

From the Board Room

A newsletter for members of the Vermont School Boards Association, 2 Prospect Street, Suite #4, Montpelier VT 05602
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ISSUE #2007-07

November 2007

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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.

Association Members Vote to Support Repeal of Act 82

At the VSBA's annual Business Meeting on November 1st, members of the Association representing 43 boards voted to approve a resolution that calls for the repeal of Vermont's Act 82 in its entirety. Before being approved, the resolution was amended from an earlier draft that called specifically for the repeal of Section 5 of the Act, the two-vote provision. Association members felt that Act 82 as a whole was disrespectful towards school boards and that calling for the repeal of only Section 5 was an insufficient response to the legislation's passage.

Newly elected VSBA President Peter Herman of West Topsham supported the resolution and told *From the Boardroom*, "There are numerous flaws in Act 82, but the most significant objection we have heard from school board members is that it interferes with their ability to present their budgets to their communities in an understandable and objective way. The result will be that the voters in some districts will oppose budgets in the erroneous belief that are being asked to approve unnecessary spending."

Discontent with the law was evident during a meeting the following day with Senator Don Collins and Representative Janet Ancel, the respective chairs of the two legislative committees on education. During the meeting, board members and school officials from all corners of the state expressed their displeasure with the last minute Act 82 adoption

process, which allowed for no public comment prior to its enactment. The Legislators both acknowledged that the wording of the two-vote provision might be modified in the upcoming session, but Ancel noted that political support for the law itself remained strong within the legislative leadership.

President Herman voiced his displeasure with the current state of education policy making to attendees of the two-day VSBA/VSA Annual Conference. "We want and expect full support for local school leadership from the State Board and the Commissioner, and at least a fair hearing from the executive and the Legislature," he said. "We need to mobilize school boards and individual members, and I will make that priority number one."

Three other resolutions passed during the Business Meeting. One, sponsored by the VSBA Resolutions Committee, calls for the repeal of the school construction aid moratorium. A resolution proposed by the Wallingford board calling for the State to legalize executive session for boards to discuss security of school property was approved after considerable discussion. This is currently not an allowable reason for boards to enter executive session. The Association also approved a resolution sponsored by the Lamoille Union High School

(VOTE continued on page 2...)

board supporting the delivery of social and medical services in school when a district is fully reimbursed for its costs.

The Business Meeting was held during the VSBA/VSA's Annual Fall Conference at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Montpelier on November 1-2. Keynote speaker Alan November demonstrated how to use technology to build learning communities. Jerry Johnson of Eastern Kentucky University presented research showing academic and economic advantages resulting from rural educational settings.

Pictures from the conference can be found on the electronic version of the newsletter. Please visit www.vtsba.org, select newsletter and November 2007.

VSBA President Peter Herman's Speech to Conference Attendees

I am pleased that the education leadership from the Legislature and the State Board is here, but let me forego all the usual stuff about the importance of school boards, of public education, of citizen leadership, of preparing our kids for the 21st century - you all know that at least as well as I do - and speak a bit about what I hope to help VSBA accomplish in the next two years, or at least get started.

First, I'm sure we'd all agree that public schools could be better than they are and that we as school leaders could do a better job for our kids. And that maybe we could do it for less money as well if we got really creative. However please bear with me because I am very angry, partly because of substance, but more about the attitudes we experience in the state. I am tired of hearing from leadership at the state level (both branches and both major parties) that we are the education establishment, the source of

the state's financial problems, that we are unconcerned about the cost of education, that we are not to be trusted with the public purse, and that people in Montpelier, many of whom have no idea about what goes on in public schools and don't seem to care to learn, must protect Vermonters from us - and from themselves as well.

Vermonters are constantly bombarded by admonitions to vote down school budgets, vote out school directors, cut teaching staff, match the numbers in some other states while our students are demonstrating in national tests and by other means that we are not doing all that bad. We want and expect full support for local school leadership from the State Board and the Commissioner, and at least a fair hearing from the

executive and the Legislature. What we get is ignored at best and, more often, insulted. I intend to see that VSBA and all its members take this challenge on directly, fighting lies and half-truths with good information and a determination to let the public know what's really going on. So make no mistake - whatever your position on Act 68, Act 82, mandates from the legislature or your political philosophy, as school board members you are under attack. Per the Commissioner's remarks yesterday, we will urge the Governor and the Legislature to work with us to make Vermont schools truly excellent at a reasonable price, but if they want a fight, we'll oblige them. In order to do either effectively, we need to mobilize school boards and individual members, and I will make that priority number one.

Second, much is going on in a number of arenas, often led by your association, to improve our schools through reorganization, consolidation, better and more consistent leadership, and

increased collaboration. While I personally support many of these efforts and am involved with a number of them, I think we need to think more boldly about how education is delivered and what we expect from our kids as educated adults. This may mean dramatic changes in our schools and perhaps a complete makeover of some models that have served us well in the past but are not up to the challenges of the next decade, much less the next century. And in doing this we may well follow our students who are already learning and teaching in creative ways that we and

our schools have not yet caught up with. I don't know what this will or should look like, but I will urge VSBA to sponsor conversations involving all interested parties on these topics and to support innovative approaches in our local schools.

This may also mean that the Legislature and the Dept of Education may have to relax their grip and let local school districts experiment broadly.

Finally, we as school board members must be careful not to become roadblocks to progress, even when it threatens our current operations or our current role. Too often it seems that ideas are thrown against the wall and whatever sticks becomes law or regulation. We have a obligation to hold the feet of those who propose change to the fire, but also to respond objectively to these proposals, supporting them where they help us achieve our primary goal, effective learning by our kids.

As always, the challenges are great and we will be calling more than ever on you as VSBA members and as citizens committed to first-rate education to put your time and effort into activities that improve public education. Thank you.



Herman's two-year term as Association President commenced this month.



Reflections on the "Think Twice" Provisions of Act 82

Prepared by

*the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont School Boards Association
and the Vermont Principals Association*

- 1) The law usurps the authority of school boards to propose budgets reflecting the needs of their communities in formats understandable to voters.
- 2) The required ballot wording for the two votes is prejudicial and misleading. To require a vote first on a "total budget" and then on "additional spending" unfairly presents the budget and will invite voters to unreasonably question the true fiscal needs of the district.
- 3) The law unfairly affects average-spending districts that require one-time greater budget increases, even if the district has a history of lesser budget increases.
- 4) The Act's spending "benchmarks" will confuse the local budget process. School boards will be pressured to "budget to the benchmark" even though benchmarks are blind to the origin of costs such as transportation, tuition and special education.
- 5) Act 82 is the product of political expediency. It was pushed through the legislative process by means of a suspension of legislative rules and the "think twice" provisions were not presented at any time for public scrutiny or comment.
- 6) Act 82 is misguided. Over the last decade, the General Assembly has passed more than 80 new laws affecting education, each one of which added more obligations to school operations and more costs to local school districts. Additionally, federal requirements have increased school costs significantly. The Legislature ignored these facts through the passage of Act 82.
- 7) Act 82 reinforces the erroneous assumption that school spending is the sole cause of increasing property taxes and supports the politically motivated message that Vermont has an extraordinarily high tax burden that is due solely to excessive school budgets.
- 8) Act 82 potentially circumvents local control in 19 Vermont cities and 12 Vermont incorporated school districts by superseding their charters.
- 9) Act 82 contradicts Vermont's obligation to equity in school funding by requiring more onerous voting procedures in some school districts. 🚌

Member to Member

Does your board have a situation that other boards have probably faced in the past or may be currently working through? Why not place a question on the bulletin board for one of the other 1,487 Vermont school board members to respond. The questions and answers are anonymous. The answer can help your board and may help others with the same issue.

New Questions: These are questions posed by fellow board members. If you have an answer please submit it.

- ◆ Our K-6 elementary school is beginning to conduct a search for a new principal. A neighboring K-6 elementary school is in the process of doing the same. We are part of the same supervisory union, yet two districts with different boards. We are considering hiring on principal and an assistant principal in some incarnation. Has this been done before? If so, did it work? Posted 11/09/07
- ◆ What do you see as the most reasonable answer to solving the SLP (speech language therapist) shortage question?
- ◆ We've just accepted the resignation of our principal. Has anyone ever gone through the process of hiring another principal? Who and how many people were on the interview committee you had?

See the answers or contribute answers at www.vtvsba.org (select Member to Member link)

Calitri Stepping Down After a Career in Public Education



Two-term VSBA president Junius Calitri stepped down from his post at the end of last month. President-elect Peter Herman took over the reins in November. *From the Board Room* profiled Calitri for the

first piece in a series on members of the Board of Directors. Did you know “Juni” started with the VSBA long before he served on his first school board?

Calitri was born in New York City and raised in the Bronx, the second of four children. Both his parents were educators. His father also pursued a successful writing career. He attended public schools in New York, graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School. Though he describes himself as having been an average student, he soon discovered a pursuit that became a lifelong passion—competitive swimming.

While in school, Calitri swam often and avidly. He won city- and state-wide championships specializing in freestyle, and continued to excel in the pool long after graduating. He attended New York Uni-

versity from 1935-39 during which time he won a junior national title, and after school won the Lifeguard Championship for the City of New York. Calitri kept on swimming, entering competitions through the 1980s.

After his year as a lifeguard, Calitri served as a chief grounds instructor for Army Air Force pilots for a year during World War II, and afterward he followed his parents into teaching. Much of his career was spent at the Putnam Valley Central School across the river from West Point, New York, where he taught for ten years before being hired as the district administrator. He was their administrator for fourteen years and then went to the town of Garrison as the CEO for six more years and it was during this time he formed his first connections to the Vermont School Boards Association.

Former VSBA director Charlie Nickels hired Calitri as a labor relations consultant for school boards, first on a part time basis, but by 1977-78, Calitri had moved to Vermont and was negotiating full-time. Although now retired, Calitri has stayed involved in labor relations and helped to negoti-

ate the first joint teachers contract for Addison Central Supervisory Union five years ago.

Calitri continued to support public education when he began serving on local school boards in the mid-1990s and he joined the VSBA Board of Directors soon after. When asked what quality of a good school board member is most important, Calitri has a definite answer. “Board members must be aware that the job they have is to provide the best educational experience for the boys and girls in their school district.” He is concerned that with the constant fuss over school funding and paying for education these days, that a board’s ultimate responsibility, to the children, can be obscured or lost.

Calitri lives in Cornwall with his artist wife Klara, and they have three grown children. In retirement, he has served as the president of the Home Health Agency for Addison County, and as president of the Counseling Service of Addison County where he is still on the board. Recently he has been assisting Klara in hosting several shows in Vermont for her work, featuring ceramic and monotype pieces. 🚗

Parents of Children with Special Needs Need Not Try Public School First

Editors note: This ruling was a 4-4 affirmation, which allows the ruling of the 2nd circuit court stand in the 2nd circuit only, including Vermont.

The U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed a federal appellate decision allowing the father of a learning-disabled child to seek private school tuition reimbursement from New York City without first giving the city’s public school program a chance to meet the boy’s needs. Just nine days after hearing oral arguments in *Board of Education v. Tom F.*, 06-637, the Court

split 4-4, thereby affirming the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals’ finding in favor of Mr. F.—the boy’s father, former Viacom chief Tom Freston. In its two-sentence, per curiam opinion, the Court did not reveal the judges’ individual votes, stating only, “The judgment is affirmed by an equally divided Court. Justice Kennedy took no part in the decision of this case.” Per Court protocol, Kennedy did not reveal the reason for his recusal. The case centers on whether a 1997 amendment to the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires children to first receive “special education and related services” from a public agency before their families pursue reimbursement. Throughout the dispute, the parents’ supporters have argued that by forcing parents to enroll their special-needs children first in the city’s schools, New York would potentially subject the already challenged students to unnecessary disruptions. The city contended that it spent mil-

(Continued on page 7... SPECIAL)

Policy Governance: A New Model for School District Accountability

One of the most difficult, recurring concerns for school boards everywhere is how to improve and maximize the relationship between the board and district administration, especially the superintendent. There are numerous opportunities during the course of a school year where a board and its CEO may disagree or hold differing visions for their district. Accountability and leadership can be obscured or even lost when clear roles and responsibilities are ill defined or disputed. The school community suffers.

To help avoid these unfortunate circumstances, the Vermont School Boards Association has recently begun promoting Policy Governance (PG), a specific system of accountability between the superintendent and the board designed to avoid leadership conflicts. We have assembled an excellent PG facilitator team willing to assist individual districts in assessing whether their district would be a good match for the PG system, and helping to implement it if appropriate.

What follows is an introduction to the principles of Policy Governance from the chair of the Northfield School Board, whose district chose to implement PG this past year. To learn more about PG contact Winton Goodrich at the VSBA (223-3580), or watch for more PG discussion forthcoming in this newsletter.

Pumpkins & Policies

Debra Wick, Northfield School Board Chair

One of my personal – and long-standing – frustrations with school board work revolves around the tension between my desire to ensure improved academic results for our students and the pressure I feel to decide how exactly we will achieve those results. Though the desire for results and the pressure to create a method to reach the results may not appear to be mutually exclusive, the common practice of most school boards tells another

story, a story perhaps best illustrated with a parable.

Once upon a time there was a good and wise king who wanted, more than anything else, to give the very best to the people of his kingdom. One day he called his favorite squire to the castle and asked



him to plant a large patch of pumpkins because the people wanted them for pies.

The squire was known throughout the kingdom as an accomplished farmer who could grow anything. The king, even though he himself wasn't a very good gardener, told the squire exactly how he wanted the seeds planted and how they were to be weeded, watered, and tended. He told the squire how and when to fertilize and he even circled a date on the kingdom calendar when the pumpkins should be harvested. The king happily left the squire to do his work with a reminder that he would visit the patch at the end of the season to admire the pumpkins before they were picked.

Months went by and the squire did exactly as the king asked. Finally, the day came for the king's special visit. The king had been eagerly awaiting this day for many months, but sadly when he arrived at the

patch hoping to find golden pumpkins all ready for harvest he was terribly disappointed. Not only were the pumpkins too few, none of them were ready for harvest! Knowing that the squire was a master gardener the king asked in disbelief, "What happened?"

The dutiful squire explained that while the king's instructions were perfectly good for some crops and in some places, they did not work for growing pumpkins in the north end of the kingdom. The squire had known all along that the king's method for growing pumpkins would not work, but he did not dare disobey the king. If only the king, after finding out that the people wanted pumpkins, had simply told the squire what he wanted and how much he could spend – and then let the squire do what he did best – there would have been plenty of large, ripe, golden pumpkins for pie. The king learned his lesson and vowed never to make that mistake again.

Traditional school board practice is very much like our parable of the pumpkins. Boards often find themselves telling their administrators how to do their jobs instead of simply telling them what the community wants and how much they can spend. As a consequence of this ineffective practice, too much time is spent discussing and working on things that neither reach the desired results nor involve the community in meaningful dialog.

To remedy this problem and refocus our board's attention on the results that matter most to our community, the Northfield School Board, during the month of June, has adopted a new decision-making style called Policy Governance.

Under Policy Governance, the Board adopts a broad set of results-oriented policies or "Ends" as we call them. Ends are based on the community's values about (1) the purpose of our schools, (2) who should benefit from our

(PUMPKINS... Continued on page 6)

schools, and (3) how much our schools should cost. The Board learns about the community's values in these three areas by scheduling meetings with various community groups, holding public discussions, and gathering input at regular board meetings.

With a better understanding of what the community wants, the Board is ready to hold the Superintendent accountable for achieving the results that support the community's values. The Superintendent must achieve the results within the boundaries or limitations set by the Board.

The School Board's new policies will define four decision-making areas:

- 1. Results or Ends** – What the community desires for student results.
- 2. Executive Limitations** – The boundaries or limits imposed on the Superintendent as he/she works to achieve the specified results or ends.
- 3. Governance Process** – How the Board holds itself accountable and how its members work together.
- 4. Board/Superintendent Relationship** – How the Board delegates to the Superintendent and how the Board evaluates the Superintendent's performance.

So what exactly does Policy Governance mean to the community? It means that more intentional opportunities will be created by the Board to gather the community's input. It means that the community will be more engaged in defining why our schools exist, who should benefit from our schools' existence, and how much our schools should cost. It means that the community will see a clearer link between academic achievement and fiscal responsibility. 🚗

Cheating Scandal and Resulting Criminal Charges Rankle NH Town

A school cheating scandal is dividing Hanover, New Hampshire, with some in the community saying criminal charges brought against the students involved are too harsh. Some 50 students at Hanover High School are suspected of either helping to use stolen keys to steal final exams in five subjects or receiving answers from the stolen exams. Rather than issuing suspensions or grade demotions, school officials notified police.

And after a seven-week investigation, the police prosecutor handling the case brought criminal charges against nine students. He recently notified their parents that if they chose to take the cases to trial, he could raise misdemeanor charges to felonies, which carry possible prison terms of 3 1/2 to seven years. Parents of the accused are furious and frantically trying to reduce charges to violations that carry no criminal penalties, penalties they say could harm their children's chances of attending college or securing employment.

The scandal has divided the community, with some residents laying blame squarely on the nine accused students—dubbed “the Notorious Nine”—while others have questioned whether the intense competitiveness of Hanover High forced students into positions of having to cheat. Some have also questioned the motives of police, suggesting they are using the incident to show that children of privilege—the parents of the accused include a physician, a business school professor, a hospital president, and a columnist at a local newspaper—are not above the law. “What I look at from my office ... is whether someone should be held accountable for their actions and whether charges are consistent with the charges of other kids their ages,” says prosecutor Christopher O'Connor.

County attorney Nancy Gray says the crimes the students allegedly committed are serious and deserve serious consequences. “The parents need to be reasonable,” she says. “This is technically a Class B felony offense. How can

you reduce that to a violation-level offense—which is for something like spitting on the sidewalk? Although you don't want to hammer them, you want them to know this is serious.” But parents of the accused say the charges are a draconian punishment for 17- and 18-year-olds. Particularly troubling, they say, is that the school turned the matter over to police; they say the incident should have been handled internally, where punishment would never have resulted in a criminal record.

School officials say they are planning to conduct an investigation of the cheating allegations but that the alleged breaking and entering and theft portion belongs in the hands of police. The school's investigation has been delayed by the nine students' attorneys, who have advised their clients not to speak to the school until the criminal charges are settled. The school last week sent a letter to parents of the students promising that anything they say about the alleged cheating and theft would not be relayed to the police. Superintendent Wayne Gersen says that once the school concludes its investigation, students found to be involved will face school sanctions, which could include three-day suspensions for taking part in the theft and a zero grade on any exam where stolen information was used. In addition, he says, school guidance counselors will make note of the cheating findings on the students' college applications.

In Hanover, efforts to stem cheating are underway. A committee of students, teachers, school board officials, and community members, with input from an ethicist, is discussing a reformulation of the cheating policy for Hanover High. A local church held a forum to discuss the moral implications of the scandal, while the school principal called a meeting for the senior class to discuss the impact on the school. 🚗

*Excerpted from
National School Boards Assn. News Clips*

School's Right to Censor Does Not Extend to *Guiles v. Marineau*

By Allen Gilbert

Legal cases have their own peculiar twists and turns, which make them very interesting to follow.

In one such curious twist, a student free speech case from Alaska that was lost before the U.S. Supreme Court likely helped to produce a "win" for a student free speech case that the ACLU-VT brought.

The student, Zachary Guiles of Williamstown, was vindicated, setting an important precedent for future student free speech cases.

Zach, a 13-year-old Williamstown Middle School student in 2004, wore a T-shirt critical of President Bush to school.

Zach was told that he couldn't wear the T-shirt unless he taped over certain parts — pictures of a martini glass, a marijuana cigarette, and cocaine. The pictures were allusions to Bush's alleged former substance abuse problems — which were also described in words on the T-shirt.

The school claimed the display of the pictures violated the school's dress policy, which prohibits all images of drugs, or drug paraphernalia, on student clothing.

After a trial in August 2004 in Burlington, U.S. District Court Judge William K. Sessions III ruled that Zach's free speech rights covered the written words on the T-shirt, even those words describing Bush's alleged drug problems. However, Sessions said, those rights did not cover the pictures on the T-shirt. The school's policy against drug im-

ages of any type allowed it to censor that part of the shirt.


The ACLU appealed the decision to the Second Circuit, which in August 2006 agreed Zach's free speech rights had been violated.

The school then applied to the U.S. Supreme Court for cert — asking the court, in other words, to take up the case on appeal. Fewer than one in 10 cases are granted cert.

The Supreme Court did not immediately deny cert. In fact, the court held on to *Guiles* for six months. Three days after the Alaska case (the infamous "Bong Hits for Jesus" case) was decided, though, cert for *Guiles* was denied. The court had been waiting to rule in *Morse v. Frederick* ("Bong Hits") before deciding what to do with *Guiles*.


Although the court's decision in *Morse v. Frederick* was viewed as a victory for a school's right of censorship, the decision was very narrow. The justices were careful to say it only applied to student comments advocating use of illegal drugs. They stated in clear terms that censorship may not extend to political comments made by students. That distinguished the case from *Guiles*.

Denial of cert in *Guiles* allowed the Second Circuit decision to stand. That decision is a strong, principled endorsement of student free speech rights in the tradition of the late-1960s *Tinker* case.

 *Editors note: Allen Gilbert is a member of the U-32 school board and the executive director of the Vermont chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.*

(SPECIAL...Continued from page 4)

lions of dollars each year reimbursing the private school tuition spent by parents who had not first given the city's public schools a chance, as required—the city argued—by federal law.

Leonard Koerner, who argued the city's case before the Supreme Court, noted in an interview that the issue may be further litigated. As a 4-4 affirmance, the decision has no precedential value outside of the 2nd Circuit. The decision leaves a split in authority with the 1st Circuit, where an appellate panel ruled that students must first avail themselves of the public school system before their parents seek reimbursement. If Justice Kennedy recused himself from the present case for a reason specifically related to Tom F., i.e., a connection with the city or a relationship with Mr. Freston, the Court may elect to revisit the issue and, essentially, allow Justice Kennedy to cast the deciding vote. A strong candidate has already presented itself to break the tie: Frank G. v. Hyde Park, a case decided by the 2nd Circuit simultaneously with Tom F. In Frank G., the appellate court came to an identical, if more intricate, holding. Analysts seeking to handicap a potential Supreme Court hearing of Frank G. can glean very little from last week's arguments in Tom F., which revealed little of how the 4-4 split may have divided. Chief Justice John Roberts questioned both sides vigorously. Perhaps the only justices to show their hands were Justice Antonin Scalia, who appeared to be sympathetic to the city's arguments, and Justice Samuel Alito, who appeared skeptical. 

*Excerpted from
National School Boards Assn. News Clips*

The
2007 Vermont
Education Law Book
will be shipped in
December.



Vermont Principals' Association

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Associate Executive Director

VPA AWARDS NOMINATION FORM

This is an opportunity for you to nominate a principal, assistant principal or technical director to be recognized statewide as an educational leader. Please take the time to complete the nomination of an outstanding school leader who may work in your local district or elsewhere. Recipients will be recognized at the VPA Leadership Academy Banquet.

The two national distinguished principal recipients will travel to Washington D.C. for an awards ceremony. Last year's national recipients were James Taffel of Barre City Elementary and Middle School and Amy Mellencamp of Burlington High School.

Please check Award

- National Elementary Distinguished Principal (Must be VPA & NAESP member)
- National Secondary Distinguished Principal (Must be VPA & NASSP member)
- John Winton National Middle Distinguished Principal (Must be VPA & NAESP or NASSP member)
- Robert F. Pierce Award – Secondary Principal (Must be a VPA member)
- Henry Giauque Memorial Award – Elementary Principal (Must be a VPA member)
- Outstanding Assistant Principal (Must be VPA & NASSP member)
- Technical Director of the Year (Must be a VPA member)

Information for Nominee

Name: _____

School: _____

Years there: _____ Total years in administration: _____

Please list the major accomplishments, which you feel qualify the nominee for an award (Feel free to attach materials)

Please list professional memberships and VPA committee work, if known:

Nominator

Name: _____ Phone# _____

School/District: _____

Relationship to nominee: _____ Superintendent _____ Board Member

_____ Teacher _____ Peer _____ other

I believe this nominee deserves consideration for the awards because of his/her service to his/her school, community and profession.

Nominator's Signature

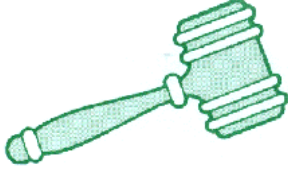
**Please return this form and at least two additional letters of support to
VPA, 2 Prospect St., Montpelier, VT 05602 by January 7th**

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Printer Friendly Version (Acrobat) October 2007, Issue 2007-7

TOP STORY

Check out *From the Board Room* Online - visit www.vtvsba.org, select newsletter then November 2007

The online version of this newsletter has a new and improved format! Its redesigned, user-friendly interface has all the same articles available in print along with more pictures, graphics, and links to additional information.

Sign up to receive the newsletter online and help us save on mailing costs. E-mail Mary Gilbert at mgilbert@vtvsba.org to register for online delivery (please send her your name, school district, and e-mail address).

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Washington County Schools Vary Widely on Breakfast Participation by Low-income

Public Opinion on NCLBA Worsening




Public awareness of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which requires standardized testing for all students and penalizes failing districts, is growing, and more people are viewing the law less favorably. So found the latest Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, conducted in June 2007, which focused on the public view of public education.

54% of respondents answered that they knew a great deal or fair amount about NCLB, up from 45% last year and 24% in 2003. 31% of respondents held a "very or somewhat favorable" opinion of

the law, about the same as last year, but 40% now say they have a "somewhat or very unfavorable" view. This is up 9 points from just last year, and up 27 points since 2003. In addition, more respondents are now likely place more blame for failing schools on NCLBA itself as opposed to the schools (49% vs. 43%). In 2006, more respondents were likely to blame the schools.

Schools place "too much emphasis" on achievement testing, a central tenant of NCLB, according to a plurality of respondents (43%, up from 31% in 2002). About 40% believe schools do "about the right amount" of testing. Among public school parents, 52% believe there is too much testing, 20 points higher than in 2002.

Perhaps troubling for school boards, PDK/Gallup found more respondents than in prior years willing to shift decision-making authority over K-12 schools from the local board to the state and federal level. In 1980, 68% believed the board should have "the greatest influence in what is taught", but that has dropped to 49% this year (9 points less than in 2006). 31% of respondents believe the state should have the greatest influence, and 20% believe this responsibility lies with the federal government.

The poll was administered to 1005 randomly selected adults nationwide, weighted to reflect the population, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 points. 

Source: National School Boards Assn.

Regional Meetings Wrap-up

September is regional meeting month at the VSBA, where executive director John Nelson and associate director Winton Goodrich hit the road to meet the regional groups and elect officers to the board of directors.

Pictures from the regional meetings can be found on the electronic version of the newsletter.

This year, John's presentation was focused on explaining the punitive aspects of Act 82 and the how authority over our schools if shifting from local decision-making to the state and federal level. His power point is available for viewing on the VSBA website: www.vtvsba.org.

Congratulations to our newly elected and returning members of the VSBA Board of Directors. The Board is comprised of 16 regional representatives listed below, and six statewide officers elected at the annual November conference.

VSBA Regional Officers for 2007-2008

Kristin Bristow
Addison President

Linda Waite-Simpson
Chittenden-Grand Isle President

Ginny Burley
Washington-Orange President

Jane Low
Addison Vice President

G. Miller
Chittenden/Grand Isle Vice President

Ann Howard
Washington-Orange Vice President

Ken Swierad
Bennington-Rutland President

Roy Eckler
Franklin-Lamoille President

Russell Capron
Windham President

Ed Hemmer
Bennington-Rutland Vice President

Lucy Ramsay
Franklin-Lamoille Vice President

Emily Long
Windham Vice President

Steve Mason
Caledonia-Essex-Orleans President

John File
Windsor President

June Rosenberg
Caledonia-Essex-Orleans Vice Pres.

Larry Kraft
Windsor Vice President

Accidents Waiting To Happen!


by Joe Zimmerman, Vermont School Board Insurance Trust Director

VSBIT Corner

The winter months are fast approaching and it will not be long before weather conditions will be making our lives just a little more complicated. For the next several months snow and ice will make for slippery school parking lots and side walks and be the cause of many accidents. Statistics concerning accidents, in general, suggest that 90% happen as a result of unsafe conditions.

Now is the perfect time to review plans for handling these unsafe conditions. Encourage all school employees to be aware of their surroundings and act accordingly. Employees

should also be encouraged to report all unsafe conditions to appropriate school personnel. Creating this awareness and reminding employees to do their part, may prevent some of those accidents that are "waiting to happen". Most of the workers compensation claims reported during the winter months involve slipping on ice, snow or wet floors. For the most part, these injuries are preventable. If you need assistance in developing a safety plan in your school district, contact the VSBIT office.

Remember, by simply increasing your employee's awareness concerning this issue, you will help to prevent an injury. 



State Board of Education Meetings

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

- ◆ **11/20/07** - the meeting will take place at the Capitol Plaza 8:30 am.
- ◆ **12/18/07** - the meeting will take place at the Capitol Plaza 8:30 am.

VSBA Professional Development Opportunities

- ◆ **12/12/07** Conducting Effective Board Hearings Workshop on VIT statewide
- ◆ **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

Conducting Effective Board Hearings December 12

It seems that school boards are having to perform their quasi-judicial role responding to major student suspension/expulsion or teacher non-renewal hearings. More than ever before, questions often arise, like when the board should hire an attorney. Should the superintendent also employ a different attorney? Many times the student and family or teacher will have their own attorney. What is the role of the board chair orchestrating this complex legal proceeding? How can hearings provide the legal balance between due process rights and maintain the fiduciary viability of the district?

Learn mechanics and strategies for running effective school board hearings, including student discipline, employee grievance, and employee dismissal hearings. Experienced board members, a superintendent and attorney will provide their prospective on this important board function.

The workshop will air on Vermont Interactive TV on Wednesday evening, December 12th, 6:30-8:30 PM and be available on DVD following the workshop. **The deadline for registration is December 5.**

Register online today at www.vtvsba.org or call 800-244-8722

Passing Your School Budget Workshop January 7

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. **The deadline for registration is January 1.**

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;

Register (or reserve a DVD) today on the VSBA web site at www.vtvsba.org or by calling 800-244-8722