

## Honesty in Education

As educators, we believe that no matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, our public schools should inspire imagination, cultivate critical thinking, and ensure our students can live fulfilling lives.

Today, individuals and outside groups with outdated thinking want to push for inaccurate lessons to fuel division among our community. They want to claim that they know what we teach. You don't need to look into the classrooms to know what we teach, you only have to look at our students. We give students information they can process, explore, and then develop into their own opinions and beliefs.

They want to cast doubt on public education by using the term "critical race theory" as a catchall phrase to distract and frighten. Their objective is to block efforts both to expand our understanding of U.S. history and to better understand the systemic hold of institutional racism in our communities. What teachers have learned is that you just can't avoid or lie through today's challenges.

We know that honesty in education is best for all students. Education for our Westerly students should be rooted in facts and truth, even if some of those are difficult facts at times, and even if some of those are unfortunate truths about the history of Rhode Island and the United States.

What are we teaching in our schools? Not "critical race theory." Rhode Island is a growing, thriving, rich and diverse state. Our students come from diverse backgrounds from a range of lived experiences. Our students will be more successful if they recognize and understand the facts, truth, and complexity of that diversity and the history of different people and their different life experiences. How is that accomplished? Through Culturally Responsive Teaching.

A full education is one that examines the history of diverse groups - including those who have historically been marginalized and underrepresented at times and over time. We all learn by critically examining the views and lives of others.

Our shared goal should be to ensure every student has a safe and well-resourced school environment with up-to-date learning materials that honor our collective history in an honest and truthful way. We can work together, across race and place, to learn from our past and build a better future for our children.

The teachers of Westerly will do as Ron Martin, Wisconsin Education Association Council president, has said "Continue our commitment to develop critical thinking that supports students to better understand problems in our society and develop collective solutions. We are for truth-telling and uplifting the power of organizing and solidarity that moves us towards a more just society."

If you are concerned about what and how things are being taught in Westerly, I would encourage you to talk to the students. Not the parents of Westerly, but their children. Adam Gilman said it best in the article in *The Westerly Sun* on June 11, "He (his teacher) showed me to take failures as learning steps and how to translate them to be a better person." That's what our students and graduates are in Westerly - better people.