

## **Vermont-NEA Legislative Agenda for 2019**

**Maintaining strong, effective and responsive local public schools is vital to our state's economic prosperity now and for our children.**

Below are summaries of the union's legislative priorities for the 2019 session, and our more complete legislative agenda is available.

### **Safe Learning Environments for All**

*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.*

### **School Finance – Eliminate the Residential Property Tax**

*Vermonters invest in their local public schools through one of the fairest education funding laws in the country. Currently two-thirds of Vermont residential property tax payers pay based upon their income. We believe the principle behind that law – that a person's ability to pay should be considered – should be expanded so that all Vermonters pay for schools based on their income, and that we continue to give our children great public schools.*

### **Health Care – Protecting Consumers and Controlling Costs**

*Over the past decade the majority of Vermonters, including all public school employees, have moved to High Deductible Healthcare Plans (HDHPs). This move was done with an eye toward "controlling" costs, which means encouraging people to not get care when they should. These HDHPs have helped to exacerbate the challenges all Vermonters face paying for their healthcare while doing nothing to actually control the cost of care. For example, education spending as a percentage of Vermont state GDP has remained steady at approximately 5% for over twenty years, while health care costs have grown from 10% to nearly 20% during the same period.*

### **Make Early Learning More Accessible**

*In the 1980's, Vermont was a leader in requiring all school districts to offer kindergarten to our state's youngest children. Over the past several decades, research has proven that early learning is essential to child brain development and the earlier that children gain access to these high-quality educational opportunities the better prepared they are to learn as they grow and develop. As the state looks to expand public Pre-K, it is essential that policy decisions don't disadvantage children with special needs or those from poorer families. Vermont's local public schools meet the needs of*

*all students and families, while ensuring high-quality education is provided equitably across the state. Many public schools already provide public Pre-K for all children in their community, and all others should follow their lead.*

### **Keep Pension Promises**

*Vermont's teachers throughout the decades have worked their careers nurturing the state's future. One of the key aspects of their ability to do so is a sound and predictable pension that gives them – along with Social Security and their own savings – a dignified retirement. The Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System ("VSTRS") must remain, now and in the future, a defined-benefit paid for by the state and teachers themselves.*

### **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.*

### **Educational Quality and Act 46**

*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. While the Act 46 merger process has nearly concluded, it is important to note that Act 46 did not establish specific metrics for equal educational opportunities.*

### **Public Funding of Non-Public Schools**

*Vermont's decades-old practice of allowing students living in towns without schools to attend schools of their choice has served local communities well. We believe the consolidation process underway does not change that fundamental premise: if a merged district still doesn't include a high school, then students in that district should be able to attend schools of their choice. If a merged district does include a high school, then that school should receive the full support and all students of the residents of the new district.*

## **Healthy Kids – Healthy Future**

*We know that the health and wellness of children is not only a foundational value of our society but also critical to ensuring they grow up to be health happy adults.*

## **Make Vermont More Attractive for Working Families**

*We share the notion that Vermont can be the country's most attractive place to live, work and raise a family. We also believe that working families will come to and stay in Vermont because of policies that can increase and share prosperity to all of the state's communities.*

