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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Finalists Named for 2022-23 Maryland Teacher of the Year

*Seven Finalists Compete for Maryland Teacher of the Year Honors;
Statewide Winner Will be Announced October 6 on MPT2*

BALTIMORE, MD (September 2, 2022) – The Maryland State Department of Education has named seven outstanding teachers as finalists for 2022-23 Maryland Teacher of the Year.

The finalists are: Charles Whittaker of Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Berol Dewdney of Baltimore City Public Schools; Alicia Amaral Freeman of Baltimore County Public Schools; Jonathan Kurtz of Frederick County Public Schools; Ashley Gereli of Harford County Public Schools; Elizabeth McDonald of Washington County Public Schools; and Rebecca Mathews of Wicomico County Public Schools.

“Congratulations to each of the 24 local Teachers of the Year who work hard each day to help us ensure that every Maryland child has access to a world-class education,” said Governor Larry Hogan. “As we announce this year’s seven finalists, we celebrate and honor all of our incredible teachers who demonstrate unwavering dedication to engaging, encouraging and inspiring our children.”

“Maryland’s Teacher of the Year program recognizes the outstanding contributions of educators throughout our State,” said State Board President Clarence C. Crawford. “As we enter this transformational time for education in our State and deliver the promise of an excellent and equitable education to every child, the contributions of Maryland’s teachers will be more critical than ever. We applaud the work of each of our local Teachers of the Year and finalists for their leadership and skill in and outside the classroom.”

“I extend warm congratulations to all the teachers of the year and especially to the seven finalists! Your commitment to making a difference in the lives of the children is an inspiration to your colleagues across the state. As we work to implement The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, we look to education professionals across the state to lead the charge and guide our efforts to transform education,” said Rachel McCusker, Maryland State Board of Education Teacher Member. “The Maryland Teacher of the Year program brings together some of the strongest

educators in the state to share their creative ideas and passion for educational excellence. We look forward to engagement opportunities with these outstanding educators and wish them well during this exciting year!”

“Maryland’s teachers are exceptionally talented and highly-skilled professionals who drive excellence in our students and communities each and every day. As we continue to emerge from the pandemic, address learning loss and accelerate academic achievement, we recognize and respect the critical role of our educators and their far-reaching impact,” said State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. “Each of our local Teachers of the Year sets an unparalleled benchmark for public service, scholarship and commitment. As we lead the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future and transform education, this extraordinary cohort of teachers will help lead us forward.”

From a group of 24 local 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 assessed on a rigorous set of state and national criteria including 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 2022-2023 Maryland Teacher of the Year will be announced on Maryland Public Television (MPT) on October 6, 2022, in a 30-minute Maryland Teacher of the Year Television Special airing at 8 p.m. on MPT2. The program will highlight all 24 local education agencies’ Teachers of the Year and culminate in the naming of the 2022-23 Maryland Teacher of the Year.

Presenting sponsors for the Maryland Teacher of the Year Program are McDonald’s® Family of Baltimore and Northrop Grumman Corporation. Platinum sponsors are Maryland Public Television (MPT) NTA Life/Horace Mann, and Whiting-Turner Contracting Company. Gold sponsors include Bank of America, the Maryland State Education Association, and WJZ-13. 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 represent the teaching profession and spend the coming year as an educational speaker, ambassador and advisor.

Learn more about the seven 2022-23 finalists:

Anne Arundel County: Charles Whittaker, Center of Applied Technology North, HVAC Instructor, Grades 9–12

After retiring from a thirty-year career, Charles Whittaker joined the faculty of the Center of Applied Technology North as an HVAC instructor. He prepares his students by training them in industry standards as well as personal and workplace skills. As a member of the School Improvement Team, Charles champions school-wide initiatives such as industry certifications. Charles earned a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Baltimore (2004) and his Master of Business Administration from Strayer University (2006).

Baltimore City: Berol Dewdney, The Commodore John Rodgers School, Pre-K

Berol Dewdney believes education is fundamental to the practice of freedom and democracy itself. Dewdney earned her Bachelor of Arts from Colby College (2013) and her Master of Arts from Johns Hopkins (2015). A designated model teacher, she will enter her 10th year teaching Prekindergarten at Commodore John Rodgers, and serves as team lead, Tools of the Mind endorsed curriculum lead, and instructional coach across the district.

Baltimore County: Alicia Amaral Freeman, Franklin Elementary School, ESOL, Grades Pre-K-5

Alicia Amaral Freeman realized her life's passion for teaching English to children when as a child she experienced her Portuguese grandmother struggling to help her with schoolwork. Seeking to understand educational inequities, Freeman studied at Barnard College at Columbia University and Notre Dame University of Maryland, where she earned degrees in Women's Studies (2001) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (2008). After teaching ESOL and Spanish and serving as principal of a dual-language parochial school, Freeman returned to the classroom to teach ESOL at three Baltimore County schools.

Frederick County: Jonathan Kurtz, Governor Thomas Johnson High School, Music, Grades 9-12

Jonathan Kurtz earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Taylor University (2003). He completed a Master of Arts in Music Education at the University of Maryland College Park (2009) and holds a Certificate of Educational Leadership from Hood College (2015). Kurtz has taught music in grades K-12 over the last 19 years including concert band, jazz band, orchestra, music theory, music technology, and music history. He regularly participates in curriculum writing and department chair meetings, and served on a school Hybrid Reopening Committee.

Harford County: Ashley Gereli, Churchville Elementary School, Special Education, Grades K-5

Ms. Ashley Gereli is a sixth-year Special Education teacher at Churchville Elementary School. A proud product of HCPS, she completed the Teaching Academy of Maryland Program at C. Milton Wright High in 2012. She attended Harford Community College to study Elementary Education, Special Education, and Psychology, earning her Associate of Arts in 2014. Ms. Gereli completed her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary and Special Education at Towson University in 2016. Currently, she is pursuing graduate studies in Transformational Educational Leadership and a Master of Arts at Towson University.

Washington County: Elizabeth McDonald, Boyd J. Michael III Technical High School, Biomedical Science, Grades 11 & 12

Elizabeth McDonald leads the Academy of Biomedical Sciences, where high school students develop content knowledge and skills to prepare for college and career. She earned a master's degree from Marymount University and a bachelor's degree from Wake Forest University. She

is a National Board-Certified Teacher and utilizes an inquiry-based learning model to increase student engagement and exploration of challenging topics in science and medicine. McDonald sponsors HOSA Future Health Professionals and mentors students in competitive events and outreach programs, including a Mini Med School for elementary students.

Wicomico County: Rebecca Mathews, Wicomico High School, Science, Grades 9-12

Earning her Bachelor of Arts in Biology from Swarthmore, Rebecca Mathews began teaching in 2000 and is currently pursuing National Board Certification. Mathews has collaborated with educators to implement the nationally recognized WestEd's Nexus program in Maryland. Utilizing professional development opportunities, Mathews has presented at seven conferences since 2015. Supporting student leadership and achievement, she advises SGA, NHS, Alliance, DI and JLAB; these groups have received local, state, and national recognition.

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