

Teacher of the Month



Malissa Mobley wants her students to feel the learn

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To be in Malissa Mobley's first-grade classroom at Gateway Elementary School in the Carr Square neighborhood is to be immersed in color, music and motion. Ms. Mobley's classroom is a reflection of her effusive personality and an indication of how she fully engages her students. "I want them to use their talents," she says. "We do a lot of chanting and music because that's the best way they can retain information. I use a lot of colors, and I'm hands-on. I want them to feel it when they're learning."

It works. Even years later, former students greet her in the hallway with a chant about the commutative property of addition they learned when they were first graders: *Either way you switch it, the answer will be the same! Either way you group it, the answer will be the same!*

Ms. Mobley is the first recipient of the 2018-2019 St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Teacher of the Month, an honor that she calls "incredible." "The twelve-plus hour shifts, out-of-pocket resources and preparation at home are absolutely worth it. To be nominated by a parent feels even more special because I was able to reach their child in a memorable way. I feel truly blessed to be recognized."

The oldest of seven children, Ms. Mobley credits her parents with encouraging her to excel academically — particularly her father, who never went to high school but continually stressed the importance of education. "Growing up, our grades had to be on-point," she says. "We were expected to go to college. The passion my parents had for education really inspired me."

Ms. Mobley was also deeply moved by the extraordinary devotion of Theresa Gilliard, a teacher she met during her internship at Shenandoah Elementary School. "This young lady had lupus, and even though she came to school sick every day, you'd never know it. She always put in 100 percent. I looked at myself and said, 'If she can do it, then anybody can be an awesome teacher.' She had so much heart."

As a first-grade teacher, Ms. Mobley is keenly aware of the profound impact she has on young children. In

fact, it's one of the things she cherishes most about her job. "I can teach them morals and manners, and that it's OK to help one another and to share. This is the age that they absorb it best. They're like sponges. I put as much time into them as I can — and hopefully the lessons will stay there!"

Parents are also a crucial part of the equation, and her classroom door is always open so moms and dads can take an active part in their children's education. "I tell them, 'This is your house. You are welcome to come.' I want the parents to see their babies grow."

Though she's just four years into her teaching career, Ms. Mobley already loves watching her former students mature and succeed. "I look at the kids I had. They're taller than me, and I think, 'What happened?'" she laughs. "But they come back, and they give me a hug and say, 'I'm doing good,' or 'I got straight A's on my report card.' I want to be 60 or 70 and see them walk across that college stage. I can see myself being their kids' teacher in school. That's my purpose."

Until then she'll keep dreaming big for her students, fostering kindness and compassion. They give her so much to look forward to and boundless optimism for the future. "When I see them helping each other, I see another president. I see another doctor. It's coming! I can't wait."

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