

2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Program Nomination Guidelines



**Sponsored by
Mississippi Department of Education
Office of Teaching and Leading
Administrator and Teacher of the Year Program
P.O. Box 771 - Jackson, MS 39205-0771
Phone: 601-359-3513
Website: <https://www.mdek12.org/OTL/OTC/recognition>**



Teacher of the Year Program Overview

The purpose of the Mississippi Teacher of the Year Program (MTOY) is to recognize the outstanding performance of teachers at the district, state, and national level. Effective classroom teachers are the backbone and heroes in creating a world class educational system that provides students with the knowledge and skills to be successful. It is the vision of the MTOY program to elevate student success by honoring, celebrating, and promoting excellence to strengthen the teaching profession.

Eligibility and Criteria

The 2026 Mississippi Teacher of the Year candidate must:

- Be a full-time certified (K-12) teacher employed in a state-accredited Mississippi public school at each stage of recognition process (district, congressional district finalist, state, and national level)
- Have a minimum of three (3) years of teaching experience and
- Have plans to continue in an active teaching status the following year.

The Mississippi State Teacher of the Year candidates have respect and admiration of their colleagues and:

- Are experts in their field who guide students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.
- Collaborate with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.
- Deliberately connect the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.
- Demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- Express themselves in an engaging and clear way.

Role of the State Teacher of the Year

The Mississippi Teacher of the Year will serve as an ambassador for the teaching profession by speaking/presenting his/her platform for the year served to civic and professional organizations, K-12 schools, colleges, and universities, conduct professional development, and assist with recruitment and retention of educators.

As the Mississippi Teacher of the Year, the selected teacher will have the opportunity to apply for the National Teacher of the Year (NTOY) (See Nationals, page 4).

Awards and Rewards

The 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Program provides the following awards and rewards:

- A one-time \$5,000 salary supplement sponsored by MDE
- Formal statewide recognition ceremony by MDE
- Tuition waiver from William Carey University for an advanced education degree (masters, specialist or doctoral degree)
- Paid travel expenses (contingent upon the availability of funds) for the duration of MTOY service year(s)
- Opportunities to speak at various conferences, conduct professional development sessions, and serve on various education and leadership committees
- Serve as a life-long alumnus of past MTOY recipients
- Attend and participate in National Teacher of the Year (NTOY) activities (availability of funds)
- Serve on the state Teacher of the Year Selection Committee.

Application and State Selection Process

The Mississippi Teacher of the Year application is available each year in October with the application deadline in January. A memorandum, application guidelines, and the application are sent to each school district superintendent by email. Application and guidelines are available via the following webpage at: <https://www.mdek12.org/OTL/OTC/recognition>

Local District Selection

At the local district level, districts may select their district teacher of the year by following all local criteria and guidelines. Each district is allowed only **one entry** for the state program.

Selection Committees and Process

Selection of the State Teacher of the Year will be the combined responsibility of two groups: MDE Screening Committee and the State Selection Committee. Each candidate application will be reviewed at least two (2) times by two (2) different members of the MDE Screening Committee. The top sixteen (16) candidates, four (4) from each congressional district, will be identified for consideration for the State Selection Committee. The sixteen (16) applications are sent to the State Selection Committee for reviewing and scoring. The Selection Committee will meet and discuss their findings based on the content of the applications submitted by the sixteen (16) candidates and then choose the top four candidates, with one being selected from each congressional district. The selected teachers will be named Mississippi Teacher of the Year finalists.

After selecting one teacher from each congressional district, the State Selection Committee will:

- Interview each congressional district finalist, which includes a performance task
- Debrief and score each finalist, and
- Recommend the Mississippi Teacher of the Year and Alternate Teacher of the Year

Nationals

As the Mississippi State Teacher of the Year, the selected teacher will have the opportunity to apply for the National Teacher of the Year. The National Teacher of the Year Program is sponsored by the Council Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Information about the National Teacher of the Year Program can be found at: www.ntoy.ccsso.org. If the Mississippi Teacher of the Year is selected as the National Teacher of the Year, the Mississippi Teacher of the Year will be released from classroom duties during the year of recognition to serve as spokesperson and advocate for the entire teaching profession across the nation.

Application Instructions

Complete all sections of the application (Sections 1 – 5). Any part of the application that is left incomplete will result in a score reduction. All applications should be **typed and not handwritten, printed one-sided not two sided**. For sections 2-4, include your school district number and congressional district number in the top right header. To be recognized as your district teacher of the year at the Mississippi Administrator and Teacher of the Year Awards Ceremony, an application must be submitted.

Section I – Application Form

Complete the application form and include the following signatures:

- Applicant
- School Principal
- School District Superintendent

Attach the application form (pages 11-13) to the original application only.

Section II – Resume

Complete the resume section found on page 14. Include your school district number and congressional district number in the top right header. Please do not add your name, address, phone number, or references on the resume page.

Section III – Professional Biography

Complete a professional biography in 3rd person with no more than 500 words. Include the following details:

- Grade level and current subject; school and city where you teach; all degree(s), name of institution(s); spell out your degree(s)
- Personal philosophy of education and teaching
- Factors that influenced you to become a teacher
- Awards or points of pride
- A sentence or two about pedagogical priorities

Include your school district number and congressional district number in the top right header.

Section IV – Response Questions

Respond to the five questions on page 16-20 of the application. Each response should not be more than 750 words. The responses to the question will be scored and based on the following:

- Adheres to standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Answers the question clearly and concisely; and
- Provides a compelling narrative that speaks to the applicant's ability to serve as the Mississippi Teacher of the Year.

Each question refers to the five (5) aligned criteria on page 2

- Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? Show how your deliberate instructional decisions create student learning and reveal your beliefs about teaching and learning.
- Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in that deliberately creates a purposeful culture in your classroom or school. Describe how you build and use relationships to collaborate and to teach students of all backgrounds and abilities. What is the status of the project today?
- Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Show how these community connections dissolve classroom walls and are used to impact student learning and success.
- Describe a time when you demonstrated teacher leadership and lifelong learning through your work in your school, state or beyond. Describe your work, how it helped you grow and how it meaningfully impacted students.
- As the Mississippi Teacher of the Year, you will serve as an ambassador of education for the state. If you are chosen as the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year and you have been asked to deliver remarks at an event for aspiring teachers and their mentors. What is your message?

Include your school district number and congressional district number in the top right header of each question per page.

Section V – Letters of Support

Attach three (3) letters that supports why you should be the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year. At least one of these letters must be a recommendation from your principal, the remaining letters may be from the following: parent, colleague, administrator, student/former student, or civic leader. Submit all letters with the application. Letters should not exceed one page in length and double-spaced between paragraphs with 12-point font size.

Letter Details:

- Student achievement and success **(Principal's letter only)**
- Applicant's achievements in and outside the classroom, or other specific evidence
- Applicants' efforts to strengthen and improve the teaching profession and why the applicant qualify to become Mississippi's 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year.

Submitting Applications

After completing sections 1-5 of the application, submit **the original application (sections 1-5) to the following email: specialprograms@mdek12.org**

Submit (4) four stapled copies with sections 2-5 (include a cover sheet with your name and school district) postmarked by January 8, 2026 to:

**Mississippi Department of Education
Office of Teaching and Leading
Teacher of the Year Program
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39205**

For questions, contact Sandra Hilliard at 601-359-3513 or by email: shilliard@mdek12.org

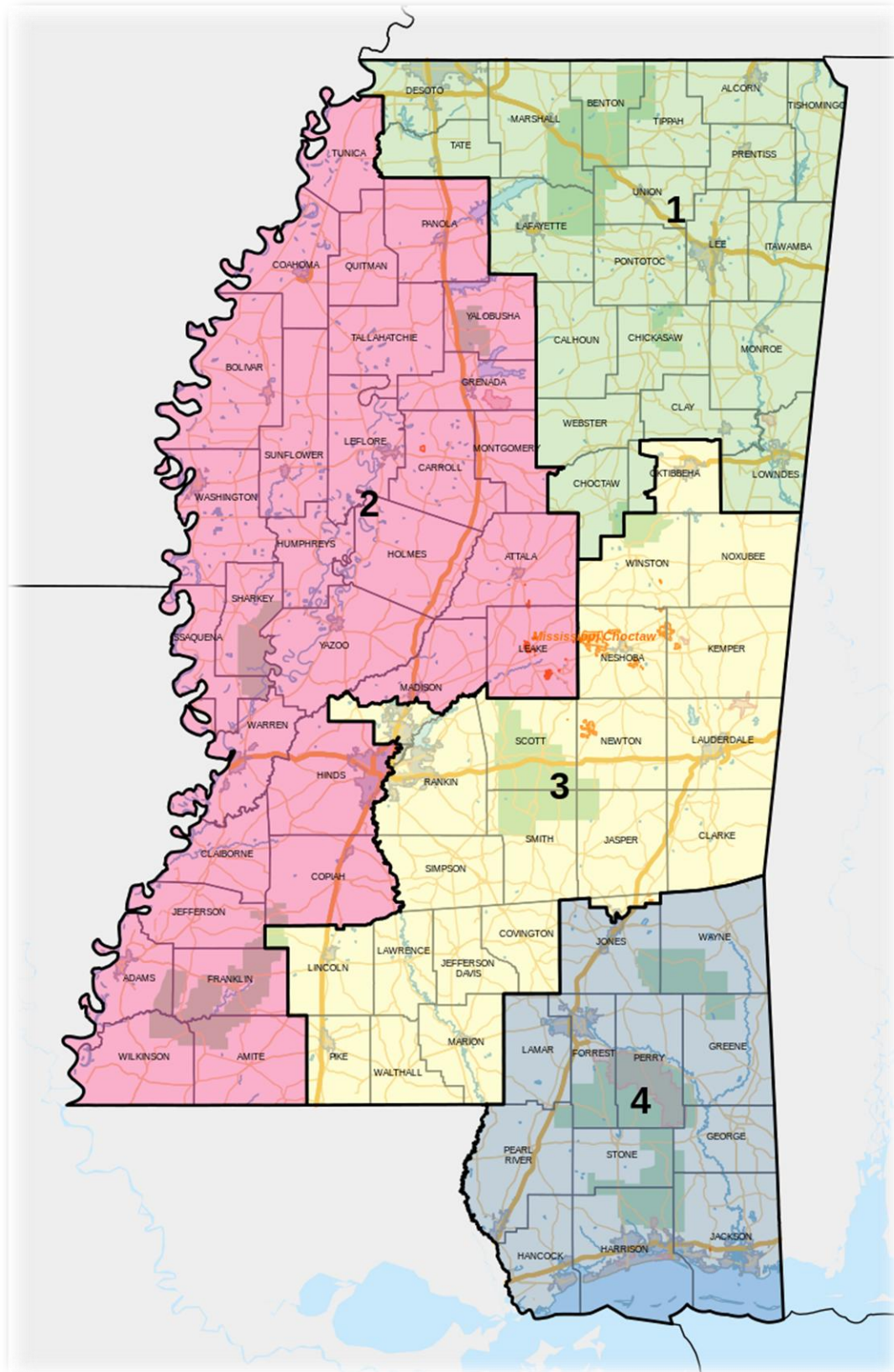
FYI: Submit only the requested sections 1-5 (original), sections 2-5 (4 stapled copies), please do not send:

- **Teacher of the Year Cover page**
- **Guidelines**
- **Timeline**
- **Congressional map**
- **Evaluation rubric**
- **Folders or notebooks**

2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Program Timeline (Tentative)

Date	Activity
October 2025	The 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year nomination application is emailed to district superintendents. The application is available on the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Teaching and Leading webpage: https://www.mdek12.org/OTL/OTC/recognition
January 8, 2026 (Postmarked)	Deadline for application submission. Submit one (1) original application sections 1-5 to the following email: specialprograms@mdek12.org and four (4) stapled copies, application sections 2-5 (include a cover sheet with your name and school district) to the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Teaching and Leading. (see page 6 for the address)
January 2026	MDE Screening Committee will review district applications. Four (4) candidates with the highest score from each congressional district will be chosen for a total of sixteen (16) candidates.
February 2026	A letter of congratulations will be emailed to district teachers.
February 2026	State Selection Committee will review the sixteen (16) district applications and choose four (4) finalists. MDE will notify school district superintendents of the selected finalists.
March 2026	Four (4) congressional district finalists' interviews.
April 2026	Mississippi Administrator and Teacher of the Year Awards Ceremony (State Teacher of the Year and Alternate will be announced)
October 2026	The application of the Mississippi Teacher of the Year will be submitted to the National Teacher of the Year Program.

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT MAP



2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Application

Evaluation Rubric

Each candidate will be rated on the components of the application. Please use the following rubric as a checklist and guide when completing your application. Incomplete applications will result in a score reduction. Each candidate may receive up to **100 points**.

CRITERIA	LOW SCORE	AVERAGE SCORE	HIGH SCORE	MAX POINTS	SCORE
II. Resume A. Education-colleges/universities, major, dates, and degree B. Teaching Employment History – district/school, position, subjects, and dates C. District/School leadership activities-position, dates D. Awards/Recognition – title and dates E. Certifications – clearly defined (endorsements and year obtained)	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-3 Points ____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 4-7 Points ____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 8-10 Points ____	10	
III. Professional Biography (maximum 500 words written in 3rd person) A. Current grade level, subject, school and city, degrees (spell out degrees), name of institutions B. Personal Philosophy of Education and Teaching C. Factors that Influenced you to become a teacher D. Awards or points of pride E. A sentence or two about pedagogical priorities	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-3 Points ____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 4-7 Points ____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 8-10 Points ____	10	
IV. Response Question #1 (maximum 750 words) <i>Criteria 1: Are experts in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.</i> Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? Show how your deliberate instructional decisions create student learning and reveal your beliefs about teaching and learning. (philosophy of teaching) ○ Lesson defines applicant as a teacher ○ Lesson engaged all learners ○ Lesson influenced all students ○ Lesson demonstrated applicant's beliefs about teaching and learning	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-4 Points ____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 5-9 Points ____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 10-15 Points ____	15	
IV. Response Question #2 (maximum 750 words) <i>Criteria 2: Collaborate with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.</i> Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in that deliberately creates a purposeful culture in your classroom or school. Describe how you build and use relationships to collaborate and to teach students of all backgrounds and abilities. What is the status of the project today? ○ Describes how teacher involvement in this project creates a purposeful culture in the classroom or school ○ Describes how the teacher build and use relationships to collaborate and teach students of all backgrounds and abilities ○ Clearly states where the project is today	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-4 Points ____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 5-9 Points ____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 10-15 Points ____	15	

IV. Response Question #3 (maximum 750 words) <i>Criteria 3: Deliberately connect the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.</i> Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Show how these community connections dissolve classroom walls and are used to deliberately impact student learning and success. ○ Describes how the teacher deliberately connects students to the community ○ Show how community connections dissolve classroom walls ○ Describes how connections deliberately impact student learning and success	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-4 Points _____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 5-9 Points _____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 10-15 Points _____	15	
IV. Response Question #4 (maximum 750 words) <i>Criteria 4: Demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.</i> Describe a time when you demonstrated teacher leadership and lifelong learning through your work in your school, state or beyond. Describe your work, how it helped you grow and how it meaningfully impacted students. ○ Describes a time when you demonstrated teacher leadership and lifelong learning through your work in your school, state, or beyond ○ Describes work, how it helped you grow and how it meaningfully impacted students	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-4 Points _____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 5-9 Points _____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 10-15 Points _____	15	
IV. Response Question #5 (maximum 750 words) <i>Criteria 5: Express themselves in an engaging and clear way.</i> As the Mississippi Teacher of the Year, you will serve as an ambassador of education for the state. If you are chosen as the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year and you have been asked to deliver remarks at an event for aspiring teachers and their mentors. What is your message? ○ Message clear, developed and tied to teacher's belief system ○ Impacts a wide range of audiences (Is the message inspiring? Does it move you to action? Is it passionate and compelling? Would you support this teacher?)	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-4 Points _____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 5-9 Points _____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 10-15 Points _____	15	
V. Letters of Support (3 letters) A. At least one letter is from the principal citing student achievement (letterhead). The remaining letters may be from: parent, colleague, administrator, student/former student, or civic leader B. Teacher's achievements in and outside the classroom, or other specific evidence C. Teacher's efforts to strengthen and improve the teaching profession D. Why the teacher is qualified to become Mississippi's 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year E. Letters do not exceed one page in length (double-spaced between paragraphs and 12 font size) F. Signature of supporter	Fails to cover all required areas. 0-1 Points _____	Provides adequate evidence in all areas. 2-3 Points _____	Provides clear and exceptional evidence in all areas. 4-5 Points _____	5	
				Maximum Points	100
Tally the points allotted in each of the sections. This is the candidate's final score. The highest total any candidate may earn is 100 points.				Final Score	



2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Application Form

Section I (please type)

Candidate's Employment Information	
Full Name: (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.)	Educator ID Number:
School District:	School:
School District ID Number:	Congressional District: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
School Address:	
School Phone:	School Website:
Subject Area:	Grade Level:
Years of Teaching:	Years in Position:
Work Email:	
Principal's Name:	
Principal's Email:	
Superintendent's Name:	Superintendent's Phone:
Superintendent's Email:	
Candidate's Personal Information	
Home Address:	
Personal Email:	
Cell Phone:	Home Phone:
Twitter Handle:	Facebook Profile:
Instagram Profile:	Other Social Media:
Professional Information	
Professional Memberships (i.e., AFT, MAE, etc.):	
Platform/Areas of Interest:	

School and District Demographic Information

The following information is not required and will have no bearing on your selection. It is collected for informational purposes only.

School Size <i>(number of students):</i>	District Size <i>(total number of students):</i>
School Type: ☐ Public ☐ Charter Public	School Location: ☐ Rural ☐ Suburban ☐ Urban
How much time do you spend working directly with students? ☐ 100% ☐ 75% ☐ 50% ☐ Less than 50%	

Candidate Demographic Information

National Board-Certified: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ In Progress	*Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Decline to answer
*Age Category: ☐ 21 – 29 ☐ 30 – 39 ☐ 40 – 49 ☐ 50 – 59 ☐ 60 or older	*Ethnicity: ☐ Asian/Indian Subcontinent ☐ Black/African American ☐ Hispanic or Latino ☐ Native American/Alaskan Native ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐ Multiple Ethnic/Racial Identities ☐ Other ☐ Decline to Answer

**The Mississippi Teacher of the Year will be selected without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and will not be discriminated against on the basis of disability. This information will not be shared with MDE Screening Committee and State Selection Committee.*

Teacher of the Year Candidate Signature

By signing this nomination form, I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understand the eligibility and criteria guidelines for Mississippi Teacher of the Year and agree to accept the responsibilities as outlined in the nomination packet on pages 2-3.
- I understand that I will become ineligible if I am not a full-time K-12 classroom teacher at each stage of the recognition process (district, congressional finalist, and state).
- If selected as the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year, I will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of my recognition as necessary to fulfill the obligations (listed on pages 2-3) inherent in the honor.
- If selected as the 2027 National Teacher of the Year, I will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of recognition to fulfill the obligations inherent in the honor.
- I give my permission that any or all the materials provided (other than home address and telephone) may be shared with people interested in promoting the Mississippi and/or National Teacher of the Year.
- This application represents my work and my experience. It was written without content generated by others, including, but not limited to artificial intelligence tools. Appropriate citation is used when referencing, summarizing or paraphrasing the work of others.

Signature of Candidate _____ Date _____

Principal and Superintendent's Approval and Signatures

By signing this nomination form, I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understand the eligibility and criteria guidelines and responsibilities for Mississippi Teacher of the Year as outlined in the nomination packet on pages 2-3.
- The candidate meets the criteria guidelines for Mississippi Teacher of the Year as outlined in the nomination packet and submits this nomination with my approval.
- The candidate will become ineligible if he/she is not a full-time K-12 classroom teacher at each stage of the recognition process (district, congressional finalist, and state).
- If the candidate is selected as a congressional finalist, the district agrees not to send a news release until the Mississippi Department of Education announces the candidate as a congressional finalist.
- The candidate will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of recognition as necessary to fulfill the obligations (listed on pages 2-3) inherent in the honor, if selected as the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year. The district agrees to provide a substitute on these occasions.
- If the candidate is selected as the 2027 National Teacher of the Year, the candidate will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of recognition to fulfill the obligations inherent in the honor.

Signature of Principal _____ Date _____

Signature of Superintendent _____ Date _____

2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year Application

Section II: Resume

Education

School Name	Degree	Major	Years Attended (i.e., 2010-2014)

Teaching Work Experience

Title	District/Organization	Subject(s) Taught	Years in Position (i.e., 2010-2014)

Teacher Leadership Experience

Position	Organization	Years in Position (i.e., 2010-2014)

Awards and Other Recognition

Award/Recognition	Year Received

Licensure Certifications

Endorsement Code/Area	Year Obtained
<i>(i.e., 154 Mathematics)</i>	<i>(i.e., 2010)</i>

School District Number _____
Congressional District Number _____

Section III: Professional Biography

(Complete in 3rd Person/maximum 500 words, see page four (4) of the guidelines for details)

Section IV: Response Questions 1-5

1. Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? Show how your deliberate instructional decisions create student learning and reveal your beliefs about teaching and learning.
(maximum 750 words)

School District Number _____
Congressional District Number _____

2. Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in that deliberately creates a purposeful culture in your classroom or school. Describe how you build and use relationships to collaborate and to teach students of all backgrounds and abilities. What is the status of the project today? (**maximum 750 words**)

School District Number _____
Congressional District Number _____

3. Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Show how these community connections dissolve classroom walls and are used to deliberately impact student learning and success. (**maximum 750 words**)

School District Number _____
Congressional District Number _____

4. Describe a time when you demonstrated teacher leadership and lifelong learning through your work in your school, state or beyond. Describe your work, how it helped you grow and how it meaningfully impacted students. (**maximum 750 words**)

School District Number _____
Congressional District Number _____

5. As the Mississippi Teacher of the Year, you will serve as an ambassador of education for the state. If you are chosen as the 2026-2027 Mississippi Teacher of the Year and you have been asked to deliver remarks at an event for aspiring teachers and their mentors. What is your message? **(maximum 750 words)**

Section V: Three (3) Letters of Support
(See page five (5) of the guidelines for details)