

## 2021-22 Tennessee Teacher of the Year Application Extended Response Guidance

The goal of the Tennessee Teacher of the Year program is to recognize and celebrate the wealth of excellent teachers that exist across the state. The tips and suggestions included in this guidance are not to be considered “magic.” However, they can help guide reflection about the application and can encourage fruitful conversations about the essays. There is not a formula and there aren’t right or wrong answers. Using these suggestions does not guarantee a specific outcome in the selection process. The purpose of this guidance is to help you present yourself and your instructional practices in the best light.

### ***The Application Extended Response Prompts***

1. How have your classroom practices resulted in students attaining mastery of your content area? Use evidence to support your response. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
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? Include evidence of student impact in your response. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
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. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
4. 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? *Do not exceed 750 words.*
5. 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. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
6. The Tennessee Teacher of the Year serves as a spokesperson and representative for teachers and students across the state. If you are selected as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year, what will be your primary message? What will you communicate to your colleagues and to the general public? *Do not exceed 750 words.*

### ***Criteria Used to Evaluate the Prompts***

Overall, each response question will be assessed according to the degree to which the response:

- adheres to standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation conventions;
- answers the question clearly and concisely; and
- provides a compelling narrative that speaks to the applicant’s ability to serve as the Tennessee

Teacher of the Year.

Additionally, the application will be evaluated holistically to assess the degree to which the applicant:

- Is an expert in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence
- Collaborates with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.
- Deliberately connects the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.
- Demonstrates leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- Expresses themselves in an engaging and articulate way.

Though a strong response may look different for each extended response prompt, these guiding criteria can help you ensure that the components of your application complement one another and give the most comprehensive view of your excellence as an educator.

### ***Questions to Address Common Missteps***

- Are you answering the question?
  - Take the time to unpack the question and think about what it is asking.
  - Ask someone else to read your response and ask if they can determine the question being addressed.
- Are you answering **all parts** of the question?
  - Use the unpacking strategy below to ensure that you plan for and address all parts of the prompt with sufficient detail.
- Are you giving a comprehensive picture of yourself as an educator throughout all responses?
  - Try to avoid using the same example or idea in your response to each question. Your goal is to give a complete picture.
- Are you writing to show what learning looks like in your classroom?
  - Write to **show not tell**. Use examples and things that students, parents, or colleagues have said.
  - Show how your work influenced the learning and growth of others through examples and evidence. Highlight your accomplishments rather than being humble about them.
  - Write “through” the word count in your draft. Often, it takes writers some time to get to the best part of their responses, so begin by writing more than you need to and then strategically edit to meet the word count.

### ***Unpacking the Application Prompts***

Unpacking is a useful writing preparation strategy that can ensure you successfully plan for and address all aspects of a writing prompt with sufficient detail. Often, it can be easy to allocate a significant portion of your allotted word count to one aspect of the prompt, leaving the other aspects unanswered and ultimately sabotaging your success. A sample “unpacking” for each application prompt is provided below. Again, it is important to note that using this strategy and these samples will not guarantee a particular outcome in

selection. Instead, this strategy should serve as a solid foundation to ensure that the personal experiences and instructional practices you describe in each response are represented in a way that allows reviewers to focus on evaluating your innovation and excellence as an educator.

### Question 1

How do you know that your students are successful in your content area specialty as a result of your instruction? Include evidence to support your response. (*maximum 500 words*)

[How do you know that your students are successful in your content area specialty as a result of your instruction?] If am successful as a teacher, what would I expect to see from my students at the end of the year? The quarter? The week? The day? In what ways can I describe what success looks and sounds like in the specific content area, grade level, and context in which I teach? [Include evidence to support your response.] How do I assess my students' success on a daily, weekly, monthly, and/or yearly basis? What stories, anecdotes, formative data, or summative data can I share that shows this success? I should clearly describe how I know my instruction is effective for my students' learning and growth.

### Question 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? How did that learning influence your students? How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit? (*maximum 750 words*)

[Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher.] I need to think about who I am as a teacher: what I value, what makes me unique, what my students would say about their experiences in my classroom. When I describe this lesson, I want to focus on showing the way students learn and what I do to create that learning. [How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning?] Here, I want to specifically address how I engaged ALL my learners. I want to explore what that looks like, how it is reflected in my practice and in their learning. [How did that learning influence your students?] Here – or earlier when I'm describing the lesson – I need to make the connection between my instructional decisions and their learning. [How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit?] This ties to the first part of the question about a lesson that defines me. I need to be explicit about the connection between the concrete details about the lesson and how those details demonstrate my beliefs.

### Question 3

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*)

[Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture.] I need to articulate our school culture and its importance. What have I done to improve my school outside of my classroom? When I describe the project or initiative, I want to focus on

sharing the ways this project or initiative contributed to how our culture is built. [What was your role, how did you collaborate with others, and what is the status of this project today?] Here, I want to specifically define my role and tasks I completed as part of the project or initiative. I need to be clear about how I collaborated with others and the value of this collaboration—for my practice, the project, and/or school culture. I need to be explicit about the result of the project or initiative, how it is being carried forward and/or improved, and my current role in the project. [Please include evidence of student impact.] Here – or earlier when I’m describing the project – I need to make the connection between the project, my role, school culture, and ultimately student impact. How do I know the project was successful? Put differently, how did students explicitly benefit from this project or initiative? What stories, anecdotes, or data can I share that shows this success?

#### **Question 4**

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)*

[How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom?] I need to think about how what I do (i.e. instruction, specific projects, clubs or extracurricular activities I lead) impacts the world outside of my classroom, specifically with my students. Why is what I teach my students important for the lives they live outside of my classroom, both now and in the future? [Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community.] Here, I should specifically describe and “show” how I connect my students to the community. Do students participate in community service? Explore the heritage of the community they live in? Connect with community members through mentorship? When I describe these connections, I want to focus on how these connections expand student learning beyond the classroom and what I do to allow this to happen. [Please include evidence of student impact.] How do these community and world connections impact my students? What stories, anecdotes, or data can I share that shows this impact?

#### **Question 5**

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)*

[What do you consider to be a major public education issue today?] I need to think about issues in public education that I am passionate about and have experience addressing. I should clearly describe the issue and cite evidence that establishes that the issue exists. I need to clearly show why the issue is important to me individually as well as important to public education writ large. [Describe how you demonstrate being a lifelong learner, leader, and innovator about this issue, both in and outside of the classroom walls.] Here, I want to explicitly and specifically describe how I am a lifelong learner, leader, and innovator about this issue. How do I continue to seek new information and improve my expertise regarding this issue? I should also connect my actions as a teacher leader in this space to tangible

results where possible: as a result of my leadership and innovative ideas or solutions, how has this issue been addressed in my classroom, school, district, community, and/or state?

**Question 6**

The Tennessee Teacher of the Year serves as a spokesperson and representative for teachers and students across the state. If you are selected as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year, what will be your primary message? What will you communicate to your colleagues and to the general public? (*maximum 750 words*)

[The Tennessee Teacher of the Year serves as a spokesperson and representative for teachers and students across the state.] Because the Tennessee Teacher of the Year is a state-wide spokesperson and representative for education, their message should be inspiring and relevant to wide and diverse audience. I should consider this when developing my message. [If you are selected as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year, what will be your primary message?] If I could speak to every single teacher in Tennessee (or even the United States), how would I want to influence their thinking? What about students? The general public? I need to clearly articulate a message that is inspiring for teachers, students, and the general public alike. Why is the message that I'm sharing important for the audience to consider? [What will you communicate to your colleagues and to the general public?] Here, I need to clearly organize my message to ensure all audiences (colleagues and the general public) can understand (or even relate) and be inspired. What are stories, anecdotes, or data that might illustrate my message for audiences from different backgrounds? I should also clearly articulate a call to action: as a result of my message, what should colleagues, students, and the general public be inspired to do?