

# [***Jill Biden recognizes her fellow teachers at a swanky White House dinner for answering 'a calling'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BY1-3NF1-DYMD-61GT-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

WASHINGTON — [*Jill Biden*](https://apnews.com/hub/jill-biden) on Thursday paid tribute to her fellow teachers, hosting the 2024 [*national*](https://ntoy.ccsso.org/2024-national-teacher-of-the-year/#:~:text=Missy%20Testerman%20the%202024%20National,families%20and%20her%20fellow%20teachers.) and [*state teachers*](https://ntoy.ccsso.org/2024-state-teachers-of-the-year/) of the year at a swanky White House dinner to honor their commitment to their students and excellence in the classroom.

“Tonight we celebrate you because teaching isn't just a job, it's a calling. And all of you were called to this profession for a reason," said the first lady, who has taught for more than 30 years. “You believe that a better world is possible and you make that world real.”

President Joe Biden made a brief, surprise appearance at the East Room event immediately after he returned from a trip to North Carolina, saying he appreciates everything teachers do.

“You're incredible,” he said. "You are the kite strings that lift our national ambitions aloft.”

The national and state teachers of the year typically attend a White House ceremony after they're selected by an organization that represents elementary and secondary school educators. (They did not visit during the coronavirus pandemic.)

But Jill Biden, who has taught English and writing at Northern Virginia Community College since 2009, added a new twist by honoring the teachers at a “state dinner” instead.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona pointed out that White House state dinners are reserved for kings, presidents and prime ministers as a sign of respect for their influence.

“So in hosting the state dinner for teachers, the president and his administration is honoring our teachers with a level of national respect that is long overdue,” he said to applause. “There is no American dream without American teachers.”

U.S. public schools continue to face a host of challenges, from teacher shortages due to low pay and job stress to underfunded schools to political fights over what should be taught and how.

A [*Pew Research Center survey*](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/04/04/whats-it-like-to-be-a-teacher-in-a) conducted in April found majorities of K-12 teachers say their jobs are often stressful, their schools are understaffed and they wouldn't advise today's young people to follow them into the profession.

[*Missy Testerman,*](https://apnews.com/article/national-teacher-missy-testerman-tennessee-cc4391a1f647e74c4bc49416db8e939b) the 2024 National Teacher of the Year, who has taught for more than 30 years, said she often wishes she could create a “dream school” that would be a well-funded, modern and well-stocked place where every child flourishes and teachers see the potential in every student.

“Sadly, that dream can sometimes feel like a fantasy and our reality often feels heavy due to the struggles that we watch our students endure,” said Testerman, an English as a Second Language teacher at Rogersville City School in Rogersville, Tennessee.

“But in real life, we not only teach our students, we wrap our arms around them, advocate for them, help them feel secure and help them create a better future for themselves," she said.

A White House [*state dinner*](https://apnews.com/hub/state-dinners) is a diplomatic tool selectively wielded by presidents to highlight cooperation from close U.S. allies. Key features include a pomp-filled welcome ceremony for the visiting head of state, face time with the president and a glitzy, black-tie dinner with hundreds of guests, including titans from the worlds of ***politics***, business and Hollywood.

Teachers got a slimmed-down version.

As guests arrived, they posed for photos in front of a book shelf-like display featuring encyclopedias and other books with the papers of past presidents, brass hand bells, gold-painted apples and vases of irises, the official state flower of Tennessee, in honor of the National Teacher of the Year. Some of the vases were made out of upside-down pencils.

Each teacher was surprised at their seat by a handmade thank-you note from their students, fellow teachers and school leadership that was organized by their school principal.

Dinner was apple, walnut and celery root salad followed by a main course of lobster ravioli. Dessert was a trio of strawberries and cream, apple mousse and coconut custard cake.

Rounding out [*the guest list*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/05/02/white-house-releases-teachers-of-the-year-state-dinner-guest-list/) of more than 200 people were Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris; Cabinet members, including Cardona and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, whose husband Chasten is a teacher; members of Congress and the heads of the two major teachers' unions. Emhoff, a former entertainment lawyer, teaches at Georgetown Law School.

This year's State Teachers of the Year include those from 49 states, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense. Florida did not participate.

The [*Council of Chief State School Officers*](https://ccsso.org/) oversees the National Teacher of the Year Program.

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