

Please complete your professional biography in 3rd person, as this will be used on your page on the CCSSO website and other promotional materials. By completing this section, you agree that your biography can be used in CCSSO materials. Please follow the content and style guidelines in the application packet. (maximum 250 words)

Chris Dier became a teacher to follow the legacy of his mother, a lifelong teacher. In high school, Hurricane Katrina uprooted him to Texas, where he finished high school and attended East Texas Baptist University (ETBU). At ETBU, Dier received a Bachelor of Arts in History. Following his graduation, Dier returned to his home parish in Louisiana to teach. While teaching, Dier obtained a Master of Arts in Teaching and a Master of Arts in Educational Administration from the University of New Orleans.

Dier, a ten year veteran of teaching, currently teaches world history and AP human geography at Chalmette High School. He was voted the St. Bernard Parish District-Wide Teacher of the Year twice and recently named the Louisiana State Teacher of the Year. Dier is dedicated to providing an equitable and multicultural education to all students. He engages students by bringing aspects of their identity and culture to the forefront of their education. Dier was featured in numerous publications and outlets for his work in the classroom and the community, most notably The Washington Post, The New York Times, and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation.

Dier was a Hollyhock Fellow at Stanford University, a program that brings educators together to create more inclusive classrooms. At Stanford, he developed an equity project with the purpose of legitimizing student language. He now participates in a professional development program at Harvard Business School. Lastly, Dier authored “The 1868 St. Bernard Parish Massacre: Blood in the Cane Fields,” published by the History Press.



Response Questions

Completed - Oct 30 2019

Response Questions

Respond to the following questions, highlighting your personal story, and why you believe you should be the 2020 National Teacher of the Year. Please indicate evidence of student impact. Please do not include external links. Maximum word counts are indicated in parentheses. Each question refers back to the aligned criteria on page 1.

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? How did that learning influence your students? How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit?

(maximum 750 words)

I teach to reach hearts and inspire students to enact change in their own lives, in their community, and globally. My goal is not just to teach content, but to empower students and give them the framework to use their voices for positive change. In particular, students with identities that exist on the margins of dominant narratives must be made visible and celebrated to ensure that all voices are magnified and everyone's potential realized. I'm devoted to making students visible regardless of race, class, citizenship status, religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, or any other identifying factor historically used to disenfranchise. Equitable classrooms centered on justice touches hearts, thus inspiring all students to pursue their ambitions.

My "Genocide and Resistance to Oppression" unit best reflects my vision while emphasizing human connection. This unit challenges bias, promotes tolerance, and engages students by bringing their identities to the forefront of their education. Lessons unpack identity, marginalization, and resistance to emphasize why identities need to be celebrated while highlighting the dangers of discrimination. Students synthesize various sources and literature from alienated communities and incorporate it into a larger framework, and dive deeply into the preconditions of violence and its impact.

As a teacher in a diverse school, I utilize content to foster empathy to build bridges. Specifically, this unit provides unique opportunities for students from starkly contrasting backgrounds to build relationships and leverage each other's strengths. My district is home to one of the fastest growing Latinx populations in the country, and I aim to reflect these demographic shifts by continually decolonizing my curriculum. Students research indigenous and African histories prior to colonization and resistance to colonization, from Tecumseh to Menelik II. They read testimonies from Mexican-American Holocaust survivors and study the Nazi persecution of people with disabilities. Students study groups not solely through the lens of their oppression but study the organizing power and successes of these groups. These groups used their agency to enact change; their experience exemplifies the inspirational power of working collaboratively to promote change.

Students also recognize that intolerance and injustice are not isolated to the perpetrators but are systemic and have the power to shape larger actions. This recognition is necessary given the realities in our world and our country. Students connect past genocides to the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya people. They compare the rhetoric of contemporary movements that perpetuate hate crimes with the

rhetoric of past episodes of violence. This informs student-led discussions on tragedies linked to white nationalism and similar ideologies, ranging from the Pittsburgh synagogue and El Paso shootings to the Christchurch mosque shootings.

The unit then brings students' attention home. Students research and connect local discriminatory policies to the lasting legacy of slavery. They draw parallels from past liberation movements to the Black Lives Matter movement today. Students trace the historic oppression of LGBTQ+ communities to discrimination today, specifically within schools. By emphasizing identity, introducing underrepresented perspectives, and connecting history to today, students gain an understanding of the roots and complexities of structural injustice and realize they have the power to change it. This inspired students to organize to courageously push for change. My former students formed a political science club and another club designed to raise awareness regarding LGBTQ+ issues.

The unit culminates with a research-based project on a self-selected genocide. Each project connects to the present and emphasizes how to address injustice. To bring our focus back to celebrating the power of diversity, students then showcase their culture to match the course's cultural responsive theme. Last year, one student displayed her traditional, handwoven Cherokee garments while another showcased intricate Mardi Gras beadwork. One student taught the class how his family cooks phở while another showed how her family cooks yakamein, a local Creole dish. The classroom is abuzz with cultural exchange as students enjoy food, music, and hear stories of cultures unfamiliar to them. Providing a platform to share their unique strengths not only narrows opportunity gaps but also reminds students that identities should be valued. I'll never forget what one student wrote on her reflection: "This was the first time I felt the history of my people was taught and respected. It made me feel proud."

In conclusion, I use my voice in revolutionary ways to build equity. I use my privilege to remove barriers so that all students will flourish like they were always meant to. As an ally who is passionate in my craft, I inspire students to achieve excellence and to be lifelong advocates of positive change.

2. Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture. What was your role, how did you collaborate with others, and what is the status of this project today? Please include evidence of student impact.

(maximum 500 words)

Growing up, well-intentioned teachers often corrected my dialect. I was always left feeling that something was wrong with my identity as someone with a strong New Orleans working-class dialect. The

speech patterns of my family are often considered “improper” outside of our community or in professional settings.

It was not until I studied the linguistic history of my dialect that I realized that patterns associated with it are not inherently incorrect; they are simply different. Pronouncing “ask” as “ax” was not a mistake; rather, “ax” is a derivative from the verb “acsian.” Usage of “beaucoup” is not slang but a French word. Using “make” in irregular places, such as saying “making groceries” instead of “buying groceries,” stems from a translation from the French verb “faire,” meaning “to make” or “to do.” These are some of the many patterns derived from French, Spanish, African, Native, or Creole origins. Like me, my students carry language traditions, both old and new, and my classroom preserves, recognizes, and celebrates these core aspects of their identity. Students become better learners when they feel validated, and validated students inspire themselves to climb to new heights.

Educators across the country often neglect student identity or correct core aspects of students’ culture as opposed to embracing their identity. This is due to misunderstandings surrounding nonstandard speech or a belief that there is only one standard English. My personal history coupled with this gap of knowledge inspired an equity project I created as a Hollyhock Fellow at Stanford University. In keeping with my vision, the project, “Legitimizing Nonstandard Languages,” leverages dialect to help build empathy and understanding between students and validates students who feel isolated due to infringements on their identity.

The project’s purpose is to demonstrate that students’ unique language is just as legitimate as so-called standard language. Linguistic patterns have historical roots that should be considered assets rather than liabilities. Students complete surveys, research etymology and linguistic prejudice, and engage in student-led dialogue to discuss identity. The project addresses the needs of migrant students and students with deep roots in the community. My students made academic gains as they felt respected and gained more self-esteem. They completed projects that consisted of interviewing family and community members and researched the significant impact of dialect on their identity. One inspired student wrote an essay, “In Defense of Bad English,” and received national accolades.

To introduce the project, I collaborated with a diverse range of educators and held professional developments. The outcome was impactful as teachers who integrated this project made linguistic patterns integral to the learning process. Teachers established rapport with students different than themselves and fostered a positive culture of mutual respect and understanding. I reached out to teachers across the state, from Cajun country to North Louisiana, to extend the project. With this new platform, I intend to collaborate with educators across the nation to expand this project to create more

equitable, culturally responsive classrooms to reach hearts and inspire change.

3. How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom? Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Please include evidence of student impact.

(maximum 500 words)

Through researching my students' history, I authored "The 1868 St. Bernard Parish Massacre: Blood in the Cane Fields," published by the History Press. This work details a racially violent episode that is notably absent from any textbook. The surnames of the victims and perpetrators often appear on my student rosters. Although students are alarmed when they learn of their history, it provides moments to have vital dialogue about our roots, and to bring these conversations to a community still plagued by racial tensions. By leveraging their history, I ensure that education transcends the classroom to inspire student activism.

Last year, my students and I collaborated with community leaders and stakeholders to organize a memorial service to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the massacre. The chosen site was a church founded in 1871 by a man who escaped slavery, fought for the Union, and survived the massacre. The entire community, specifically the descendants of the survivors of the massacre, was invited. Community leaders from all walks of life spoke on reconciliation. The memorial concluded with the displaying of a wreath to commemorate the victims. Preserving history with the descendants of the massacre, which included students, embodied classroom transcendence to the community. These initiatives outside the classroom increase educational awareness, secure community support, and inspire student engagement with their community. Student investment in authentic history is one of the many ways to foster racial reconciliation in our communities.

This type of community-based learning connects what is taught in the classroom to the broader community by utilizing the inherent value of the community. I also invite experts, activists, and veterans to share their experiences with my class. Perhaps the most important way to connect students to their community is to share their experiences within the community. I am fortunate to live within the community that raised me. I teach in Room 215, my mother's former classroom, next to my former teachers. My students and I share similar struggles, from Hurricane Katrina and the BP Oil Spill to the impact of climate change on our vanishing coastline, which provides understanding as we work together to make our community survive and thrive.

By bringing in these experiences and dignifying their history, students take ownership over their learning

and leave comfort zones to become active. My students volunteer to plant trees to revitalize marshland. They organize cultural festivals, such as the Isleños Festival to celebrate our community's Hispanic origins. They participate in seminars regarding history and culture. One student who brought his family to a college to hear my research was so moved by the experience that he started his own personal research, which assisted with his acceptance into a prestigious school. Other students are conducting their own research as amateur historians and activists. My current students are advocating for the first physical marker to memorialize the victims of the massacre that occurred in our community. These are merely a few examples of their history inspiring involvement to make our world a richer, brighter place.

4. What do you consider to be a major public education issue today? Describe how you demonstrate being a lifelong learner, leader, and innovator about this issue, both in and outside of the classroom walls.

(maximum 500 words)

I recall being intrigued in my mother's class when she detailed the uniqueness of our culture. It was not until graduate school did I gain an academic understanding of why teachers like my mother were able to captivate classrooms; they make students feel valued. These memories remind me that educators have the power to validate and empower. As an educator, I'm passionate about culturally responsive pedagogy and the legitimization of student identity.

One major educational issue is the increasing need for culturally responsive pedagogy. Linguistically and culturally diverse students experience intellectual apartheid when they are not reflected in their learning. Cultures across the United States, from Native American communities to the rural South, are often neglected or shunned. These disparities often have real material impacts.

As a teacher, there are ways I connect to students who are from backgrounds different than me. I create culturally responsive spaces to guide their education as culture shapes how students process information. I deliberately integrate students' experiences, frames of reference, and anything relevant to their culture to scaffold them from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Emphasizing culture builds mutual trust as it allows for students to maintain their identity while succeeding; it minimizes the gap between the classroom and the community.

As a soccer coach, I get to know players from various countries on a personal level as we enjoy the sport that unites regardless of origin. To further bridge cultural gaps, I take Spanish classes on weeknights to improve comprehension and visit the home countries of students to gain deeper insight. I ask students to teach me phrases in their first language to greet them in a manner preferable to them. I also sponsor a

club formed by my former students designed to destigmatize mental health issues through peer counseling and cultural understanding to better address their emotional needs.

My passion regarding cultural responsiveness inspires me to always seek more development. I made cultural competency a core focus of my studies throughout both graduate programs and as a Stanford Hollyhock Fellow. I attend conferences, including the Conference on Education and Equity hosted by the Bronx Academy for Software Engineering that centered around “supporting undocumented learners.” Teaching for Change sponsored a trip to the National Council for the Social Studies Conference to lead discussions after learning of my culturally responsive initiatives. I currently participate in a program hosted by the Harvard Business School regarding case method teaching.

These experiences are invaluable to foster skills necessary to develop cultural competencies that promote equity. Culturally responsive teaching reaches hearts and inspires autonomous growth and human connection. In today’s hyper-polarized world, the “other” is often perceived as bad or wrong, but it is hard to hate people close up. When we learn where people came from and hear more about their struggles and history, we realize we are more alike than different. I work to make that world a reality each day in my classroom because our students deserve a world where that is also true.

5. As the 2020 National Teacher of the Year, you serve as a spokesperson and representative for all teachers and students. What is your message? What will you communicate to your profession and to the public?

(maximum 750 words)

In 2005 I entered a new high school in Texas with no school supplies and wearing the only clothes I owned after Hurricane Katrina devastated my community. I was homeless and spent nights in shelters sleeping on crowded floors as my mother job-hunted during the day. I was isolated from the only community I had known and was bringing with me the weight of trauma to an unfamiliar environment. To my surprise, my new teachers rallied to my aid. They provided notebooks, art supplies, and even a new pair of soccer cleats. The chemistry teacher arrived an hour early to tutor me and help compensate for missed time due to Katrina. My Spanish teacher incorporated my French culture in her lessons. They showed me that I could embrace my new community without forgetting the one I was forced to leave behind. Teachers made me feel valued, and with their compassion, I held my head higher and began to heal. Despite the dire circumstances, my new school became my refuge and home when I no longer had one.

I also saw the resilience of my former teachers back home. My mother, a lifelong teacher, moved back to

Louisiana and lived in a small, government-issued trailer on the school parking lot to teach students in trailers temporarily set up as classrooms. Teachers like my mother were committed to helping students finish the school year, even at the delay of rebuilding their own lives.

The teachers who graciously welcomed me in Texas and the teachers in Louisiana who sacrificed to rebuild their communities demonstrate true service: dedicating their lives not only to the academic betterment of students but to their wellness and safety. I consider these individuals my role models, and I think of them whenever I encounter a challenge that doesn't fall under the job description of a teacher. I am available for students who face adversity, whether it's my student recently released from incarceration or my student who walked thousands of miles to get a better opportunity.

My personal saga, the legacy of my mother, and the values I hold all shape my vision to provide an equitable education that engenders opportunities for all and centers student identity at the forefront of their learning regardless of background. I want to extend this vision to classrooms across the country with nationwide, student-led, self-sustaining initiatives to build culturally relevant schools where pedagogical approaches are humanized and identity is validated. Every school in the nation is rich with possibilities to connect content to the culture of their community and the experiences of students. Research demonstrates that building upon existing knowledge, experiences, and frames of reference significantly improves how students process information and ensures students of all backgrounds feel included. By spotlighting identity, we teach to students' strengths and experiences, thus empowering students to take ownership of their learning while supporting their emotional well-being.

In addition, culturally-relevant pedagogy is correlated with academic success and ethnic-racial identity development. Supporting students from minority groups is crucial considering disparities within education, from disciplinary actions to graduation rates. Furthermore, the United States has the highest youth incarceration rate in the world that disproportionately impacts students of color. There are many reasons for these inequities, but research indicates that culturally relevant teaching minimizes disparities and reduces opportunity gaps. When schools reflect students' lives and experiences, students believe in themselves and remain actively engaged in the learning process. To best accomplish this, we must act as allies and assess our own interpretations and biases. It is also beneficial for teachers and students in majority populations to be provided with cultural experiences unlike their own to heighten awareness. Culturally responsiveness within the classroom is an effective antiracist tool and a necessary response to intolerance. Students become more tolerant when they learn and understand a variety of histories and cultures.

In conclusion, a nationwide initiative to build culturally responsive schools is a major step in addressing

educational inequities. Teachers have the power to create compassionate, tolerant, and empowered students to positively impact communities; this is our moral obligation. By modeling our passion and drive to ensure equity, we foster the required skills for them to achieve as much as possible while giving them the agency to use their voice to enact change. Changing our country starts with classrooms that put students at the forefront of their education and inspires students to make the world a better place. Educators do not just teach; rather, we build a sense of home.



Letters of Recommendation

Completed - Oct 30 2019

Attach 3 recommendations that support why you should be the 2020 National Teacher of the Year. At least one of these must be a recommendation from a parent, colleague, administrator, or student and each letter should not exceed one page in length. The file should also be in .pdf format.

Please title the file in the following format:

LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation1.pdf LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation2.pdf
LastName_StateAbbreviation_Recommendation3.pdf

Dier_LA_Recommendation3

Filename: Dier_LA_Recommendation3.pdf **Size:** 951.9 kB

Dier_LA_Recommendation2

Filename: Dier_LA_Recommendation2.pdf **Size:** 425.3 kB

Dier_LA_Recommendation1

Filename: Dier_LA_Recommendation1.pdf **Size:** 878.9 kB



Headshot

Completed - Oct 15 2019

Attach a headshot (color, portrait orientation, 300 ppi, .jpg format). This headshot will be used on the CCSSO website and in promotional materials for CCSSO and the NTOY Program. By completing this section, you agree that your biography and headshot can be used in CCSSO materials.

Please title the file in the following format:

LastName_StateAbbreviation_Headshot.jpg

Dier_LA_Headshot

Filename: Dier_LA_Headshot.jpg **Size:** 857.1 kB



Chief Acknowledgement