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation’s history and current crisis."

The RA also featured a further discussion of institutional racism with NEA’s Merwyn Scott and an exploration of restorative justice with Attorney General candidate TJ Donovan.

Dues

As a result of Vermont’s fair share fee law, dues increases continue to be much less than they otherwise would have been. With little debate, delegates overwhelmingly approved 2016-17 dues increases of $8 a year for full-time teachers and $4 a year for full-time Education Support Professionals.

“These modest increases are a result of more and more non-members paying their fair share,” Allen said. “We take our responsibility to protect the rights of everyone in the bargaining unit very seriously. And we urge non-members to become members, because there is so much more power in belonging to the union.”

Bylaws Changes

The delegates also overwhelmingly approved all bylaws changes proposed by the board of directors. One change makes promoting the safety of students and school employees a part of the association’s statement of privilege. Another change allows the president to delegate the evaluation of the executive director to others. A third allows for instant-runoff elections of officers and board directors, ending the need to hold costly run-off elections. The fourth formally establishes the Political Education Action Committee as the government/legislative standing committee of the board.

Celebrations

Of course, the RA is also a celebration.

continued on p. 4
Vermont Not Immune to Institutional Racism

Martha Allen

Think about this; if the drinking water in an affluent suburb in any American city was contaminated, would years pass before action was taken? If white boys were being arrested and subsequently incarcerated on a regular basis in order to meet police department quotas, would that be allowed to continue for years and years? In our nation’s public schools, are students of color encouraged to take AP courses and apply to college, or are they, instead, finding themselves in trouble at a higher rate than their white peers, facing barriers to a quality educational experience?

As Vermonters, many of us might say that these conditions don’t apply to us. These inequities and discriminatory practices may be happening in other states, but they don’t happen here.

Well, I disagree. Maybe these specific examples are not pertinent in our state, but unfortunately, there are other examples of discrimination that persist in Vermont due to the systems that have been in place in the United States for years.

I have written about institutional racism on more than one occasion, I spoke about it at our RA, and I plan on keeping this topic on the front burner for a long time to come.

Why? Because we are now at a place in this country where the public has been made aware of the long standing practices and patterns that have oppressed people of color, denying them the rights, opportunity and equality that white people have enjoyed for generations.

We have a window of opportunity here. Now is the time to take this on in our schools. We need to talk with our students and discuss what is happening in our country, and why.

Look at Flint, Ferguson, South Carolina’s Emmanuel Church, and the murders in New York and many other states, just for starters. The media is finally paying attention to these brutal displays of violence and neglect that are the result of laws, unspoken cultural norms, and blatant discrimination.

Somewhere, we have allowed this to continue in every corner of our country. Vermont is not immune, either.

I want Vermont’s children to grow up with an understanding that every child deserves to be treated with respect, regardless of the color of their skin.

Opportunity should be there for all to embrace. Every child should feel safe in our schools. They should know that there are adults in our schools who are ready to listen to the problems and challenges that may arise simply because of their skin color.

How exactly, do we do this? I am not sure. But I do know that we all need to learn more about the impact institutional racism has on our students and staff of color, and their families.

I have been doing some reading, and although I will never be able to truly experience what those of color experience on a daily basis, I can at least try to acknowledge these discriminatory behaviors by listening and learning from others. Once these behaviors are identified, we can then work to eliminate them.

I invite you to join me on a journey. Together we can offer our students what they need to become successful and happy citizens, regardless of the color of their skin.

We must look within ourselves and examine our biases. We must identify discriminatory school policies that have been in place for too long. We must examine cultural norms and adjust them accordingly. We must avoid making assumptions about students without talking to them. We must get to know the families of our students and provide assistance and support so that school becomes what it was intended to be, the gateway to opportunity for all.

Certainly, this is a very difficult and challenging task.

But as some have said, there is a moral imperative here. We have an ethical responsibility to act with our students’ happiness and success in mind. Let’s start some conversations amongst ourselves and figure out what needs to be acted upon in our schools. It is what public schools are all about.
9 Ways to Plan Effective, Fun, Relevant Field Trips

By NEA Member Benefits

Tighter budgets, standardized tests and heavier workloads have resulted in fewer field trips in recent years. But cutting educational travel from the budget is a mistake—take it from the U.S. Travel Association, who recently conducted a study with 400 adults (balanced for gender, age, race and income), half of which had taken a learning trip in their youth, the other half had not.

The study found that, regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, youth who take educational trips have better grades (59 percent), higher graduation rates from high school (95 percent) and college (63 percent), and greater income (12 percent higher annually). In fact, 89 percent said educational trips had a positive, lasting impact on their education and career because the trips made them more engaged, intellectually curious and interested in and out of school.

“When I was growing up, my parents said the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) were important,” says Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “But for my kids, I made roaming the fourth R. We live in a global society, and if you don’t see outside the neighborhood you grow up in, the world will pass you by. Traveling has opened my kids’ eyes; it’s made them more confident and inspired them to reach outside their normal environment to learn and obtain skills to bring them to the next level.”

Margy Natalie, acting onsite learning manager at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum, agrees: “Field trips give students the opportunity to learn in a natural environment and experience things first-hand and from primary resources, rather than texts; real objects rather than photos.” Carylann Assante, executive director for Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA) and SYTA Youth Foundation, seconds that notion. “Today’s students are visual learners and a field trip lets them touch, feel, and listen to what they’re learning about, which helps them learn. Building on classroom instruction, gain a better understanding of topics, build cultural understanding and tolerance, and expose them to worlds outside their own.”

Assante says field trips are particularly important for disadvantaged students, as they provide students with unique opportunities that level the playing field. “Field trips give diverse and financially-in-need students equal opportunity to experience things outside classroom that their families may not be able to afford.”

A field trip can also be the first trip a student takes without their parents, so it builds independence, as well. “There’s a reason people say I need to get away and recharge my batteries—there’s truth to it,” adds Dow. “If I was a school system looking at these stats, I couldn’t afford not to make this a part of our curriculum.”

So just how can teachers ensure a successful field trip? Keep these tips in mind:

1. Look around your region for nearby trips, suggests Dow. “You can take a quick drive and see the history of places around you—there’s tons of inexpensive things teachers can do that will have a phenomenal impact.”
2. Do your homework. “Plan carefully, do your research, visit the site before you plan, ask questions and take recommendations of staff,” suggests Natalie.
3. Follow protocol. “Teachers need to review their school’s policies on field trips in advance and prepare the forms with specific learning objectives and how the field trip will accomplish those objectives tied to their school’s core curriculum,” says Assante. Most museums, attractions and locations have education materials you can use to show how their attraction supports educational curriculums.
4. Involve the students. “Discuss the goals of the field trip in advance, talk about what they will see and what they should learn,” advises Natalie. Consider letting the class pick the field trip destination so they have ownership, adds Assante.
5. Make trips relevant. “Base your field trips on your content area—if you’re studying ancient Egypt, don’t take them to Jamestown,” warns Natalie. “Focus on how the trip fits into your content or another educational goal. A field trip should be a day out, not a day off.”
6. Incorporate technology. “Many students use their mobile devices to engage with the field trip in the classroom with apps and blogs,” says Assante.
7. Select a field trip where students are not sitting down like in the classroom, but are able to touch, explore and share their experiences, suggests Assante.
8. Fundraise. “Engage the parents, PTA or other teachers to support school wide field trips and help raise the funds so everyone can afford to attend the trip,” says Assante, who also notes that companies, like Target, now offer field trip grants.
9. Follow up. “Students are much more likely to write about an experience they recently had, like the field trip, than a random prompt,” says Natalie, who recommends following up with graded assignments. “Have them write about their favorite artifact or activity on the field trip, or why this field trip is important to keep, or conversely, how a different field trip might be better.”

Field trips are still an integral part of any student’s school experience.
Fletcher EA's Denette Locke was recognized as the Angelo J. Dorta Award for Teaching Excellence winner; Chittenden South EA's Fran Brennan was honored as the ESP of the Year; and 10 children of members each won $1,000 Maida F. Townsend scholarships. The delegates also honored our three Human and Civil Rights Award winners: Windham Central EA's Jeryl Julian-Cissé; Outright Vermont; and Reading to End Racism. Delegates also saw the debut of Vermont-NEA's new video "Together." If you haven't seen it, check it out at vnea.org/together. Details of the winners follow.

Dorta Award for Excellence

The Angelo J. Dorta Award for Teaching Excellence recognizes, rewards, and promotes excellence in public school teaching and underscores high standards of service to students and to the teaching profession. Denette will represent Vermont in the national competition for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence, which honors the winner with $25,000.

Denette Locke is one of those teachers who does not, as some say, toot her own horn. Fortunately, this award will give her some long overdue recognition. She exemplifies excellence in education by putting her students first, always. In her school and community, Denette is a natural leader. The staff at Fletcher Elementary, go to Denette when leadership is needed, and Denette is there to respond. She has embraced NEA’s professional opportunities too, bringing her new learning back to her school.

Not only does Denette have the respect of her peers, her students and their parents rely on her to provide the best learning opportunity for each individual child in her class.

Tiffany Pelkey, the parent of one of Denette's students wrote, "Denette Locke is one of those teachers that you will always remember. The teacher that is there to support you and that you can turn to for a hug on those extra difficult days. She is the teacher that encourages you to follow your dreams and knows that a dash of creativity and glitter goes a long way."

These glowing remarks are not uncommon when it comes to praises for Denette. Denette's dedication to public education is commendable.

ESP of Year Award Winner

This year the winner is Fran Brennan from Chittenden South EA. Fran's nomination stood out because of her local leadership and countless hours as an ESP building representative and negotiator within Chittenden South SU. She actively serves on the Chittenden County ESP Leadership Roundtable and served as a local Association leader on the CSSU Consolidation Committee. She works tirelessly to promote public education through her ongoing involvement with the school budget committee – not an easy task at times – and fundraising efforts at the Shelburne Community School.

Please see page 7 for Fran's speech to her fellow ESP during March's ESP conference.

Human and Civil Rights Awards

This year's individual award goes to Jeryl Julian-Cissé. Jeryl "lives and breathes diversity and human and civil rights". She spent several years in Senegal where she gained an appreciation of that country. As a teacher of Spanish at Leland & Gray High School in Townsend, Jeryl not only teaches the language and organizes trips to Spain but organizes host families for visitors from Spain to encourage cross-cultural understanding. She is deeply involved as advisor to the local student organization, Child Labor Education Action now known as Civil Leadership Education and Action. Recently, this organization worked to raise awareness of the ebola outbreak in Africa.

Reading to End Racism is a volunteer-run non-profit that starts conversations around race and racism in Vermont schools. Community leaders and high school students visit elementary and middle schools as "readers" to share stories on race/racism and then facilitate conversations with students. Begun in Burlington in 2003 they now have programs throughout the state.

In 2009 Mater Christi School leaders in Burlington refused to bring the program to their school saying that they did not want to talk about racism. The story was picked up in the Associated Press. As a result, Reading to End Racism has started to expand across the country.

The mission of Outright Vermont is to build safe, healthy, and supportive environments for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth ages 13-22. For the past 17 years OutRight Vermont has worked statewide with youth, schools, families, youth-serving professionals, clinicians and the broader community to help create more safety and inclusion across sexuality and gender identities. Their many programs from support groups to student empowerment have had a positive impact on the lives of many youth and their families.
Townsend Scholarships Celebrate Our Future

One of the highlights of every Representative Assembly is the awarding of the Maida F. Townsend Scholarships, and this year was no exception.

The sons and daughters of Vermont-NEA members—students in their last year of high school, undergraduates, and graduate students—even eligible to apply. Established in 1991, the $1,000 scholarships are awarded annually at the Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly. This year’s essay question was: “Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.”

In all, 10 exemplary students received the scholarship after a competitive process. We congratulate these young men and women as well as their parents!

Heather Robinson, Castleton University, Parent: Melinda Robinson, Orange Southwest EA

Zachary Trepanier, West Rutland High School, Parent: Jodi Trepanier, Rutland School SA

Elizabeth Skerrett, BFA—Fairfax, Parent: Jennifer Skerrett, BFA—Fairfax EA

Haley Usilton, Woodstock UHS, Parent: Elizabeth Usilton, Woodstock Elementary EA

Abigail Snow, Milton High School, Parent: Molly Snow, Essex Junction Westford EA

Laura Valastro, South Burlington HS, Parent: Wendy Valastro, Essex Junction Westford EA

Hannah Funk, Mount Abraham Union High School, Parent: Elizabeth Maher, Addison Northeast EA

Jared Lehoullier, Lake Region UHS, Parent: Maureen Lehoullier, North Country Union EA

Gordon MacMaster, Woodstock UHS, Parent: Joann MacMaster, Woodstock Elementary EA

Erin O’Farrell, Lyndon Institute, Parent: Brian O’Farrell, St. Johnsbury EA

Schools that began the Vermont Breakfast After the Bell Challenge in January already report success!

- Coventry Village School
  - 61% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 103% increase over last year
  - Serving methods: universal, breakfast in the classroom, and grab and go

- Elm Hill School
  - 36% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 157% increase over last year
  - Serving method: breakfast in the classroom

- Molly Stark School
  - 91% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 175% increase over last year
  - Serving methods: universal and breakfast in the classroom

- Morristown Elementary
  - 26% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 30% increase over last year
  - Serving method: grab and go

- Pownal Elementary
  - 92% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 217% increase over last year
  - Serving methods: universal and breakfast in the classroom

- Thatcher Brook Primary School
  - 21% of students are eating breakfast
  - A 40% increase over last year
  - Serving method: grab and go

Registration Now Open for the Fall 2016 Challenge: hungerfreevt.org/breakfast-after-the-bell-challenge
Joel Cook, the long-serving executive director of Vermont-NEA, will retire in December after nearly a quarter century of service to the state’s largest union and its 12,000 members. Cook joined Vermont-NEA in 1992 as the association’s general counsel, becoming executive director in 2000. He will end a four-decades-long career devoted to making life better for Vermont’s students, educators, seniors, working people, and Vermonter’s who are economically disadvantaged.

“While we wish Joel well on his well-deserved retirement, we will miss his steadfast dedication to Vermont-NEA and to its purpose,” said Martha Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan who serves as Vermont-NEA president. “Joel’s advocacy on behalf of the women and men who work in Vermont’s schools has been as unwavering as his desire to do what’s best for our state’s children.”

Allen said the union will begin a national search for his replacement in the coming weeks. As executive director, Joel oversees a $5 million-a-year, 20-employee operation.

“I have been proud of what we have accomplished together over the years,” Cook said. “Vermont-NEA has been – and will continue to be – the state’s greatest champion of children and of the people we entrust to educate them.”

In 1975, after earning a law degree from the University of Oregon School of Law, Cook began his career in Vermont as an attorney with Vermont Legal Aid. During his 10 years there, he advocated for people with mental health problems; helped clients with welfare, unemployment and disability issues; and directed the organization’s senior citizen law project.

In 1985, he joined the administration of Madeleine Kunin as the director of the Vermont Office on Aging and as the first Commissioner of what is now the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. He joined Vermont-NEA in 1992, becoming executive director in 2000. During his tenure, many protections for children as well as for educators and other working people became law because of his advocacy.

“Vermont-NEA’s members and their families have benefited directly from Joel’s work over the years,” Allen said. “But Joel hasn’t advocated just for our members; he has worked just as fiercely on behalf of all working Vermonter’s.”

Cook lives in Charlotte with his wife Christine Cook, who was a special education teacher – and member of Vermont-NEA – for 32 years. They have three children: Shoshana, who is an attorney in Maine; Sarah, a middle school math teacher in Massachusetts; and Joshua, who is about to begin work with the Vermont Department of Families and Children.

Cook will still remain active as executive director for the rest of the year; you will still have a chance to see him at the Leadership Conference; Fall District Meetings, and, until adjournment of the legislative session, you can catch him in the Statehouse.

Good luck for a great, relaxing retirement, Joel!
In Hartford, It’s All About Organizing

more nervous: if the school budget didn’t pass, then the board most likely would have proposed an even more dangerous budget.

“Obviously, we are not happy with the budget,” HEA Chief Negotiator Cherrie Torrey told the Valley News. “It’s a million-dollar-and-change cut, which means programs and positions which can affect our school and what we can offer students. However, she said, the budget would only get worse.

After deciding to support the budget, members packed school board meetings. They organized their own 10-minute meetings to keep everyone informed. And they showed the community that Hartford educators were united.

Keep in mind that as Town Meeting rolled around, teachers had been negotiating for more than a year, even working without a contract for many months.

At the final board meeting before the budget went to a vote, HEA President Nicholle Vieilleux spoke, flanked by dozens of fellow members.

As many of you know, I and my fellow teachers have been working without a contract since July. We remain in our classrooms because of our dedication to our schools is second only to our dedication to the communities’ children. Despite months of sometimes contentious negotiations, despite the fact that we have yet to reach a fair settlement, we are here tonight to urge our fellow residents to vote “yes” for the school budget next Tuesday.

Yes, we know that this budget will cost the district’s taxpayers more next year than this year, even though its bottom line is lower. Yes, we know that this budget will mean that 14 of my colleagues may be out of jobs they love, and the kids they serve will suffer. And yes, we know that in a perfect world, we would design budgets that always put kids first.

The reason my fellow educators and I urge our fellow taxpayers to say “yes” is simple: Hartford’s children. All too often, budget writers consider the debits and credits, expenses and income, and tax rates above all else. We understand the immense pressure put on our board – and boards all over Vermont – to focus on the bottom line.

But beyond numbers and spreadsheets are actual real students, the children of our communities. And the simple fact is that while this budget is painful, we believe cutting services and programs for our children any further would be far more painful, and could lead to even fewer opportunities for our children.

This is a great place to live in large measure because we have made the commitment to support our schools. And our great schools, in turn, help keep our communities vibrant. The more we reduce educational opportunity, the less attractive our district will be to parents, businesses, and even teachers. Indeed, with districts across the river paying higher salaries and offering greater stability, many good, eager teachers pick up and leave our

The budget passed. And, even more importantly, the show of solidarity and support for the board’s budget was well-received by board members, who welcomed a resumption of negotiations. After a marathon session, both sides settled on the terms of the contract.

This was the third cycle in which negotiations were tough; this was the first one, however, where a concrete organizing plan was implemented.

“I am proud of what Hartford members were able to accomplish together,” said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “When we stand with one another, and make our case for fairness, we and our students win.” Congratulations to Hartford EA!

I Felt No Need to Join the Union

ESP of the Year Fran Brennan spoke to her peers at the Vermont-NEA ESP Conference. Here are her remarks.

I got my start in the area of education when I was working with my own children in California. I ran the computer lab for the elementary school, back when we were still using the very large floppy disks, and I also chaired the PTA. After moving to Vermont, I felt the best way to become part of a new community was to get involved with the schools that my children attended. I soon became the chair of the PTO and also started to sub. Of course, one thing led to another, and I soon found myself employed as the library assistant in Shelburne and I have been there for 23 years.

When I started work, I felt no need to join the union. I was happy with what I was doing and felt that I did not want to part with any more of my small paycheck. However, I had a very alarming wake-up call when one of our students was killed by a falling bookcase. I quickly realized that I needed liability protection. I, along with several of my colleagues, decided that union membership was the best place to get that coverage. So, that was my start! Through information provided by Vermont NEA and the leadership at SCCS, I started to understand that there is so much more to membership beyond the liability insurance.

I had two other wake up calls, both of which were provided by members of my own family. My son, who saw me every day at school, belittled what I considered to be a great job; he said, “you are nothing but an aide”. Wow! Of course, I knew my son had no intent to be hurtful, but he expressed to me that I was sure was shared by many. A lack of respect for the people we now refer to as pareducators and the work that they perform. My second wake up call came around the same time from my husband; he said, “When do you plan to get a real job, one that pays a little more?” Ouch! Both my husband and my

son provided the impetus for me to become more involved in my union and to strive towards garnering more respect for paras and the work that we do and also improve the pay of all support staff.

Since those wake up calls, I have been the president of our local unit and the lead negotiator of four new contracts for our district. My goal has always been to highlight the incredible, talented, and highly educated staff that we have working with our students and to help negotiate greater benefits for all, particularly in the compensation and benefits areas. Training has become very limited at the local level as budgets get sliced and that is an area that needs great expansion.

We all know that our student population is changing rapidly: as a library assistant, I have the privilege of seeing many K-8 students nearly every day, I am able to watch as they mature from innocent pre-schoolers to hormonal adolescents. It is amazing how much information children share while checking out books! We need to listen! Our demographics are changing and we need to be able to help students from all walks of life. As Martha Allen has addressed this year, violence has become a factor in our schools and we need to come together and determine how to best handle behavior situations in all of our schools.

To end, I would like to quickly share with you a library happening:

Around Martin Luther King Day, I put up a display of MLK books. A kindergarten class stopped by and the teacher asked if anyone knew who these books were honoring.

Without hesitation, one little boy said, “I don’t know, Bernie Sanders, of course.” It’s hard to contain the amusement! Working with students is one of the greatest joys; helping to mold the future of a child is powerful...
Vermont-NEA Board Gives Nod to Donovan in AG Race

Your board last month announced its support for T.J. Donovan’s bid to be the state’s next Attorney General.

“T.J. brings a refreshing commitment to the state’s children and working people,” said Martha Allen, Vermont-NEA’s president. “Whether it’s his successful restorative justice programs, his work to help people reinstate their driving privileges or his unabashed support of the right of workers to form unions, we are confident he will be an Attorney General who puts the interests of working families first.”

The nod marks the union’s first for a statewide candidate this election cycle. It is also the first time in more than a decade that the board has made a recommendation in the Attorney General’s race. As of press time, Donovan has no primary challengers.

“I am deeply humbled to receive the endorsement of the Vermont NEA and consider it a great honor,” Donovan said. “Our educators are the backbone of our society and every day they see first-hand the impacts of government policies and social pressures on Vermont’s children and families. I greatly value our educators’ trust and confidence in my candidacy and as Attorney General would look forward to their partnership and input.”

Donovan told the board that as Attorney General, public safety is his top priority, and education is one of the most important pillars of public safety. His focus on restorative – rather than punitive – justice will pay many dividends in our families, communities and schools.

His pledge to help people caught in the suspended drivers’ license cycle back on the roads legally will lead to more job opportunities. And his unabashed support of unions – and respect for collective bargaining – is increasingly rare among public officials.

“When a crime is committed, a torrent of negative results erupts,” Allen said. “The impacts spread far beyond the victim and the person who committed the crime. Entire families suffer, including the children we see in our classrooms every day. We are confident that T.J.’s holistic approach to criminal justice will make Vermont a better place for all of us.”

Oops! Your editor goofed last month.

We misidentified the person in our monthly member photo in last month’s edition. The teacher in the picture is actually Anne Koplinka-Loehr from Windham Southeast EA. We're sorry, Anne!