

## 2016 Teachers of the Year Share Powerful Narratives in New “Leading from the Classroom” Podcast Series from NWEA

*Reflections on Classroom Teaching, Education Policy, and Their Students*

**Portland, Ore. – December 13, 2016** – “[Leading from the Classroom](#),” a new podcast series featuring firsthand accounts from the 2016 State Teachers of the Year, launches today. Each episode features a different teacher sharing a personal and poignant moment that crystallized the importance of teaching and of being a teacher. The teachers speak as advocates and ambassadors for sound education policy, for the teaching profession, and for the needs of their students.

The series is produced by the not-for-profit educational services organization NWEA [in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\)](#). The [National Teacher of the Year program](#), run by CCSSO and presented by Voya Financial, Inc., identifies exceptional teachers throughout the country, recognizes their effective work in the classroom, engages them in a year of professional learning, amplifies their voices, and empowers them to participate in policy discussions at the state and national levels.

The first seven episodes, each four to seven minutes long, are now available on NWEA’s multimedia site, [Teach. Learn. Grow](#). NWEA facilitated a reflective experience for the teachers in which they could frame up their experiences as letters to the public, policymakers, or fellow teachers, including their successors. For some, their revelation resulted from a year’s worth of experience as Teacher of the Year for their state, broadening their vision to the impact they can have beyond the classroom. For others, it was an insight that strengthened and renewed their dedication to the profession they love, which many said is a calling. And for still others, it was a powerful moment they experienced with the students they teach and love, too many of whom face outsized challenges.

“Teachers have incredible stories to tell, and their voices are especially essential now, as we face new challenges and implement new policies,” said Matt Chapman, CEO of NWEA. “‘Leading from the Classroom’ offers insightful accounts of the rewarding, joyful, and sometimes challenging world of teaching. With this innovative new podcast series, we are proud to help educators raise their voices so more people can hear firsthand what teachers understand about our children and our future.”

The teachers talk on a number of themes and topics, including the impact teachers can have on local, state, and federal education policies; the critical need for education equity, not just equality; the necessity of understanding classroom teaching as a profession; and the efforts they

make to reach and teach all their children, especially those with additional challenges. The first seven episodes are:

- Justin Coffey, 2016 Kansas Teacher of the Year, reflects on how a story about NASA’s Alan Shepard reinstilled in him the importance of being a classroom teacher.
- Mary Hansen, 2016 Department of Defense Education Activity Teacher of the Year, shares how military-connected students experience life quite differently from their peers, and that “military children serve too.”
- Amy Hewett-Olatunde, Ed.D., 2016 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, shares her deep connection with her diverse English language learner students, and recounts the impact of one in particular whose name, she notes, “is not Refugee, but is so much more.”
- Dana McDonough, 2016 New York Teacher of the Year, discusses how she works to reach each child every day by thinking about what is in their “invisible backpack” and the feelings and experiences they bring into school with them.
- David Morales, 2016 New Mexico Teacher of the Year, talks about his father’s experiences after immigrating from Mexico and his own efforts to support immigrant students and their families.
- Andrea Santos, 2016 West Virginia Teacher of the Year, examines the power of words and how she uses them to help her students find encouragement and believe in themselves.
- Shawn Sheehan, 2016 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year, discusses why his experiences in the classroom inspired him to run for state senate.

To listen to the podcast episodes, please visit [Teach. Learn. Grow.](#) Written statements and photos of the State Teachers of the Year also are featured on the site. Additional episodes of “Leading from the Classroom” will be released starting in January.

### **About NWEA**

NWEA™ is a global not-for-profit educational services organization with nearly 40 years of expertise in providing innovative assessment solutions, including our flagship interim growth assessment, Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®); our progress monitoring and skills mastery tool, Skills Navigator®; and the OECD Test for Schools (based on PISA). More than 8,500 schools, school districts, and education agencies in the US and abroad trust us to offer pre-K – 12 assessments that accurately measure student growth and inform instruction; professional development that fosters educators’ ability to accelerate student learning; and research that supports assessment validity and data interpretation. Educators currently use NWEA assessments with over nine million students worldwide. Visit [NWEA.org](#) to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

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