Dear Mississippi Teachers,

It is with great pride that I welcome you to the 2021-2022 school year! I hope that you have all rested well over the summer and feel prepared to face another epic year of teaching. Many of us greet this new academic year with a mixture of enthusiasm for the learning that will take place and valid concerns as we continue to strive to create safe environments for our students. We hoped that we would begin our time together in a more traditional fashion; however, we are again met with mask-mandates, social distancing constraints, intermittent online instruction, and the constant worry if we will be able to fill the gaps that the pandemic has created. Regardless of how we are starting our year, we stand united as educators with the same goal – to provide high-quality, standards-based instruction to the students of Mississippi in an effort to create critical thinkers, contributing citizens, and college-career ready learners. Although COVID causes us to physically separate from each other and our students, it also inspires us to come together in creative ways so that we can continue doing what we do best. This year has the potential to be equally as, if not more so, challenging as last year; however, we know so much more now than we did twelve months ago. This prior knowledge, combined with grit and accountability, will provide us with everything we need in order to thrive in yet another unpredictable year.

The theme for my school this year is “Setting the Stage for Success”. My staff and I developed this theme not only because we are an elementary school and it is our great responsibility to provide a firm foundation for learning, but also because of the immense amount of influence we have upon our learners. To many of our students, we will be their safe place to land after a summer of uncertainty, their solace in the midst of chaos, and their encouragement to persevere when things get hard. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we hold one another and our students accountable for the difficult work that lies ahead of us and them. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we don’t have time to waste. Cherish the time you have with the students in front of you, take advantage of opportunities for students to collaborate, welcome conversations with parents and families as you share in the responsibility for student learning. These are all things that can disappear overnight, and we must be ready to pivot to another way of providing instruction without losing focus.

As we strive to support the social and emotional well-being of our students during this continuous season of the unknown, I implore each of you to devote the same amount of attention to your own mental health and well-being. As educators, we want to ensure our students receive our very best; but we cannot provide that to them without first taking inventory of our own needs. Ensuring self-care is giving your students the best of you, not what’s left of you. That is what our kids, and you, deserve. It is important that we continue to provide one another, and ourselves, with copious grace. I tell my teachers that all we can do is today. By taking it one day at a time, and being our best in each individual moment, we can conquer the inevitable challenges that will arise this school year.

Muhammad Ali said, “It isn’t the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it’s the pebble in your shoe.” If we take it day by day and remove pebble by pebble, we are sure to conquer this mountain before us. I wish you a healthy and memorable school year. Keep climbing!

In service to children,

Mandy Lacy, Ed.D.
2021 Mississippi Administrator of the Year