

DEAR ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES,

As we begin a new school year, I hope you are filled with anticipation. Despite having taught high school for twenty years, I still get a flutter of joy when I see all the school supplies begin to appear in the stores. A new box of bright yellow Ticonderoga pencils is always going to be a beautiful thing to me, I suppose.

I am so honored to serve as your Mississippi Teacher of the Year and will do my very best to represent our state's hard-working educators at the national level. Mississippi teachers are doing amazing things to ensure our students, schools, and communities continue moving forward. I am proud every day to be a part of our tradition of excellence.

As a second-generation Mississippi teacher, I have grown up "in the business," so I know this profession can be full of moments both wonderful and daunting. Despite what sometimes doubtless seems like a mountain of challenges, we must keep holding on to the hope we started with. Nelson Henderson said, "The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit." We may never see the results of the seeds we plant, but I absolutely believe that they will grow, that the shade will be there for someone in the future because of our persistence.

We must never forget we have the power and opportunity to "be the change [we] wish to see in the world." We can create positive change for our students by building strong connections with them. We can bring change to our campuses by collaborating meaningfully with each other. We can also be changemakers for ourselves by learning new skills, setting needed boundaries, and reaching for help when needed to keep ourselves healthy and rejuvenated. We shape (or reshape) our corners of campus to serve our students, school, and ourselves better.

If there is anything I can do to help you during this year, I hope you will let me know. Whether talking about literature or writing, geeking out over educational technology, or brainstorming ideas for activities, I would love to connect with and learn from you. Together, we can act as positive changemakers for our great state's future.

Sincerely,

Shauna Rynn Waters 

2024 Mississippi Teacher of the Year

