

## **Keynote Address by 2021 Vermont Teacher of the Year Susan Rosato on March 23, 2022**

Thank you, Dean Shepherd, and the department of Education for elevating Vermont teachers. I want to begin by saying I'm honored to speak with you and the awardees. Formal recognition of excellence in our profession is not common and can feel uncomfortable. We know that great teaching involves collaboration. I hope you embrace your title as 2022 Outstanding teachers of Vermont. You were made for this moment. The title can help open doors so that you can affect positive change within our systems. Great teachers change lives.

Representing you as the 2021 Vermont Teacher of the Year has been a humbling experience. My friends and colleagues at Colchester High School are my fellowship. Their love, support, and most importantly professional collaboration is the reason why I received this recognition. My Laker family are great teachers who change lives. I hope my words and actions during my year of service and going forward convey that we are stronger together and ultimately all you need is love.

I have met so many incredible educators through this experience and I want to thank Don Tinney, Secretary French, and Bibba Khan for the positive impact they have on k-12 public education and the support they selflessly gave me when I found myself in the deep end of the pool.

Thank you, Don Tinney, for all of your passionate efforts to advocate for teachers and children. I am excited to join your efforts going forward. Don is hard at work thinking about and executing ways to elevate teacher voice and the joy of teaching. He makes sure that teachers have a seat at the table.

I also want to thank Secretary French for welcoming me onto his advisory group that put systems in place to deal with how our schools responded to and now, will recover from, this pandemic. Your vision to prioritize students' and teachers' social-emotional wellbeing, as critical to student engagement and learning, has shifted the conversation and is one of the good things to come out of a bad situation. My multilingual students loved your visit to our EL summer program. They felt seen and respected. They are also impressed that you speak Korean.

I am grateful to our 2020 Vermont Teacher of the year Bibba Khan. Our time in Washington DC, open my eyes to how educational policy is shaped. We share equity as our TOY platform, and I want to thank you for answering all my questions and helping me understand that our work is just beginning. You are a brilliant teacher and fierce advocate for a joyful and just education for all.

A big congratulations to Karen McCalla. You will do a wonderful job representing us during your 2022 year of service. Your platform to bring STEAM education to more students is incredible. Offering hands-on engineering projects to all children is a tangible way to provide equity. I cannot wait to build something cool in your maker's space and learn how to do this with my students.

This is arguably one of the most challenging years to teach. Being recognized as a 2022 Outstanding teacher indicates that you are a person who can maintain hope and thrive during difficult times. I want to hear the story about what drives you to show up every day for your colleagues and students. What is your WHY?

For me it's hope. I believe that hope is a discipline. It is a powerful tool that gets me to rise up when I feel all might be lost. We have not all had the same experience during this challenging time. We need to heal and offer our students and colleagues grace. I have spent my career advocating for refugee and immigrant families who have fled unbearable circumstances for the hope of a better life. The dream that America is a place they can call home and where their children can thrive because a free public education levels the playing field and opens doors. They are resilient and brave, and their stories are important. That is my why. I want our communities to see these new Vermonters for the assets they bring to our schools. Diverse perspectives and cultures enhance our classrooms and have the power to dismantle racism and inequalities that exist in our systems.

I believe equity work exists in the small victories we make happen for the children who are in our lives and learning in our classrooms. I seek out these small actions every day. Can I find a warm jacket for a student without making them feel less than? Is there a way to connect a student with a classmate so they can get a ride to after-school activities and sports practices? Can I help a student apply for Governor's Institute or Rosie's Girls to spark an unknown passion? Can I support their content teachers with resources and strategies that build authentic relationships and break down social and linguistic barriers?

My work centers around collaborating with teachers so their instruction is comprehensible for multilingual learners and their assessments utilize multiple modalities for these students to demonstrate their learning. I advocate for our students so they see themselves in the curriculum and materials they interact with. I believe that instills hope and inspires students to believe in themselves.

Recently, a student of mine who immigrated from the DRC in the 8th grade and is about to graduate with a degree from UVM in Biochemistry gave me a gift to place in my classroom. The plaque reads: You got this! She told me that every time she came up against a difficult situation, she heard my voice in her head saying, "You got this!" Hope is a powerful instrument that we need to teach ourselves and students to play. It will be why we rise up and overcome in those moments when we feel most defeated.

You all embody the hope that public education brings to children no matter what their background or circumstances might be. There is no doubt that everyone's story includes a teacher. You are that teacher in someone's story. Your students may not remember all the lessons you taught but they will remember how you made them feel. They will remember that you believe in their abilities and that you never stopped believing in them.

I advocate and love public education because it gives me the opportunity to share my talents and gifts with others. I am delivering this keynote from my classroom because it's my home away from home. It's the place where I get to give and receive hope.

So, I hope that this speech has touched a chord in you. And I will hope you welcome the power that being selected as a 2022 Outstanding Vermont teacher can bring to your students and your district. We all have different scars left by this pandemic. It is important that we center healing and connection as we move out of the uncertainty and into recovery. My message is you got this! We got this! We are stronger together and, in the end, all you need is love. ❤️