



Mohammed Choudhury
State Superintendent of Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MEDIA CONTACT:

Sylvia Lawson, 410-767-0463
sylvia.lawson@maryland.gov

Finalists Named for 2023-2024 Maryland Teacher of the Year

Seven Finalists Compete for Maryland Teacher of the Year Honors; Statewide Winner will be Announced October 13

BALTIMORE (September 11, 2023) – Today, the Maryland State Board of Education and Maryland State Department of Education announced the names of the seven finalists who will compete to be named the 2023-2024 Maryland Teacher of the Year.

“I congratulate these seven educators on their nominations and commend them on their extraordinary impact on the lives of our children – educating, encouraging, and inspiring Maryland’s future leaders,” said State Board President Clarence Crawford. “Maryland’s educators demonstrate an unwavering dedication to the children of our state every day and are a true inspiration to their colleagues and community. These seven educators embody that dedication.”

“Our State’s educators provide our students with guidance and knowledge that reaches far past the classroom promoting life-long learning,” said Superintendent Choudhury. “Our seven finalists exemplify excellence in education here in Maryland and have a profound impact through the support they provide to our communities in and out of the classroom.”

The finalists are Mary Kay Connerton, Anne Arundel County; Brianne Sounder, Cecil County; Nicole Rhoades, Frederick County; Andrea Schulte, Queen Anne’s County; Raymond Weber, Washington County; Tara Martens, Wicomico County; and Dr. Jaimie Ridgely, Worcester County.

The finalists were selected by a panel of judges from key Maryland education organizations representing principals, teachers, school boards, teacher unions, parents, and higher education. Finalists were chosen according to a rigorous set of national criteria that included student achievement, teaching philosophy, academic results, community involvement, and knowledge of educational issues from a group of 24 local teachers of the year, representing the 24 Maryland local education agencies.

Maryland has celebrated its Teacher of the Year Program and participated in the National Teacher of the Year Program for 33 years. In the last 10 years, Maryland has had five national finalists, with three going on to become the National Teacher of the Year. Presenting sponsors of the Maryland Teacher of the Year

Program are McDonald's Family Restaurants of Baltimore and the Northrop Grumman Corporation. Platinum sponsors are NTA Life, Educational Systems FCU, Maryland Public Television, and Whiting-Turner Contracting Company.

The 2023-2024 Maryland Teacher of the Year will be announced during a gala reception and dinner at Martin's West in Baltimore on October 13, 2023. The winner will receive cash awards, national traveling opportunities, and participate in several national meetings and conferences.

The selected Maryland Teacher of the Year will compete for the esteemed National Teacher of the Year Award, to be announced next April. Maryland's Teacher of the Year will also spend the 2023-2024 school year as an educational speaker and advisor in Maryland and will be honored by the President at the White House next spring.

Additional information on the seven 2023-2024 Maryland Teacher of the Year finalists:

**Anne Arundel County – Mary Kay Connerton, Annapolis High School
Physical Education/Wellness, Grades 9-12**

Mary Kay Connerton is a fierce advocate for student wellness and serves as the Wellness Coordinator at Annapolis High School. The wellness program she created assists the school community with living healthfully, earning a Wellness School of Distinction Award. She co-leads the Trauma Team, other programs that focus on healing and connecting communities, and pioneered the first yoga program and Social Emotional Learning/Wellness curriculum. She received the 2020 SHAPE Friend Award and earned a master's in special education and a bachelor's in childhood education from SUNY Cortland.

**Cecil County – Brianne Souder, Rising Sun High School
Fine Arts, Grades 9-12**

Brianne Souder is a visual arts educator with 17 years of experience. She received her bachelor's from Penn State University and her master's from Montclair State University. She is a committed advocate for arts education and has presented at the county, state, and national levels. Brianne is passionate about teaching students about the world through the visual arts and the mental health benefits it provides. She delivers engaging, diverse, and enriching experiences to guide students in discovering their potential while addressing their social emotional needs.

**Frederick County – Nicole Rhoades, Windsor Knolls Middle School
Science, Grade 7**

Nicole Rhoades is in her 13th year of teaching seventh grade science at Windsor Knolls Middle School, where she organized the first school-wide science fair, STEM Career Day, and educational opportunities at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. She earned National Board Certification in Early Adolescent Science in 2013 and coaches other teachers pursuing National Board Certification. She earned a bachelor's in biology from Salisbury University and has previously conducted biomedical research at Johns Hopkins Medical Institute. She was an Excellence in Gifted and Talented Education Award winner and was a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching nominee.

**Queen Anne’s County – Andrea Schulte, Kent Island High School
Visual Arts, Grades 9-12**

Andrea Schulte is a passionate teacher leader, championing student-centered approaches to teaching the whole child through student choice/voice and social emotional learning in and out of the classroom. Her career began in 2001 as a science teacher before becoming a middle and high school Visual Arts teacher. Her professional experiences include serving as the Art Department Chair, Statewide Presenter, National Art Honor Society Sponsor, and National Honor Society Advisor. She has a bachelor’s in art education and a master’s in Art Education with a concentration in Art Therapy from Edinboro University.

**Washington County – Raymond Weber, Salem Avenue Elementary School
English/Language Arts, Grade 8**

Raymond Weber, a 13-year fifth grade teacher at a Title I school, empowers students to realize their potential and develops their knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed in and beyond the classroom. He earned his bachelor’s in Elementary Education at Shepherd University and master’s in Instructional Design and Technology at West Virginia University. He is a team leader, curriculum writer, and mentor for Destination Imagination and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. He earned the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and is a Fulbright Teacher for Global Classrooms.

**Wicomico County – Tara Martens, West Salisbury Elementary School
Math Intervention, Grades 1 and 2**

Tara Martens, an 11-year teacher in Wicomico County, holds a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Salisbury University and a master’s in Special Education from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. She is the Math Intervention Teacher at West Salisbury Elementary, where she re-writes contemporary songs connecting music with math for her students. She co-chairs both the Instructional Leadership Team and the Family Engagement Committee. She also initiated a Grades 1 and 2 Title I Summer Tutoring Program, worked for Home and Hospital, and tutored students experiencing homelessness under a district initiative. She was honored with the McEducator Award of Excellence.

**Worcester County – Dr. Jaimie Ridgely, Stephen Decatur Middle School
Literacy Enrichment & Technology Education, Grades 7 and 8**

Jaimie Ridgely is a National Board Certified teacher. She is a literacy enthusiast who prioritizes identity exploration and joy in her Literacy Enrichment and Technology Education classes at Stephen Decatur Middle School. Community, voice, choice, and reflection are cornerstones of her student-centered classroom where students share their creative voices within and beyond the classroom walls. She earned her bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees from Salisbury University. She is a 21-year veteran teacher who also serves as an adjunct professor, Worcester LEAD teacher, peer mentor, professional development facilitator, and serves as an afterschool sponsor for the Book Club, tutoring, and Dungeons and Dragons.

###