



MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Jeff Fannon, Executive Director, Vermont-NEA

DATE: January 11, 2017

SUBJECT: Background information about Vermont-NEA

Lobbyists you may see:

- President: Martha Allen (mallen@vtnea.org)
- Executive Director: Jeff Fannon (jfannon@vtnea.org)
- Political Director: Colin Robinson (crobinson@vtnea.org)
- Communications Director: Darren Allen (dallen@vtnea.org)

Purpose and Priorities

Vermont-NEA wants all children to have an excellent education. Our purpose is to make sure our members have a satisfying work environment where they are acknowledged for the work they perform and where the work they perform helps students do their best.

Organization basics

- An affiliation of local Associations of educators (teachers and support staff) in almost all public school districts in Vermont (and more than 320 schools).
- Membership, including retired teachers and student teachers, comprises approximately 12,000 Vermont educators who belong to their local Association, Vermont-NEA, and the National Education Association.
- Structure: 20-member Board of Directors elected by membership (4 statewide Officers, 16 regional Directors) + Executive Director *ex officio*. 20 staff members almost entirely consisting of former teachers who train our members to bargain and administer their own collective bargaining agreements.
- Subject matter affiliates: Some 20 professional affiliation groups (such as teachers of math or English or special education) function as formal affiliates of the Association, and the Association sponsors about 20 other education organization projects and programs (such as the Scholars Bowl).
- An affiliate itself of the National Education Association.

Activities basics

- Organizing and developing strong local Associations (> 130)
- Collective bargaining and "contract administration" (> 200)
- Professional development (reaching > 2000 educators annually)
- Public policy advocacy

"Corporate" citizenship

- Importance of public education and of unions to a strong middle class
- Retirement:
 - ✓ 2010 agreement addressed 10% of FY 11 deficit AND >10% of FY 12 deficit AND so on ...
 - ✓ protecting security and dignity for a career of public service
- Health care reform:
 - ✓ VEHI: \$ millions in lower than otherwise health insurance cost each year since 1995
 - ✓ Principles adopted 2004
 - ✓ Created (along with AARP Vermont) the Campaign for Health Care Security and Vermont-NEA has otherwise been a leader in health care reform for years
- Funding reform:
 - ✓ Property tax reform principles

Professional excellence

- Initiated the development of the Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators—an independent body of teachers that oversees the teaching profession
- Created a professional development program that now has school districts seeking us out

Baseline themes

- There are multiple reasons for the high quality of Vermont's public schools. The fact that they are locally governed is key. Therefore:

Volunteer (elected) school boards, with the advice of professional educators and scrutiny of their local communities, determine the programs for their schoolchildren and how best – with regard to both cost and quality – to educate them. They should be supported by the state, in both policy and rhetoric.

- The "achievement gap" is primarily a function of socioeconomics. Public policy generally, not just education, should focus on the economic and social conditions of our children

Essential issues of the moment

(they overlap)

- **Education policy**

- ✓ Achievement gap: in particular, **weighting** in the calculation of equalized pupils
- ✓ Teacher quality: Pre-service training; mentoring of new teachers and new principals
- ✓ Teacher relicensing: a process that is too onerous and confuses professional licensing with job evaluation

- **Education finance/spending**

- ✓ Spending and student achievement are, in fact, linked
- ✓ The uniqueness and goodness of our financing system
- ✓ The guilt factor in shorting the General Fund transfer
- ✓ Beware of the "simple" solution – this isn't easy

- **Other policy areas** (We also address many issues under these headings):

- ✓ Labor law and workers' rights: fair share fee; Acts 153 & 46 employment transition; summer unemployment for low wage school employees
- ✓ Retirement: full-funding of the actuarial required amount and paying for the health benefit
- ✓ Health care: reform providing universal access to affordable high quality care; protecting workers from loss in the transition between jobs