

Zhao Headlines VSA / VSBA Conference



The 2009 fall conference, hosted jointly by the VSBA and the Vermont Superintendents Association, was a well-attended affair with a mix of education policy and finance topics. On the shore of Lake Morey, the main ballroom was packed for the keynote speakers during two crisp autumn days in October.

Keynote Speakers & Workshops

New Vermont State Colleges Chancellor Tim Donovan discussed the importance of partnerships between K-12 and higher education and detailed efforts the state colleges are undertaking to strengthen this connection, including college readiness courses and dual enrollment.

Commissioner of Education Armando Vilaseca addressed his priorities for the near term, which include continuing to look at public school governance structures and leading the Transformation of Education project into the implementation phase.

Leading educational researcher and Michigan State University professor Yong Zhao presented on his research into the perceived crisis in American public education. Drawing on his experience growing up in rural China, Zhao is particularly interested in the widespread belief that Asian nations like Japan, Singapore, and China are far ahead of the United States in science and math education. He questions the validity of this perception, first noting that oft-cited international math test scores correlated negatively with individual wealth, productivity and happiness, and then explaining how each of the supposedly advanced Asian education systems are revamping their curricula



to emphasize creativity and empathy, which are both strengths of American education. He also emphasized that the globalization phenomenon in business and culture must be translated to American education by broadening the geographic scope of curriculum across disciplines.

In the afternoons of both days, conference attendees broke out into workshop groups. Topics included the Race to the Top federal program, "Current Realities" in Vermont public education, the PATH wellness program for school employees, and *Shout It Out*, a documentary exploring the tribulations of Vermont high school students. Four faculty members from UVM's education department described project-based research partnerships existing or beginning in Vermont schools. The

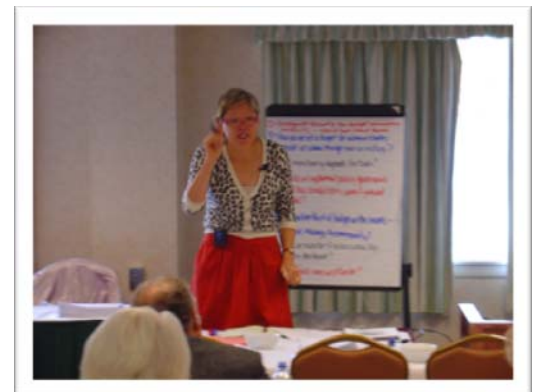


VSBA hosted workshops on board roles and responsibilities, and a series of workshops on the Policy Governance method of managing administrator-board relationships. The VSBA also hosted a workshop on current trends in labor relations with attorneys Joseph McNeil and Dennis Wells.

VSBA Business Meeting

At the VSBA's annual business meeting on October 15th, the following were elected officers of the Association:

- President: **Kalee Roberts**, Hyde Park
1st Vice President: **Ken Fredette**, Wallingford
2nd Vice President: **John Fike**, Reading
Treasurer: **Larry Kraft**, Springfield
Member at Large: **Mike Hebert**, Vernon & Brattleboro
Member at Large: **Junius Calitri**, Cornwall



The membership also approved changes and additions to the VSBA's Resolutions, which guide the work of the association. Perhaps the most important addition was an addendum to the resolution addressing the Teachers' Retirement System: If some or all of the future obligation of the teachers' retirement system is shifted to local school districts, that (1) the state shall remain obliged to fund the portion of the payment that is designated as an accrued liability, that (2) the composition of the Board of Trustees for the state teachers' retirement system be modified to include representation from local school districts, that (3) any increase in benefits conferred by the system be determined by representatives of persons who would be obliged to fund those increased benefits that, (4) any financial impact on the education fund caused by this shift should result in a one-time adjustment on the base education amount and an commensurate increase in the general fund shift percentage to the education fund, that (5) no fund shift occur without a full analysis of the legal implications of such a shift, especially to Act 60, Act 68, Act 82 and general tax law; as well as the retirement fund structure itself.