

January 13, 2021

An open letter to all Vermont State Representatives and Senators:
Public school educators deliver, deserve support

For nearly 10 months, Vermonters' lives have been upended by a deadly pandemic that has not occurred in more than a century. Jobs have been lost; businesses have been closed; and the normal rhythms of the year – summer barbecues, holiday celebrations, family get-togethers, dinners out, going to work – have been altered or canceled or done over Zoom.

But perhaps the biggest disruption to our collective routines is how the pandemic has affected public schools and the tens of thousands of students – and their families – who rely on them. When schools went remote last spring to stem the spread of the deadly virus, everyone from administrators to custodians to school nurses and beyond began pitching in to develop ways to make sure students could continue learning under unprecedented circumstances.

And while it was – and is – a team effort, our state's public school teachers have led the way in service of students and our communities. It was a teacher who spearheaded the construction – from scratch – of an emergency field hospital in Chittenden County. It was teachers, across the state, who brought assignments to students who did not have adequate access to internet broadband. It was bus drivers and teachers who helped drive food to families who would otherwise go hungry. And it was teachers, in communities in virtually every county, who creatively re-imagined important rites of passage like graduation.

In short, while they have been in their classrooms nearly every day since September, teachers have been and will continue to be [here, no matter where](#). Through this they have tirelessly worked to retool their lesson plans for in-person, remote, or hybrid learning, and have remained dedicated to their students, even as their own lives have been upended. Some face childcare issues of their own; some have been infected with COVID-19; some have watched family members die. They, too, cannot visit with their friends and families. And all of them miss being in school, with their students, learning and teaching together.

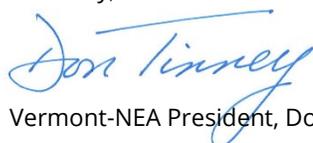
I know that teachers, [the majority of whom are women](#), are not alone in being affected – sometimes traumatically – by the pandemic, but they have faced these challenging times even as attacks on their healthcare, wages, and benefits continue unabated.

Indeed, to be clear, teachers and other school employees have faced years of increasing healthcare costs, due to a broken health care system for all Vermonters, and costs are expected to go up again in the coming year. Put another way, higher healthcare costs are eroding the paychecks of these dedicated public employees.

I know that many of you are proud supporters of teachers and public education, and I thank you for that unwavering commitment to those who shape Vermont's future. I hope that you continue that support as conversations about the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System begin to occur. The teachers' pension is a lifeline of financial security to thousands of retired teachers – most of whom are women. The pension is also a promise to active teachers, who expect at the end of their careers to have the financial security of a system into which they have paid every dollar ever asked of them.

As we all continue to navigate this horrific pandemic, let us remember that teachers are doing what they always do: stepping up for Vermont's children. I hope you will be there for them.

Sincerely,



Vermont-NEA President, Don Tinney