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“Why Belong,” in Members` Words

Throughout this booklet, Vermont educators make powerful statements about why they belong to the Association and what they say to encourage their colleagues to join. Their messages underscore the remarkable history and success of Vermont-NEA and its local affiliates, described here...

As PR&R chair of our Association, I found out that every single word in our contract is important. I respect this process of negotiating and what it does for me as a professional. Vermont-NEA is taking the lead in terms of what it means to be a professional educator.

Ronda Curry, Teacher
Chittenden East Supervisory Union

Here’s what I’ve said for years to potential members: “Superintendents, other Administrators and School Board members come and go, but Milton Education and Support Association (MESA), Vermont-NEA and NEA will always be there to work for your best interests.”

Jane Phillips, Paraeducator
Milton Elementary School

Local Associations Provide Support and the Camaraderie of Colleagues

As members of the Local-State-National Association family, educators get the legal protections that every good union guarantees, plus the camaraderie of fellow educators who are members of the Local Association. They belong to the group and participate in both the fun and the important work of the Association. Here` s what the Local Association does:

1

Stands Up for You. A Local Association Representative who has worked successfully in the school community for years assists local members if ever they have a problem at school. They answer questions, offer guidance, and help their colleagues avoid trouble!

What would you do if you asked for Friday off to attend your grandfather's funeral, a day your contract says you are entitled to take off, but your principal tells you there have been abuses, so days off on Friday are not permitted?

Or, what if your school board approves a new class schedule that permits only 30 minutes of preparation time, although the contract says you should get 45?

In situations like these – which are not uncommon! – and others – some that are much more complex – the Local Association will provide someone to handle the case. This representative may join you at meetings with the administration to resolve the problem. Or, if necessary, the Local Association will call on Vermont-NEA for assistance carrying the grievance to binding arbitration.

In any case, what` s important is that you will not be alone. Your Local Association, Vermont-NEA and NEA will stand up for you.

2

Negotiates the Local Contract. Although the school district may give educators their first copy of the contract, no one should make the mistake of assuming it is a gift from management! The local contract is a document fought for and won by the Local Association.

Every year or so (depending on the length of the last contract), the Local Association exercises its right under Vermont law to negotiate with the school district to bring up salaries, make improvements in educators` working conditions, and decide on benefits, everything from the length of the lunch break to the amount the school district must pay for health insurance coverage.

Association members have a say in what is included in contract talks and a vote on when to settle the agreement.

3

Keeps Members Connected. Association members are connected to educators throughout Vermont and the nation because they belong to the 11,500-member Vermont-NEA (founded in 1850) and the 2.8 million-member National Education Association, the largest employee organization in the United States. They receive member-only publications, privileges, protection, and services. They are on the inside, helping direct and participating in their Association's work on behalf of educators, children, and public schools during elections, in the legislature, and before state boards and committees.

Association History Establishing and Protecting Educator Rights

Over the past century and a half, Vermont-NEA has participated in the development of just about every good public education and labor policy there is in Vermont. Association members today continue to benefit from the hard work and historic accomplishments of those who preceded them:

4

Collective Bargaining Law. In the late 1960's, Vermont-NEA led the campaign to establish collective bargaining rights for teachers and the obligation of school districts to bargain with them in good faith. Thanks to the Vermont Labor Relations Law for Teachers, a negotiated master agreement controls the terms and conditions of employment for teachers, guarantees their right to an orderly process through which to resolve employment disagreements, and protects teachers in virtually every school district in the state.

A comparable collective bargaining law for school support staff was enacted soon after the law for teachers.

What do I say to new colleagues to encourage them to join the Association? I tell them what it was like working, as a new teacher just out of college, in a high school district in a small town in Arizona in 1970. There was no union; therefore, there was no health insurance, no bargaining agent (we all individually bargained our own contracts for the next year), no job protection, and no legal representation beyond what you could afford yourself on a \$600 a month salary. A teacher could be fired for literally anything...

Any teacher who does not believe in joining the Union should work in a district without a teachers' association for a couple of years and see the difference.

Millard Cox, Special Educator
Middlebury Union High School

5 **“Just Cause” and Due Process.** In the early 1970`s, Vermont-NEA worked with legislators to establish that a teacher is entitled to continue in her job unless the school district has just and sufficient cause not to renew her contract. And, a companion law protects a teacher`s right to due process if her school administration wants to dismiss her during the school year.

6 **Right to Strike.** Through advocacy at the Labor Relations Board and in court, Vermont-NEA has protected the right of educators to strike and protected striking educators from retaliation and replacement. Never has a teacher or education support professional lost his/her job for going on strike.

7 **Successful Job Actions.** Vermont-NEA provided the legal service, on-site guidance, and financial support necessary for the successful conduct of every teacher strike in Vermont history, as well as Vermont`s only strike by education support personnel. Employees in each of these 23 strikes were protected and achieved a settlement.

I first joined the Association as a new teacher, encouraged by colleagues to do so because the Association was in a crisis situation that fall. I was painting strike headquarters within my first month of teaching!

Whoever would have thought that I would be the chief spokesperson of a striking group [Green Mountain NEA] 28 years later. I never could have done it without all the training and experiences that I have had as a member of Vermont-NEA and the NEA, as well as my local.

I continue to belong for the protection the Association provides, for the support of colleagues in my district, across the state and across the country, and because the Association keeps me up to date on professional issues.

When I advise a colleague to join the Association, I say it's for these reasons and because belonging is the right and professional thing to do.

Terri Szymanski, Teacher / Local President
Chittenden East Supervisory Union

8 **Good Faith Bargaining.** When Local Associations must enforce a school district`s obligation to bargain in good faith, Vermont-NEA provides legal counsel to file and prosecute claims of unfair labor practices. Since the late 1970`s and continuing to this day, the Association has won dozens of unfair labor practice claims it has brought before the Vermont Labor Relations Board.

I continue to be a Vermont-NEA member because power comes in numbers, and we never stand alone with any issues that we deal with from year to year. Thank you, Vermont-NEA, for always being there for us.

*Cheryl Capilli, Paraeducator / Chief Negotiator
Hartland Elementary School*

9 “Up from 51st.” As recently as the 1980`s, Vermont teacher salaries ranked 51st in the nation, behind all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It was then that Vermont teachers gave collective, organized voice – through their Association – to the absolute necessity for a major increase in state money for public education. They lobbied legislators and, in February of 1985, some 2,000 teachers marched behind Vermont-NEA President Maida F. Townsend from Montpelier High School to an “Up from 51st” rally on the steps of the Vermont State House. Then state Rep. Howard Dean was among speakers calling for education funding reform.

These efforts, in combination with aggressive and effective collective bargaining by Local Associations, brought Vermont teacher salaries up to the middle of the ranking of the states, where they remain to this day.

10 Limits to “Finality.” Because of Vermont-NEA advocacy, it is established law that a school district may not impose on teachers terms and conditions of employment for more than one year.

11 No Retroactive Economic Loss. Because of Vermont-NEA advocacy, it is established law that where a school district lawfully imposes terms and conditions of employment on its employees, it may not impose a retroactive economic loss.

12 Subcontracting as Mandatory Subject of Bargaining. It was a 1996-2003 Vermont-NEA case, brought on behalf of a newly organized group of education support personnel (Milton Education and Support Association), that established the principle that subcontracting bargaining unit work is a mandatory subject of bargaining under Vermont`s municipal labor law.

13 Subcontracting Not Implied in Contracts. Because of Vermont-NEA advocacy, it is established law in Vermont, and perhaps only in Vermont, that, in the absence of express contract language permitting it, a school district may not lawfully subcontract bargaining unit work.

14 History Supporting Women`s Rights. Vermont-NEA has a proud history supporting the right of women to participate, vote, and be paid the same as men.

In 1863, female members of the Association became “active,” and began to serve on committees. In 1871, the first woman teacher addressed the Convention, and in 1914 Caroline S. Woodruff became the first woman president. She later became president of the National Education Association. On August 15, 1960 the Association resolved: “That when qualifications are equal, and when equal services are rendered, male and female teachers should receive equal compensation.”

Today, over 70% of Association members are women.

The Association Makes Sure Educators Have a Voice

Wherever decisions are made affecting public school education, educators and children, Vermont-NEA develops and maintains professional relationships and expertise to assure Association members have a voice in the development of pro-education strategy.

15 Legislation. Vermont-NEA represents its members in the State House, attending to hundreds of legislative bills every session under the headings of education, labor, finance, retirement, health, and more.

16 Standards Board for Professional Educators. Vermont-NEA advocacy led to the creation of a purely advisory teacher-majority Standards Board for Professional Educators in the late 1980s. In 2006, Association advocacy led to the adoption of a law transforming that advisory function into an actual decision-making one, through which professional educators actually adopt and enforce the standards of their profession, just like other professional groups.

17 Vermont Education Coalition. This group, of which Vermont-NEA is a founding member, consists of a dozen organizations devoted to public education. Our work in the Education Coalition has produced major advocacy approaches and documents addressing, among other things, special education regulations, “School Quality Standards,” principles of school finance, school choice, protecting local school district funds, and the No Child Left Behind law.

18 Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security. In 2006, Vermont-NEA created this “mother of all coalitions,” to which more than 20 Vermont statewide labor and other advocacy organizations belong, for the purpose of creating a powerful, consistent voice on behalf of health care reform. The Campaign has used its voice over the airwaves, in press and other media events, and throughout the halls of the State House.

19 Paraeducators Standards Task Force. The Task Force, conceived and organized by Vermont-NEA, developed and advocated for professional standards for paraeducators. Once the State Board of Education adopted regulations, in the fall of 2001, the Task Force began working to make certain they are followed. The standards are aimed at providing schools and children with qualified staff and requiring that appropriate training be provided for paras, particularly in the context of federal mandates.

20 Vermont Safe Schools Coalition. Vermont-NEA collaborated within this group to produce a number of resources for school districts, including a report on approaches to school violence and a widely distributed – and since revised – handbook on how to respond to school crises.

21 “Working Vermont.” Vermont-NEA works in concert with all other labor organizations in the state, under the name “Working Vermont,” to protect and expand the rights of workers through a structure that facilitates communication and collaboration with public officials in the State House and elsewhere.

Vermont-NEA Lobbies for Educators

Vermont-NEA protects and promotes in the legislature the interests of educators, education, and children. Some issues the Association deals with are minor and others can have significant impact, for good or ill.

22 Money for Education. A major issue on Vermont-NEA’s legislative agenda every year is securing adequate funds for Vermont public schools. The Association works for funding from the state sufficient to provide an equal educational opportunity for each child. And, because local communities provide most school funding, we work to assure fairness for local property taxpayers.

23 Principles of School Finance. Vermont-NEA has been a voice of reason in the battles surrounding school finance, with our position determined by principles, established in 1994, supporting equal educational opportunity for every child, while at the same time respecting local control and local property taxpayers.

24 Improving the Retiree Health Insurance Benefit. Vermont-NEA, arm in arm with the Retired Teachers Association, obtained no less than a 60% improvement in the health insurance benefit for retired teachers in 2001. Upon retirement, teachers who were 30-year Vermont-NEA members will more than make up for any dues paid within 10 years.

In addition, Vermont-NEA was successful, in 2000, in getting a law passed to permit a teacher with 25 years of service to purchase five years of credit, enabling her to retire several years early.

25 Protecting the Retirement Benefit. In large part because of Vermont-NEA advocacy, the state, in 2006, was in the midst of a major and positive psychological and substantive shift toward fulfilling its obligation to assure the fiscal integrity the Teachers' Retirement System.

It was Association advocacy that led to the establishment of a 2005 special study commission and to the development and implementation of several recommendations that make full funding of the System more viable and, therefore, likely.

26 Attack on Academic Freedom. In 2000, fully one-fifth of the House of Representatives sponsored a bill that would have prohibited school employees from uttering words or behaving in any way that would sanction homosexual conduct. The Association worked with other education and civil rights groups to defeat this terrible bill.

27 Leading the Way on Education Reform. Most of Vermont's early educational reform was first proposed by, or received its first organized support from Vermont-NEA (known then as the Vermont Teachers' Association, and still later as the Vermont Education Association). Association accomplishments include the establishment of a state board of education, the enactment of a compulsory school attendance law, permissive legislation for the establishment of graded schools, and the inauguration of a system of state aid to public schools.

By joining together in a professional organization teachers are able to influence the many political decisions that affect education in our communities, state, and nation. United we stand, individually we get walked all over.

*Marilyn Gillis, Health Educator
Milton Senior High School*

28 Health Care Reform. Vermont-NEA adopted formal principles in 2004 to guide its advocacy in the ongoing public debate over health care reform. These principles would lead to a system that provides and protects our members` – and the public`s – access to high quality health care. The principles themselves, became the model for other organizations and are found, with really just slight changes, in 2006`s Vermont Health Care Affordability Act.

29 Probationary Status. Virtually every state has a mandated probationary status period for teachers. Vermont-NEA helped convince the 1999 Legislature to adopt a reasonable approach. The duration of that probation is two, not three, years; it applies only to the first two years of employment as a teacher in Vermont, rather than in every school district; and it requires school districts to pay needed attention to the professional well-being of new teachers.

30 Fingerprinting. Most states require active educators to undergo intrusive background checks despite the firm knowledge that few if any within their ranks pose any risk to children. In 2000, Vermont-NEA advocacy led the Legislature to take a much less intrusive approach, one that presumes only that we should deter bad actors from applying for positions. While the law is anything but perfect, it is far less intrusive into lives of educators than it would otherwise have been.

31 Bad Statewide Teachers Contract Plan. Beating back bad bills is an important Association responsibility. In the early 1990`s, the Legislature considered adopting, as part of an approach to school funding reform, a single statewide salary schedule for teachers.

Because of its poor design, purposeful under-funding, irredeemable intrusion into the rights of educators, both individually and collectively, and elimination of most local school district decision making, the Association led the successful effort to defeat it.

32 Educators and Bomb Threats. In the late 1990`s, serious consideration was given by law enforcement and other state agencies to adopting a model policy that would require educators, in the midst of pending threats, actually to search for bombs on school grounds.

The Association led efforts that limit the obligation of educators in such situations to protecting students in their charge and notifying law enforcement of any out-of-the-ordinary objects.

33 Binding Interest Arbitration. Educators use the tools available to them to settle contract disputes with school districts.

In Vermont, educators have the right to strike, while some states require instead that an arbitrator resolve differences the parties can`t otherwise work out.

Vermont-NEA believes it would be appropriate to replace the right to strike and, with it, the school boards` right to "impose finality," with binding arbitration to resolve negotiation impasses. The Legislature has not yet enacted such a law.

34 No Striker Replacement. Working with other labor organizations in 2000, Vermont-NEA obtained for public school support staff, and other municipal employees, who engage in a lawful strike, the only law in the nation protecting these employees against so-called "permanent replacement."

35 Federal Legislation and Regulations. Vermont-NEA works collaboratively with Vermont`s Congressional Delegation, as does our National Education Association, on such issues as school vouchers, No Child Left Behind and special education. The Association submits comments, proposals and testimony on federal legislation and rules, and seeks always to influence the way Vermont`s department of education implements federal law.

I have been in the district for 28 years. Ten years of this time was spent as a para; then as a reading teacher and currently as an English teacher. I have always been a union member. What I tell new people, whether they are paras or certified staff, is that the union is a security blanket. It is another network of support during your educational career.

***Diane T. Abel, English Teacher
Brattleboro Area Middle School***

Vermont-NEA Brings Members' Views to Policymakers

Vermont-NEA participates in the development, by the Department and State Board of Education, of state policies and rules governing public education. We do so by attending monthly meetings of the State Board of Education, by meeting periodically with the Commissioner of Education, and by meeting regularly with employees of the Department as they develop and implement Department policies – all on behalf of Association members. Here are specific examples:

36 Restrictive Behavioral Interventions. The use of seclusionary time out, passive restraint, and other restrictive measures in working with students with difficult behaviors is increasingly a matter of concern for students and educators alike. The Association is involved in developing standards for use by all school districts with a focus on the needs of both students and educators.

37 Selection of the Commissioner. Vermont-NEA members, through their President and Executive Director, have been active participants in the process through which the past and current commissioners were selected, and the Association has successfully advocated against allowing the Governor to appoint the commissioner directly, since to do so would directly politicize that office.

38 School Quality Standards. In conjunction with the rest of the Education Coalition, Vermont-NEA submitted detailed comments on early drafts of the School Quality Standards that now govern our school districts. The result, while not all we wished, is a much more coherent, student- and employee-focused document than originally proposed.

In 2005, the Association led the successful charge against efforts to eliminate limits on class size.

39 Special Education Cost and Regulations. Working with the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights, Vermont-NEA advocated for many changes in how the state administers its special education obligations.

Due in large measure to the Association's advocacy, the extent to which social service costs have been shifted to school district budgets has become an increasing focus of policy attention.

40 Model Harassment Policy. The Association worked with the School Boards Association to develop a model policy on sexual harassment that has since been adapted and adopted by many school districts.

41 Model Discipline Policy. Working with other education organizations, Vermont-NEA has contributed to the development, by the Department of Education, of a model student discipline policy, to be used by every school district in developing comprehensive student discipline plans.

42 Educator "Code of Ethics." Due in large measure to Association advocacy, a draft "code of ethics," quite draconian and punitive in tone and temperament, was rewritten and promulgated, instead, as a statement of aspiration for professional educators in Vermont. More significantly, by virtue of the Association's work, the new and authoritative Standards Board has statutory authority to develop a code for our profession.

43 Education Milestones in History. In 1852, the Association not only resolved to see the establishment of Teachers' and Parents' Associations in each Vermont county, but also went on record recommending single desks as preferable to any other. The Association worked for the passage of the Supervisory Law in 1906; the establishment of the Vermont Teachers' Retirement Fund Association in 1910; the first voluntary Teachers' Retirement Law in 1919; the compulsory Teachers' Retirement Law in 1947; the Sick Leave Benefit of 1957; the first mandated minimum Salary Schedule Law, including increments for experience, which was passed in the same year; and a Fair Dismissal Law in 1963.

The Association Advocates for Members and Local Associations

Vermont-NEA protects and advocates for its members and their Local Associations in a host of ways. This level of advocacy is the locus of most direct contact between individual members and their Association.

44 Organizing. The more educators who are affiliated with Vermont-NEA, the stronger its collective voice will be. The Association provides guidance and assistance to new groups of educators who want to join the Vermont-NEA family.

Why join the Association? I joined the Vermont Education Association and National Educational Association the first year I taught school, fall of 1971 at Green Mtn Union High School in Chester, Vt. I never questioned it. I felt it was my professional duty to belong to the organization that represented the teachers in Vermont. This is the organization I would owe my future wages and benefits to. This is the organization that would support me in time of need. Perhaps part of this came from knowing my father belonged to unions while he worked in the granite industry in Barre during the 1940's-1970's. He believed in the union...

I continue to be an Association member and am an officer again!!

Mike Gilbert, Business Teacher
Spaulding High School, Barre

45 Unit Determination. If a school district disagrees about which employees belong within the Association's local "bargaining unit," Vermont-NEA represents the Local before the Labor Relations Board in unit clarification proceedings.

46 Crisis Assistance. When a Local Association reaches the last stage of impasse procedures without settling an acceptable contract, Vermont-NEA provides Crisis Assistance. This service includes training, establishing internal communications, developing a community information campaign, preparing for and, if necessary, engaging in a strike, delivering financial assistance to striking members who need it, and providing professional staff and legal support for any job action.

47 Liability Insurance. The Association's Educators' Employment Liability plan provides up to \$1 million in liability protection for members.

48 Legal Assistance. Local Associations and individual members receive free legal representation in matters associated with employment. This most frequently occurs for Associations challenging the good faith of their school districts during negotiations and for individual educators who face loss of their employment or other significant discipline.

49 Criminal Defense. Each year, several educators are accused of a criminal offense arising from employment. In these circumstances, Vermont-NEA provides up to \$35,000 toward the payment of the educator's criminal defense, payable upon the educator's exoneration.

In conversations with colleagues regarding association membership I respond by saying that their advocating for the rights of their students is the same advocacy they should have for themselves as association members.

*Thomas Nola, Special Educator/Consulting Teacher
Vergennes Union Elementary School*

50 General Legal Services. Vermont-NEA members have access to any of a group of private attorneys who offer discounted fees to Association members regarding an array of personal business matters not related to their employment, but requiring legal expertise.

51 Unfair Labor Practices. School boards occasionally commit unlawful practices during collective bargaining with Vermont-NEA Local Associations, usually in violation of their obligation to bargain in good faith. Vermont-NEA sues school boards before the Labor Relations Board on behalf of Local Associations to seek enforcement of the Locals' legal rights.

52 Grievance Representation. Provisions of collective bargaining agreements are legally enforceable. When a school district violates its own agreement, the Association is there to challenge it, informally if possible, and through the filing of grievances if necessary. Sometimes the violation is minor, sometimes major. It can involve one or a few employees, or it can affect the entire work force. The overall purpose is to make sure the school district complies with its obligations.

53 Arbitration. If a grievance is not resolved "internally," virtually all our collective bargaining agreements provide for arbitration by an outside neutral decision-maker. Vermont-NEA provides direct representation at arbitration, either by a UniServ Director or staff attorney, and pays a portion of the cost.

54 Regional Bargaining Councils. The success of collective bargaining for a Local Association depends, in large part, on the results at the bargaining table achieved by Local Associations in neighboring districts. And success in a region of the state depends, in part, on the results obtained in other regions. Vermont-NEA hosts Regional Bargaining Councils of Local Association leaders to share information, coordinate bargaining and, ultimately, win better contract settlements.

55 Leadership Training. Because Vermont-NEA is as strong as its local affiliates, the Association provides formal and informal training to Local Association leaders throughout the year. At conferences and regional workshops Vermont-NEA staff teach contract negotiation, grievance processing, communication skills, community organizing, and crisis resolution.

56 Professional Assistance with Negotiations. Vermont-NEA trains local negotiators, provides research, and when necessary, sends a professional to work with the Local Association, especially after impasse.

Vermont-NEA Supports Professional Development Activities

Through Vermont-NEA, educators to support, advocate for, and present valuable professional activities for themselves and their colleagues. Thanks to Vermont-NEA resources, both human and monetary, members have more opportunities to develop and enhance their skills. These are among the excellent programs supported by the Association...

57 Advice for New Teachers. Vermont-NEA publishes *Tips and Ideas for New Teachers*. Available at www.vtnea.org, it is filled with valuable advice, from "Communicate Effectively with Parents," to "Promote Yourself and Your Profession," to "What to Keep in Your Professional File."

In many years as an Association officer, it has been my experience that the time teachers are most in need of the support of the Association is in their first few years -- Questions related to one year contracts, "reduction in force," seniority, contractual issues, and the list goes on.

Association membership provides a constant and unfailing support system for every need that arises in those early years. By the time all of those issues are resolved, all of the other benefits become clear and you are a member for life!

Kathy Buley, Grade Two Teacher
Chamberlin School, South Burlington

58 National Board Certification. Vermont-NEA is in the forefront of organizations supporting teachers interested in seeking National Board Certification. The Association provides information about National Certification and promotes training sessions for educators to learn about the National Board Certification process.

59 New Teacher Training. Vermont-NEA offers new teachers special training in the Association's nationally recognized "I Can Do It" training for first- and second-year teachers.

The Association also sponsors an annual New Teachers' Conference and has contracts with an increasing number of school districts to provide training in the PATHWISE Induction Program for veteran teachers to become mentors for their new colleagues.

60 Mentoring. In part because of Vermont-NEA advocacy, state regulations require school districts to provide high quality mentoring to teachers in the first two years of service.

61 Governor's Institutes of Vermont. Vermont-NEA supports the Institutes, which offer special learning opportunities for motivated high school students, with an annual grant and through the work of Vermont-NEA members who promote the Institutes among students.

62 Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl. The Association is the partner and financial backer of the Scholars' Bowl, an academic competition among high school students statewide.

63 Subject Matter Affiliates. Vermont-NEA supports some two dozen statewide affiliate organizations of educators serving the teachers of particular subject areas, such as the Vermont Educational Media Association, the Vermont Science Teachers Association, and the Vermont Council of Teachers of English Language Arts. The Association funds these affiliates, provides publicity and mailing service for them, and supports their annual meetings.

64 Vermont-NEA Partners. Vermont-NEA creates formal Partnerships, through which it provides ongoing financial and/or promotional backing for worthy projects and organizations whose work supports students, educators, and public education, including: The Vermont Foodbank, which reduces hunger in Vermont; the First Day of School Holiday, which encourages family and community involvement in children's education; and the Vermont Society for the Study of Education, which shapes policies and promotes educational practices that work in the best interest of children.

65 Vermont-NEA Fall Educators` Convention. The Association has presented the annual Educators` Convention in Vermont for 155 years – since 1851.

Most Vermont schools close for this statewide convening of educators, which occurs on a Wednesday evening, Thursday and Friday early in October. The Convention features the state`s largest exhibition of education materials, a general assembly offering performances by students and a keynote address, gatherings of other education groups, and an array of professional workshop opportunities – many offered by Vermont-NEA subject matter affiliates.

Political candidates for statewide office who are recommended by the Association are traditional guests at the Convention.

66 Sponsorships. Vermont-NEA sponsors special events and activities whose organizers want the prestige of the Association`s endorsement, as well as funding and/or publicity. Among events sponsored by the Association have been the New England Conference on Gifted Education, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Readers` Conference, and a book giveaway by Parents, Teachers and Students for Social Responsibility.

67 Support for Education Support Professionals. Because Vermont-NEA recognizes the professionalism and special information needs of paraeducators, instructional assistants, custodians, secretaries, food service workers, bus drivers and all other support staff who serve in our public schools, the Association provides high quality professional development training.

The Association Offers Member-Only Discounts and Endorses Providers

The Association endorses an array of financial, insurance, and other services, through which its members can save and feel secure.

68 Health Insurance. Vermont-NEA led the effort that resulted in the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI), through which education employees all over the state obtain health insurance that provides excellent coverage at what is, relatively speaking, low cost. VEHI has saved Vermont-NEA members and school districts tens of millions of dollars since its establishment in the early 1990`s.

69 Dental Insurance. Association members in districts that provide dental coverage through VEHI receive coverage at a cost below what is generally available to them individually or otherwise through their employment.

70 Discounts and Endorsed Providers. Group buying power makes possible for members discounts on a host of financial products and services, from car rental and magazine discounts to long-term disability coverage. The National Education Association's Member Benefits division screens, endorses and monitors providers of retirement, investment and insurance products, ensuring that members have access to high-quality products at a reasonable cost and with special customer service. These offerings result in savings to members that sometimes exceed the cost of Association dues.

Association Members Get Important Information, and They Get It First

Because they belong to the Association family, Vermont-NEA members are the first to be informed about issues important to educators. Regular publications, an award-winning website, an electronic newsletter, and staff and elected leaders readily available for consultation keep Association members in the know.

71 www.vtnea.org Vermont-NEA maintains an award-winning website that includes opportunities for educators, advice for parents, special program information, training conference information, and Association facts, from phone numbers and email addresses to resolutions.

72 Electronic Newsletter. *MONDAY* is Vermont-NEA's electronic newsletter for Association members. It delivers timely news briefs, legislative updates, meeting/conference announcements, the latest local contract settlements, and offerings of free stuff. Members may subscribe to *MONDAY* on-line at www.vtnea.org/e-newsletters.htm.

73 Special Publications. Vermont-NEA publishes free materials for members each year, including pocket calendars, brochures recommending summer reading for kids, cards for welcoming parents to the classroom and, every other year, an election guide.

74 Monthly Newspaper. Vermont-NEA publishes a monthly newspaper, *Vermont-NEA Today*, which is distributed to all members' households. The paper features opinion, letters, news about contract settlements, trends in salaries and benefits, professional honors and opportunities, legislative issues, legal decisions and advice, actions of the Vermont-NEA Board, and more.

75 Legislative Reports and Alerts. During the legislative session, Vermont-NEA calls upon Association members to use their considerable collective influence to help move education legislation in a good direction. This is the key to making a real difference in public education policy. To get up-to-date legislative information, every member is encouraged to sign up at www.vtnea.org/e-newsletters.htm to receive the e-newsletter devoted to politics and public issues: *Vermont-NEA V.O.T.E. Insider*.

76 Face-to-Face Communication. The Association conducts periodic meetings for members who wish to speak directly with their elected leaders. Formal opportunities for face-to-face communication include regular meetings of the Vermont-NEA Board, UniServ District meetings, and the Representative Assembly. In addition, Vermont-NEA Board members, state officers and staff all are available to visit Local Associations.

77 Word from NEA. Our National Education Association publishes an award-winning magazine for members. It reports national education news, trends, politics, and stories of the people who belong to teacher and ESP Local Associations across the nation. NEA's work representing its 2.8 million members in Congress and before the boards and commissions of the federal bureaucracy is featured in *NEA TODAY*.

78 Toll-Free Telephone Service. Advice, assistance and information are a toll-free telephone call away for any Association member. Call 1.800.649.6375 any time; voice mail is in place to get messages to Association staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

79 E-mail. And, of course, Association staff and the Association president all can be contacted directly by Association members via electronic mail. Find addresses at www.vtnea.org.

Political Activity Informs Members, Educates Politicians

Legislative and policy advocacy is not separable from the officials who develop it. This is why the Association works to maintain sophisticated and careful political activity. Vermont-NEA has in place a well-developed approach to educating candidates for public office about Vermont-NEA and public education, and informing Association members about candidates.

80 Members Are Informed. Vermont-NEA provides Association members with information based on the recommendation process. Information about all legislative candidates, as well as those running for statewide office, is organized on a countywide basis and published in an Election Guide, complete with short biographical sketches, the extent to which each candidate agrees with the Association on particular issues, a description of the voting record of incumbents, and a recommendation from the Association based on that information.

81 Members Participate. Vermont-NEA conducts a recommendation process for candidates for the Legislature and statewide office that relies on Local Association members getting to know candidates, among other ways, through forums and interviews, and a thorough analysis of the incumbents' voting records.

82 Voluntary Political Contributions. Vermont-NEA members contribute to the "Vermont-NEA Fund for Children and Education," a distinct account, separate and apart from any dues money, that is used to provide assistance to pro-education candidates for public office.

The Association approaches its members annually inviting them to contribute to this fund, which is used to provide modest financial assistance to candidates the Association recommends for election.

Becoming a member of Vermont-NEA is the best way I know to connect with educators on "Big Picture" issues. Through Vermont-NEA you can stay on top of trends, policies, and best professional practices. You can receive valuable professional development, develop your skills as a leader, learn from others and let your voice be heard. It is the best way I know to become "part of the solution, rather than part of the problem."

Mary Ann Barnes, Grade 5 Teacher
Malletts Bay School, Colchester

83 Voluntary Political Work. Vermont-NEA offers the assistance of its members to the election of candidates for public office who are supported by the Association. This is almost entirely a matter of volunteer work in candidates` districts by Association members who call prospective voters, distribute leaflets and lawn signs, and provide other kinds of direct help to education-friendly candidates.

Vermont-NEA member volunteers – participants in the Association`s Public Elections and Legislative Advocacy program – not only meet with candidates to discuss issues important to education and educators, but in doing so, open up a line of communication so that in the future, legislators have an informed source to contact when education issues are discussed in the State House.

The Local/State/National Association Is a Democratic Organization

Educators belong to their unified Association because they get a substantial say in policies and activities at the local, state and national level through a democratic structure. Members participate at every level of the Association, from some 150 Locals, each with its own elected officers, to the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors, elected by region, to our National Education Association, which convenes the world`s largest democratic deliberative body every summer.

84 Local Associations. Vermont-NEA Local Associations are the front line for delivery of Association service to individuals. They drive the most important programs for Vermont-NEA, from collective bargaining to membership promotion. Local Associations have their own officers elected from the local membership and help determine state Association programs and policies.

85 Representative Assembly. Each Local Association is represented at Vermont-NEA`s annual meeting – the Representative Assembly – by a number of delegates that depends on the number of members in the Local. The delegates decide on resolutions, business items, and state dues.

86 Resolutions. Vermont-NEA`s operating philosophy is determined by Association members through Resolutions, which are debated and approved every year by Local delegates at the Representative Assembly.

87 Board of Directors. Every Association member is entitled to run for election to the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors. The Board consists of members elected from 16 areas of the state, plus officers who are elected statewide. All members have a standing invitation to attend Board meetings to listen, to participate, or to request action on proposals.

88 Committees. Vermont-NEA maintains more than a dozen standing and ad hoc committees through which members who are appointed by the President contribute to the development of Association policy, including Human and Civil Rights, Partnerships and Sponsorships, and Resolutions.

89 District Meetings. The Association's elected leadership conducts meetings each fall in each of the seven "UniServ" districts of the state. At these meetings, any member can propose new business items and resolutions for consideration at the Representative Assembly in the spring, and participate in a discussion of wide-ranging issues affecting the organization, its policies, the public schools and the working conditions of employees.

90 NEA Representative Assembly. Vermont-NEA is a state affiliate of the 2.8 million-member National Education Association. We are represented each year at the NEA R.A., where Vermont delegates – who are elected from the ranks of Vermont-NEA members – have the same right to propose new business, argue for their beliefs, and vote as do some 10,000 other delegates.

Our National Education Association

Thanks to our affiliation with NEA – with its 2.8 million members in 50 states and the District of Columbia – Vermont-NEA receives substantial grants, services, and benefits.

91 Program Funds and Project Grants. NEA provides funding to support a variety of Vermont-NEA activities the state Association otherwise might not be able to afford, including the UniServ Program, Legal Assistance Program, and our expanding Professional Programs.

NEA grants also have funded public opinion polls, training opportunities for Vermont-NEA members, and a media campaign featuring radio spots of Vermont-NEA members speaking about the joy of teaching and the need to attract excellent people to the profession.

The Symbol of our United Education Profession



This symbol was adopted by NEA in 1966. The design symbolizes the forward thrust of education through a united profession.

- π is for παιδεία, the ancient Greek word for education.
- The arrow indicates forward direction for education.
- The spherical triangle represents the mutually supportive local, state and national education Associations.

92 UniServ Program. “UniServ” is short for “Unified Service,” meaning service provided through the unified effort of the state and national Associations. Vermont-NEA’s seven UniServ Directors – the professional staff who work in the field with local members and Associations – are the heart of this program, which was conceived and is subsidized by our National Education Association.

93 National Staff Assistance. NEA dispatches professional staff to assist the state Association in special situations. It was the NEA General Counsel who worked with Vermont-NEA staff in 1969 to secure one of the best teacher collective bargaining laws in the nation. NEA Government Relations staff have worked in Vermont for years, as have NEA specialists in professional development and communications.

94 Training Opportunities. Our NEA offers training at the national level for rank-and-file Association members in negotiations, leadership, technology and instruction.

At Your Service: Vermont-NEA Staff

An educator’s decision to belong to Vermont-NEA certainly is influenced by the Association’s record of success supporting its members at the bargaining table, in the courts, before arbitrators, at the labor board, and in the legislature. And Vermont-NEA’s great training, communications, governance and professional development programs are important. But effective delivery of all this service comes down to the skill of the Vermont-NEA staff.

95 Headquarters Staff. Vermont-NEA’s office professionals – including administrative assistants and business and membership staff – provide the support systems necessary to manage the budget and serve the administrative needs of the Association and its 11,500 members.

96 UniServ Directors. These are the people who travel to Vermont schools to assist local negotiating teams, handle mediations and arbitrations, coordinate regional bargaining councils and conduct leadership training. When Vermont-NEA Local Associations face trouble in contract negotiations or when they must defend members whose jobs are threatened, they can call upon their Vermont-NEA UniServ Director for help.

97 Organizers. Vermont-NEA provides experts who can step in when Local Associations need organizing assistance to deal with wide-ranging issues, from contract disputes, to election campaigns, to Local Association development. One Organizer also helps coordinate training and membership promotion. The other organizer coordinates Association political action activity.

98 Director of Communications. Keeping Vermont-NEA members informed is an Association priority. The Communications Director edits the Association's monthly newspaper and weekly electronic newsletter. She writes and designs Association brochures and special publications, created and manages the Vermont-NEA website, and coordinates all media relations. She also organizes the Vermont-NEA Educators' Convention.

99 Director of Member Benefits. The Director of Member Benefits manages the Association's strategy around health insurance and benefit programs and supports other Association staff, as well as Local Association leaders, with up-to-date information. He is in charge of product endorsements and Vermont-NEA's relationship with VEHI, the Vermont Educators' Health Initiative.

The Director also is Vermont-NEA's point person on retirement issues and Association liaison to the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security, the coalition he helped conceive and establish.

100 Director of Professional Programs. Vermont-NEA's newest program for members, established in 2004, provides training for new teachers, support professionals, and veteran educators. The Director of Professional Programs conducts surveys to ensure that Association offerings meet members' needs, recruits talented educators to serve as Association trainers, provides direct training herself, and sells mentor and new teacher training programs to school districts throughout the state.

101 Lobbyists. The Executive Director, President, and a staff attorney all are registered lobbyists for the Association. They work with friendly legislators to write and guide legislation. They track legislation and organize support for it or opposition to it, as needed. They attend legislative committee meetings, testify on behalf of educators, and when necessary, organize Vermont-NEA members to help educate and persuade legislators.

102 Legal Counsel. Vermont-NEA members are served by two in-house attorneys and an Executive Director/General Counsel. The Association's legal staff represents individual members in employment-related difficulty, advises other Association staff who are serving members, and represents the Association and its members in legal proceedings, from the Supreme Court to school board hearings.

In Conclusion...

A Word About Belonging: It is steady, stalwart Association members who deserve credit for the success of our unified Local-State-National Association. Because they belong, the Association can:

- Provide not only the legal protections that a good union guarantees for its members, but also a family of colleagues, people Association members can count on who truly understand.
- Continue to negotiate and defend educators' contracts.
- Support every educator's well-being as well as the interests of children and public education.
- Guarantee that Association members are never alone, and that they know the security of belonging to the largest employee organization in the United States – an Association that stands up for them..

A Word About Not Belonging: We all decide to join or not join organizations. We know it takes only one reason to trump more than 100 reasons to belong. We know the Association can't be all things to all educators. But we can – and we do – offer all educators a wide array of services, programs, and products to improve their professional lives, their financial circumstances, and the quality of the schools in which they work.

We want all Vermont educators to belong to Vermont's preeminent education organization. We are stronger, more effective advocates for public education when our numbers are strong.

Join the Association! We can't do it without you!

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