

An Inspirational Message from Jennifer Attkisson 2021 Burroughs Wellcome Fund Northeast Region Teacher of the Year

Greetings Fellow North Carolina Educators,

As we enter a new month, COVID remains to be a challenge for both beginning and veteran educators. What began with a shutdown 18 months ago, has continued to be pervasive in our schools today, affecting students, staff, and families. In the midst of a global pandemic, our students are living the stories of future history books right now. We as teachers are the anchor that provides calmness and support for them. Teaching during this time has caused us to approach instruction in entirely different ways. As we see that learning is not always linear, we as a profession have continued to showcase amazing innovation as we strive to do what is best for kids.



While we can't control COVID or the way the pandemic has dramatically affected our lives, our classrooms, or our families, we can choose how we respond to these times. There are some pretty awesome things happening in our public schools, and we are so proud that you are one of these superstars in our state, making a difference each and every day. I'd love to share some thoughts with you as you continue on this year's journey.

Know Your WHY.

It is one thing to know what you are doing, but when you really know and own why you are doing it, the work you are doing rises to a whole new level. We love our students! They are our why, each day, when planning and creating learning and life opportunities, and making important decisions for and about them. We all want our kids to leave us each day better than when they came in. Find joy in each day. There will be hard days. Look into the eyes of a student on those hard days and remember your "why". Enjoy the love of learning something new, the relationship created with a student, or the thrill of conquering a difficult task.

CREATE A LEARNING COMMUNITY.

Motivate, support, inspire, energize! Expect growth with a focus on rigor and standards-based instruction. Be a teacher leader by leading from the heart with the success of your students at the forefront of decisions you make. Meet the whole child where they are. Embrace opportunities to GROW, right along with your students! We want our students to know they each have a valued voice in the classroom and beyond and that their words can be impactful. Show your students the journey of being a lifelong learner. Share struggles and successes with your students. Model how innovation can be a result of problem-solving. Invest time in helping students to understand how they learn best, and that each learner is different. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Everyone learns differently.

Everyone succeeds differently. Strive to do what's best for kids, and remember that each day is a new opportunity for both you and your students.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER.

While data definitely drives instruction for each child, personalized instruction goes far beyond those numbers. Building relationships, finding out interests, learning AND understanding each child's story, is the key to student-centered learning and ultimately their success. Know your students as individuals. Take the time to teach self-awareness. How do I learn? What do I need so that I can learn? Embrace a Growth Mindset. Weaknesses can become your strength. Just as you have to feed the physical body, you have to feed the emotional body. In turn, this care, concern, and attention can show students what their future can give them. Building relationships of trust are crucial. When students feel free to share themselves without fear, but rather with the love, support, trust, and tools they need, they can soar. Promote and teach tolerance, acceptance, and how our own thoughts, questions, and diversity can make a huge, positive impact on the world.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE.

Bring grace, acceptance, and an open heart and mind, both for your students and yourself. Self-care must happen in order for you to be the best you that you can be.

It is important to implement mindfulness activities, both personally and within the classroom. These are not separate activities or "one more thing to have to do," but rather embedded and woven throughout the day. Examples include morning check-ins, use of calm spots, words of affirmation, and calming, breathing techniques. All have led to a decrease in referrals, and an increase in students being able to talk through their feelings and pay attention to their own mental health. This powerful skill, of understanding how we all feel and why we feel that way, is truly a life skill. We need to equip ourselves with the tools to be the best version of ourselves so that we can create those safe, loving, learning environments where our students can become the best versions of themselves. I strongly believe, especially in these historical times, that SEL is one of the most important things we can offer to our students and ourselves as educators.

UTILIZE MENTORS AND COLLEAGUES.

Seek out people who inspire you! Our shared ultimate goal is to develop lifelong learners who succeed in life. The story of what we do as a collective profession each day to help our students succeed is one with many storytellers. Listen closely to these stories. Watch them play out through your observations, in your school building, and beyond. Learn from them! You can learn from every story you encounter. We grow and learn and change each day through collaboration and support from each other. Visit those classrooms and talk to those teachers, ask those questions, seek out those resources that will ultimately make you a better educator and colleague.

Our Regional Teachers of the Year Team is working together to support all NC students and educators. We have developed a mission of educating students by empowering educators. We believe in our beginning teachers! We are here to support you! Thank you for the difference you make each and every day. Believe in yourself. Believe in your students. Believe in our profession. The work we do day in and day out DOES matter. Together we will make a difference!

Have a wonderful year!

Jenn

Tweet with us, October 19th 7-8pm
during the "Great Expectations"
Twitter Chat using #NCBTChat.

