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**VALLEY SPRINGS MIDDLE TEACHER CHOSEN AS  
2017 BUNCOMBE COUNTY SCHOOLS TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

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(ASHEVILLE)- Catherine Belair, a 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics Teacher at Valley Springs Middle School, has been selected as the *2017 Buncombe County Teacher of the Year* at the annual Teacher of the Year Banquet held at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel®. Once again, Tammy Jones and Dex Mitchell, hosts of *Tammy and Dex In the Morning* on Mix 96.5, served as the MCs of the event.

“Honestly, I’m in shock. To be selected from this amazing group of teachers is overwhelming and incredibly humbling,” said Belair. “As I was going through this process, I always stayed true to myself because I don’t know any other way to be. I am truly honored to have been selected.”

Belair was announced as a finalist for the honor along with five other District Teachers of the Year for 2017 at the September 1 Board of Education meeting. Also competing for the honor were (listed in alphabetical order by school name): Jennifer Vann, *Barnardsville Elementary School*, Samantha Gallman, *Charles D. Owen High School*, Sean Dare, *Enka Middle School*, Caitlin Sullivan, *Fairview Elementary School*, and Tina Evans, *Martin L. Nesbitt, Jr. Discovery Academy*.

“Every year, we pay tribute to exceptional educators across our schools. It is an unbelievably difficult task to narrow the list down to the district winners, but it is even more challenging to select a system winner because of our large pool of deserving teachers,” Superintendent Dr. Tony Baldwin said. “Mrs. Belair has an unmistakable ability to first connect with her students and then help them understand how math concepts are applicable in their lives. She is definitely a most deserving choice as the BCS Teacher of the Year for 2017.”

Belair now competes for the title of Western Region Teacher of the Year and then will move into the North Carolina Teacher of the Year selection process, should she win the regional competition.

Each year the BCS Teacher of the Year Committee awards an outstanding teacher the *Ruth Henderson Award*, which recognizes an altruistic teacher whose light shines for every student and gives of themselves unselfishly. This year’s recipient announced at the banquet, is Amado Gutierrez, an ROTC instructor at Clyde A. Erwin High School.

The district winners are selected from the school Teachers of the Year in each of the six districts that comprise the Buncombe County School System. The selection process for the Buncombe County Schools Teacher of the Year includes a portfolio, interviews, classroom observations, and a prepared speech presentation.

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