



MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Martha Allen, President, Vermont-NEA

DATE: January 11, 2017

SUBJECT: Testimony before House Education Committee

Good morning. Although most of you know me, let me introduce myself. I am Martha Allen, a 30-year teacher in Vermont's public schools who is proud to serve as president of the Vermont-NEA. As someone who has worked alongside hundreds of men and women dedicated to Vermont's future, I am honored to represent educators from every local public school in the state. With me today are our new Executive Director (and, to many of you, old friend) Jeff Fannon, and our political director, Colin Robinson.

As you know, our schools are the lifeblood of our local communities, treasured by residents who want the best for their children. We know you, too, share our belief in strong public schools. This year, we look forward to working with you as we find ways to make our schools even better for Vermont's future – our children and grandchildren.

We were heartened to hear Gov. Scott talk about the importance of education to the state's economic future, and that's why we believe that maintaining strong, effective and responsive local public schools is vital to Vermont's prosperity now and for our children.

This year, we intend to focus our efforts on those policies that will make it easier for children to learn and educators to teach. Here's a brief introduction to the issues important to our members. A more detailed explanation has been handed out to you.

Guarantee School Student and Staff Safety

Public schools are the heart of most of our cities and towns. Public education is also the single most important way to prepare our future generations for economic success. In order for our schools to provide a high quality, appropriate education for all Vermont children, our schools must be safe places to teach and learn. You have surely heard about the unfortunate situation in Rutland, where over just a six-month period paraeducators had been physically assaulted 71 times by students. This issue is not isolated, and we urge you to work with us in finding ways to help students and preserve safety.

Help Schools Do Even Better

One of the most attractive attributes Vermont has to offer businesses, entrepreneurs, and young families is our public school system. Locally accountable, our public schools rank in the top 5 in the nation consistently year after year. We need to ensure our local public schools are equipped with the

resources to provide Vermont's children with a top-quality education, so that they continue to be the catalyst for shared prosperity throughout Vermont.

Maintain community involvement in our schools

Perhaps the biggest reason Vermont's local public schools succeed is the high level of local accountability under which they operate. Indeed, many states clamor for schools that have enough educators to really work with students one-on-one, that are the centers of their communities, and are accountable to local voters every year at Town Meeting. Wherever practical, local residents should maintain accountability over their local schools. Our local public schools are the linchpin of economic prosperity, and ensuring they remain vital parts of local communities is vital if we are to continue giving all Vermont children a good chance at a better life.

Reduce inequality in access to early childhood education

It is clear that children begin learning at a very early age. The state's early childhood education law is a good start. We believe that the most effective – and most valuable – early education requires professional educators in a school setting. We must find a way to expand opportunities for our youngest Vermonters to get a great start on their schooling, and we must resist using vouchers from the state education fund to do so.