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WEHS teacher wins prestigious teaching fellowship

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Apr 27, 2018



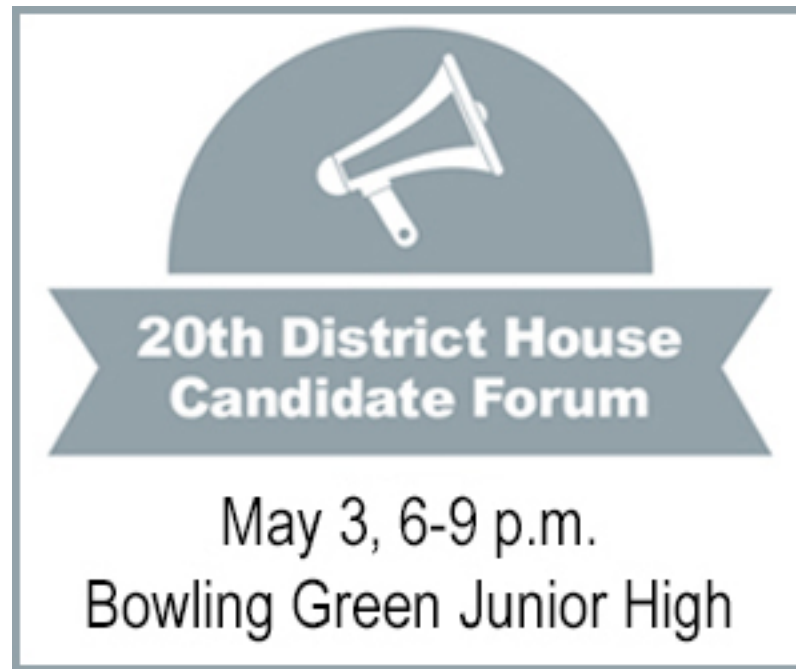
Claire Bellar

Submitted

A Warren East High School teacher has been selected for the 2018 James Madison teaching fellow – an honor awarded to one teacher per state.

“I am still so shocked,” said Claire Bellar, who teaches social studies.

As part of the \$24,000 fellowship, Bellar will complete a master's degree with a focus on the U.S. Constitution.



Her journey will take her next summer to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where she will study under some of the nation's top scholars and meet a U.S. Supreme Court justice, she said.

Bellar, who has been teaching for two years, is grateful for the chance to complete her master's degree. She hopes to bring that knowledge and experience back into her social studies classroom.

"First and foremost, I want to use it to better my students," she said.

Bellar's colleagues said her commitment to students is obvious.

"She's an outstanding teacher," WEHS Principal Nicole Clark said. "She takes her role as a mentor and teacher very seriously."

Clark said it's an honor to have Bellar represent WEHS and that she's proud to have her as an educator in her school.

Along with the knowledge Bellar will pass on to her students, Clark said Bellar will stand out as a role model for students when it comes to applying for academic opportunities.

Cory Dodds, coordinator of nationally competitive opportunities in WKU's Office of Scholar Development, helped Bellar apply for the fellowship.

Melissa Marr, a social studies teacher and department head, said she's also seen Bellar's skill in the classroom.

"The main thing that I love about Claire is that she builds wonderful relationships with her students and she puts her students first," Marr said.

Marr added that Bellar is always searching for new ways to reach students.

"What we love is that she is innovative in her classroom," Marr said. "The most important thing is that she puts students first."

Western Kentucky University Provost David Lee was Bellar's history professor and spoke as a reference for her in the application process.



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"Claire is a very deserving recipient of the Madison Fellowship," Lee said in a news release. "She's committed to giving her students the strongest possible education in history and political science in order to prepare them to be responsible citizens of the Commonwealth. The Madison Fellowship will help her to do just that."

According to the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, the fellowship is aimed toward teachers seeking to become “outstanding teachers of the American Constitution.”

Applicants compete against others from their state and only one candidate from each state is selected each year.

“It is extremely competitive,” Bellar said of the process.

Bellar said she wants to teach dual-credit courses at WEHS so her students can begin accumulating college credit.

Along with her lessons, Bellar conveys an appreciation for the Constitution by advising the school’s Y-Club, which allows students to participate in a mock legislature, and the Kentucky United Nations Assembly.

She sees her teaching as a way to help students become better citizens.

“When American students have knowledge of the Constitution and its role in American history, they have knowledge not of their legal limits, but of their individual possibilities as American youth and global citizens,” she said in a news release.

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