

CLASSROOM CHRONICLES

EQUITY in EDUCATION

How Louisiana's Teacher of the Year Calls on Educators to Create Culturally Responsive Classrooms



In July 19, Chris Dier's 10-year commitment to his students was acknowledged, as he was named the 2020 Louisiana Teacher of the Year. Each year, the State Teacher of the Year (STOY) spends their tenure advocating for a cause that they are passionate about in education. Dier's passion is

deeply rooted in providing an equitable education to all, and supporting teachers in being culturally responsive to their students. His vision for his year-long tenure as STOY is to encourage teachers to work in collaboration with their students to eliminate prejudice and bias within the classroom.

"Achieving success requires a bold vision. My vision is to provide an equitable learning environment that engenders opportunities for all. Students whose identities fall outside of society norms should be made visible and celebrated," Dier said. "Every student who walks into my classroom deserves equal opportunity to thrive. I hold firm to this principle as my pedagogical foundation."

As a lifelong learner, Dier knows that collaborating with educators and educational leaders can create a vision for change. He recently reached out to the 2020 Teacher of the Year finalists, sharing his equality in education initiative, and invited them to collaborate with him.

Through this collaborative effort, Dier is determined to spend this school year opening up dialogue and expanding awareness of biases in education impacting the students of Louisiana. He aspires to arm teachers with the tools, support, and resources needed to effectively shed light on these issues in the classroom, working as one with students to explore and ultimately overcome adversity through framing and building on equity.

"In order to build equity into education, we need to first and foremost work together and identify what we need to do - collaboration is necessary. I see people in different classrooms trying to have the same conversations regarding culture and identity. I want to bring that to the forefront," Dier said.

Dier, a native of St. Bernard Parish, has taught at the middle and high school levels. He currently teaches at Chalmette High School, in the same classroom where his mother taught, in the same hall as the educators that taught him.

"My passion derives from my mother. Growing up in St. Bernard Parish, there were so many times that people would stop my mom to thank her and voice their appreciation. Seeing the influence she had on others throughout my life growing up was life-changing," Dier said. "When I was in college and deciding on a career choice, my mom invited me to observe her at Chalmette High School. I saw in real time that influence as it manifested itself. I then got into teaching, and I never looked back."

In Dier's classroom, he works with his students to establish an open and honest classroom culture, a practice that he hopes to expand throughout the state of Louisiana. Together, he and his students build a classroom based on value and respect for one another.

"In my classroom, we celebrate diversity. I am the first to open up about my background, discussing with my students the way in which I grew up, speaking the way that I do. We collaborate, collectively creating a precedent about how we are going to talk to each other both within the classroom and extending beyond school walls," he explained. "I ask them, 'What do we value as people?' Through this communication, we establish agreed upon values and don't deviate from that."

Dier believes that every student, regardless of their background, has a voice that should be heard. In fostering a culturally responsive environment within his classroom, he seeks to highlight diversity in a way that allows his students to feel included in the world around them. He strives to create a lasting impact that influences students' lives for the better.

“STUDENTS BECOME BETTER LEARNERS WHEN THEY FEEL VALIDATED, AND IT IS EASIER TO INSPIRE VALIDATED STUDENTS.”

Dier believes educators can play a unique role in helping students with issues like this by:

- seeking to understand the culture of students;
- fostering the required skills needed for students to achieve as much as possible while giving them the agency to use their voice to enact change; and
- supporting these initiatives by hosting professional developments for teachers to raise awareness of this issue.

“It is the moral responsibility of a culturally responsive teacher in a position of privilege to advocate for all learners, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, class, culture, sex, citizenship status, ability, body type, or any other indicator that has been used to marginalize. Providing students with the platform to showcase their unique abilities and experiences is vital to making students visible and narrowing opportunity gaps.”

If you would like to join Dier in his initiative this year, contact him at chris.dier3@gmail.com, or follow him on Twitter: [@chrisdier](https://twitter.com/chrisdier).



CHRISTOPHER DIER
2020 LOUISIANA STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

