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## Women's Work? Voices of Vermont Educators

Rebecca Kolins Givan and Pamela Whitefield





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**In the past few years, public schools in Vermont have been at the center of far-reaching policy debates and numerous administrative changes.**

Key initiatives have included a massive reorganization of schools and school districts, the restructuring of employees' benefits, and proposals to reduce educators' rights on the job. All of this upheaval is taking place in the context of a growing statewide opioid epidemic, rising student loan debt and increasing economic insecurity and child poverty.

Often absent from these policy debates are the voices of educators themselves, the majority of whom are professional women. These educators have firsthand knowledge of the challenges facing Vermont schools. They experience the impact of these policy initiatives daily, both in the classroom and in their lives. To that end, it is imperative to hear their voices. As one teacher put it, "There are more men in the political sphere. Our profession is mostly made up of women, but all of these men are making decisions about our lives, and they really do not understand our reality." This report details that reality.



## METHODOLOGY

This report uses both quantitative and qualitative data compiled from late November 2017 to early January 2018. These sources include a statewide survey, one-on-one interviews and secondary sources. The survey was administered to Vermont school employees over a ten-day period in early January 2018.<sup>1</sup> This population includes both union members and agency (fair share) fee payers, all of whom are covered by Vermont-NEA (National Education Association) collective bargaining agreements. In addition, we conducted a total of nineteen one-on-one interviews with school employees from eight school districts, including Orange Southeast, North Country Supervisory, Windham Southeast Supervisory, Hartford, Washington Northeast Supervisory, Franklin West and Winooski.<sup>2</sup> A more detailed methodological appendix is provided at the end of this report.

## VERMONT'S EXCEPTIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

For several years, Vermont's students have consistently outperformed their counterparts throughout the country. According to the U.S. Department of Education database (the National Assessment of Educational Progress), in 2015 Vermont students scored higher than the national averages in math, science and reading assessments.<sup>3</sup> Vermont students have also enjoyed consistently high graduation rates, with over half the states' student population going on to college.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Vermont joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Each year, these data show how many students are reaching proficiency in core subjects. The Vermont Agency of Education set an intentionally ambitious standard for proficiency, in keeping with its commitment to high quality education. These new data affirm that schools with higher poverty rates and lower paid teachers perform less well on these raw assessments,

illustrating the challenge of maintaining excellence during difficult economic times.<sup>5</sup> The national assessment data, however, do not tell the whole story behind Vermont's educational success.<sup>6</sup> In classrooms across the state, teachers are implementing innovative strategies and new approaches to ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education tailored to their needs. These high educational standards reflect Vermont's commitment to quality teaching and learning.

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"There is a wonderful climate here for education, and people really care about it. What seems to be different here in Vermont is the strong sense of community and recognition that public education is the backbone of democracy."<sup>7</sup>

*Diane Ravitch, Education Advocate, Professor and former US Assistant Secretary of Education*

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Educators are delivering this high quality education, despite often counterproductive directives from Washington, DC. Vermont has been a strong exception to national trends, eschewing elements of the federal testing regime and incorporation of charter schools. From its system of rich deliberation through town meetings to local negotiation of contracts, the state is committed to empowering local communities and educators to make their own decisions. Legislators, local leaders and school boards have embraced the principle that the provision of quality education is only achieved through a close collaboration between teachers, parents and communities. The state legislature has played a supportive role, affirming local control and allowing communities to make their own decisions.

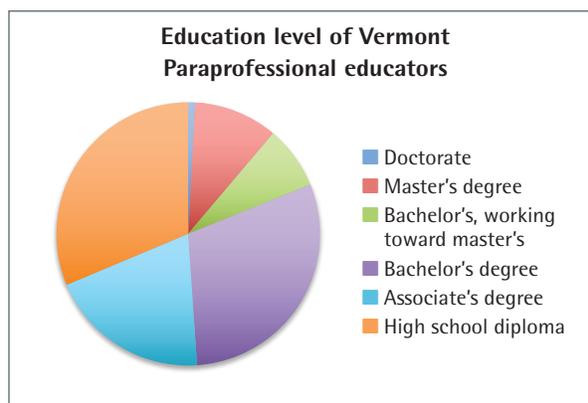
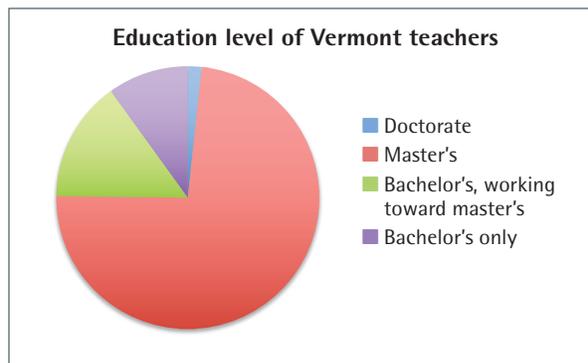
Vermonters are rightly proud of their schools. In 2013, 63 percent of Vermonters said they were satisfied with the school system in their community, while only 1 in 5 were dissatisfied.<sup>8</sup> Recently, the governor announced plans to turn Vermont

into “an education destination for families.”<sup>9</sup> The state’s commitment has been shown in the policy arena through measures like equalizing funding for all Vermont students, expanding universal early education and increasing resources for technology in the classroom. All of these initiatives demonstrate consistent evidence-based policy making in education.<sup>10</sup>

The success of this system relies on over 14,000 educators who work in the public school system in Vermont.<sup>11</sup> About 9,000 of these employees are classroom teachers; others are essential paraprofessionals and other educational staff, including librarians, and specialists in technology and literacy. These employees are facing an onslaught of new and ongoing challenges – from economic and social crises affecting families across the state, to policy changes emanating from Washington and Montpelier.

## VERMONT EDUCATORS: A PROFILE

The success of Vermont schools depends on the efforts of the educators who work in the public school system. Over three quarters of Vermont’s educators are women, including 75 percent of teachers and 87 percent of paraprofessionals. In total, professional school employees are the largest group of college-educated women workers in Vermont.<sup>12</sup> Three quarters of teachers have a master’s degree (or a doctorate), and a further 15 percent are currently pursuing a master’s while teaching. Although paraprofessionals are not required to have a college education, and can meet the federally-mandated minimum qualifications via a number of different paths, nearly half of paraprofessionals (49 percent) have at least a bachelor’s degree.



Our survey reveals that one half (50 percent) of Vermont educators are the primary earners in their families. This income is a secondary source of support for only one in five educators (21 percent). Amanda, a high school science teacher in Springfield, provides a typical example of this situation. After teaching for almost ten years, Amanda makes a little over \$60,000 (almost exactly the median salary for a Vermont teacher), and supports a family of four. While the median teacher’s salary in the state is just under \$60,000 per year, the state calculates the basic needs budget for a family of four as \$84,000 (and higher for urban areas), and this basic needs budget does not account for any student loan payments.<sup>13</sup>

**In Vermont**, 87 percent of paraprofessional educators are women.<sup>14</sup> Our data reveal that 39 percent are the primary wage earners in their household. Many expressed frustration over the widespread misconception that paraprofessionals are wives trying to pick up extra work, with the implicit assumption that this salary does not need to cover their full cost of living. Fewer than one in three paraprofessionals are able to survive on this income alone. Close to two thirds of paraprofessionals (63 percent) work an additional job during the school year. Sixty-eight percent of paraprofessionals work during the summer when school is closed, and over half of these employees (57 percent) work additional jobs both during the year and during the summer. The reality is that paraprofessionals are struggling economically, yet their schools depend on them to support essential educational needs. One paraprofessional spoke of the frustration of living with roommates in her 40s, describing it as “degrading.”

“It is assumed that paraprofessionals have a partner or are married, essentially that there is a two-person income supporting you. The low wages make it really tough to do this job and be on your own. Until I got my second job, there were some days I actually came home and went to bed hungry. I just had about enough to pay my rent.”

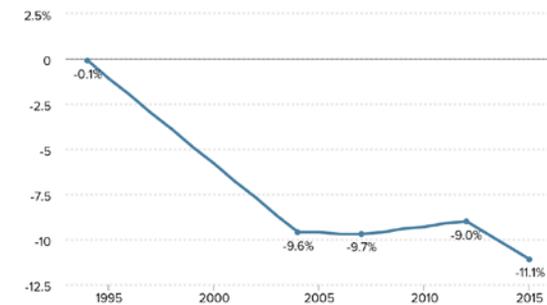
*Paraprofessional, Chittenden County*

### 75% of school district employees statewide are women.<sup>15</sup>

Many educators believe that they are paid less, and expected to work harder, due to the gendered nature of the teaching profession. As one teacher commented, “Teaching is seen as a woman’s job and so women don’t need to earn as much as men.” Indeed, teachers nationwide are paid significantly less than other professionals with the same level of education. In Vermont, teachers are paid only 87 percent of the typical salary of other professionals with the same level of education. Although teachers receive a relatively higher proportion of their total compensation in the form of benefits rather than salary, this difference is insufficient to make up for the salary penalty.<sup>16</sup> Total compensation for teachers is significantly less than compensation for other professionals.

#### **The teacher compensation penalty has grown to 11 percent**

Compensation gap between public school teachers and similar workers, 1994–2015



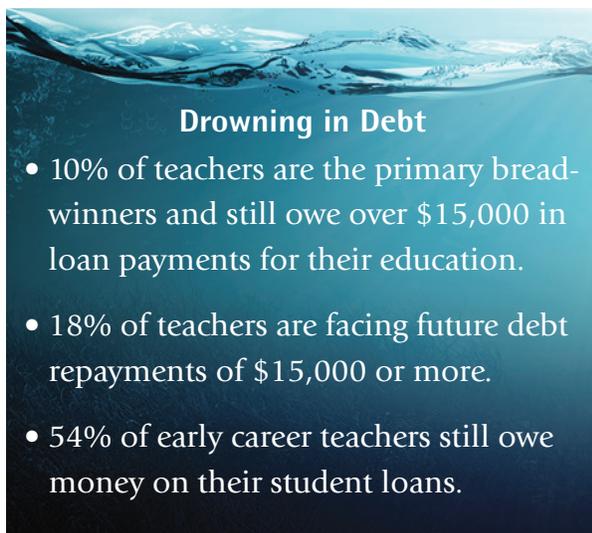
Source: Authors' analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data and Bureau of Labor Statistics Employer Costs for Employee Compensation data

Economic Policy Institute

Our research revealed that Vermont school employees, particularly new teachers and paraprofessionals, are facing increasing financial strain. The factors contributing to this trend include a surge in the levels of student loan debt, the rise in the cost of housing, increasing childcare costs and higher healthcare spending. Many educators we spoke with resort to cobbling together part-time jobs to supplement their school wages.

### Generation debt

Survey responses revealed that Vermont's educators have already paid off a large amount of student loan debt, and many expect to be repaying this debt for decades to come. Over 40 percent of teachers have already paid back more than \$15,000 in student debt, while 18 percent of teachers are facing future debt repayments of \$15,000 or more. Many of the early career educators we spoke with felt the double burden of large student debt compounded by relatively low starting salaries. A third of teachers in the first ten years of their career still owe more than \$15,000 in educational loan repayment. As Nora, an elementary teacher from Randolph explained, "You look at the amount of debt teachers are carrying going into the profession. And then you look at the salary compared to what is expected. Almost all of us have master's degrees. And if we don't have them right away, we are getting them." A high school teacher we interviewed reported still owing \$30,000 after making over twenty years of full payments, while a 43-year-old paraprofessional shared that she expected to be repaying her student loans until she is well into her eighties.



**Drowning in Debt**

- 10% of teachers are the primary breadwinners and still owe over \$15,000 in loan payments for their education.
- 18% of teachers are facing future debt repayments of \$15,000 or more.
- 54% of early career teachers still owe money on their student loans.

### Facing the burden of increased housing and childcare costs

Across the state, housing costs are rising and childcare is in short supply (and unaffordable for many).<sup>17</sup> Wages and salaries in all industries are not keeping up with these costs. Educators, like all workers, are feeling the burden of the increasing cost of their basic needs. Laurie, a school librarian in the Northeast Kingdom whose husband also works in the district, reported that with two children in daycare, she and her husband are on a strict budget. "Daycare is really expensive. We have had some pretty lean years." One paraprofessional in greater Burlington who shares a house with four other people. said "I have to live with five people. When is that going to change? Housing is so expensive!"

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"Teachers should be representative of the middle class. If we are not able to pay our bills, that is a problem. Especially when we are working all the time."

*Elementary school teacher, Orange County.*

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### Concerns over increasing healthcare costs

We found widespread concern over the cost of health care. Many employees felt that they had consistently accepted lower salaries in return for more affordable health care, but that this tacit agreement has been eroding. Most educators utilize their health insurance benefit; 84 percent of employees take their employer-sponsored health insurance and two-thirds of these employees (67 percent) are the source of insurance coverage for additional members of their household. The survey reached school employees a little over a week into 2018; new VEHI (Vermont Education Health Initiative) plans had gone into effect on the first of the year. Some respondents already reported health care costs for ongoing prescriptions that were unaffordable to them under their new plan.

Over half of survey respondents said that they were not confident about being able to afford medical care if they become seriously ill. Many reported cutting back on other spending in order to afford their health care.<sup>18</sup> One survey respondent wrote that a new deductible for prescriptions caused her to delay filling a prescription, and that “It will take me about five months to pay off a \$500.00 prescription deductible.” Under the 2018 VEHI plans, some families will be responsible for up to \$8,000 in out of pocket costs, which is well over ten percent of the median teacher salary.<sup>19</sup>

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“Five thousand dollars out of pocket is a lot of money... I don’t think anyone should be in debt for health needs.”

*Nora, elementary school teacher, Randolph.*

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### Working double duty

To face this increased financial strain, our data reveal many school employees work additional jobs. Vermont’s school employees are unable to make ends meet with a single job. In fact, they are working second and third jobs both during the school year and the summer to support their families. Over half of Vermont educators work a second job during the school year and over half work other jobs during the summer. Many of these jobs are in retail, and hospitality. Countering the outdated notion that educators have a lot of time off, 45 percent of respondents work additional jobs both during the school year and during the summer, and this number rises to 57 percent for paraprofessionals. As Rebecca, a kindergarten teacher in Plainfield recalled, “When I first started teaching, I had to work a second job because there was not enough money to support my family. I worked Monday through Friday at my teaching job and worked in retail on the weekend. I did that consistently for the first three or four years of my career.”

**In addition to her full-time position** at the Brattleboro Middle School, paraprofessional Christie Therault currently works an additional twenty to thirty hours a week as a mental health worker for adolescent teenagers in a residential program at the Brattleboro Retreat Center. Christie noted, “Ever since my children were small, I have had to work two jobs just to make ends meet. I love working with kids, so leaving the school for a better paying job was not a plan for me.”



## FACING NEW CHALLENGES ON THE JOB

Life at school has also become much more challenging for Vermont’s educators. Teaching has gotten more difficult as workplace violence and abuse have become more common. Educators are trying to maintain high standards with limited resources.

### Increased workplace violence

Teachers are experiencing high levels of workplace violence and the threat of violence. Of those surveyed, 14 percent responded that they have been physically attacked by a student in the past year. As one elementary school teacher told us, “There is just so much trauma and stress on the kids, and it bleeds to the teachers... I have considered leaving my job, mostly over safety issues. In the role I am in right now, I have been injured three times this year.” Paraprofessionals, often working with the highest need students who also face serious challenges at home, are particularly at risk, and one in four reports having been physically attacked in the past year. One paraprofessional concisely connected challenges facing students to workplace violence: “There are a

lot of kids struggling in my district. But it is hard to go to work to get hit and kicked and spit at."

### **Bullying and harassment on the job**

As in all workplaces, school employees experience harassment on the job. Typically, during times of hardship, stress and economic insecurity, these problems become more acute. A collective bargaining agreement provides the ability to speak up and protection from retaliation, both of which are crucial to teachers responding to harassment of all kinds. "Our past superintendent was incredibly sexist. He would pass around cards and things that were horribly sexist jokes at a meeting. Totally inappropriate and half of us are women. The old boys network still exists," one elementary teacher reported. Two thirds of employees (66 percent) agreed that being in a union provides protection against sexual harassment, while over three quarters (77 percent) of respondents agreed that "Being in a union makes it easier to fight sexual harassment when it does take place." In a climate of increased awareness of sexual harassment and bullying, and the imperative to fight both, these responses affirm the research showing that unions can both prevent and address workplace abuse.<sup>20</sup>

### **Doing more with less at school**

Across the state, respondents described an environment where they are required to do more with less. In some cases, there are insufficient budgets for substitute teachers. In others, teachers are covering lunch duty. There are increased regulatory requirements that take far longer than any allocated preparation time. A middle school teacher in Brattleboro said, "Sometimes I think that the increase of paperwork and bureaucracy gets to me. The non-teaching duties overwhelm me."

One in six Vermont students has special needs, and Vermont has the highest rate in the country of students with emotional disturbance.<sup>21</sup> With the statewide initiative to upgrade and professionalize special education in compliance with federal guidelines, many paraprofessional positions were

eliminated, with the goal of increased utilization of credentialed special education teachers.<sup>22</sup> In practice, however, districts could not afford to hire enough special education teachers, and the reduced number of staff has caused problems. Teachers and paraprofessionals had a clear-eyed view of this situation; they understood the overall objective of this initiative, but had grave concerns about the consequences for students. Crucially, one teacher reported that "Our ratio of adults to students went way down." Respondents reported that these students were not receiving the level of services they received in the past, which they still needed. Frustrated with the decrease in overall support for students with special needs, one paraprofessional contended "The kids need more support, not less." As Julie, an elementary school teacher from Randolph said: "We are asked to do more and more, but nothing goes away. For example, giving more assessments, attending more meetings, tending to students' increasing academic and emotional needs, increased committees and duties. It would feel more manageable if the approach was 'we are going to try something new so put your energy there and we will shift your energy away from something else.'"

## **EDUCATING STUDENTS IN A TIME OF ECONOMIC INSTABILITY**

Vermont school employees are faced daily with the consequences of a statewide rise in economic insecurity, generally, and a rise in the child poverty rate, specifically.<sup>23</sup> Many Vermonters are confronting ongoing economic challenges as the "tale of two Vermonts" means continued struggles for those outside the Burlington area.<sup>24</sup> Sixty percent of respondents knew a family in the school where they work who had been affected by foreclosure or eviction in the past year. One in four educators reported knowing a family in their school who had faced family bankruptcy in the past year. The

economic challenges facing families across the state are particularly severe for children. The child poverty rate has increased and the number of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals is growing.<sup>25</sup> As one elementary school teacher put it, "People have a lot less money these days. The poverty has increased dramatically in our district, with more and more kids coming to school hungry." Some parts of the state have been hit particularly hard. As Arielle, an elementary school teacher put it, "Springfield was a prominent town, there were all the machine shops and it was a lucrative place to live, people could have a comfortable living. Now a lot of those jobs are gone. Families in our community are faced with a lot of financial strain. It has really impacted our community."

### A growing statewide drug epidemic

Vermont school employees are also faced with the realities associated with the growing opioid crisis. [From 2015 to 2016, drug overdose deaths in Vermont increased by one third.](#)<sup>26</sup> Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents said they know a family in their school that has been affected by opioid addiction in the past year. One special education elementary teacher reported, "Out of my current case load, half of the students come from households that include active addicts. Many of my students have experienced significant trauma."

## AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

School employees are determined to continue delivering high-quality education to Vermont families. In spite of all the aforementioned challenges, teachers are using innovative strategies to improve student learning. They consistently spend additional time and money to support student needs, working many extra hours. Ninety-nine percent of respondents spend their own money on classroom supplies, with over a third of respondents spending more than

\$500 per year on supplies. Eighty percent also spend money helping students in need, for example paying for meals and paying out of pocket for in-class snacks. Forty percent of respondents used their own money to purchase winter clothing for their students. Rebecca, an elementary teacher in Plainfield summed up a very common experience, "If a kid comes to school and does not have snack, I buy them snacks. If a kid comes to school and doesn't have proper winter attire, I will buy them boots, hats or scarves."

### Collaborating and innovating

Teachers and paraprofessionals are committed to working collaboratively, staying on top of new evidence-based practices in their profession and maintaining the highest quality of education in their schools. Hundreds of Vermont teachers have completed or are currently working towards [National Board Certification](#). Teachers at Williston Central School have used personalized learning plans for all 5th through 8th grade students for over twenty-five years. Following the passage of Act 77, they were easily able to extend this often labor-intensive practice through 12th grade. The program is now fully online and students present their learning plans to their parents, enabling a high level of engagement between students, parents and their teachers. The feedback from students is extremely positive, as students have become adept at advocating for their own learning needs, and teachers believe the program works partly because there is time dedicated to it embedded in the weekly schedule.

Vermont educators are using a variety of approaches to reach their students, with an increasing use of technology to stay in touch with parents, as well as in the classroom. The growth of technology has created increasing demands on teachers to communicate with parents with greater frequency and immediacy. However, Vermont's teachers have not shied away from the opportunities afforded by these new programs. Teachers are taking advantage of numerous training programs and web-based applications to enhance both student learning and communication with parents. There are numerous

examples of these initiatives, and teachers are seeking out opportunities on their own, as well as through structured professional development programs. Sharon, a kindergarten teacher, uses numerous platforms with her students, including [Seesaw](#), which allows students to record and share their work, with both teachers and their parents. Others use technology such as [Google Classroom](#) and [Google for Education](#) to encourage collaboration while allowing real-time progress reports to other teachers and parents. Many teachers are taking advantage of free training and information sharing. It is clear that teachers are eager to innovate in the classroom, even though many of these new opportunities require even more feedback, monitoring and communication with families.

Educators are creating and engaging in professional development that improves their teaching practice. Many teachers emphasized the value of professional development programs that directly address their local needs. Terri, a high school teacher in Plainfield reported, "About eight years ago we bargained for the creation of a block of common planning time. It was then the school began to move to standards-based education; teachers were required to work more in teams, but there was no room in the schedule for collaborative planning time. So we, as a local, negotiated for this provision. Eight years later, the qualitative change this has had on the school community, particularly in the secondary level is evident."

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*"Making sure we have a say in our professional development time really helps kids."*

*Nancy, middle school teacher, Brattleboro.*

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Changing student needs require new approaches from teachers, and local unions have been at the forefront of addressing these needs. Union-sponsored professional development opportunities have helped teachers better navigate the complexities of family trauma and addiction. Interviewees pointed out that many local unions have prioritized professional development in their negotiations.

Karen, a paraprofessional in Brattleboro, recounted her experience in a union-sponsored professional development program, "I recently went to a course on how trauma affects the developing brain of a child. It covered the significance trauma can have on decision-making and other learning functions. It really helped me understand why some of the children I work with behave the way they do."

### **Working extra hours to get the job done**

In addition to working second and third jobs during the school year, teachers put in numerous extra hours to get their jobs done. One high school teacher reported, "I routinely go to work on Sundays, for four to six hours to get caught up with planning and grading for the week." Another said, "I don't take lunch or breaks. I build these relationships and the kids relate to me and I can get more work out of them. When they ask can you stay so we can take the math test or do this writing essay... I stay." Amanda, a high school science teacher in Springfield, routinely works between 15-20 additional hours a week and also works through lunch every day. The challenging economic environment, combined with a commitment to high quality education for each child, requires long working hours from educators.

## **A VOICE ON THE JOB**

While working harder, and under challenging circumstances, teachers feel that it is more important than ever to have a voice on the job. A huge majority of survey respondents, fully 89 percent, agree with the statement "Bargaining collectively allows us to act on our local priorities for employer spending on health benefits, salaries, and other compensation." This demonstrates the importance placed on allowing local communities to determine their educational and spending priorities. As decades of research show, unions give employees this voice in the workplace, and allow them to speak up when something is wrong.<sup>27</sup> A massive 83 percent of survey respondents agreed that "Being in a union helps to ensure that men and women are paid the same if they do the same job and have the same

experience and education." Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that being in a union provides protection against harassment, and makes it easier to fight harassment when it does take place. These survey responses were affirmed in our interviews. Interviewees discussed the importance of being able to advocate for their students' needs, and their own needs, without fear. As one paraprofessional put it, "Having collective bargaining makes me feel empowered, like someone has my back."

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"Having a union levels the playing field for teachers."

*Library Media Specialist*

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### THE UNION DIFFERENCE

Terri Vest, a National Board Certified Teacher, grew up in a "right to work" state and recalled she was always "anti-union." As a young woman, she was taught that unions prevented management from doing their work. When Terri first moved to Vermont, she was very hesitant about joining the union. However, as she got more involved, her feelings about the union began to change. She came to understand that the union provided a very important support system for teachers, a system for educators to support one another.



## CONCLUSION

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"Strong and vibrant communities have excellent schools at their center."

*Congressman Peter Welch.*<sup>28</sup>

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The educators at the core of Vermont's excellent school system are under increasing pressure. While Vermont's children are still receiving a high-quality education, the system increasingly depends on staff who take on second jobs, dip into their own pockets to help their students, and work many additional hours to meet student needs. Teachers are struggling, especially recent entrants to the profession who are carrying large debt burdens. A voice on the job is essential, particularly during challenging times. As Rebecca, an elementary school teacher put it, "Most of our staff is female and we are fighting for equal rights for all, but more specifically for women." In our interviews and our survey results, we consistently observed educators' frustration that their voice on the job was being put in jeopardy by men (as they saw it) in Montpelier, who did not understand how hard educators are working and how much financial stress they endure.

The research is clear that attacks on collective bargaining lead to the loss of experienced teachers and to poorer educational outcomes for students. After teachers' bargaining rights were essentially terminated by Act 10 in Wisconsin, turnover among teachers increased dramatically, particularly among the most experienced teachers. In the first year after the passage of the law, over ten percent of teachers left the profession. This is a serious concern because experienced teachers produce better student outcomes.<sup>29</sup> A majority of Wisconsin school superintendents reported a "lasting negative effect on my personal morale."<sup>30</sup> One study of the impact of the demise of collective bargaining in Wisconsin schools found that the changes resulted in a decrease in average student achievement, with the negative effect concentrated in the schools that were already lower performers.<sup>31</sup> As a recent report detailing the negative impact of these changes in Wisconsin put it, "Other states should heed the warning of Wisconsin's example."<sup>32</sup> Limiting bargaining has the direct consequence of worsening education.

The predominantly female educators who maintain Vermont's educational excellence are feeling the strain. They are working long hours at school, stretching themselves to support student educational and economic needs, and struggling to support their own families. They feel taken for granted because their work is demeaned as women's work. They are paid less than their peers with similar levels of education, and they interpret this pay gap as highly gendered. One middle school teacher summed up this frustration: "If this profession was primarily men we would be making more money and we would be working fewer hours."

## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This research draws from qualitative and quantitative data collected by Rebecca Kolins Givan and Pamela Whitefield, between November 2017 and January 2018. The quotes and qualitative data are from nineteen interviews conducted in eight school districts. Our interviewees spanned Vermont's geographic diversity, working in both urban and rural districts. Most interviews were twenty five to forty five minutes long, and were conducted one on one. All interviews were recorded. Many interviewees are quoted anonymously or with only partial identifying information, such as town or county. The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey. All Vermont NEA members and fee payers for whom VT-NEA had a working email address were sent a unique link to the survey via email; 11,525 emails were sent of which 853 messages bounced due to inaccurate or outdated email addresses. The use of a unique link means that each participant can only complete the survey once. The survey was completed by 1,054 people. Of these respondents, 1,005 were full union members and 49 were agency fee payers (non-members). The survey was started but not completed by 133 additional people, and another 10 respondents were screened out, as they were not current school employees; these responses were not usable and were discarded. Our response rate, from the full population of eligible employees with valid email addresses, is therefore 10 percent. The sample is representative of the workforce as a whole, based on workforce demographics from state sources. Survey respondents worked in schools in every county in Vermont.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rebecca Kolins Givan is an Associate Professor of Labor Studies and Employment Relations at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. She holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University. She has published widely on employment relations in the public sector, health care, comparative welfare states and labor studies in numerous journals such as *Social Forces* and *ILR Review*. Givan is the author of *The Challenge to Change: Reforming health care on the front line in the United States and the United Kingdom* (Cornell University Press, 2016).

Pamela Whitefield is a doctoral candidate in Political Science at the City University of New York's Graduate Center and a current Fellow at the Center for Innovation in Worker Organization at Rutgers University. Whitefield has over seventeen years of experience as a university-based labor educator and researcher. She formerly held positions at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Division and the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies. She currently lives with her family in White River Junction, Vermont.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This group included employees from the following job classifications: clerical, custodial, food service, paraeducator, school counselor, security, skilled trades, student health, teacher (pre-K), teacher (elementary), teacher (middle), teacher (high school), technical and transportation
- 2 Interviewees included six elementary teachers, five high school teachers, two middle school teachers, five paraprofessionals and one librarian.
- 3 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.
- 4 New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), Common Data Project 2017 Annual Report: School Year 2015–2016.
- 5 Tiffany Danitz Pache, "Vermont Students in Low-Income Areas Perform Poorly on Tests," *VT Digger*, September 22, 2016.
- 6 In order to comply with federal requirements, the state is currently utilizing the Smarter Balanced Assessments in Mathematics and English Language Arts/Literacy. For more, see <http://vt.portal.airast.org/>.
- 7 Alicia Freese, "A Counter-Reformation on Schools," *Valley News*, October 29, 2013.
- 8 Castleton Polling Institute, "Vermont Quality of Life Survey," (2013). [https://s3.amazonaws.com/castleton/files/resources/qualityoflife\\_complete.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/castleton/files/resources/qualityoflife_complete.pdf)
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