Your Union

Tinney Takes Helm as President

Don Tinney, a high school English teacher at BFA-St. Albans, became Vermont-NEA’s 115th president on July 1, replacing Martha Allen, who served for nine years, the maximum allowed under the union’s bylaws.

Tinney – a long-time local and state leader – was most recently the sole Vermont-NEA representative on the National Education Association board of directors. “I am honored and humbled to represent my fellow 13,000 members,” Tinney said. “Together, we will continue to do what we do best: work every day so Vermont’s children have a bright future.”

Serving with Tinney as the union’s officers are Alison Sylvester, an elementary teacher from Springfield who is vice president; Erin Carter, a high school math teacher from Barre who is secretary-treasurer; and Mary Bowers, an elementary teacher from Barre Town who is the NEA board director.

Tinney was born in Burlington, graduated from South Burlington High School and earned degrees from the University of Vermont. His first job was with what was then called the New England Telephone & Telegraph Co., where he joined his first union: the International Brotherhood of Electrical

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Your Power

Board Recommends Hallquist for Governor

The Vermont-NEA Board of Directors has recommended Christine Hallquist in the race for governor, saying her support of unions, public education, and working families will make Vermont a better place for the middle class.

“We’ve endured two years of attacks on public schools and the women and men who teach our children,” said Vermont-NEA President Don Tinney. “We’ve had enough of policies that will shortchange kids, cut programs, and lead to the firing of 4,000 educators.”

Hallquist overwhelmingly won the Democratic primary election in August, becoming the first transgendered candidate for governor from a major party in the country’s history. She has spent the last several months emphasizing that Vermont needs a competent leader – not a manager whose only vision is to spend less.

“I am honored to have the support of educators,” Hallquist said. “You will have a leader who knows the importance of strong local public schools, who knows that we need a Vermont where everyone can succeed and do well. You will have a leader who also knows and respects the importance of unions.”

She said a priority for her is lifting up Vermonters at the bottom of the economic ladder. “Where we are today is uncivilized,” she told the board.

“Growing the bottom 25 percent of the economic ladder is the best return. Of course, for that to work, we have to accept the fact that we are no longer going to be uncivilized. Leaning into our discomfort is how we solve things.”

She also said it was long past time to talk about more than just austerity. “Public investment is crucial,” she said. “We’ve been told taxes are bad. Somehow, we’ve lost our bearings. Greatness requires that we make public investments so that we become a civilized society.”

Here’s where Hallquist stands on the issues important to educators, working families, and students:

On eliminating the residential education property tax

“It is abundantly clear in my conversations with Vermonters that they love their schools, and do not mind paying for them, as seen on town meeting day school budget votes. While examination of the education funding model is something I would support, the rhetoric that boils education funding down to property taxes is an attempt to divide Vermonters. Above all else, we should not squander the crucial resource of Vermont’s public school system.”

On meeting the needs of all students and co-location of services

“I want schools to work with local designated agencies to ensure we are fully utilizing not only our school buildings but the opportunities throughout the school day to provide support services to children and their families.”

On student and staff safety

“I come from a highly dangerous industry. I believe that sending an employee into a situation for which they do not feel prepared or supported is a clear failure of leadership. With that, I very much support investment in the training necessary to keep our educators and students safe.”

On public pre-K

“Pre-K is critical to children but also critical to our economy. My spouse and I worked opposite shifts while my children were young as we could not afford the expense of pre-K. This is not a decision families should have to make. Furthermore, even though investment in publicly funded pre-K is the right thing to do by families and students, I also believe that it represents a strategic investment in the future well being of our state.”

On the right to strike

“The right to strike should not be up for discussion. It is absolutely critical that this right be maintained. The balance of powers between negotiating bodies is only maintained if the right to strike is upheld as a last resort option in the negotiating process.”

On retirement security

“To not invest in our pension plan is bad financial practice. You cannot claim you have a surplus if you have underfunded teachers’ pensions. It really is that simple. State government must not be playing the lottery with our educators’ pensions, especially in today’s uncertain financial times.”

You can read more about the board’s election recommendations in the next issue of Vermont-NEA Today or by visiting vtnea.org/election2018.
Engage For The Future - Our Students

Since I was 28 years old, I have spent the month of August preparing for my return to the high school classroom. Now, at 60, I am spending the month of August learning how to be the 115th president of the state’s largest labor union. While my schedule, calendar and workplace look very different from previous years, my fundamental mission remains the same. As one colleague said, “You’ve always been passionately committed to your students and now you simply have the same commitment to every student in Vermont.” We all share this mission.

As members of Vermont-NEA, we draw strength from our commitment to every student. As educators, our purpose in life is clear—to serve the children and youth of our communities. While I have spent 31 years working with educators, I now work for educators in leading this extraordinary organization of 14,000 members. While it might be a cliche, it is still true that there is strength in numbers.

We are a strong labor union because we are a large labor union. Even if you are a member of one of our smallest local affiliates, you are still part of the largest union in the state, as well as part of the National Education Association, the largest labor union in the nation with over three million members. We need to make sure that the power and strength of our state and national organizations are felt at the local level.

The corporate ownership class is afraid of our power and strength. Labor unions not only assure that workers experience a balance of power in the workplace, they also assure that those of us in the working class experience a balance of power in the public discourse we know as democracy. As Senator Bernie Sanders said at his recent Workers Appreciation Dinner, the ownership class is out to destroy organized labor because they know that we are the last powerful group of citizens who can effectively fight against the reactionary policies of the Trump era.

This spring’s Supreme Court ruling in the Janus v. AFSCME case reflects the fact that the corporate ownership class knows no bounds in their attacks on working class people and their unions, as NEA General Counsel Alice O’Brien points out in a recent blog post. “The fact is that the Janus majority opinion is not about expanding the speech rights of public employees at all. It is about five justices constitutionalizing their disdain for the right of working people to come together to speak with a unified and strong voice.”

I signed my first union card in the spring of 1978. When I went to work for New England Telephone & Telegraph and joined the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, I could not have foreseen the attacks on organized labor that would eventually lead to the Janus decision 40 years later.

I was proud to carry my union card then and I am proud to carry my union card today, for unions have not only brought dignity and fairness to the workplace but have played a pivotal role in creating the middle class and establishing professional workplace benefits that we now take for granted.

As the trade unions have contributed to a better workplace for all, Vermont-NEA and its affiliates have sought to create fair and equitable teaching and learning environments for students and educators. We know that all students deserve a fair and equitable education. After all, public education is a cornerstone of our democracy. While we teach our students about the value of our civic responsibility, we cannot shy away from being involved in the democratic process. While many educators would be content to avoid politics altogether, we need to be engaged.

Virtually every aspect of public education is decided by an elected official or decided by someone appointed by one. As my friend Kris Cameron of the Wenatchee Education Association in Washington says, “It would be an abdication of professional responsibility for educators not to be actively engaged in advocating for public schools, families, and our communities in the political arena.”

Let’s keep those words in mind as we start another school year, remembering that we do this work because our future – Vermont’s children – depends on it.
Start the year strong and curb back-to-school jitters with these tips and ideas from educator, educational speaker and author, Dr. Harry Wong.

Back-to-school is an exciting time, even if you’ve been teaching for decades. Sure, you’re excited to welcome a new class of students, but getting back to class may also bring first-day butterflies, stress and concerns about your ability to groom successful learners.

The antidote to your anxiety, says Harry Wong, co-author of “The First Days of School” and “THE Classroom Management Book” (HarryWong.com), is a carefully thought out classroom management plan. “A well-managed classroom may even be more important to students than teachers since it provides a sense of structure, comfort and security,” says Wong. What’s more, in this type of organized environment, students are relaxed, focused and eager to learn.

Whether you’ve been teaching for years or this is your first year in the classroom, the cornerstone of successful teaching is creating a culture of consistency. Here’s how:

1. **Be proactive.** Teachers typically fall into two categories: proactive and reactive. “Proactive teachers plan ahead to prevent problems,” says Wong. “They visualize a classroom that runs itself and proactively create a plan to accomplish that vision.” Reactive teachers respond to problems as they arise. They think on the spot and inevitably waste valuable instructional time corralling class clowns and trying to control chaos.

2. **Organize the learning environment.** Successful classrooms are effective learning environments because they give students structure, guidance, focus and direction. Having a place for everything and everything in its place also helps streamline activities. It also reduces the time students spend searching for a pencil (or their crayons!), less time they have to focus on the tasks at hand.

3. **Establish effective routines.** A well-managed classroom uses procedures and routines so learning activities are executed smoothly. Effective teachers create procedures for everything—entering the classroom, turning in homework and participating in class discussions. Since students do best when they know what to expect, posting a daily agenda is critical, including the day’s schedule, an opening assignment and a lesson objective.

4. **Lavish specific praise (but only when warranted).** When children meet or exceed your expectations, praise them. But, instead of simply saying “Good job, Suzie!” Explain exactly what they did correctly. Not only will the student appreciate the acknowledgement—and grow from it—but your other students have another opportunity to learn what’s expected of them.

5. **Become a model of optimism and positivity.** Your attitude is even more important than your students’ in terms of creating a positive learning environment. “Children sense the positivity and enthusiasm that flows from you,” says Wong. Each day is a chance to wipe the slate clean and start fresh with a new plan. Each moment is a valuable commodity. When you treat it as such, students will match that expectation with eagerness and success.

While these are effective tips for every educator, your approach to creating a classroom management plan may differ depending on your career level. New teachers may focus on building an effective model to withstand the years, those with some “street cred” may need to evaluate where their plan works (and where it doesn’t), and educators nearing retirement might want to shake things up a bit. According to Wong, teachers at each level are guided by different key questions:

- **New Educators: What do I do?** Focus on starting your career with good habits, which is easier than overhauling your approach years later.

What to do: Develop a first day of school script that details your every move, from greeting your students when they first arrive in class to dismissing them after the last bell rings. In between, ensure you have an effective plan for teaching students the procedures they’ll be following throughout the year. But there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. Instead, seek out veterans whose work you hope to emulate.

- **Mid-Career Teachers: What did I do and how can I do it better?** With years of teaching under your belt, chances are you’ve developed an effective plan, but there’s always room for improvement.

What to do: Think back on the previous year. Where were you successful? Where did you fall short? What can you incorporate into your plan this year to improve your performance? Whether last year was a breeze or your toughest yet, taking time out to analyze what you did well, and what you’d like to do differently, can help you improve your craft. Then you can create a lesson mastery plan packed with tools and strategies to help you teach for better student learning and achievement.

- **Educators Near Retirement: Why did I do what I did?**

If you’re unsatisfied with the status quo, even this late in the game, you can always learn a new approach to teaching, says Wong. Author Maria Robinson writes, “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” It’s never too late to modify your approach to teaching. What to do: Don’t be afraid to start from scratch. Create an all-new classroom management plan and leave a legacy by coaching others on the do’s and don’ts of effective teaching.
Teacher leaders who were on the front-lines of educator walkouts this year charged up the crowd during this year’s Power UP! conference. Nearly 100 members from locals around the state heard from their counterparts from West Virginia, Arizona, and Oklahoma, three states in which teachers walked out even though strikes are illegal.

“We didn’t know we were starting a movement,” said Heather Deluca-Nestor, a member of West Virginia EA who was a key leader in the walkouts that started it all. “There were just things that we had to do.”

Things indeed; years of low pay, rising health insurance costs, deteriorating classrooms, inadequate staffing, and hostile politicians. “Why are we doing this? For the kids. The kids deserve so much better.”

Their nearly two-week walkout produced results – a pay raise, a restructuring of health insurance – but the struggle is far from over, Deluca-Nestor said.

Power UP! replaced the Leadership and Learning Conference. It’s focus was on empowering local leaders, teaching them how to organize and unleash the power of solidarity for our union, our profession, and our students.

“Our collective voice will be heard in the schoolhouse and in the statehouse. And on our way to raising that powerful, collective voice, we must always remember to listen to the diverse individual voices in all our meetings at the local, regional and state level,” said Vermont-NEA President Don Timney. “Everyone needs to be heard. We are a powerful force when we stand together in our common cause of working for the schools all students deserve.”

Leah Knaebel, a teacher from Phoenix and a leader of the Arizona Education Association walkouts, talked about how a movement starts: hope, voice, and power. She explained to members that top-down organizing doesn’t work – and stressed the importance of hearing all voices in the movement, even it means losing control. Doing so leads to a loud chorus fighting side-by-side.

And all at least united against one force: the state’s Republican governor and legislators.

“They hate teachers,” Knaebel said. “I honestly don’t know why they hate teachers.” Those teachers stayed out for more than a week, winning higher pay and a promise to invest more in Arizona’s students. Kanebelle isn’t confident those promises will be kept, but she is certain that her fellow union educators will be there if they aren’t.

The conference featured a full-day organizing training by Labor Notes; a day filled with regional discussions, door knocking for health care, and how to harness social media for digital organizing. There were opportunities for attendees to brainstorm, and, both nights, to have some fun: the first night featured a barbeque and the second night culminated at an Irish pub on Burlington’s Church Street.

But before all of that, Jessica Jernegan from the Oklahoma Education Association started the conference with the story from her state’s walkout. She challenged the crowd to ask themselves a simple question: “What is your ‘why?’” The why for Oklahoma educators was the same as it was for educators in West Virginia and Arizona.

“It was about we,” she said. “It was about our kids. We’re in this fight together for one thing: our kids.” Jernegan, who stayed for the entire conference, admitted that she would love to one day teach in a blue state. But she is not giving up the fight in Oklahoma.

“We followed through telling our story of what we need for our kids,” she said. “That is how long-term change happens.”

Power UP! unleashed a new energy for the new year. Top, Vermont-NEA members are joined by Arizona EA’s Leah Knaebel. At left, Knaebel addressed the crowd. At right, West Virginia EA’s Heather Deluca-Nestor talks about that state’s walkouts. Below, Jessica Jernegan from the Oklahoma EA stands with Vermont’s NEA Director Mary Bowers and Vermont-NEA Vice President Alison Sylvester.
Your Power

Educators Stand With UVM Hospital Nurses

The women and men who spend their days teaching Vermont’s children stand in solidarity with their sisters and brothers who put patient care first every day at UVM Medical Center.

“For months, the women and men who are the first line of care for patients at Vermont’s largest hospital have been trying to reach an agreement that will stem the high turnover and staffing shortages brought about by years of non-competitive pay,” said Vermont-NEA President Don Tinney.

“At a time when the hospital’s CEO earns nearly $2.2 million a year, it is disgraceful that the members of the Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals aren’t even paid the same as others within the UVM Health Network.”

Vermont-NEA members, officers, and staff joined hundreds of nurses during their two-day strike in July.

At a rally before the strike, Erin Carter, Vermont-NEA’s secretary-treasurer, spoke to similarities between educators and nurses.

“My sisters and brothers, we know what it’s like to be in a profession that puts others first. In our classrooms, my fellow educators and I strive to do our best for Vermont’s children – just as you do your best to bring the best possible care to your patients.

“Join me in urging the hospital—from the $2.2 million-a-year CEO to the rest of the highly compensated management team – to reach a fair settlement with you. Your livelihoods depend on it. Your profession depends on it. And you patients depend on it.”

Since then, the administration has failed to come to a fair agreement with their nurses, who are paid less than their counterparts in Plattsburgh, NY, despite being a part of the same hospital network.

“It’s long past time for UVM treat its hard-working, patient-focused nurses with dignity and respect,” Tinney said. “Make no mistake: we will be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our sisters and brothers until they get the contract they deserve. Like educators, nurses and health professionals put others first every day. We implore the hospital’s management to do right by them and work with them to make UVM Medical Center a better place to work.”

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WASHINGTON – The NEA Foundation today announced that Kate McCann, a math teacher at U-32 High School, is one of 46 public school educators who will receive the prestigious California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence at the NEA Foundation’s Salute to Excellence in Education Gala next February in Washington, D.C.

The California Casualty Awards for Teaching Excellence awardees are nominated by their peers for their dedication to the profession, community engagement, professional development, attention to diversity, and advocacy for fellow educators.

“We are proud of Kate, and she is most deserving of this great honor,” said Vermont-NEA President Don Tinney. “She exemplifies the outstanding dedication to students that is the hallmark of Vermont’s educators.” In addition to receiving this national award, McCann was the 2017 Vermont Teacher of the Year.

Each year, the Salute to Excellence in Education Gala draws almost 1,000 supporters of public education, and thousands more online, to applaud these awardees.

At the gala, the educators are truly the stars, celebrated throughout the night with music, performances, videos, and more.

“We are delighted that during our 50th anniversary next year, we will celebrate the largest number of awardees in our history. These educators are keeping the promise of public education by creating learning opportunities for their students that are relevant and rigorous. They advocate for each other, the profession, and public education,” says Harriet Sanford, NEA Foundation President and CEO.

“We deeply appreciate California Casualty’s partnership in recognizing these exemplary educators, and we look forward to honoring them next February on stage at the beautiful National Building Museum in Washington, DC and with virtual celebrations across the country.”

“We are glad to have the chance to show our respect and appreciation for the work of public school educators each year,” says Beau Brown, California Casualty CEO. “We applaud the great work of the California Casualty awardees.”

Of the 46 state awardees who were nominated by their National Education Association state affiliate, five finalists will be announced at the beginning of the school year and receive $10,000 at the gala.

The nation’s top educator will be revealed at the gala on February 8, 2019 and receive an additional $25,000. The gala will be livestreamed at neafoundation.org.

The NEA Foundation and the National Education Association jointly present the awards.
Workers. From there, he worked at local newspapers until taking his first teaching gig in 1986. “I am grateful for my student teaching experience with my ninth and 12th grade English teacher, Tim Conoil, at South Burlington High School,” Tinney said. “His approach to the material and his attitude toward students shaped my educational philosophy and practice for my entire career.”

He taught at Vermont Academy, Middlebury Union High School (where he served as grievance chair and co-president of the Middlebury Union High School TA), and then, starting in 2002, at BFA-St. Albans. Along the way, he was the president of the Vermont Council of Teachers of English; served on the Vermont Task Force on Teacher and Leader Effectiveness; was chair of the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators; and was on the board of the National Education Association.

“For the first time in 32 years, I won’t be doing what you are all doing: beginning another new year working with Vermont’s students,” he said. “But I am committed to serving you as we make our union stronger, we make our profession better, and make our students our first priority.”

He may not be opening up a classroom, but he did return in late August to help start the school year where he taught for many years. “Public education is a common good that we must invest in, so that ALL students attend the schools they deserve,” he told the Maple Run EA. “Public education is the foundation of our democracy. Investing in school means that we are investing in children. Investing in children means that we are investing in our future.”

“This is your school, and you should be proud of what you have achieved,” he said. “You are the adults who know the students by their first names. When you walk into your classroom, you do not see per pupil costs, you see real human beings with needs, wants and desires.

“When you walk into your classroom, you don’t try to figure out the staff-to-student ratio, you immediately start figuring out how to best support these young learners as they begin to take on the world.”

DataPath, VEHI to ‘Start From Scratch’ on Claims

This article is written by DataPath

This memorandum contains new guidance for school districts and school employees still struggling with the medical, financial, and administrative consequences of future Planning Associates’ incomplete administration of plans set up by VEHI groups.

When we took over your benefit plans three months ago, we weren’t fully aware of how complex the problems were, from incorrect plan structures to unprocessed claims.

As you know, it has taken far longer to assess, categorize, and clean-up the problems caused from the previous administrator than we had imagined.

We at DataPath now recognize that an unknown number of claims eligible for FSA or HRA funding incurred during the initial months of 2018 were not entered into the previous administrator’s system.

Therefore, we have been unable to identify and pay these outstanding claims. Further, the account balances we received were frequently incorrect or incomplete, massively complicating and delaying FSA and HRA reconciliation efforts.

We have come to realize the depth and scope of these problems, thanks in part to your recent requests to escalate outstanding claims.

Our customer service division is daily facing an enormous volume of calls and e-mails, which, because of bad, missing, or incomplete data, requires a time and analytical commitment significantly more than a routine interaction.

None of this is acceptable. We apologize for the inconvenience, anxiety, and hardships this has caused, no matter who is responsible.

What is DataPath doing about these problems?

DataPath, in consultation with VEHI, has decided to start from scratch. We are implementing a new process and procedure on our end to ensure that your claims are administered in their entirety for the 2018 plan year – specifically those that should have been processed prior to our engagement, from January through April.

DataPath Administrative Services has been providing professional benefits administration for over two decades, and we take great pride in doing things the right way.

1. We will reimport, reload and re-process every claim incurred utilizing a comprehensive claim file from BCBSVT.

2. DataPath will also reload and reprocess all claims that were submitted manually by employees.

3. This process will allow us to find claims that were not submitted to us by the previous TPA. It will give us the ability to identify with greater speed and systemic efficiency who is owed money and how much, what providers were already paid by FPA, and “duplicate claims”.

4. The most urgent and largest number of unresolved issues are centered on claims incurred between January and March.

5. DataPath is hoping to complete this process by mid-September at the latest.

6. Once this work is complete, the MyRSC web portal will be more accurate and easier to navigate.

Upon conclusion of this process, we will add the option to directly pay providers (auto-pay provider).

This feature is activated at the school district level, and we discuss this option with central office staff in greater detail in the coming days. Thank you for your business and continued patience.
We’re Sticking With Our Union

In late June, the US Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that public sector unions cannot collect fair-share fees from nonmembers who nonetheless benefit from the contracts and protections won by you and your fellow members. The case, Janus v. AFSCME, was propelled by corporate interests who have spent decades trying to destroy your collective voice.

While this ruling was expected, it is still nonetheless gravely disappointing. Here in Vermont, you and your fellow members have done a tremendous job talking to nonmembers and demonstrating the value of membership. None of that changes because of this ruling.

We will not allow them to succeed – now more than ever, we need to be even more resolved to unleash our power to make our schools the best they can be.

Vermont-NEA firmly believes that our union gives you and your fellow members the power to do right by Vermont’s kids. We believe the union gives you the power to earn a good living, prepare for your future, and, most importantly, be your best for Vermont’s students.

You and your fellow 13,000 members are the hardest working people in Vermont, and all of us will continue to fight for what is right and what is best for Vermont’s children – our state’s future.

As we settle into another school year, the Janus decision will not weaken our resolve to be the singular voice for our schools, our profession, and, above all, our students.

It’s no coincidence that states with strong unions have strong schools. Of the top performing school systems in the country – and again, Vermont is firmly in the top-five – all have strong collective bargaining legacies with strong unions.

You have, together, fought to make Vermont’s schools among the very best in America. You have fought to bring Vermont’s educators’ salaries up from the very lowest in the nation. You have fought – and continue to fight – for accessible health care for each other and for all Vermonters. Most of all, together, you are the fiercest advocates for your students – and Vermont’s future.

Keep Connected
www.vtnea.org
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Retirement Seminars Set

For the 14th year, your union is hosting the ever-popular Retiring With Security Seminars at locations around the state. These fill up fast, so be sure to head over to vtnea.org/retirement2018 and register before it’s too late!

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Oklahoma EA’s Jessica Jernegan and Rutland Northeast EA’s Marielle Blais at Power UP!