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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Finalists Named for 2021 – 2022 Maryland Teacher of the Year**

*Eight Finalists Compete for Maryland Teacher of the Year Honors;  
Statewide Winner Will Be Announced October 7, 2021 on MPT2*

**BALTIMORE, MD (September 3, 2021)** – The Maryland State Department of Education has named eight finalists for 2021-2022 Maryland Teacher of the Year. They are:

Jing Dai of Anne Arundel County;  
Sidney Thomas of Baltimore City;  
Brianna Ross of Baltimore County,  
Adrin Leak of Prince George’s County;  
Stephanie MacKenzie of Queen Anne’s County;  
Lauren Greer of Talbot County;  
Caroline Schlegel of Washington County; and  
Dustin Thomas of Wicomico County.

“Maryland’s teachers are critical in the lives of Maryland children, demonstrating unwavering commitment to engaging, inspiring and encouraging our students,” said Governor Larry Hogan. “These outstanding eight finalists represent the many exemplary teachers throughout our great state, and I congratulate them on their nominations and well-deserved recognition.”

State Superintendent Mohammed Choudhury agreed that becoming a State Teacher of the Year finalist is a prestigious honor. “It is important that we celebrate teaching and these exceptional educators who are experts in their field,” said Mr. Choudhury. “We know that the single most important school-based factor in student success is the adult in front of the classroom each and every day. Our educators drive student achievement, and we applaud their dedication to excellence and equity.”

From a group of 24 local systems’ teachers of the year, the finalists were selected by a panel of judges representing key Maryland education organizations, and include principals, teachers, school boards, teacher unions, and representatives from higher education. All finalists were chosen based on a rigorous set of state and national criteria that include instructional abilities, collaboration with colleagues, students, and families, community connections, leadership and innovation in and out of the classroom, and ability to articulate education issues and beliefs.

The 2021-2022 Maryland Teacher of the Year will be announced on Maryland Public Television on October 7, 2021 in a 30-minute Maryland Teacher of the Year Television Special airing at 8 p.m. on MPT2 as well as being streamed on YouTube at video.mpt.tv. The program will highlight all 24 local school systems' teachers of the Year and end with the announcement naming the new 2021-2022 Maryland Teacher of the Year.

Presenting sponsors for the Maryland Teacher of the Year Program are Comcast, the Maryland Automobile Dealers Association, McDonald's® Family of Baltimore, Northrop Grumman Corporation, and SMART Technologies. Platinum sponsors are Maryland Public Television, NTA Life/Horace Mann, and Whiting-Turner Contracting Company.

The selected Maryland Teacher of the Year will go on to compete for the esteemed National Teacher of the Year Award. Maryland's Teacher of the Year will also spend the coming year as an educational speaker and advisor in Maryland. At this time, both virtual and in-person venues are being planned throughout the State and nation.

### **Additional information on the eight 2021 – 2022 Maryland Teacher of the Year finalists:**

#### **Anne Arundel County – Jing Dai, Meade High School, Chinese, Grades 9-12**

Jing Dai holds a Master of Education from LaSalle University and Master of Arts from Towson University. Her Bachelor of Science is from Sichuan University in China. She is the current president of the Chinese Language Teachers Association-National Capital Region and a frequent presenter at national and regional conferences. In honor of Jing's work with the Chinese Embassy promoting cultural proficiency for equity and inclusion, she was honored with the Distinguished Teacher Award from the Chinese School Association in the United States and the Outstanding Performance and Achievements in Teaching Confucius Classroom.

#### **Baltimore City – Sidney Thomas, Holabird Academy, Social Studies, Grades 7-8**

Sidney Thomas earned her Bachelor of Arts from Millsaps College and her Master of Arts from Jackson State University. She is committed to racial equity and supporting students as they blossom and thrive. As a BMore Me Fellow, she develops and writes a racially equitable and culturally responsive Social Studies curriculum for Baltimore City Schools. Sidney also serves as a Multi-Classroom Lead, Holabird Equity Committee Leader, Project LIT leader, and other outside roles such as a CHARM magazine advisory board member and a One Book Baltimore committee member.

#### **Baltimore County – Brianna Ross, Deer Park Middle Magnet School, Social Studies, Grade 6**

Brianna Ross views teaching as “a revolutionary act of love.” She has a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science from the University of Pittsburgh, and a certificate in Administration and Supervision from Loyola University of Maryland. Brianna is working on a doctorate in Urban Educational Leadership from Morgan State University. Brianna serves as the Equity Liaison and Social Studies Department Chair. She launched a Summer Transition Program to help students thrive in middle school.

#### **Prince George's County – Adrin Leak, DuVal High School, English Language Arts, Grade 10**

Adrin Leak attended the Ohio State University and earned two Bachelors of Arts in both English and Psychology and a Master of Education, graduating Summa Cum Laude. After graduation, she returned home to proudly serve Prince George's County Public Schools as an English teacher, Professional Development Lead Teacher, Engagement and Technology Liaison, and Coordinator for the Aerospace

Summer Bridge program for Duval High School. She later earned her Administrator I licensure from Loyola University. In addition, she vets Maryland curriculum.

**Queen Anne’s County – Stephanie MacKenzie, Sudlersville Middle School, English Language Arts, Grade 8**

Stephanie MacKenzie has a Bachelor of Arts from Wesley College and a Master of Arts from Wilmington University. She also earned an Administrative Certification from Johns Hopkins University. She teaches English Language Arts and is the Service-Learning Coordinator, presenting students with opportunities to learn empathy and practice civic involvement. Currently participating in multiple committees, including Equity, Social Emotional Learning, and Title I Engagement, she won QACPS New Teacher of the Year, NHD History Teacher of the Year, and QACPS’ Spirit Award for coaching competitive cheerleading.

**Talbot County – Lauren Greer, St. Michaels Middle/High School, CTE/Science, Grades 9-12**

Lauren Greer is a Career and Technology Biomedical Science teacher with a Bachelor of Science from Gettysburg College and a Master of Arts from Towson University. Lauren is the PBIS Coach, Green Schools Committee Chair, Co-Advisor of the National Technical Honor Society, Biomedical Engineering Society faculty advisor, member of the school’s Equity Team and a digital leader for her school. She contributes to science curriculum-writing and also leads school-based and county-based professional development opportunities.

**Washington County – Caroline Schlegel, Smithburg High School, Spanish, Grades 9-12**

Caroline is a master Spanish educator who holds both a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Education from Salisbury University. As the 2019 Maryland World Language Teacher of the Year, she knows that language and culture are keys to making connections across complex ideas around cultural proficiency. As the School Improvement Team Chair and Washington County Spanish curriculum author, she believes professional development is integral and she has presented throughout the nation, ways to build a community of practice to connect and lead teachers through collaboration.

**Wicomico County – Dustin Thomas, Prince Street Elementary School, Physical Education & Health, Grades Pre-K-5**

Dustin Thomas has taught Physical Education and Health in Wicomico County for 10 years. With both a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science from Salisbury University, he also coaches, volunteers at charity races, founded the Rhythm and Roots drum program, and created a World Music class. He won McEducator and the Extra Mile Awards, Wellness Coordinator of the Year, and Hertrich’s Cash for Class Community Choice Award. Dustin and Rhythm and Roots scholars earned local and national recognition from WMDT, WBOC, *Inspire One* magazine, SHAPE Maryland, Hip Hop Public Health and the NBC Today Show.

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