



by Mary Ann Hutcheson

Grace Abbott



Lexington Richland County's 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year

Someone once said about teaching, “In essence, you teach who you are.” It is a fitting reference to Grace Abbott, English teacher at Chapin High School and Lexington Richland County’s 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year. Abbott’s intelligence, humility, candor, and passion for serving others are how she engages her students. She teaches who she is.

A graduate of Cardinal Newman Middle and High School in 2012, Abbott grew up in a Catholic school setting. She credits it with reinforcing her family’s belief in the importance of education and how it can change someone’s life. It taught her how to instill in students the importance of serving others. She says, “In order to fulfill my purpose, I need to serve.”

Abbott began her teaching career at Richland Northeast High School after her Master’s program. She says, “Students can’t

learn if their needs aren’t met. I learned to make sure they feel safe and valued, that it will make a difference in their lives.”

Abbott credits Mrs. Stephanie Sharpe, a fellow teacher there, whose classroom teaching she observed, for showing her how to be a better teacher and how to love her students.

A need to be closer to her aging grandparents in Irmo prompted Abbott to transfer to Chapin High School. She calls their hiring her an immense blessing and probably the smartest move of her professional life.

Abbott underscores the importance of teamwork and support in her department. “You are never alone in this profession,” she says. “The whole Chapin High School faculty is wonderful, but I particularly love my English department. They are the smartest and kindest, most thoughtful individuals.”

When asked about plans for the future she says, simply, “I want to be in the classroom until they kick me out. I love my job; I love being a teacher. I don’t know what I would do if I weren’t. I will be here until they tell me to go home.”

Abbott enjoys kayaking, camping, and hiking with her husband Ross, and she is learning to crochet. She loves to read. “I read a lot,” she says. “I love learning, and I am happy to learn just about anything, especially when I can share that passion with others. I teach students, but I learn from them every single day.” She invites her students to share their passions with her. It is what bonds teachers and students in the learning environment and builds trust. Her students love her for it.

She says, “My main mission, main goal, is to help every person I encounter feel that they belong. Everybody has value, everybody contributes, everybody belongs. Everybody deserves a seat at the table.”

These are trying times for teachers; no need to define the reasons. Yet woven through the strands of pessimism and fears are countless teachers like this young lady who are doing an incredible job of loving and teaching our children. It is still a noble profession, and Grace Abbott is one of the very best. ■