My Fellow Educators,

What an honor it is, to serve as your Teacher of the Year this year! Last year, we embarked on an unprecedented year in the field of education. We faced challenges that were previously unheard of; we completely changed the face of our instruction through a variety of models throughout our schools; we expanded our profession to face the needs of our students in ways we never imagined would be necessary. I believe we have gained an overwhelming amount of respect for the work we have done as well.

This summer, I have had many conversations with individuals outside our profession. They seem to revolve around a similar line of questioning: “How did you teach in a mask all year? How was it possible to teach virtually? How could you teach under those circumstances?”

There is one comment, however, that has really resonated with me in recent months. Maybe you have heard something similar to this: “I just don’t know how you can do it. There’s no way I would be a teacher in a time like this.”

I have given this some thought. What does it mean to teach in a “time like this…”

… A time when now, more than ever before, our students need to know that their physical presence in our classrooms is not only our hope, but our delight for daily instruction.

… A time in which our instruction and our students’ learning are not bound by bricks and mortar, but can extend beyond physical limitations, if needed.

… A time in which we remember and value our responsibilities to not only educate the minds within our classrooms, but also nurture the developing hearts who have embarked upon this “new normal” right along with us.

… A time when we are literally making history every single moment we spend together in a learning environment.

I could go on, because there are so very many reasons why teaching in a “time like this” is not only a challenge, but a true testament to the perseverance of our educators and our students. The only conclusion I can draw, for those of you who are once again facing a new school year as educators determined to have a positive impact in the lives of your students, is that maybe you were born for a time such as this.

I do not know what the 2021-2022 school year will hold for us all. However, I am certain that we will persevere, and we will continue to serve our students to the best of our abilities. I am inspired, daily, by the dedication of teachers across our state. Our students are fortunate to learn from you, and I am honored to serve alongside you.

Sincerely,

Leslie Tally
2021-2022 Mississippi Teacher of the Year