Cost Containment Talk Dominated the Pre-Session

Emily Simmons, Former VSBA Director of Legal and Policy Services

Every indication points to PreK-12 cost containment being the focus of yet another legislative session in 2018. Communications from the Scott administration this fall indicated that the governor will seek policies that adjust staffing ratios and additional cost containment measures to ensure property taxes do not increase in FY 2019.

In an October 4 memo, Secretary Holcombe urged school boards, business managers and superintendents to examine the staff to student ratios in their school districts. The Secretary included the Agency's data for every school district's student-to-teacher and student-to-staff ratios. Vermont's total student-to-teacher ratio is 10.55 to 1, making it the lowest in the county. Secretary Holcombe wrote that, "while Vermonters love our micro classrooms and low ratios, they are a very expensive way to educate our children."

CONTAINMENT continued on page 2

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It is likely that the Agency's ratio data will be the basis of a conversation in the General Assembly this session. Secretary Holcombe cautioned that the Agency's ratio data, which are based on reports submitted from districts, may not be correct and asked that school districts review their own data for accuracy and inform the Agency of any errors. Based on that review, it is apparent that common definitions of "staff" and "teacher" do not exist statewide. In addition, school boards and superintendents have voiced concern that districts that contract out certain services, such as transportation, food, and special services, will appear to have more favorable ratios because they do not directly employ as many staff.

On November 14, Governor Scott issued a letter to education leaders outlining his view of the challenges facing the state's education fund this budget cycle. The governor asked for school districts to work with his administration to address these fiscal challenges and to hold this year's spending per equalized pupil to no more than 2.5%. The governor also used his letter to invite education leaders to a summit on December 18th to discuss solutions to the education funding challenge.

On December 1, the Commissioner of Taxes issued the statutorily required letter announcing the non-residential tax rate and the income and property dollar yields for FY 2019. The Tax Commissioner predicts a 9.4 cent increase in the average homestead property tax rate. This is only a prediction at this point – the legislature will set the final yields and tax rates after voters have approved budgets and the legislature knows how much money needs to be raised by taxes to fund the budgets that were approved.

While the letter acknowledges the FY 2019 education fund deficit, the letter emphasizes that the majority of the tax rate increase is due to school budgets and education spending at the local level.

A fiscal note prepared by the Joint Fiscal Office in early November is a good explanation of all the factors that should be considered in order to clearly understand what is contributing to projected FY 2019 tax rate increases. The fiscal note indicates that state policy decisions, including the use of one-time money and shifting teachers' retirement payments to the Education Fund, are responsible for a significant portion of the projected tax rate increase. Even if education spending was level in FY 2019, we would still see a tax rate increase of between 3.5-4.5 cents.

On December 18, roughly 300 members of the education community attended the governor's education summit. Secretary Holcombe opened the first session with remarks detailing the state's demographic reali-

CONTAINMENT continued from page 2

ties. She stated that the labor market is shifting, with job growth over the next 10-20 years in careers requiring professional and bachelors' degrees, along with growth among jobs that require less than a high school diploma. She reminded attendees that our schools have to prepare students to enter the job market of today, rather than that of 50 years ago.

The governor spoke next. He said that the Brigham decision changed the dynamic of school funding, which led to the tension over who ultimately decides how we educate our students. He said there is "no doubt Montpelier has inserted itself into local education" and cited well-meaning efforts to expand opportunity and contain costs on the part of local districts and state lawmakers alike. The governor said he appreciates school boards' hard work, and acknowledged the frustration and fatigue due to Act 166, Act 77, and Act 46, all in the name of education reform in recent years. Finally, the governor said that there will be a 9.4 cent property tax increase if the state does nothing, and that he does not find the increase acceptable. He asked those present to work together to find solutions.

The day also included two panels on savings that have been found in newly unified school districts and another panel on staff to student ratios. Participants had the opportunity to talk at their tables and to share feedback from those conversations with the governor's staff.

This conversation continued as the Legislature convened on January 3rd. The governor will lay out his plan for addressing FY 2019 education funding when he delivers his budget address on January 23rd.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM RELIES ON A STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE SUPERINTENDENT.

Superintendent Evaluation Services

An effective evaluation provides the board and superintendent with data to measure performance and inform decisions. It enables both the board and the superintendent to continually improve their efforts.

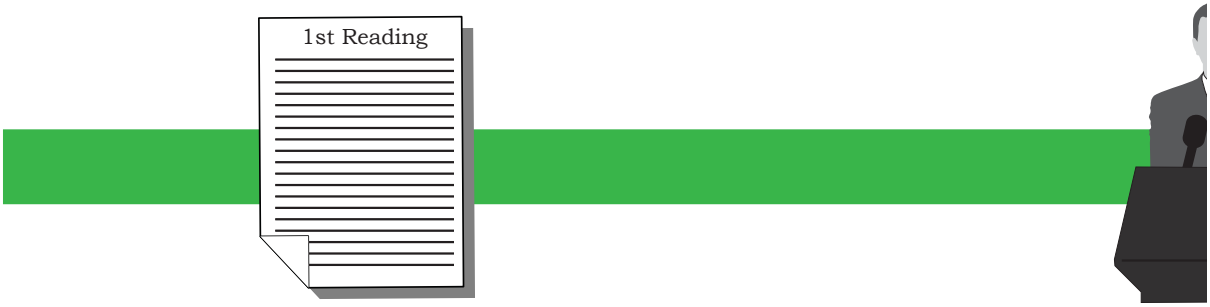
Why use the Vermont School Boards Association?

- The VSBA works with school boards and can customize an effective evaluation process.
- The VSBA understands the role of leadership, and has developed an evaluation process that helps boards and superintendents work together to achieve their vision.

Contact

For more information contact Susan Holson at sholson@vtvsba.org or 802-223-3580.

How a Bill Be

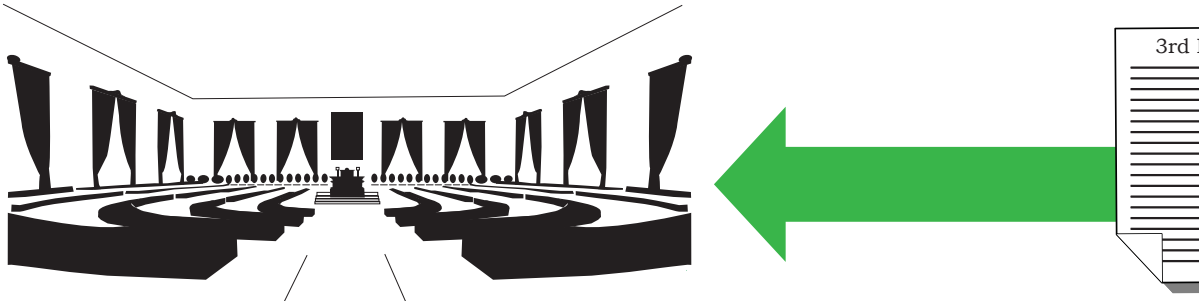


Bill Introduction/ First Reading

Any legislator from either the House or Senate can sponsor a bill to amend Vermont law. The bill is assigned a number and then introduced on the floor of the sponsor's chamber during first reading.

Bill R

Upon first reading, the b committee of the chambe matter. The bill may be sul committees based



Other Chamber Consideration

After passage in one chamber, the bill remains in that chamber for one legislative day and then the bill — as it passed the first chamber — goes through the same process in the other chamber. If the second chamber proposes any amendments, the bill must go back to the first chamber so it can consider those proposed amendments, and the first chamber may agree with those amendments or agree and propose additional amendments.

Third

Third reading happens th reading and it is another chamber to propose amer After voting on any amend bill a third time, the cham whether the b

Committee of Conference

If the two chambers are unable to agree on the bill or the proposed amendments, a committee of conference may be appointed in which three members of each chamber will attempt to reach agreement on a final version — called a committee of conference report — which is then submitted to both chambers for approval. The chambers cannot amend the committee of conference report and will adopt or reject it by majority vote.

Governor's

If both chambers agree on bill passes and it is sent t will sign it into law, allow it her signature, or veto it. I and Senate may override th each

For more information on Vermont's legislative process, see "Vermont's Legislative Process" by the Clerk of th

ECOMES LAW

EFERRAL

ill is referred to a standing r based on the bill's subject bsequently committed to other on its subject matter.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

If the committee decides to pursue the bill, the committee may take testimony on and recommend amendments to it. Committee votes on any amendments and whether to pass the bill out of committee are taken by majority vote.

READING

e legislative day after second chance for members of the ndments and debate the bill. dments and then reading the ber votes by majority vote on ill should pass.

SECOND READING

After it is voted out of committee, the bill is sent to the chamber floor for second reading. A member of a committee to which the bill was referred or committed and considered will report the committee's recommendations; members of the chamber may propose amendments to the bill or to a committee's recommended amendments; and the bill and any amendments are debated. The chamber will take majority votes on any amendments and whether to read the bill a third time.

CONSIDERATION

a final version of the bill, the o the Governor who normally t to become law without his or f the bill is vetoed, the House ne veto by a two-thirds vote in chamber.

BILL ENACTMENT

Once the Governor signs the bill into law or allows it to become law without his or her signature, or if the chambers successfully override the Governor's veto, the bill becomes an official law of Vermont and is assigned an act number.

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ne House, http://www.leg.state.vt.us/HouseClerk/Vermont%20Legislative%20Process.htm

A Word from the President

by Geo Honigford, VSBA President

To say that this budget season is shaping up to be interesting is an extreme understatement. The state is currently projecting over a nine-cent increase in the state-wide tax assessment. Since it is unlikely that legislators and statewide office-holders want to raise taxes in an election year, they are likely to look at a number of cost containment measures to fill the hole in the education fund.

The VSBA board recognizes that there is plenty of blame to go around for the education fund deficit and that finger wagging will not solve the issue. We are committed to working with the legislature and governor to find solutions that will address the fiscal issues while working to continue to strengthen student outcomes.

At our annual business meeting in the fall, the VSBA membership passed a series of resolutions pertaining to cost containment. We believe districts can improve efficiency and still maintain effective education systems. During the 2018 legislative season, we will advocate for following measures:

- A state-wide teacher health care contract, negotiated by a group of school board members from around the state.

- A state-funded early retirement fund that districts can access if they are using it to lower their student/teacher ratio

- A task force comprised of various stakeholder groups to research best practices regarding student/staff ratios and to recommend implementation tactics aimed at improving efficiency by increasing the ratio.

- That the legislature establishes guidelines for fact finding in collective bargaining negotiations that will incorporate data from comparable districts and general economic measures such as the inflation rate and a community's ability to pay.

None of these measures will bring an immediate end to the financial situation that we are experiencing, but they will begin to reduce the burden while not sacrificing our student learning.

Two Vermont Supreme Court Cases Impact School Board Members

Emily Simmons, Former VSBA Director of Legal and Policy Services

In Toensing v. the Attorney General of Vermont, the Court applied the Public Records Act to state officials' private email accounts. The ruling was consistent with VSBA's training in recent years. Public records, the Court said, are not location-dependent, but are subject-matter dependent. If a record is created or acquired in the course of public business, it is a public record subject to disclosure, unless an exception applies. In this case, the Supreme Court decided that the Attorney General's office had an obligation to search a state official's private email account to determine whether any of the emails were responsive to the public records request. **School board members are advised to keep separate email accounts for their school board business, and to not intermingle their personal and school board emails.** This practice will prevent the need to search for potential public records within a board member's private email account.

Last month, the Supreme Court of Vermont held oral arguments for an open meeting law case about school district negotiations with teachers. In Washington Northeast Supervisory Union v. Cabot Teachers' Association and Twinfield Education Association, the question is whether negotiations sessions between the school board and the teachers' negotiation team are subject to the Open Meeting Law.

Oral arguments took place on December 12, and a decision will be issued later this year. The VSBA was an intervenor in the case, meaning that we joined the argument along with Washington Northeast Supervisory Union. WNESU and VSBA argued that the school board's negotiation council is a public body, subject to the requirements of the Open Meeting Law when it meets to negotiate with teachers. The Teachers' Associations and Education Association argued that while the school board negotiation council is a public body, it is not required to follow the Open Meeting Law when it negotiates with its teachers, because the General Assembly never intended negotiations to be held in public. The justices had many questions for the attorneys representing both sides during oral arguments, including whether members of the public have a right to know how school boards and teachers negotiate to spend education tax dollars; whether bargaining in public shifts the power dynamic in negotiations; and whether school boards have been violating the Open Meeting Law when they agree to hold negotiations in executive session.

We are hopeful that a decision will be issued soon, holding that the Open Meeting Law does apply to school board and teacher negotiations. In the meantime, until a decision is issued, the VSBA will continue to advise districts to work with their legal counsel when considering whether to hold negotiations in public or in executive session.

Upcoming Board Development Workshops & Webinars

Spring is a perfect time to participate in VSBA Board Development offerings! Your budget is board-approved and warned; road conditions are improving, making local travel easier; and you're beginning to look ahead to your summer retreat. Here are some of the professional development tools we've got planned.

You asked. VSBA Listened. In a survey that was sent to all members via email on November 27, the VSBA sought member input on professional development. The questions focused specifically on possible board development topics and preferred scheduling options. Eighty-two members replied, expressing strong interest in several of the workshop suggestions. As a result, two different workshops are scheduled for March in locations around the state.

Think Big! **Developing & Monitoring a vision for your Education System**

3/15 @ Winooski, 6-8PM
3/21 @ Green Mountain UHS, 6-8PM

Effective School Boards operate with an overall vision that addresses these questions:

- What do we want students to know?
- What do we want students to be able to do?
- What kind of experiences do we want students to have?
- Given limited resources, what are our priorities?

In this session, we'll discuss the range of stakeholders, techniques for gathering their input, and the board's role in honing, using, and updating a vision statement. We'll also explore ways to use the vision statement as the basis for a strategic plan for the district. This workshop will get your juices flowing ahead of your summer board retreat by addressing the integral relationship between setting goals and monitoring outcomes.

Paying for it All **Understanding Education Funding**

3/19 – Lyndon, 6-8PM
3/27 – Manchester, 6-8PM

Boards have an important role in assuring the education system has sufficient financial resources to achieve its mission and in providing high-level financial oversight to assure that resources are properly managed on behalf of tax payers. In this challenging fiscal environment, how can the board manage the complex task of balancing the needs of all stakeholders of the educational system?

Participants will gain understanding about how education is currently paid for in Vermont, exploring impact of local and legislative decisions, and how the board's adopted budget translates into the education tax rate assessed in their districts. We'll also address options being considered in the 2018 legislative session and how boards can inform the process with local information and perspectives.

Register at www.vtvsba.org/liveworkshops

We encourage your input on Board Development tools. For questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact Susan Holson (sholson@vtvsba.org).

Essential Work of School Boards

A Comprehensive Overview of the VSBA Framework for Effective Governance

New board members will get a thorough introduction of the roles and responsibilities of school boards and their work in this 3-hour workshop. The domains for the Essential Works framework address the full scope of board work: developing a shared vision for education in the community; establishing and recording policy; hiring, partnering with, and evaluating the superintendent; monitoring progress; developing and adopting a budget; and engaging the community in supporting student education.

While this workshop is particularly tailored to new board members, we repeatedly hear from veterans how helpful it is to have an occasional "refresher."

Dates and locations for Essential Work of School Boards are:

- 3/28/18 – Jamaica
- 4/02/18 – Lyndon
- 4/04/18 – Winooski
- 4/09/18 – Newport
- 4/10/18 – Montpelier
- 4/16/18 – Rutland
- 4/17/18 – Windsor
- 4/23/18 – Webinar

**All workshops will be held from 5:30-8:00pm and include a light dinner except the webinar which will be from 6:00-7:00pm. The webinar version is very streamlined and does not include all of the content from the live workshops.*

Register TODAY at
www.vtvsba.org/liveworkshops

Webinars

For particularly timely content, like a legislative preview, or for those unable to attend live workshops, we supplement our content with online webinars, which are recorded and always available on the Webinar Archive page of vtvsba.org.

Legislative Priorities

- What are the VSBA's legislative priorities?
- What is your role as a board member in the legislative process?

This interactive webinar will provide an orientation to the legislative landscape and structure, and the process for developing public policy. We'll also focus on ways school boards can influence legislation.

Hosted by Nicole Mace
Tuesday, January 23, 6:00-7:00 PM

Getting Ready for Town Meeting

This one-hour interactive webinar will help frame your local budget discussion in the context of the statewide fiscal climate. We'll walk through a template presentation that you can customize for your district and share at your own town meeting!

Hosted by Susan Holson & Jeff Francis
February 20, 6:00-7:00 PM

Welcome New Board Members

This 45-minute program will introduce newly-elected board members to the roles of school boards, the Essential Work of Vermont School Boards, and Vermont's education governance structures. VSBA online tools and upcoming workshops will be featured.

Hosted by Susan Holson
March 13, 5:00-6:00 PM

Register TODAY
at www.vtvsba.org/webinars

Board Development Tools

VSBA supports school boards by offering tools that you can access whenever you need them. We are continually adding new resources and updating and refreshing others.

Education Funding Video

In case you missed it, we introduced a new video tool, *Making Sense of Vermont's Education Funding*, at the annual conference in October. Intended to explain the complex funding system is everyday language for both school board members and the general public, the video has been distributed by Vermont Public Access Television network and received attention from many popular statewide media including Vermont Business Magazine and VT Digger. Feedback from Vermont Association of School Business Officers (VASBO), AOE, and the Tax Department has been very favorable, including this from a tax department statistician who writes the Commissioner's Dec. 1 tax letter and establishes the yields and nonresidential tax rates: "one of the best resources on education tax rates I've ever seen."

We are hopeful that it will be widely viewed and will contribute to a better understanding of the system so that boards and voters can make informed decisions regarding budgets. Some districts have already linked it to the budget pages of their websites. If yours hasn't, we encourage you to do so. You may also want to share it at any budget presentations you have planned.

For Possible School Board Candidates

VSBA created a 5-minute video for people who are curious about running for school boards. The link was sent to all board members and superintendents, who were encouraged to add it to district websites. We also sent it to the Secretary of State and all municipal clerks in the state. We strongly encourage you to share it through your most commonly used digital media – Facebook, Twitter, and especially Front Porch Forum for your town.

Here's a posting template, or feel free to make your own!

Have you ever thought of serving for school board? [Optional:] *I've been serving on the* [fill in your board name here] *for* [fill in how long you've been on your board] *years. It's a powerful way to influence the direction of education for kids in the school district. The Vermont School Boards Association has a 5-minute video that tells you everything you'll need to know to get started! Take a look: http://www.vtvsba.org/new-school-board-members. If you have any questions, get in touch!*

New & Updated Tool Kits

Board Chair Tool Kit

The work of the board chair is challenging and often complicated. VSBA is developing a tool kit of resources to specifically support board chairs, which will be housed in the tool kit section of vtvsba.org in time for Town Meeting Day 2018. All members are encouraged to visit this new resource prior to reorganizing and electing a chair for the year.

New Board Member Tool Kit

The resources collected for new members and housed in the New Members Tool Kit will get a facelift in time for Town Meeting Day 2018 in an effort to support new board members upon election. This resource will enable new members to access the most popular online resources and is an excellent companion to the Essential Work of School Boards workshop scheduled in venues around the state in April. (See page 9 for details).

Board Reorganization Tool Kit

With elections comes board reorganization. The resources compiled in the tool kit section of vtvsba.org supporting all board members through the legal and best practices of reorganization will be updated in time for Town Meeting Day 2018, prior to most districts' reorganization.

Essential Work of School Boards Tool Kit

The six domains that form this resource will be getting refreshed throughout 2018. Updated materials, new formats, and user-friendly elements will enhance the value of this propriety VSBA instrument.

We encourage your input on Board Development tools. For questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact Susan Holson (sholson@vtvsba.org).

VERMONT
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
Great Governance, Excellent Education, Strong Communities

A Tribute to Vermont School Boards and School Board Members

Nicole Mace,
VSBA Executive Director

January is School Board Recognition Month

January is school board appreciation month and a fitting time to recognize the significant, and in many cases, tireless, contributions of Vermont's school boards and school board members.

It is well-known to every school board member - past and current - that Vermont's education system is in a transition. The reasons for the transition are many: demographics, socio-economics; changes in educational theory and practice; and the desire to do better for communities, taxpayers, and most significantly children. The evolution of our public education system is a reflection of changes in society itself.

This evolution has brought with it the challenges of deliberation, debate, and change. The task of school boards has been to create opportunities for citizens to build shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges we confront, and to facilitate a resolution that serves children and communities. School boards create opportunities for well-intended, altruistic contributions by citizens and public officials, irrespective of position or opinion. This form of exchange is the foundation of our democracy.

Please join the VSBA Leadership in paying tribute to school boards and board members this month. Thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of children, taxpayers and communities. And thank you for contributing so much to our democracy.

To all school board members,

We want to thank you for your dedication to Vermont's students and our public education system. We appreciate you and all of your hard work!

Keri Nicole Susan

2017 Award for Exceptional Board Leadership

At the 2017 Fall VSA/VSBA Conference at Lake Morey in October, the Vermont School Boards Association announced the recipients of the Award for Exceptional Board Leadership, which recognizes the exemplary work of a school board in the State of Vermont. Selection criteria include:

- Consistent demonstration of an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the board relative to administrators, teachers, and community
- Effective and ethical operations
- Demonstrable contributions to the well-being of students, the District, or the cause of public education in Vermont.

The committee had a difficult time choosing from among the nominees, each of which demonstrated competence and accomplishments in each of the three areas. Maple Run Unified School District was named the 2017 Award for Exceptional Board Leadership.

"Vermont has nearly 300 elected boards that oversee the system of public education. The Award for Exceptional Board Leadership is a means of recognizing the contributions of a particular board. It is also a way to recognize all of the hard work done by citizen representatives who serve throughout the state" said Nicole Mace. Nominations for the Award came from board members, citizens and school administrators.

The Maple Run School District unified in

Maple Run Union School District Award

Commissioner of Education, Rebecca Holcombe; VSBA Executive Director, Nicole Mace; MRSU Board Member, James Farr; MRUSD Vice Chair, Michael Malone; MRUSD Superintendent, Kevin Dirth.

Maple Run Union School District Award
VSBA Award Committee Member, Marikate Kelley; MRSU Board Member, James Farr; MRUSD Vice Chair, Michael Malone.

March, 2016, and testimonials submitted with its nomination indicated that the board has done an outstanding job overseeing the merger of four school districts. The board's focus was consistently on ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students in the district through initiatives such as elementary in-district transfers, district-wide school choice, and common assessments. There was strong buy-in from the school community as evidenced by a nominating letter signed by all administrators in the District. In the first year of operation, they capitalized on cost benefits by combining certain operations like transportation and personnel. And their transparent process improved community relations and even strengthened teacher/board relationships during the most recent negotiations. The board accomplished all of this thanks to its respectful, focused leadership on policy-level decisions, using data to identify and remedy inequities between schools.

The VSBA Award for Exceptional School Board Leadership is presented annually at the association's annual conference in October. The VSBA solicits nominations for the Award in September. Please contact Susan Holson (sholson@vtvsba.org) if you have an interest in nominating a board or questions about the process.

VERMONT
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH SERVICES

SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION SYSTEMS DEPEND ON EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS.

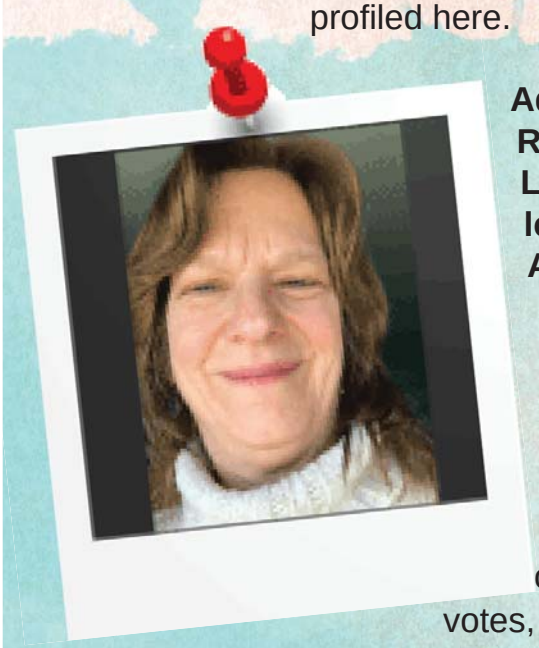
Hiring of a superintendent is the most important decision of a board. The VSBA is pleased to provide comprehensive superintendent search services to assist boards in this all-important endeavor.

The VSBA will work with a district to identify an experienced search consultant to guide the entire process. Throughout the process, the board sets criteria and retains control of key decisions, with the VSBA assuring that a healthy process is established and facilitated, and key details are completed in an effective and timely way.

Meet Your New Board Members

One important aspect of VSBA regional meetings held in almost every one of our 11 regions every fall is the election of new VSBA Board members. (In a couple of instances, geographically close regions attend the same meeting but vote for regional representation on the VSBA Board by region.)

New VSBA Board members, who are all elected for 2-year terms are profiled here.



Addison
Regional Representative
Laurie Childers
lchilders@anwsd.org
Addison Northwest Supervisory District

Laurie currently serves on the Addison Northwest School District (ANWSD) School Board and serves as their Finance Committee Chair. When her four children were young she served on their elementary school board (Addison Central School) and worked on mission statements, action plans, successful bond votes, playground fundraisers and volunteer-driven reconstructions. The ANWSD is new board that became operational in July 2017, a consolidation of two union school districts and two other school districts, which was the result of an excellent Act 46 committee, its hard work, and a supportive community.

Laurie lives in Addison and works for Democracy for America in Burlington. She has three college graduates and one child in college. She considers her children her greatest legacy and is grateful for the Vermont public education gave them the start they needed to succeed. Laurie continues to work so all Vermont children have equitable access to the education they need.

Orleans/Northern Essex
Regional Representative
Kathy Nolan
kathy.nolan@ncsuvt.org
Newport City School Board

Kathy Nolan lives in Vermont's beautiful Northeast Kingdom. She is a life-long educator, having taught high school and middle grades mathematics for 30 years at North Country Union High School, North Country Union Junior High School, Brighton Elementary School and, as a new teacher at Harwood Union High School. She has also served as prin-

cipal of E. Taylor Hatton School in Morgan (now closed) and as a mathematics instructional specialist and a Director of Curriculum for North Country Supervisory Union. With nearly 42 years of experience in Vermont public education, she cannot seem to quit completely. After retiring in June 2016, she joined the school board of Newport City Elementary and then the North Country Supervisory Union School Board.

Kathy did her undergraduate work at Trinity College and her graduate work at UVM. She was a member of the very first cohort of the Vermont Mathematics Initiative. She served as a teacher leader with the Vermont Institute of Science, Math, and Technology (VISMT), was chosen to represent Vermont in the Presidential Awards for Mathematics Teaching in 2004, and achieved National Board Certification in middle grades mathematics in 2006.

She and her husband Ward raised three sons, 1 dog, 1 cat, and 2 parrots. All have left the nest except the cat.

Washington/Orange
Regional Representative
Lucas Barrett
lbarrett@beschool.org
Bradford School Board

Lucas has been involved in school governance in Vermont since the first year he established residence. He graduated from Bryant University with a degree in accounting, moved to Vermont with his future wife, and took a first job auditing mostly school districts and municipalities for a small public accounting firm. He spent six years as the Business Manager at Blue Mountain Union School District, and joined the Bradford Elementary School Board in 2013 and the Orange East Supervisory Board in 2015. He is a third-generation school board member following the leadership of his grandmother and mother who each dedicated seven-or-so years to the Keene School District and Monadnock Regional School District respectively.

Lucas and his wife of thirteen years, Trisha, have two children attending Bradford Elementary School.

VSBA BOARD continued on page 18

Windham Regional Representative
Dan MacArthur
dmacarthur@windhamcentralboard.org
Marlboro School Board

Dan MacArthur grew up on the hillside that he and his wife still live on in Marlboro. They raised two children who also live and are raising their families on the same road.

He is a member of the Marlboro School Board, and has been on the Board for much of the last 40 years, many of those as the Chair. Dan and his wife Gail run a small construction business and a small diversified farm making maple syrup, growing raspberries and blueberries and many types of vegetables for their farm stand. Dan also sits on the Board of the Center for Health and Learning, a Vermont-based non-profit dedicated to improving health in our schools and communities.

Dan believes strongly in public education, and that we all need to work hard to give our students a chance to become future leaders, thinkers and doers. He believes that it is crucial to integrate the school with the community, and to give the community a voice in the education of their children.

VSBA Regional Representatives
HERE FOR YOU

Regional VSBA representatives serve two roles: first, they represent their regions on the statewide VSBA board. They attend the monthly board meetings and vote on action items presented there. **They are your voice in VSBA!**

The second and equally important aspect of their work is that they facilitate contact with school boards in their regions about issues facing them. They may reach out to you by email, attend one of your meetings, and/or organize regional meetings if there's enough interest.

Get to know your regional representatives! They're another resource available to help you do your work.

2017-2018 VSBA Board Members

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Winooski School Board Reflections

The Winooski School District Board was asked to describe recent improvements from a Board perspective.

Seven years ago, the Faculty, Administration, and the Board were not all on the same page and the Winooski School District was a dysfunctional organization, often operating at cross purposes. Initiatives were introduced but not fully implemented. Trust had been broken between board, administration, and faculty.

The current climate is one unity of vision and direction. For the Winooski School District, three significant changes precipitated the quantum leap from where we were in 2010 to a more unified, clear direction for the betterment of all students, families, faculty, and community members.

1. In 2011, a year after a threatened teacher strike, two out of five board seats changed and resulted in a quorum dedicated to stronger governance for a stronger educational organization that would meet the needs of our complex and unique community and school.

2. In 2012, The Nellie Mae Foundation granted Winooski and Burlington school districts a joint 3-year grant to redesign the high schools into student-centered, personalized learning environments.

3. In 2013, Sean McMannon was hired as Superintendent, a role he continues to fill.

Organizational healing required slow and steady attention provided by the clear, consistent, cooperation between the Board and the Superintendent. The expertise of the

superintendent and his attention to student and faculty wellness were imperative. The board adopted a policy governance model focused on clear roles and responsibilities for strong partnership and prioritized good governance while the Superintendent concentrated on the health inside the organization. This collective focus resulted in building trust.

With building trust, the goal of improving the educational organization moved ahead thanks to a collaborative action plan Winooski and Burlington designed for student-centered, personalized learning environments. This transformation addressed the needs of our student population and its broad range of learning needs. The district needed focus and received grant funds to realize its vision for transformation. Strong leadership from the board and within the school was a critical starting point for transformation and for sustained organizational growth and development.

The Board Role: Good Governance and Community Engagement

Prior to the board's change in governance, board meetings were mired in operational issues. Discussions ranged from the color of paint to be used to who had keys to the building to deep discussions of teacher hiring choices. The governance model change began with trainings with Val Gardner and coaching from Angelo Odato. Val took us through the necessary decisions to change operating habits from "running the schools" to "ensuring the schools were run well". The board learned and practiced how to shift its focus from the Means to the Ends. She advocated hiring a great superintendent, setting clear goals for the district, and measuring outcomes not means.

The new governing habits and focus were established with training, practice, and progress monitoring. Primary focus areas were:

- Setting outcome expectations with clear measurements.
- Focusing on and monitoring the Superintendent role, actions, and policy.
- Remaining flexible in times of uncertainty.

Clear Expectations with Measurements

The ENDs statement (the Policy Governance equivalent of a mission statement), created by community voice, drives governance and discussions from budget meetings to community outreach.

> *"All students will graduate from the Winooski School District (WSD) college and career ready at a cost supported by a majority of the Winooski community. WSD students will lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community."*

The district published this statement several years ago and continues to seek evidence of achieving our goals. In addition to the usual measurements (reading, math, attendance, behavior), we look at grit. How do you develop students that keep trying in difficult times? Students with a global perspective? Students that are active local citizens? This last question cannot be measured by time spent but needs to incorporate a measure of passion.

Focus on the Superintendent

Through our newly adopted governance model the board discontinued its focus on the color of paint and turned instead to outcomes. This does not mean taking our eyes off the critical piece of our role of ensuring that ENDs are achieved in a

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fashion that is fair, legal, and treats staff well.

An annual appraisal of how the superintendent is meeting expectations is critical. When we ask other board members around the state about their procedures around superintendent evaluation, this question is usually met with a very uncomfortable pause, a squirm and an acknowledgement that a rigorous annual appraisal is not common. In Winooski, we measure eight categories that cover the major items we need to know are being done well and give the superintendent wide latitude in his execution with very specific exceptions. We measure

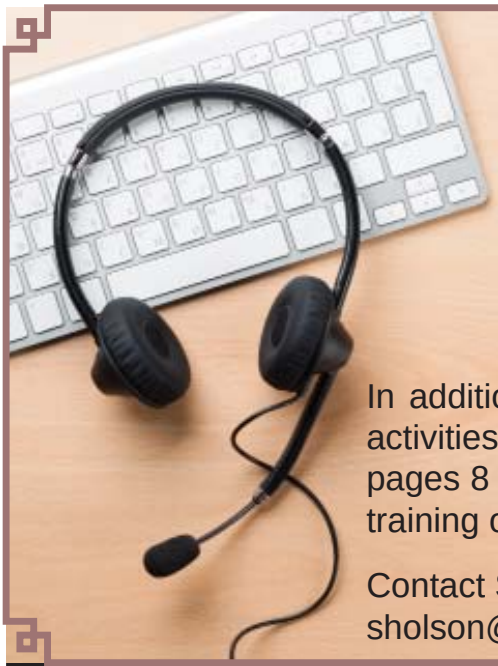
- Treatment of students and community
- Treatment of staff (bi-annual survey)
- Financial conditions
- Budgeting and Compliance
- Emergency Superintendent Succession (superintendent wins the lottery and flies south. Can we survive until we find a replacement?)
- Asset protection (are we insured?)
- Salary and compensation (are we paying staff fairly?)
- Communication/Support to the board.

Flexibility in Times of Uncertainty

Of course we do have times of uncertainty, and how we react as a board will set a tone that will be resonate through the organization.

The ultimate lesson in all of this is to trust the experts. Board members are not typically trained in education. Your role is to ensure the board's needs are known and clearly communicated and that the superintendent is held responsible for results. If the board is not clear, don't punish the superintendent; do the hard thing and clarify your communication. If the board dictates methods, procedures, and operations and the outcomes are unsatisfactory, the board – and not the staff – must bear the blame.

Hire good people. Ensure they know what is expected. Put measurement systems in place to understand if you are getting what you are paying for. Let the place run with management of education experts.



Need Help?

VSBA Board Development services are available to help you and your board! Whether you're eager to develop a deeper understanding of your job as a board, working on a strategic plan with your superintendent, undergoing board self-assessment, or building your annual work plan, we are here to help.

In addition to the regularly scheduled board development activities scheduled throughout the state (and outlined on pages 8 and 9) we can travel to your meeting and facilitate training on topics that are specific to your board.

Contact Susan Holson for more details.
sholson@vtvsba.org or 802-223-3580

Dear VSBA Members,

I want to take this opportunity to introduce myself to those of you I haven't been lucky enough to meet yet. I joined VSBA as the Director of Education Services at the end of the summer (replacing Harry Frank) and am thrilled to be supporting school boards in advancing VSBA's vision of public education in Vermont. The timing was perfect as I traveled around the state to our 7 regional meetings and the Annual Conference and heard discussion about pressing issues for our members.

Since moving to Vermont in 1990 I have been involved in my community with a special interest in education. I spent 6 years on district and supervisory union boards and 4 years as a Justice of the Peace. I've taught liberal arts, communications, and business courses at CCV and Champlain College for many years. My interest in and commitment to Vermont's children also led me to an 8-year stint as the Publisher and Managing Editor of *Kids VT Family Newspaper*. In the year before joining VSBA, I consulted with school districts about managing communication challenges in the context of consolidation.

Over the next several months, I will be bringing the show on the road around the state offering board member professional development workshops on Goal Setting and Monitoring, Education Funding, and the Essential Work of School Boards. Details on these board training opportunities are outlined on pages 8 and 9 in this newsletter.

I hope you find the workshops, new videos, and planned website enhancements useful in your work. I'm always open to suggestions on how to improve the services VSBA provides to our members, so please call or email me with your ideas.

I very much look forward to meeting and working with you all!

Susan

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