

We should be thankful for Mississippi's teachers.

Not only are they on the front lines in the classrooms every day, they are on the front lines of our future. They have a view of the promise and potential for our state that few ever have the opportunity to really see.

They look at the faces of our children and see what Mississippi can and will be.

What about a different point of view, one that turns the focus on the teachers and their promise and potential?

In this space, at this same time last year, I wrote about the latest group of Mississippi teachers who had successfully completed their national board certification. This certification, done through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, is one of the highest professional achievements for teachers.

Mississippi was the first state in the nation to offer additional pay for teachers who earned their national board certification.

The year-long process is rigorous, with each teacher being judged by his or her peers from around the country against the strictest of standards.

According to the Board, teachers must "document their deep knowledge of the subject matter they teach, provide evidence that they know how to teach their subjects to students effectively, and demonstrate their ability to manage and measure student learning."

Last year, over 400 teachers from around the state were nationally board certified, giving Mississippi the sixth highest number of certified teachers in the country.

Two days before this Thanksgiving, the latest numbers were released, and again, we have reason to be proud.

A total of 321 Mississippi teachers achieved their national board certification. This was the seventh highest number in the nation, and we rank sixth in the nation with a total of 1,459 board certified teachers.

These teachers and every teacher across our state have made a commitment to their profession, and I'm proud of the commitment we have made back to them.

We are going to pay them as the professionals they are, with a teacher pay package that, when fully implemented, will raise the average salary in Mississippi from 49th to 19th in the nation.

We've put together a budget recommendation that puts schools first, and focuses on making sure the foundation for our state is strong and deeply rooted in the gifts of those who teach, and those who are taught.

Our teachers stand at the front of the classroom and look at faces of hope. They are well aware of the possibilities in each of the children they teach, of the tremendous energy waiting to be tapped in each child's mind.

The point of view from the other direction is just as exciting and just as hopeful. The men and women who bring their own talents and energy into the classrooms as teachers are also faces of hope for our state.

Wherever you stand, the outlook is good, but one thing always remains true.

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