

Candidate Questionnaire - 2020

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on what's important to Vermont-NEA's 13,000 members and their families. In this brief survey, we outline key issues, followed by our position on them.

We ask you whether you agree or disagree with (or don't know about) our position on thirteen issues. The issues fall into two broad categories: education and labor/economic well-being. However, there are two board introductory questions that we believe are important overlays to all questions – resisting austerity and battling institutional racism. The specific education issues include: community schools; universal school meals; student and staff safety; paraeducators; school finance; and public Pre-K. The labor/economic issues include: recommitting to health care for all; right to strike; teachers' rights; retirement security; and good cause employment. **You must register your opinion on each issue to move forward in the survey.**

Again, thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will be available to the women and men of Vermont-NEA. Together with our communities, we strive to make our local public schools Vermont's most important resource.

Candidate Information

First Name: _____

Office you are seeking: _____

(e.g. House, Senate, Governor)

Last Name: _____

Legislative District: _____

(e.g. Chittenden Senate, Addison-1)

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Incumbent (circle one): Yes or No

Local School Visit

Would you be interested in visiting a school in your district and meeting with local educators?

- Yes
- No

Resisting Austerity – Building a Just Recovery

The COVID-19 Pandemic, horrific in its own right, did not cause grave economic destruction all by itself. Indeed, more than anything, it exposed the vast chasm of inequality – even greater for people of color and women – that is an ugly hallmark of nearly a half-century of neoliberalism and austerity. From our bloatedly expensive but shockingly ineffective healthcare system to decades of stagnant and too-low wages for working Americans, the suffering wrought by the worst pandemic in a century is laying bare an economy that works for the rich and for corporations and virtually no one else.

We are seeing massive lines – sometimes thousands long – of people seeking food. We are seeing an unprecedented number of workers – mostly low-wage workers, predominately people of color and women, who suffer in the best of times – lose their jobs, their health insurance, their security, and, for some, their homes. We are seeing small businesses go under while corporations with huge amounts of cash get even more from the government. We’re seeing wealthy families, predominately white, get the best care as they flee to their second- or third-homes. We’re even seeing a Wall Street giddy with anticipation of great corporate profits, even while the economy on Main Street is heading toward another Great Depression.

In other words, all of the supports for a decent, dignified life put in place by the New Deal in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II are showing the effects of more than 40 years of chipping at those protections.

Vermont-NEA believes that we cannot – must not – reopen our economy, because to return to the way it was would be a cataclysmic failure. We must reimagine our economy, one where every American resident is afforded a living wage; accessible, universal, and affordable health care; access to a strong public education; functioning infrastructure including clean water, public transportation, maintained roads and airports, and affordable high-speed internet; and basic benefits like paid family and medical leave, free public college, and robust unemployment benefits.

On resisting austerity, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don’t Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on resisting austerity?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on resisting austerity?

Battling Institutional Racism: Supporting Anti-Racism

The demonstrations that occurred all over America in the wake of George Floyd’s murder at the hands of Minneapolis police officers has once again exposed a 400-year-old system that routinely discriminates against and endangers black Americans. The thousands of people coming out to protest have been met with, in many instances, a brutal response by militaristic police forces that do nothing but prove the point that black Americans, and all people of color, have been mistreated by their government for far too long. However, it is one thing to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism and systemic bias; it is quite another to be actively anti-racist. **Vermont-NEA believes that in order to eradicate institutional racism, we must actively advocate for policies that are anti-racist. We must adopt laws that permanently demilitarize our police forces. We must stop the imposition of racist policies in our courts, our prisons, our hospitals, our schools, our businesses, and our workplaces. And we must view all policy decisions through the lens of equity and the active elimination of racism.**

On institutional racism, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don’t Know

Anything you want to add on institutional racism (required)?

Community Schools: Meeting the Needs of All Children

Vermont’s student population is changing. More and more children, especially in the early grades, are coming to school unprepared to learn because of adverse childhood experiences. These experiences can be related to physical and emotional trauma, the impacts of poverty and related economic uncertainties, or caretakers dealing with drug addiction. These traumas and challenges are even greater among our students of color due to our state and nations deep seated institutional racism. Whatever the cause, very young children are bringing those experiences – sometimes traumatic – with them to school. This affects not only their individual ability to learn but also that of their peers to learn and their teachers to teach. In order to meet the needs of not only all children, but that of struggling families, there should be efforts to expand essential social services to children and families in a school-based setting. Schools are already the center of many Vermont communities and it is logical to provide other essential services to students and families in this setting. This could include access to mental health services, dental care, health care and other state social services. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown the complete role that schools already provide to support students and families to meet their basic needs. We should formalize this even more by helping families struggling with poverty (including homelessness, food insecurity, and lack of transportation), mental health services, health care, and other social supports. Known as a “Community Schools” model, there are over 5000 schools like this across the country and some schools in Vermont have already begun this work. **Vermont-NEA believes at a time when young students are coming to school unable to learn due to complex family circumstances, a pandemic and institutional racism, we should move toward providing essential support services for all students and families by adopting a community schools approach and adoption of a state mechanism for supporting this model.**

On community schools, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don’t Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation establishing community schools?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on community schools?

Universal School Meals – Feeding all Children

We know a child who arrives to school hungry is a child who is unprepared to learn. Vermont schools have been working to provide healthy, nutritious, often local, meals to children for years. This includes breakfast, lunch, and supper; however, there is still a stigma associated with getting a school meal. Nationally, studies show that by providing universal free school meals to all children removes the stigma associated with school meals while ensuring all children have the nutrition they need to learn. In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic Vermont schools and educators – bus drivers, food services workers, para-educators and others – provided universal school meals to all students. **Vermont-NEA believes the state of Vermont should adopt a policy to provide free universal school meals to all Vermont public school children.**

On universal school meals, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on universal school meals?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on universal school meals?

Student and Staff Safety – Support for Training

With the changing student population, there are more students who exhibit challenging and at times violent behavior toward themselves, fellow students, and school staff. Students exhibiting these behaviors are often very young – including some in kindergarten and the early grades – and are coming to school from home circumstances marked by complex challenges related to poverty, drug addiction and other traumas. These adverse childhood experiences can result in dangerous and violent situations that make learning conditions for fellow students and working conditions for teachers and school support staff challenging and at times unsafe. Students exhibiting these behaviors need supports, which school staff and leaders are working to provide them; however, more training and capacity are needed to meet these safety and learning challenges. **Vermont-NEA believes the state of Vermont should invest in providing training to all school personnel on how to deal with these challenging student behaviors while also ensuring staff the time and capacity to properly implement these strategies.**

On student and staff safety, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on student and staff safety?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on student and staff safety?

Paraeducators – Essential Workers Essential to Student Success

Providing equal educational opportunities to all Vermont students is not only essential, it is constitutionally required. Students come to school with varying needs that must be met to help them learn and be successful. Going far beyond teaching our students reading, writing and arithmetic Vermont teachers include critical thinking, artistic expression and essential social skills often tailored to the individual student's ability and interests. What is often not acknowledged is that paraeducators are a critical component of making Vermont schools and our students thrive and learn. Paraeducators provide critical one-on-one support to students, while also supporting teachers' ability to deliver detailed direct instruction to a diverse spectrum of students. During the COVID-19 pandemic many paraeducators, bus drivers, and food service workers were on the front lines providing and delivering food to children and families. Whether it is in special education, general education or other school support functions, paraeducators are essential to ensure our schools meet all students' needs. **Vermont-NEA believes that any decisions about the use of paraeducators and other support staff in Vermont schools should be made at the local level, where school leaders, school boards, and teachers know best what essential education supports are needed to ensure all students succeed.**

On para-educators, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on para-educators?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on para-educators?

School Finance: Eliminate the Property Tax, Fair Taxes for VT Kids

Together with our communities, Vermont-NEA members are leading the charge in making our already great public schools even better, equipping our students with the tools they need to live happy, productive and fulfilling lives, no matter what paths they choose to pursue. The state's constitutional obligation is to ensure access to a substantially equal amount of funding for each student, regardless of community. A related purpose of the original Act 60 was to enable low wealth communities to level up. It was a striking success, but that leveling up fed a public misperception that, coupled with our state's decline in school-aged children, we are spending "too much" on education. The state is paying no more on schoolchildren now as a percentage of the state's economy than it has for decades dating back to well before the enactment of Act 60. Moreover, we know that two-thirds of Vermont homeowners pay their education property taxes based upon their income and their family's ability to pay, but the wealthiest one-third of Vermonters do not. We believe the next step for Vermont schools is to ensure all residential homeowners pay their fair share and support all children's education based upon their ability to pay – this includes the wealthiest. By eliminating the residential homestead property tax and moving it to an income tax for all Vermonters, and not just for lower and middle income as we do now, we can ensure that everyone pays their fair share. **Vermont-NEA believes we should eliminate the education property tax for residential homesteads to move it to an income tax for all, so that all Vermonters – including the wealthiest – pay their fair share for our children's public education.**

On school finance, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on school finance?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on school finance?

Expanding Pre-K: Public Investment in our Future

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. Recognizing the importance of prekindergarten education (pre-K), the Legislature in 2014 passed Act 166, which provides families up to 10 hours of public money, through a voucher, to use toward qualified Pre-K programs. While an important step in acknowledging the needs of our youngest children, Act 166's funding mechanism – vouchers – has, perversely, made it harder for our state's most vulnerable children: those in poverty and with special needs. Nationally, we also know that children of color disproportionately lack access to high-quality pre-k. Since Act 166 only provides funding for 10 hours, families unable to pay for the additional portion of the privately provided childcare can't access this public benefit. We already know that children who come from families on the margins are at a disadvantage when they enter public schools. Additionally, Act 166 incorrectly presumes that vouchers for privately provided high quality pre-K ensure its availability, and that just is not so. As the state looks appropriately 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. **Vermont-NEA believes that high quality universal Pre-K is essential to the development of our children, especially those in less advantaged households, and that any additional state investment in Pre-K should ensure equity for all children by having local public school districts provide this early education directly.**

On public funded and provided Pre-K, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on public funded and provided Pre-K?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on public funded and provided Pre-K?

Recommitting to Health Care for ALL – A path forward

Vermont-NEA has been and remains a leading advocate of health care reform, including Medicare for All, while supporting incremental reforms along the way. Affordable health care is still out of reach for many Vermonters and only getting more expensive. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of employer-sponsored health insurance when tens of thousands of Vermonters lost their jobs. It has also exposed the racial injustices of our disfunction health care system as people of color, specifically black folks, are twice as likely to die from COVID-19. And obviously, the pandemic makes painfully clear the importance of access to healthcare at a price Vermonters can afford. Additionally, the health insurance that school employees receive has been a major subject of debate in Montpelier over the past several years. While this debate was happening, educators and their families, who make up the largest private health insurance pool in the state with nearly 40,000 lives, moved to high deductible plans. The transition was problematic to say the least. What both the debate in Montpelier and the experiences of educators moving to these new plans has reinforced is that we must do something about the cost of health care for all Vermonters. Healthcare costs are growing faster than the rest of the economy and eating up more and more costs for both workers and employers. 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. Whether it is the cost of public education, running a small business or state government, health care costs are having a significant negative impact on our economy. Though the pressures are great to do something quickly, we must not fall into the trap of cost shifting who pays and put more economic stress on working people. Instead, we need to reform our health care system, including the creation of a prescription drug affordability board, direct regulation of medical pricing, and an expansion of primary care such as the extension of Dr. Dynasaur for all Vermonters under the age of 26. **Vermont-NEA believes the state should recommit to health care for all, reemerge as a leader in the nation and implement innovative policies that begin to control the soaring health care costs, while expanding affordable accessible coverage, and stop the move towards shifting the ever-increasing costs of health care onto working Vermonters.**

On health reform, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on health care reform?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on health care reform?

Right to Strike

Vermont teachers and school support staff have had the right to collectively bargain for 50 years. Vermont's average teacher pay is in the middle of the pack nationally and \$2,000 below the national average. In the 1980's, Vermont's teachers were the lowest paid in the nation. As a result of collective bargaining Vermont educators are now paid a decent wage, a key reason why our school system is among the top five in the country. One part of collective bargaining for teachers and school support staff is that if at the end of a long process an agreement cannot be reached, educators may choose to withhold their labor by striking and school boards may choose to impose working conditions on employees. Both of these options are used as a last resort and are decisions not made lightly by union members or school boards. In fact, over the past 50 years of educator collective bargain there have been over 5,000 contracts negotiated and fewer than 30 strikes or impositions, ever. **While strikes are exceedingly rare, Vermont-NEA believes that the right to strike for school employees is fundamental and has been and will remain a last, but sometimes necessary, resort to reach a fair contract settlement.**

On the right to strike, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Anything you want to add on the right to strike?

Teachers Rights and Pursuing Professional Growth

Teacher's number one priority is their students. Everyday teachers enter their classroom prepared as professionals, often with graduate degrees, to facilitate their students' academic and social emotional learning. As professionals with advanced degrees, one would expect that if a teacher wants to change employment for personal or professional reasons she could do so between academic years without issue. However, unlike other professionals, teachers must obtain permission to interview before applying for a new teaching position in another school district. Even if she is granted permission to interview, a teacher must be granted permission of their current Superintendent to leave. This is unique and limits the personal and professional growth opportunities for Vermont teachers. **Vermont-NEA believes the state should adopt a policy that affords teachers the same professional opportunity and respect when pursuing a new teaching position.**

On teachers rights and professional growth, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on teachers right and professional growth?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on teachers right and professional growth?

Retirement Security

In 2010 and 2014, Vermont-NEA reached historic agreements with the State protecting the fiscal security of the State Teachers' Retirement System, saving taxpayers more than \$1 billion over the course of the next several decades (Vermont-NEA and the State reached quieter agreements protecting the Municipal Employees' Retirement System.) Vermont's teachers are paying more and working longer for their retirement benefits. During the prior two decades, the State annually and routinely underfunded the Teachers' Retirement System by millions, sometimes tens of millions, of dollars. The State has met its full funding commitment to this system for each of the past 11 years. **Vermont-NEA believes the State must continue to meet its annual funding commitment to the State Teachers' Retirement System. Moreover, Vermont-NEA believes, as was the case recent years, any budget surplus should be earmarked to make-up for the state's past underfunding of the State Teachers' Retirement System in order to reduce the interest costs paid by the state, thereby saving taxpayers millions of dollars.**

On retirement security for teachers, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Anything you want to add on retirement security for teachers?

Making Vermont attractive to workers: "Good cause," not "at will"

Vermont is a wonderful place to live and raise a family. It should be an equally wonderful place to work. For many Vermonters such as unionized school employees, they enjoy protections from many forms of arbitrary or discriminatory treatment by employers and, if unionized employees are mistreated by an employer, they have a way to present their perspective and have a neutral decision-maker decide who is right. Non-unionized employees, however, do not enjoy such a benefit. Their employer may treat non-unionized employees as "at will" employees, which means an employee may be terminated, at any time, for any reason not prohibited by law, or for no reason at all. "At will" employment makes job-taking risky and job retention fortuitous. It makes employees insecure because their employment is not protected. Vermont needs to attract more people of working and family-rearing age. Doing so is a state imperative. Providing job security that distinguishes Vermont from other states will make Vermont comparatively more attractive to employees. **Vermont-NEA believes the state should enact legislation that employers may only fire employees only if they have a good faith reason related to the employer's business and not trivial, arbitrary, or capricious reasons.**

On good cause employment, do you

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't Know

Do you wish to sponsor legislation on good cause employment?

- Yes
- No

Anything you want to add on good cause employment?
