

My name is Kathryn Leach and I am a second grade teacher from Westerly, RI. I am the 2nd Vice President of the Westerly teacher's union representing 280 members and a member of NEARI.

Westerly teachers are dedicated professionals committed to assisting and encouraging students to achieve their highest potential. As we emerge from the COVID crisis, with the havoc it has wreaked on our education system and the emotional and mental health of students and teachers alike, we continue to feel the academic and social-emotional effects. Teachers continue to offer significantly more than academic instruction to their students. In addition to constantly monitoring academic progress to close the achievement gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, teachers, administrators, mental health and support staff are stretched beyond their limits in dealing with the emotional and behavioral toll. Teachers are required to do more than ever before and at times it can feel overwhelming and unmanageable. The time it takes to plan and implement high-quality instruction is more than can be accomplished during the work day and teachers unfailingly spend much of their personal time to ensure the best outcomes for students.

The availability of ESSER funds allowed our district to increase essential mental health personnel, math and ELA interventionists, paraprofessionals and tutoring programs. As this funding source comes to an end, a reduction in state aid at this critical time would further halt the important progress our students are making. In Westerly, a reduction in state funding would contribute to eliminating five elementary and two middle school classroom teachers, thereby increasing class size significantly. A reduction in behavior specialists would occur at a time when students need this support more than ever before to be successful in the classroom and beyond. At a time when closing achievement gaps in reading is essential to student success, the loss of a reading specialist would hinder this progress.

We are at a critical juncture where local and state leadership must invest in our teachers and students. We ask for your support in ensuring that our district has the resources and essential funding needed to assist and encourage every student to reach their highest potential.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Leach

2nd Vice President

Westerly Teachers Association