

VSBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: VERMONT SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS
FROM: SUE CEGLOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DATE: OCTOBER 2024

INTRODUCTION

By serving on a school board, you play a vital role in supporting the American system of a free, public education for all. Public education sustains the foundation of our democracy: well informed citizens. It's an honor to support your work and we look forward to continuing our partnership in the coming year. Thank you for your commitment to Vermont's students.

THE VSBA TEAM

VSBA's team is dedicated to supporting you by providing the information and tools school boards need in these rapidly evolving times. Below is a brief introduction to each team member.

Kerri Lamb – Director of Operations (she/her)

klamb@vtvsba.org

Kerri has been with the VSBA since 2001 and serves in several critical roles, including business operations, member services, communications, marketing, event planning, personnel processes, and graphic design. Kerri served on the Barre Town School Board for 5 years. She is moving out of state in November and will be transitioning out of her role over the next few months. Please join us in thanking Kerri for her pivotal role in keeping the VSBA running smoothly and efficiently for 24 years. We will be expressing our gratitude to Kerri at the VSBA/VSA Fall Conference and throughout the month of October; she will be missed greatly.

Sue Ceglowski - Executive Director (she/her)

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Sue joined the VSBA in 2018 as the Director of Legal and Policy Services and moved into the Executive Director role in 2019. She is responsible for the overall management and operation of the association in order to achieve the goals set out in the strategic plan. Sue is an attorney licensed in the State of Vermont and provides legal information and guidance to board members and administrators. She served as the chair of the Mettawee School District Board and the Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union Board for several years.

Sandra Cameron - Associate Executive Director (she/her)

scameron@vtvsba.org

Sandra joined the VSBA staff in 2019. Her primary roles at the Association are overseeing superintendent searches and evaluations, leading educational equity initiatives, and collaborating with other VSBA staff on legislative work (serving on legislative committees), updating the model policy manual, and providing policy guidance to board members and administrators. Her experience as an early childhood special educator and public school administrator provides a solid background for advancing education equity, analyzing public policy initiatives and proposals, and supporting board-superintendent partnership as this relates to goal setting and evaluation. Additionally, Sandra developed a VSBA student internship and has been instrumental in the VSBA's strategic planning process.

Debbie Singiser – Director of Board Services (she/her)

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Debbie joined the VSBA staff in May 2023 as the Director of Board Services, facilitating school board development and providing boards with services such as new board member learning, chair/vice chair support, and retreat facilitation. Debbie is currently a school board member serving as the chair of the Barstow Unified Union School District Board (RNESU) and previously served on the board of directors at an international school in Kathmandu, Nepal. Debbie has a Certificate in Introduction to Policy Governance from the Carver Institute. Her work to support board members and to coordinate meaningful webinars, trainings, and the annual conference is enhanced by her vast experience both in the U.S. and overseas.

David Englander - Director of Legal and Policy Services (he/him)

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David joined the VSBA staff in June of 2024. He is a licensed attorney with 20 years of experience working in Vermont for the Department of Health (Senior Policy and Legal Advisor), the Department of Fish and Wildlife (General Counsel) and the Agency of Natural Resources (Litigation Attorney). He has extensive experience in public policy and legislative advocacy as well as expertise in rulemaking, Open Meeting Law and Robert's Rules of Order. David's work at the Association includes maintenance of the model policy manual, policy reviews, and member support on policy and legal questions, including the Open Meeting Law and Robert's Rules of Order.

The VSBA's most important task is to help you, our members, perform your duties effectively. We encourage you to use our services. You can find a complete description on the VSBA website. The following summary is intended to provide members with an understanding of the critical pieces of work accomplished during 2023-2024.

THE VSBA

Incorporated in 1961, the VSBA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The articles of incorporation state that the organization was established for the following purposes:

- To promote and stimulate interest in education
- To cooperate with other organized educational groups
- To assist school directors in promoting better educational opportunities for the children of Vermont

The vision and mission of the organization are:

Vision: The VSBA is the trusted leadership organization advancing the essential work of Vermont school boards so that each and every student is supported in their educational journey.

Mission: Develop and provide systems and resources that support school boards and their members, informed through inclusive community engagement.

You can see all of the [VSBA's Beliefs here](#).

The VSBA is governed by a board of directors, consisting of 24 members: a president, immediate past president and 22 regional representatives – 2 representatives elected from each of 11 regions. The President is elected from among the VSBA board members at the August meeting each year, to serve a term from November 1 to October 31 of the following year. This August, the VSBA board elected Flor Diaz Smith of East Montpelier to serve a second term as President of the Association.

RESOURCES

Developing and providing systems and resources that support school boards and their members is VSBA's core mission. We provide foundational resources as well as unique resources to address the current challenges of school boards.

Foundational resources include the tool kits on our website which are accessible to members. This year, we added a [Negotiation Tool Kit](#) with practical bargaining tips, comparison data, sample language and other important information. Kerri Lamb took the lead on this project, working with a group of school board members, superintendents and business managers. Additional foundational systems and resources are outlined in each section of this report.

Unique resources this year addressed the challenges that lie ahead for the FY2026 budgeting cycle. In mid-August, the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA) and Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) issued a [Collaborative Budgeting Memo](#) to our members, providing indicators to aid in early budgeting efforts. Following up on the memo, our pre-conference workshop for school board officers and superintendents will focus on strategies for contending with the political and fiscal pressures facing school boards. After the conference, we will continue to provide members with budgeting resources designed to meet their current needs.

PUBLIC POLICY

The VSBA utilizes its Beliefs and Resolutions as the basis for its positions in the legislature and with administration officials, including the Agency of Education and the State Board of Education. We also serve as the staff for the Vermont Education Legislative Coalition, a partnership of the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals' Association, the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust, the Vermont Association of School Business Officials, and the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association. Working with these partner organizations, we ensure robust coverage of the legislative session and the production of Legislative Reports and other updates.

Legislative issues of primary interest to school board members this year included education finance, funding for PCB remediation and removal in schools, school facilities/construction aid, Open Meeting Law changes, literacy, school library materials, mental health and wellbeing services for youth, prekindergarten, and boards of cooperative education services. The [2024 Legislative Reports](#) provide a full recap of the legislative session, which lasted January through May 11, 2024.

At its Annual Business Meeting in October, 2023, the VSBA membership approved a resolution expressing long-standing board member concerns about state-level leadership and calling for a Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students ("Task Force") to make recommendations to state leaders addressing the provision of appropriate support toward the education of Vermont's students. The Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students was convened following the passage of the resolution.

Sandra Cameron staffed the Task Force, which met more than ten times over nine months, collected feedback from other groups such as the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals Association, the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, and the Vermont Business Managers Association. Members of the Task Force also met with Interim Secretaries of Education and the Chair of the State Board of Education. Information was synthesized into discrete and actionable recommendations.

The result of the Task Force's work is the [enclosed report](#), which outlines the background, the priorities, and the recommendations to build on Vermont's strengths. The report has been shared with Governor Scott, the Vermont Agency of Education, the Vermont State Board of Education, and every legislator. Perhaps most importantly, the report will be shared with the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont, because the recommendations in it are only the beginning of the important work that needs to be done.

VSBA is fortunate to have a representative on the Commission on the Future of Public Education who has a deep understanding of school board work and education public policy. Through this representation and advocacy to the Commission, we have communicated that it is imperative that any statewide recommendations impacting FY2026 should occur as soon as possible to be the least disruptive as possible to local school budgeting. Working with the VSA and VASBO, VSBA provided the Commission with [this memorandum](#) outlining our belief that the most impactful change in the short-term will come from addressing cost drivers rather than mechanisms that enforce cost suppression without consideration for equity and quality. VSBA will continue to provide information and recommendations to the Commission based on the association's beliefs and resolutions. Additionally, we encourage all school board members to provide input to the Commission.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT

A major function of the VSBA is to provide orientation and professional development for board members to help them be as successful as possible in their role. Debbie Singiser leads us in organizing and delivering these services.

This past year, we continued our monthly webinars, with a few more added. We held webinars for new members, continuing members, and joint webinars for board chairs and superintendents. Topics included New Board Member Academy, Implementation and Quality Review Process of the DQS Governance Standards, Becoming an Effective Board Member: A Guide to Roles and Responsibilities, School Construction: Supporting Equitable Access to High Quality Educational Opportunities, Orientation: Building the Board Team, Let's Pass a Budget: Communicating Your District's Priority Needs, Legislative Advocacy and Get on Board: Pre-candidate Training.

In 2024, we introduced a more flexible model for chairs and superintendents to meet their statutory joint training requirement. It includes three options:

1. The [VSBA/VSA Annual Fall Conference](#) on October 24-25 (8 hours of in-person, live training)
2. A Pre-Conference Workshop for board officers and superintendents at Lake Morey on October 24th (2 hours of in-person, live training)
3. A published guide developed in partnership with the Vermont Superintendents Association, providing options for members to meet the requirements of this mandated training. The guide, "[Leadership Expedition](#)" was released in March.

The Policy Governance® Maintenance Program is also new this year. VSBA developed the program in response to requests for board training from boards utilizing this particular governance model. The 6-month program began with in-person training followed by virtual monthly one-hour drop-in sessions for PG boards and superintendents. The post-training survey showed a 4.6 (out of 5) satisfaction rating with this new program. Comments from participants included “I found this workshop series to be extremely informative to gain a better understanding of PG and to hear real world examples of PG in practice.”

As an online space to discuss common challenges and opportunities, the Board Chair/Vice Chair Forum met every six weeks. As host, VSBA staff were present to facilitate the one-hour discussion and answer any questions specific to the organization. In addition to brainstorming together, this forum has proved to be a convenient way for chairs/vice-chairs from around the state to get to know each other in an informal setting and to build a professional network. Feedback from chairs and vice-chairs about this service, especially during the difficult period last spring when many districts faced failed budgets, has been extremely positive.

Over the summer, we had increased demand for facilitating board retreats and training in areas such as Open Meeting Law, Robert’s Rules of Order, Roles and Responsibilities, district goal setting, and the upcoming implementation of the governance standards in the District Quality Standards. High ratings and comments from participants show that school boards are benefiting from VSBA’s guidance and ongoing support on effective board practices.

COMMUNICATIONS

Over the past year, VSBA communications have continued to be a priority. The overall approach to member communications is:

- Prompt and consistent responses to inquiries via email and phone calls from members seeking guidance and/or resource
- VSBA Weekly Updates – weekly email communications on pertinent topics
- Postcards – targeted mailings to members regarding board development offerings
- Legislative Alerts - electronic alerts on legislative issues requiring immediate action
- Legislative Reports - summaries of legislative action, published at the beginning, middle, and end of the legislative session
- From the Boardroom - a newsletter with information on topics of broad interest to board members
- Website - the VSBA website is full of resources and information. Be sure to visit www.vtvsba.org for more information

LEGAL AND POLICY SERVICES

Although we do not provide formal legal counsel, we provide guidance and information which can help point districts in the right direction and avoid the need for extensive legal expenses.

The Vermont Education Policy Service - a joint service of the VSBA and VSBIT - continues to provide updated model policies for all members. VSBA staff reviewed and updated over 20 model policies in FY 2024. All revisions were communicated to members through the weekly update emails. VSBA staff have answered countless policy questions and have provided direct consultation to boards seeking to update their policies.

We are engaged in the ongoing process of reviewing and updating the model policy manual and continue to provide policy manual review services for our members. For more information about these and other policy services, visit VSBA's [model policy web page](#) or contact David Englander.

VSBA SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE

The VSBA superintendent evaluation tool has been designed to reflect best practice, which is to use a rubric to determine levels of performance for the superintendent. The rubric was built on a common set of leadership expectations that are tied to professional standards and indicators. Each section of the rubric contains clear indicators with specific criteria to rate each performance level. The rubric survey provides quantitative and qualitative feedback regarding the superintendent's performance in the following areas: Board and Superintendent Relationship

- Policy
- Business and Finance
- Community Relations
- Faculty & Staff Relationships
- Instructional Leadership

The tool can be customized with input from the school board and provides for the evaluation of 3-5 district-specific annual goals that have been identified and mutually-agreed to by the superintendent and board. The VSBA assisted six supervisory unions/supervisory districts with superintendent evaluations in FY2024 and four supervisory unions/supervisory districts so far in FY2025. We are currently developing a superintendent evaluation tool kit to provide an additional resource for boards. For more information on superintendent evaluation services, contact Sandra Cameron.

VSBA SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH SERVICE

Perhaps the most important decision a board makes is to hire a qualified superintendent to lead and manage education throughout the Supervisory Union/District. VSBA offers its Superintendent Search Service for member districts that are experiencing transition at the highest administrative level to assist in finding the right leader for them. Working with the SU/SD board to organize a projected timeline, screening committee selection process and screening committee charge, job posting, candidate evaluation, interviewing, and introducing final candidates to community stakeholder groups. VSBA is aware of a higher than usual number of superintendent turnovers for FY25. We are working on increasing the VSBA consultant pool and updating resources. Contact Sandra Cameron to learn more about the VSBA's Superintendent Search Service.

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The VSBA's work to advance equity has continued, both internally and externally. This year, VSBA developed and distributed a membership survey which will help us understand the composition of our diverse membership and advance our mission to "Develop and provide systems and resources that support school boards and their members, informed through inclusive community engagement." Feedback has been reviewed and we have identified key takeaways for continuous improvement. For more information see the infographic at the end of the annual business meeting packet. We'll be distributing the survey

again in late October and encourage members to participate. Completion of the survey should take no more than 10 minutes and all information shared will be kept strictly confidential.

With the leadership of Sandra Cameron, a dedicated group of school board members worked together on a new equity resource “Reviewing Policies with a Lens for Educational Equity.” This resource, which will be issued this fall, provides information and explores how school board members can create policy to influence operations and correct inequities so that all students receive the resources they need to graduate prepared for success after high school.

VSBA DUES

The VSBA is a membership organization, with about half of the Association’s revenue coming from dues paid by member districts.

Dues are assessed by supervisory union/supervisory district, which means the technical definition of “member” is a “supervisory union or supervisory district board.”

Dues assessed to member supervisory unions/districts are calculated as follows:

- a. 50% of the total amount to be raised by dues is assessed equally across all member supervisory unions and/or supervisory districts.
- b. The remaining 50% is assessed based on the Average Daily Membership (ADM) within the member supervisory union/district.

In 2021, VSBA members approved the following language in the Bylaws related to dues:

On an annual basis, the VSBA Board of Directors will determine the amount of revenue to be raised by dues. The VSBA believes that it is important to manage the organization’s finances in a manner that minimizes the financial burden on its membership. To that end, the VSBA intends to hold dues increases, over time, to a rate not exceeding the rate of increase in education spending in Vermont. Individual years can vary significantly in terms of statewide education spending growth and of the needs of the membership for services from the VSBA. Therefore, to measure success against this goal, the VSBA will annually compare the cumulative growth in dues with the cumulative growth in education spending over the prior three fiscal years, and report such comparison to the membership with each year’s proposed budget.

The FY25 budget includes a 5% increase in dues which is less than the 12% increase in education spending statewide during the same fiscal year. The compound annual growth rate in dues over the prior three fiscal years is 5.00% compared to a compound annual growth rate in education spending over the same time period of 8.5%. The compound annual growth rates reflect that education spending increased over the past 3 years from \$1,496.6 million to \$1,914.0 million; while dues increased from \$438,694 to \$507,843.

The increases in dues in the past two years supported moving a part time staff member to full time, allowing the VSBA to respond to the increasing number of inquiries from school board members, the expansion of model policies required by law and the growing complexity of legislative work and analysis.

PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR

As we look to the coming year, our priorities include the following:

- Inform and influence the work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education, based on VSBA Beliefs and Resolutions
- Advocate for implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the Task Force to Benefit All Students
- Support school boards in the adoption of governance priorities, protocols and processes required by the District Quality Standards
- Support school boards in the implementation of the revised Education Quality Standards
- Provide school boards with systems and resources to meet budgeting challenges

Thank you to all Vermont school board members for your dedication. Your focus on students and your willingness to engage the community on complex issues highlight the important role school boards play in Vermont's education system. What you do makes a difference!

Respectfully submitted,



Sue Ceglowski (she/her)
Executive Director