

From the Board Room

A newsletter for members of the Vermont School Boards Association, 2 Prospect Street, Suite #4, Montpelier VT 05602
Phone: 1-800-244-VSBA or 802-223-3580 Fax: 802-223-0098

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Editor: David Cyprian

email: david@vtsba.org

Production Manager: Kerri Lamb

email: klamb@vtsba.org

Articles printed represent diverse points of view and may be controversial in nature. It is the belief of the Association that the democratic process functions best through discussions which challenge and stimulate thinking on the part of the reader. Therefore, materials published present the ideas/beliefs of those who write them and are not necessarily the views or policies of the VSBA unless so stated. This newsletter is distributed at no charge to all members of the Association. Contact the Association by calling 802-223-3580.

New VSBA Model Policies

Separate Board and Administrator Roles; "Gender Identity" Now Required in Anti-Harassment Policies

by John Nelson,
VSBA Executive Director

The VSBA has revised 24 of its model school board policies and posted them on the Association website. The revisions follow the first major review of the Association's model policies in over five years. The revised models share one common feature—a clear distinction between policy requirements adopted by boards and administrative procedures developed by superintendents and principals. The revised policies are posted on the VSBA website at <http://www.vtsba.org/policy/policy.htm>. School boards and administrators should also be aware of the addition of "gender identity" to the state's non-discrimination laws. As explained later in this article, the addition will require changes to the anti-harassment policies now in place in most school districts.

The policy revision work began over a year ago, and included a review of statutory requirements for school board policies and the revision of all policies found to be required by federal or state law. A significant addition to the model policies that were revised is the inclusion of endnotes in each policy. The endnotes will help boards and administrators understand why certain policy provisions are included in the models and will provide legal citations to the statutes

(MODEL continued on page 3)

Commissioner Presents School District Consolidation Plan: Rejects VSBA Recommendations

By Peter Herman,
VSBA President

As you may have heard, on December 1st Commissioner of Education Richard Cate issued his recommendations for school district reorganization, which is now clearly consolidation (reducing the number of school districts and boards in Vermont from 287 to as few as 50). These recommendations nominally came from the "conversation" held statewide over the past year, although it is common knowledge that attendees at these meetings were overwhelmingly opposed to mandated school district consolidation. This is the same reaction Vermonters have had for almost 100 years of recorded attempts at the state level to mandate consolidation.

The VSBA is well aware of the issues facing Vermont school districts, and is on record as favoring consolidations when local districts choose this option. At the same time we also understand that there are innumerable unanswered questions about the Commissioner's recommendations and considerable research outlining the pitfalls. Probably the best exposition of our concerns is a letter our Executive Director, John Nelson, sent to the Commissioner in November of this year. This was in response to a request from the Commissioner for the VSBA viewpoint, and is eloquent, thorough, and compelling. John has summarized the much longer document for this issue of *From the Board Room*. Rather than excerpt from his work, I

(PLAN continued on page 2)

will let it speak for itself. School board members who want the complete letter will find it on our website (www.vtvsba.org).

Excerpts from VSBA's Letter to the Commissioner

Beginning in 2000, this Association made its participation in governance reform activities one of its stated priorities. Since 2000, we have worked on-site with 88 school districts in 19 supervisory unions as they have engaged in community processes to study the question of whether school district consolidation would be beneficial to those communities. It is important to note that in each instance the driving force behind the initiative to study consolidation has been one or more local school boards. Few of the initiatives launched in the past seven years have resulted in community acceptance of proposals to consolidate school districts. Our experience has been that communities value their school districts and are willing to tolerate certain "inefficiencies" in order to retain the authority to make fundamental decisions about their schools.

Even without the capacity to do extensive research, we have had little trouble finding research studies that call into question the often-assumed benefits of school consolidation. Among the findings were:

◆A Pennsylvania study sponsored by the Fordham Foundation arrived at this conclusion. "If the history of public education tells us anything, district consolidations, and the inevitable school consolidations that follow, are generally both bad ideas. In the short run, consolidation promises lower costs and taxes and better student performance. But neither happens. Over the longer haul, consolidation sucks power upward, and away from parents, students and local conditions, to centralized political arrangements where unions and other special interests have more political clout."¹

◆An analysis of the results of school

district consolidation in several states arrived at this conclusion. "In summary: the educational and financial results of state mandated school district consolidations do not meet legislated expectations; there is no 'ideal' size for school districts; smaller districts have higher achievement, affective and social outcomes; there is no solid foundation for the belief that eliminating school districts will improve education, enhance cost-effectiveness or promote equality; and students from low income areas have better achievement in small schools."²

"The educational and financial results ... do not meet legislated expectations"

◆A very recent analysis of school district consolidation in Indiana focused on student achievement and school performance. "The research suggests that the factors which affect student achievement to the greatest extent appear to include the following characteristics: smaller school size; smaller class size, primarily at elementary schools; a challenging curriculum; and highly qualified teachers in every classroom."³

◆A very recent analysis of school district consolidation in Indiana focused on student achievement and school performance. "The research suggests that the factors which affect student achievement to the greatest extent appear to include the following characteristics: smaller school size; smaller class size, primarily at elementary schools; a challenging curriculum; and highly qualified teachers in every classroom."³

VSBA recommendations

1. **Decisions to consolidate school districts should be made locally**, by the voters in the school districts to be affected by the consolidation.

◆Bruce Richardson's doctoral dissertation of 1994 is still recognized as the most comprehensive look at the history of governance reform efforts in Vermont. Richardson concludes his dissertation with one clear recommendation: governance changes must be preceded by the involvement of local citizens and can not succeed if mandated from the top down.

◆At the annual conference of the Vermont Superintendents Association and the VSBA last month, Dr. Jerry Johnson summarized his work on this issue by saying, "It is absolutely essential that any consolidation of school districts be the product

of local democratic processes. If it isn't, in my observation, drawn from my research in several states, is that it will do considerable harm."

2. **Make the processes for forming union and unified school districts more accessible** by clarifying and simplifying the statutory requirements.

3. **Provide Incentives** to Encourage Local Consideration of Governance Change Proposals.

◆ We have yet to see a district vote in favor of consolidation when they will "lose" financially from the consolidation.

◆ We believe a phase-in period whereby new tax rates are adjusted gradually, over a three to five year period, would be a meaningful incentive for those districts.

4. Address the Clarification of School Board/Administrator/Electorate Roles and Responsibilities to **Distinguish Between Management and Policy Functions**.

◆ We believe this recommendation can be achieved in part by action on the part of the legislature and in part by local activities.

◆ We recommend that the State Board and the Commissioner's office support a thorough review of relevant statutes in the next legislative session with the objective being to eliminate vague or conflicting sections of the law.

◆ We also recommend the State Board and the Commissioner's office support a legislative appropriation to fund the Vermont Education Leadership Alliance process in more districts, which works to clarify the roles of the school boards, electorates and school administrators.

¹ Wanders, John T. Why School Consolidation is a Bad Idea for Pennsylvania, *The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation*, April 10, 2003

² Bard, Joe et al, Rural School Consolidation Report, *Research Summary for National Rural Education Association*, April 2005.

³ Plucker, Jonathan A. et al, Assessing the Policy Environment for School Corporation Collaboration, Cooperation and Consolidation in Indiana, *Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University*, Summer 2007. 🚌

or regulations that dictate the scope of each policy.

The most noteworthy feature of the new models is their delineation of the policy role of boards and the management role of administrators. The new models include only policy statements either required by law or necessary to fulfill the board's role of determining the "what's" in specific areas while leaving the "how's" in those areas to be determined through administrative rules or procedures. This delineation is consistent with the distinctions made in Vermont law. Section 563(1) of Title 16 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated charges boards with determining "...the educational policies of the school district." Section 563(1) further requires that board policies "...be of general application to the district," and allows (but does not require) boards to "...approve or disapprove rules and regulations proposed by the principal or superintendent for the conduct and management of public schools in the district." Because the revised VSBA model


policies do not include procedural requirements, it will be necessary in most cases for administrators to develop procedures to accompany the policies. In several cases, the revised policies are accompanied by sample procedures to assist in this work. In other cases, sample procedures will be posted on the VSBA website as they are developed in the future.

It is important to note that it is not necessary to make changes to existing policies solely because revised models have been developed. The revised policies are intended to be used as boards review their existing policies in the normal course of their business.

One exception to this general rule is in the area of anti-harassment policies. The legislature added the classification of "gender identity" to the list of protected classes for harassment and non-discrimination purposes in 2007. Gender identity has been defined by the State as, "an individual's actual or perceived gender identity, or gender-related characteristics intrinsically related to an

individual's gender or gender-identity, regardless of the individual's assigned sex at birth."

A new model policy on student harassment has been developed by the Department of Education, and is posted on the Department and VSBA websites. The anti-harassment law requires that school policies on harassment be "at least as stringent as model policies developed by the Commissioner." The VSBA therefore recommends adoption of the anti-harassment policy developed by the Department of Education, even though that policy includes several changes to the Department's previous model that go beyond the mere inclusion of the new gender identity classification. School district anti-harassment policies must include gender identity as one of the protected classifications by August 1, 2009.

As always, questions about any of the VSBA model policies can be discussed with the VSBA staff by calling our office at 802-223-3580 or by emailing us at jnelson@vtvsbva.org. 

Passing Your School Budget Workshop

By Winton Goodrich, VSBA Associate Director

As your school budget nears completion and you begin to see the immense impact that rising fuel costs, special education, and health insurance will have on 2008-09 school operations, it's time to prepare your budget passage strategies for the annual school district meeting. To assist you, the VSBA staff has scheduled a "**Passing Your School Budget**" workshop on **January 7th, 6:30 to 8:30 PM on Vermont Interactive Television**.

Presenters will also address the future impact this budget will have on next year's response to Act 82 "Think Twice" legislation.

This event will be aired on 15 VT Interactive Television sites and will also be available on DVD following the workshop.

Workshop Goals:

- Communicate current statewide budget data;
- Identify key finance and tax components;
- Learn strategies for making school performance indicators and budget information understandable for voters;
- Refine your budget presentation skills and tactics;

The workshop will be available on DVD after January 14.

**Register today on the VSBA web site at www.vtvsba.org or call 800-244-8722
Cost \$35.00/supervisory union (billed to SU)**

VSBA Governmental Relations Network More Important Than Ever:

A Message from John Nelson, Executive Director

As I have said many times when speaking with VSBA members this summer and fall, I believe Act 82 is a startling indication that the quality of Vermont's public schools is, for the first time in my 35 year experience in the field of education in Vermont, in real danger of being compromised in the interest of state-level partisan politics. The VSBA must be prepared to make itself heard on behalf of Vermont's students and communities in the immediate future. If we are not able to meet this challenge, I fear that we will become observers of the slow dismantling of one of the nation's most successful public education systems.

The legislative session that will convene in January is certain to give serious consideration to proposals that could have long lasting effects on our public education system. Among the topics we expect to be on the legislative agenda in January are these:

- ◆should the state mandate the consolidation of school districts, reducing the current number of districts and boards to as few as 50;
- ◆should supervisory union budgets be subject to voter approval;
- ◆should the moratorium on state support for school construction projects be continued; and
- ◆should Act 82's two-vote requirements be expanded to include more school districts than those



currently spending above the state per pupil average?

Whether or not you support mandated school district consolidation, supervisory union budget votes, construction aid cutbacks or "think twice" budget votes, I think you will agree that these are all subjects that simply can not be considered without the active involvement of school boards. The question we face is how to ensure that school boards are heard (and their views respected) by state policy makers in both the executive and legislative branches of state government.

For the past four years, we have used our Governmental Relations Network—or "GRN"—as our primary means of communicating with board members during legislative sessions. Members of the GRN receive regular legislative bulletins and updates during the session, and are occasionally asked to make contacts with their local legislators on specific legislative issues. We have found the GRN to be effective. For the most part, GRN members have told us that they appreciate the information they get from us, and they find that it helps them to be prepared for discussions with their legislative representatives.

In the past, we have asked each board to appoint one member as its GRN representative. While this process has yielded a core of 60 or so GRN participants, it has fallen short of meeting our need to have a designated contact on EVERY board in the state. This year we have therefore decided to change the way we identify GRN members. We are still asking each board to identify one or more its members as GRN representatives. **Until we hear from boards with the names and email addresses of their designees, however, we will assume that the board chair will be each board's GRN representative.** We will also willingly add to our GRN list the name of any board member,

whether or not he or she has been designated by his or her board as its "official" representative. This will allow us to communicate with all of the school boards in the state as soon as the legislature returns to Montpelier in January.

I can assure you that we will not fill GRN members' email boxes with unnecessary messages. Depending on how the legislative session progresses, a GRN member might receive one email message a week, usually with updates on the issues being discussed in legislative committees and with information about upcoming hearings or related events. We only ask that GRN members keep their boards informed about the information they receive from us and that they let us know how they and their boards feel about various issues.

I know that you have a very difficult job as board members without the additional burden of involving yourself in state policy making. If I did not feel that this is absolutely necessary, I would not be sending this message. I can assure you that the VSBA Board of Directors and the VSBA staff will work tirelessly in the coming months to represent the interests of public education in Montpelier. I know that we can be successful, but experience has shown us that real success will depend on you and your fellow board members as well as those of us who work in Montpelier.

Registration for GRN membership is easy. Just go to this link on our website to let us know that you want to be on our GRN list: <http://www.vtvsba.org/legis/grn.html>. If you can not access our webpage, simply call our office and ask to be added to the GRN list. If you have questions about the GRN or any of VSBA's advocacy activities, feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 802-223-3580 and by email at jnelson@vtvsba.org. 🚌

School Bus Surveillance Video Can Become Evidence in Court


The Washington State Supreme Court has ruled that a videotape from a school bus surveillance camera is subject to public disclosure under state law because it does not fall within the student file exemption. When an altercation between two elementary students was recorded by a bus surveillance camera, the parents of one of the students requested a copy of the videotape. Kelso School District No. 458 (KSD) denied the request on the ground the videotape was exempt from public disclosure. The parents sued in state court, alleging the denial violated Washington's Public Disclosure Act (PDA). The trial court held that the videotape was exempt from disclosure under the PDA, finding that the tape "contains information that would allow a viewer to identify a student" and "was maintained by the district for potential discipline." The state's intermediate court of appeals affirmed.

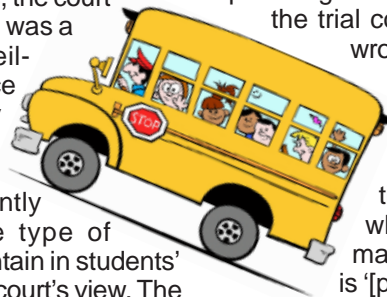
In reversing, the state supreme court narrowly construed the PDA



exemption for "[p]ersonal information in any files maintained for students in public schools, patients or clients of public institutions or public health agencies, or welfare recipients." By exempting only information that is both "personal" and "maintained for students," the PDA contemplates protection of materials in a student's permanent file, such as grades, standardized test scores, social security number, and other similar records, the court held. The videotape was a product of a surveillance system in place to maintain security and safety on school buses, making it significantly different from the type of record schools maintain in students' personal files in the court's view. The court emphasized that the placing the tape in a student's file does not transform it into a record maintained for students. KSD's argument also was undermined by the fact that it had allowed the parents to view the

videotape on the evening of the incident. Even assuming the videotape constituted "personal information" within the meaning of the PDA, KSD had failed to meet its burden of showing the videotape was "in any files maintained for students."

In a brief concurring opinion one justice indicated he would have found that footage of a fight on a crowded bus is not protected "personal information" at all, but "public or general" information. Another opinion agreed with the majority that the trial court had applied the wrong legal standard but argued that the case should be remanded to the trial court for "determination of whether, and to what extent, the information in the videotape is '[p]ersonal information' that is 'in any files maintained for students' and thus exempt under the student file exemption." 



Excerpted from National School Boards Assn. News Clips

The Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC) Project

By Mark Sustic

Editor's note: The following article is being printed at the request of the writer. With the passage of the Pre-Kindergarten law, Act 62 of 2007, Mr. Sustic's work with the Preschool Collaborative described below will be of interest to school districts that are considering utilizing existing preschool providers in programs for three and four year olds.

The primary purpose of the VCPC project is to provide support and resources to communities in Vermont so that public schools, childcare providers and others can collaborate on establishing and sustaining high quality learning experiences for three and four year olds that qualify

for public education funding. We hope that the project will help communities move toward achieving a universally available, voluntary system of high quality experiences for three and four year olds that qualify for public education reimbursement, and that it will be part of a comprehensive system of high quality opportunities for all children, birth to school age.

Funding and Management

The project is supported by several philanthropists and funding partners through the Vermont Community Foundation. I work as a consultant

for the Vermont Community Foundation and as director of the project. I also work with a 'Kitchen Cabinet' that functions as a combination advisory/management group, consisting of financial supporters and staff from the Vermont Community Foundation. The project also has an advisory group consisting of legislators (past and present), state government leaders (past and present), pediatricians, parents of preschoolers, and others. A variety of other potential financial backers are interested in supporting future projects,

(PRESCHOOL continued on page 10)

VSBA Around Vermont

By: Winton Goodrich, VSBA Associate Director



Laura Soares,
VSBA Field Consultant

The VSBA is happy to report that Laura Soares, former VSBA Board president and current Randolph Elementary Board chair, has been hired to provide additional consulting and field services to districts around the state. Laura brings a great deal of skill, experience, and creativity in clarifying leadership roles and responsibilities, implementing Policy Governance systems, and facilitating general board development activities for the VSBA.

Welcome aboard, Laura.

Governance Initiatives

The VSBA has submitted a governance study proposal to the Windsor Northwest SU for funding consideration. The SU is exploring options for dealing with the impact of declining enrollment and increasing costs in the Bethel, Rochester, Pittsfield, Granville and Hancock School Districts.

I continue to facilitate a phase I governance study in the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union. This study is looking facility and program issues for the Whitingham, Wilmington, and Halifax School Districts.

We have contracted with Laura Soares to help facilitate a governance study with Underhill, Underhill I.D., and Jericho School Districts.

I facilitated a Peacham community forum as they consider the future of their small school.

Policy Governance

Laura is facilitating a Policy Governance implementation process with the Hartford School District and has been providing follow-up Policy Governance support for the Washington South SU.

From the Board Room spoke recently with Orleans Southwest co-Superintendent **Dave Ford** about how PG has worked in Hazen Union High School, where it was implemented over the last several years. He told us, "Policy Governance has worked to build organizational trust. It sharpens the focus of the school board to meet the direction of the school, with zero micromanagement and high board satisfaction. We had no board turnover in the most recent election." Ford also pointed out that other boards within his supervisory union are now considering adopting PG for their own district.

PG is a specific system of accountability between the superintendent and the board designed to avoid leadership conflicts. For more information on how PG can help clarify roles and responsibilities between the school board, school administrators, and the electorate in your district, contact the VSBA (223-3580).

Superintendent Searches

The VSBA has contracted with Southwest Vermont, Washington West, and Franklin Central Supervisory Unions to begin superintendent searches.

The average superintendent salary this year is \$101,000. Vermont finally broke the six-figure mark.

Strategic Planning

I met with the Barnet School Board and submitted a proposal to train a cadre of facilitators from the Caledonia Central SU who will in turn be prepared to facilitate strategic planning processes in their respective districts.

VSBA/VSA Annual Conference

We will be compiling conference evaluation data on the conference later this month.



Winton Goodrich,
VSBA Associate Director

Attendance Numbers:

- ◆ Thurs. – 100 board members and 75 administrators
- ◆ Friday – 119 board members and 74 superintendents
- ◆ Total overall board member attendance – 121

Superintendent Evaluation DVD

The new superintendent evaluation DVD has just been completed and is ready for sale to school leaders. Board members who contributed time and expertise to the board development DVD are June Rosenberg – North Country UHS, Jane Low – Mt. Abraham UHS, and Laura Soares – Randolph Elementary; superintendents, Bob McNamara - Washington West and John Everitt - South Burlington, presented administrator's views on CEO evaluation in this timely electronic resource. Order your copy today from the VSBA web site at www.vtvsba.org

I presented a superintendent evaluation and board self-assessment workshop to the Windsor Southwest SU Board on December 4th. This workshop is a follow-up component included as part of all VSBA superintendent search contracts.

Field Work

I worked with the following boards on roles and responsibilities: Canaan, Miller's Run, Lake Region, Irasburg, North Country UHS. 🚌

Herman Urges Vocal Role for School Boards

Editor's Note: Our profile series on members of the VSBA Board of Directors continues with current President Peter Herman. On this issue's cover is a message from Peter regarding Commissioner of Education Richard Cate's recently released report on governance change and school district consolidation.

Peter Herman was raised in Mamaroneck, New York, the first of two children. His father was a building contractor and his mother worked part time as a nurse. He attended local public schools before attending Dartmouth College, where he graduated in 1958 with a degree in geology. He continued his studies at Montana State College before serving five years in the US Navy where he was stationed on a destroyer.

Following his service, Herman moved back to the New York City area where he worked with his father as a contractor. He also pursued a doctoral degree in regional planning, a career that Herman believed would offer him a greater chance to make a difference in people's lives. It was during this time

that Herman first bought property in Vermont, a camp in West Fairlee. He had remembered the northern New England fondly from his days at Dartmouth, and the camp allowed him an outdoorsy escape from the city.

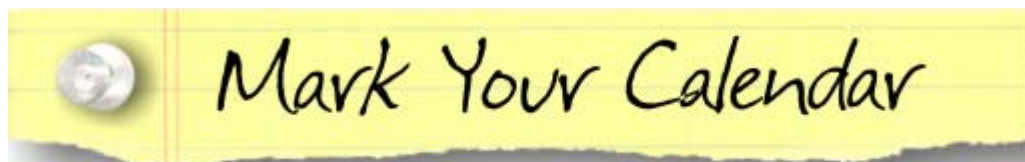
By 1971, Herman had completed his doctoral studies and decided to make a more permanent exodus from New York, buying a farm in Waits River. The Vermont State Budget Office offered him a job and he moved to Montpelier that year. He worked in the Budget Office for seven years, eventually being promoted to Director of Budget Operations, and afterward went on to serve as staff for the Vermont Assembly's House Appropriations Committee.

In the mid-1980s, Herman took a management consulting position for the Arthur D. Little company in Boston. His role with ADL included organizational development and strategic planning for a diverse range of clients. Herman specialized in planning projects that incorporated opportunities for higher education into economic development in developing countries. His position allowed

him to both travel widely and continue living in his Waits River home-

Herman first served on a school board in 1996 when he was elected to the Waits River Valley board. He later served on the Orange East Supervisory Union board, and he currently serves on the board of Thetford Academy. After several years on the VSBA's Board of Directors, Herman was elected Association President last month. Since joining the Board, Herman has observed the challenges that local school boards face all over Vermont, and his experience has reinforced his belief in public education and its importance to our society. As President, Herman would like to emphasize the VSBA's role a vocal supporter of public education. In a speech to members last month, he expressed concern with the state of educational policymaking in Vermont and remarked that, "We need to mobilize school boards and individual members, and I intend to make that priority number one."

Now retired, Herman lives in Waits River with his wife, Sheila. Their two grown children, Kristin and Nicholas, live in neighboring states. 🚗



State Board of Education Meetings

For more information call Carol King at 802-828-5101 or email carol.c.king@state.vt.us

- ◆ **1/15/08** - The meeting will take place at the Capitol Plaza 9:00-4:00
- ◆ **2/19/08** - The meeting will take place at the Capitol Plaza 9:00-4:00.

VSBA Professional Development Opportunities

- ◆ **01/07/08** - Passing Your School Budget workshop on VIT statewide
- ◆ **02/06/08** - Improving Board Operations workshop on VIT statewide
- ◆ **03/10/08** -Board Member Swap Shop workshop on VIT statewide
- ◆ **04/16/08** -Governance Options and Enrollment Projection workshop on VIT statewide
- ◆ **05/05/08** -The School Board Chairperson workshop on VIT statewide

You may register for any of these workshops or order the DVD at www.vtvsba.org or 800-244-8722.

NOTES from your representation to the STATEWIDE CALENDAR COMMITTEE...

By June Rosenberg, Member, North Country UHS Board

As we headed into a statewide Vermont Interactive Television (VIT) School Calendar Committee Public Engagement Forum on Wednesday November 28th, we were prepared to actively listen to as many stakeholders as may turn out. Participation, however, was scant with one person at Rutland, one person at Springfield, two at Newport, and perhaps a half dozen at Waterbury. Funny how that works as the dialogue, nevertheless, was very meaningful and lasted until 8 pm. On Thursday November 29th, the School Calendar Committee met to review all the feedback received from stakeholders at the meetings in Newport, Essex Junction, Bennington, Springfield, Montpelier, and at the VIT sites, as well as a multitude of email and written communication that was sent to Carol King at the Department of Education. Up to this point we have heard from almost 150 folks in person, as attendance at these forums ranged from 10 to 60+ stakeholders. Newport drew the largest turnout, and was notable for a detailed presentation with questions from the North Country Union High School Student Council.

Most meetings saw superintendents, educators, school support staff, school board members, parents, and community members employed by the ski industry, each presenting a different and important perspective to be considered. Several legislators turned out at each forum to hear comments, and at the Essex site, Tom James, Chair of the State Board of Education was in attendance to listen. We are all working together on this issue. The chair of the Senate Education Committee and the chair of the House Education Committee turned out at Waterbury and Newport, respectively, as

did some committee members, which was valuable to the dialogue.

The difficult job now, however, is to reflect on all the feedback and to formulate a single proposed calendar to be submitted to the Vermont State Board of Education for review, and hopefully approval. The legislation gives the State Board the power to accept or reject a calendar, but not to modify it. If the calendar is rejected, the School Calendar Committee will need to “go back to the drawing board.”

This public engagement process was to seek comments and recommendations required by the recent passage of law requiring a statewide school year calendar. Act 31 of the 2007 General Assembly requires the development of a statewide student attendance calendar to be acted upon by the State Board of Education by January 30, 2008.

The committee was specifically charged with soliciting “comments, and recommendations concerning common periods of uninterrupted student attendance days, common

v a c a t i o n
s c h e d u l e s
and holidays, common in-service days, and common periods for student assessment,” and developing a uniform statewide calendar to be adopted by the Vermont State Board of

Education by January 30th of each year, and announced no later than March 31st of each year.

Comments were broad and varied, but most were concerned with why this legislation exists, why districts couldn't continue with calendars viewed as appropriate to the district, what the waiver process may be, how snow and early release days will impact the required 5.5 hour day, shared calendars and shared resources, options for vacation weeks, the common start day, statewide professional development days, high school testing days, other needs for holidays or breaks from school, changing the vacation times of those who live/work along Vermont's borders, changing the vacation times for those who live by or work at Vermont's ski areas, and recommending that the committee simply refuse to propose a calendar due to all the negative input received about a statewide calendar.



CVU Student Jon Bateman participates in calendar discussion




Statewide Calendar Committee discussion

(CALENDAR continued on page 9...)

(CALENDAR continued from page 7...)

The next Statewide Calendar Committee meeting will be scheduled during the second week of December, with the hope of reaching consensus regarding a proposed calendar. There has been discussion regarding options suggested by various stakeholders, but thus far, no action has been taken.

Chaired by Brian O'Regan, Deputy Commissioner of Education, the Committee is composed of two representatives each from the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals Association, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont National Education Association, the Vermont business community, the Vermont Association of Career and Technical Center Directors, the high school student body of the state, and the Department of Education. Some of the meetings have also been attended by the executive directors of the VSBA, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the Vermont Ski Areas Association, who are not representatives to the Committee but have willingly shared their perspectives and experiences. Your representatives from the VSBA are Ken Fredette of Wallingford, and me, June Rosenberg of Westfield (Montgomery Center address). We have been actively representing the interests of the VSBA, and are happy to answer any questions.


In addition, the Department of Education has posted extensive information at http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/school_calendar.html 

Education Week Profiles Effects of Technology on Sexual Misconduct in Schools

The national newspaper *Education Week* (edweek.org) published a story last month that investigated how technology has affected incidences of inappropriate sexual misconduct in schools. The article explains that widespread use of cell phones, text and picture messaging, and social networking websites like MySpace has enabled potential child predators and sexual abusers to contact children directly in ways unimaginable even a few years ago. A state education official in Texas explained this phenomenon to the newspaper. "Suddenly an educator has all the opportunity in the world to have direct contact with a student outside the school setting," said Doug Phillips. "They don't have to call the home directly anymore and

hang up when the parent answers. They can just send the kid a text message."

The article highlighted the recent sexual misconduct allegations brought against Bradford teacher Richard A. Foster. *Education Week* explained that in this case, as in many others, text and picture messages that allegedly were sent between the accused and the victim will now be introduced as evidence in court proceedings. The full article is available at the web address below. You must register online for free with *Education Week* to view the text.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/11/28/13webabuse.h27.html?print=1> 


Premium Increase

by Joe Zimmerman, Vermont School Board Insurance Trust Director

On December 4, VEHI announced that health insurance premium contributions would not increase beyond a certain percentage. This is the seventh year that VEHI has made such an announcement in an effort to help school districts in the preliminary stage of budget development.

VEHI announced that the premium increase for 2008-09 will not exceed 7% for active school district employees. This number is derived chiefly from an analysis of claims' data available in November. During December, VEHI will review additional claims and trend data to determine the actual rate increase for the year beginning July 1, 2008.

VEHI will announce the actual premium rates for the 2008-09 school year during the first week of January, 2008.

VEHI is also pleased to report that *U.S. News and World Report* ranked **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont** among the top 50 health plans in the United States in 2007. BCBS-VT ranked 32nd in a field of 250 commercial health plans that submitted data from consumer surveys and on performance measures related to disease prevention and treatment. 

VSBIT Corner

and more partners will allow us to expand the number of funded projects and the technical assistance offered.

Projects

At this point there are 13 VCPC funded projects in their first or second years of funding, and three projects finished a two-year cycle in September (Bennington, Highgate and Manchester). Five projects were approved over the summer and are in their first year (Lyndonville, Newfane, Rutland, St. Johnsbury and Wallingford). Six projects are in their second year of funding (Brattleboro, Cavendish, Grand Isle, Middlebury, Vergennes and Westminster), and two projects were newly approved this fall (Bridport and Dummerston). The funded projects are designed to ensure the strengthening and sustaining of partnerships between public schools and childcare providers.

Six additional communities are not currently being funded but are working on possibilities for VCPC start up projects within the coming year. The project currently also provides technical assistance to more than 20 other communities around the state. The non-funded projects are engaged in planning activities to help determine community's goals regarding young children, to assess assets, and to identify needs, with the possibility of project funding in the future.

Criteria

There are several criteria we look for when selecting projects for funding, and the general categories in which we provide technical assistance: leadership, partnerships, linkages and results. These are the critical elements we have come to believe are important in this work.

Leadership: There needs to be a designated coordinator/leader with early education expertise and credibility who will serve as the primary liaison and responsible person for early education, and who can participate in a 'community of practice' consisting of coordinators/leaders from other communities. Also there needs to be key leaders representing constituencies outside early education who are involved, and have endorsed and made commitments to focusing on early education.

Partnerships:

There should be agreements, letters of understanding, and/or other documents that articulate

relationships between the local public school and non-public school providers of early education services. There should be resources dedicated to early education from private and other non-government sources, not just the typical sources of support for early education.

Linkages: The local public school, including its board and administration, should have made commitments to using early education as a primary strategy in improving student achievement, have dedicated an amount of money at least equal to the ADM generated by preschoolers to services for preschoolers, and considered the re-dedication of some level of existing public education funds to early education. The community should be involved in working with the Vermont Department of Education and others on addressing issues related to endorsement of preschool teachers, early education linkages with curriculum and standards, and preschool program accreditation and quality standards. Early education should be a component of school action planning activities, and the

school should be engaging non-public school providers of early education services in the development of early education components of the school's action plan. The regional Early Childhood Council or its equivalent should be participating in discussion, making decisions, and keeping informed and updated.

Results: There should be a commitment to successful start up, implementation, and tangible results within a relatively short period of time. Children participating in preschool should be tracked throughout their public school careers to help determine the long-term impact of project activities. And there should be a commitment that some percentage of all three and four year olds will participate in a high quality preschool within a specific period of time.

Other Considerations

There needs to be enough people involved in planning to suggest a cross-section of the community/region and a variety of perspectives. Critical participants in these planning activities are childcare providers and public education representatives. If the project is focused on a single community, there should be some planning related to how efforts might be expanded to other communities. If the project is more regionally focused, there needs to be some planning about where to start first, and what the plan is for expanding from there. Communities also need to have a long-term commitment and plan for sustaining their efforts beyond initial planning or funding from something like the VCPC project.

We are seeking additional high quality proposals. If you're interested in learning more, please contact Mark Sustic at mrksustic@together.net or 802-849-6968. 🚗