Ohio History Teacher Named 2022 National Teacher of the Year

Washington, D.C. (April 19, 2022) – The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) today announced that Kurt Russell, a veteran high school history teacher, is the 2022 National Teacher of the Year.

Russell, currently in his 25th year in the classroom, teaches at Oberlin High School in Oberlin, Ohio, where he was born and raised. Inspired to become an educator by his first Black male teacher, Russell works to emphasize cultural relevance and diverse representation in the curriculum of classes he teaches, including African American history; U.S. history; International Baccalaureate History of the Americas; and Race, Gender and Oppression.

Russell is also the school’s head varsity basketball coach. He sees basketball as an extension of the classroom and a place to teach life lessons on adversity and success. Additionally, Russell is the faculty advisor to a student-led Black Student Union, whose work has led to positive impacts for students across racial groups.

“I am truly humbled and honored to be selected as the National Teacher of the Year,” Russell said. “With this recognition, I hope to bring attention and awareness to the importance of diverse faculty and representative curriculum that helps students feel more empowered in their education.”

CCSSO’s National Teacher of the Year Program identifies exceptional teachers across the country, recognizes their effective work in the classroom, engages them in a year of professional learning and amplifies their voices.

As the 2022 National Teacher of the Year, Russell will spend a year representing educators and serving as an ambassador for students and teachers across the nation. He plans to advocate for classrooms to better reflect the students within them — from a curriculum that reflects their backgrounds and identities to a more diverse teaching profession.

“Kurt’s extensive career shows the power of educators to shape the lives of students from the classroom to extracurricular activities to the basketball court,” said CCSSO Chief Executive Officer Carissa Moffat...
Miller. “Dedicated educators like Kurt will be key to helping students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and set them up for success in college and careers. CCSSO has been honored to support excellent educators through the National Teacher of the Year Program since the first National Teacher of the Year was recognized 70 years ago.”

Every year, exemplary teachers from each state, U.S. extra-state territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity are selected as State Teachers of the Year. From that group, the National Teacher of the Year is chosen by a selection committee composed of 17 individuals and education organizations.

The selection committee said in a statement: “Kurt is a powerful advocate who always puts students at the center of his work. With more than two decades in the classroom and strong connections to his community, he speaks with warmth and honesty on how schools can best meet students’ needs. Kurt will be a passionate and authentic voice for teachers and students as 2022 National Teacher of the Year.”

Russell was previously recognized as teacher of the year by the Oberlin Heritage Center and the Oberlin chapter of the NAACP, and as Lorain County Basketball Association Coach of the Year and the Northeast Ohio Coach of the Year.

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“Kurt Russell is an inspiring educator, leader and role model who is fully committed to his students’ success. His passion for ensuring students are engaged and enthusiastic about learning is evident,” Ohio Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction Stephanie Siddens said. “Ohio is proud to have exceptional educators like Mr. Russell who strive to connect with their students and make a positive impact on their lives while ensuring they receive the high-quality education they deserve. Congratulations and thank you to Mr. Russell for continuing to uplift, motivate and inspire your students, school community and, now, individuals across the nation.”

The National Teacher of the Year Program is sponsored by Clorox, Cognia, Curriculum Associates, Data Recognition Corporation, Equitable, ETS, Google for Education, Instructure, MetaMetrics, NWEA, Pearson, Smarter Balanced and Voya.

The finalists for the 2022 National Teacher of the Year are Autumn Rivera (Colorado), Whitney Aragaki (Hawai‘i) and Joseph Welch (Pennsylvania). You can read more about the finalists here.

Learn more about Kurt Russell, including his biography and photos, at www.ntoy.org.

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Bureau of Indian Education, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.