

# News Release: Ridgecrest Elementary Educator Named 2017 Christa McAuliffe Outstanding Educator

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For Immediate Release

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**UPPER MARLBORO, MD** – Ridgecrest Elementary School teacher Rachel Elizabeth Wheelin is the recipient of the 2017 Christa McAuliffe Outstanding Teacher Award from Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS).

Wheelin, who teaches sixth-grade Reading/Social Studies, was selected for the award by her peers. A nine-year veteran educator, she has served at Ridgecrest for the past five years. She has taken on numerous roles, including lead and mentor teacher, student government advisor, National Geographic Bee coordinator, robotics instructor and softball coach.

"Ms. Wheelin's dedication to lifelong learning supports our focus," said Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer. "By continuing to build her skills and keeping abreast of literacy trends and research, she is well-equipped to meet students' needs in the classroom." In nominating her for the award, school staff highlighted not only Wheelin's effectiveness as an educator, but also her passion, leadership, creativity and dedication to students.

"When she started to teach at Ridgecrest, she saw the needs of the community and set out to fulfill them," said Ridgecrest principal Denise Dunn. "She wanted the students to have a voice in the school, so she created our Student Government Association. She is inclusive and acutely aware of the needs of others, and willing to assist wherever she can."

Wheelin will be honored at the annual Employee Recognition Dinner on May 25 at Martin's Crosswinds in Greenbelt. In addition, her name will be added to the Christa McAuliffe award plaque at the Sasscer Administration Building in Upper Marlboro.

The Christa McAuliffe Award honors an outstanding educator based on competitive standards of excellence established by other teachers. The award is a tribute to McAuliffe, the Teacher-In-Space who lost her life aboard the space shuttle Challenger in January 1986. McAuliffe taught in Prince George's County from 1971 to 1978.

Prior to Ridgecrest, Wheelin was a special education teacher in Washington, D.C. She began her teaching career with the AmeriCorps City Year program in Philadelphia, tutoring and mentoring middle school students.

The following teachers joined Wheelin as nominees for this year's award:

- Rhonda Cipolla - High Bridge Elementary
- Regina Dorsett - Glenn Dale Elementary
- Jamie Goldsmith - Rosaryville Elementary
- LeAnn Holden-Martin - Charles Herbert Flowers High

- Alaiyo Kiasi-Barnes - Academy of Health Sciences @ PGCC
- Mary Grace Pagharion - International High School @ Langley Park
- Hubert Willoughby - Eleanor Roosevelt High

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Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), one of the nation's 20th largest school districts, has 201 schools and centers, more than 133,000 students and nearly 20,000 employees. The school system serves a diverse student population from urban, suburban and rural communities located in the Washington, DC suburbs. PGCPS is nationally recognized for college and career-readiness programs that provide students with unique learning opportunities, including dual enrollment and language immersion.

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