

RODNEY ALEXANDER ROBINSON

The Region 1 Virginia Teacher of the Year is Rodney Alexander Robinson, a history teacher at Virgie Binford Education Center in Richmond City Public Schools. Mr. Robinson earned his bachelor's degree with a major in history from Virginia State University in 2000, and he received a master's degree in administration and supervision from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2011. He is beginning his 19th year as a teacher in Richmond City.

Among Mr. Robinson's many awards and recognitions, he received the National Association of University Women Richmond Branch Award for Community Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars National Citizenship Education Post Recognition Award, and the R.E.B. Award for Teaching Excellence. He has delivered multiple lectures and presentations on pedagogy at the Yale National Teacher Institute, as well as the Association for the Study of American Life and History National Conference and the Korean War Digital History Project National Conference.

"Teaching is not a profession, it is a calling," wrote Mr. Robinson. "I love and nurture students as if they were my own children." Rodney's inspiration to become a teacher came from his mother. Every day after football practice his freshman year of high school, Rodney Robinson sat at the back of his mother's GED class waiting for a ride home. What was annoying to him at the time turned out to be what changed his life by inspiring him to become an educator. He observed his mother actively learning, taking meticulous notes, laughing and enjoying time with classmates.

She did not let the worries of working 10-hour days and raising five children deter her. She was not upset that her educational opportunities were limited due to poverty and segregation in the rural south. She was a different person in that classroom, escaping all of life's hardships while learning. These moments were engraved forever into Rodney's memory and demonstrated the power of learning. His mother showed him that education was a gateway to a happier place and better opportunities in life. He works diligently to provide those same experiences for his students.

As a history enthusiast and social advocate, he spends hours studying and creating curriculum, active learning ideas, and project-based learning assignments that fit the needs of his students while considering all learning styles and intellectual abilities. In 2015, Rodney began teaching at Virgie Binford Education Center, a school inside of the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center. He wanted to use his whole child approach to education to help the students who are the most vulnerable. He views his classroom as a collaborative partnership between him and the students. He provides a civic centered education that promotes social and emotional growth. His major focus at the detention center is to reduce the recidivism rate among his students and create socially and civically responsible citizens.

Mr. Robinson's colleague, Ta'Neshia Ford, who has known him for over 14 years, wrote, "Mr. Robinson is a vital component to our school success at Virgie Binford Education Center. Under his tutelage, our young ladies



and men entered and won first place in the district's history fair, for the first time in school history. Mr. Robinson's love of history and his passion for children is beyond compare. ...He makes history come alive for the students. He is also responsible for creating beautiful interactive displays in our school hallways. Those displays are instrumental in creating and maintaining a comfortable learning environment in our detention faculty."

Mr. James R. Vivian, Director of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute in New Haven, Connecticut, wrote, "Mr. Robinson has become a leader in our work nationally and locally. He is highly respected and influential among the other teachers who now come [to the Institute] from 19 school districts in nine states and the District of Columbia. He similarly is a leader in the local effort which the Richmond Public Schools and Virginia Commonwealth University have undertaken as partners to create a Teachers Institute locally. ...Mr. Robinson exemplifies the highest level of his profession in terms of his commitment to continually developing his own knowledge, engaging his students actively in learning about the subject he teaches, and serving as a leader among his colleagues not only in Richmond but also from around the country."