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### **Beth Ruff Selected as 2023 School Counselor of the Year Finalist**



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Beth Ruff, Ed.D., school counselor, Powder Springs Elementary School, Powder Springs, Ga., as a finalist for the 2023 School Counselor of the Year awards program (#SCOY23). Ruff has been a school counselor since 2008. Powder Springs Elementary School, a Recognized ASCA Model Program school, serves 815 students, grades K–5, two-thirds of whom receive free and reduced-price lunch. Ruff received

her bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees from the University of West Georgia.

“She does everything to the maximum, in the best way possible,” said Alexandra Huguelet, elementary school counseling consultant, Cobb County School District, Ga. “She tirelessly advocates for students – most fiercely for the voiceless ones, silenced by society, like our students in the foster care system. She advocates for our profession – moving and shaking all the time at the local, state and national level ensuring everyone knows what school counselors can do. She collaborates like none other – always building relationships and creating infrastructure to ultimately help her families along the way. She’s a leader in all arenas – stepping up at her local school, throughout the district on various leadership teams and at the state level as well.”

When students returned to Powder Springs Elementary School after the pandemic, they struggled to manage their emotions, handle conflicts and regulate impulsivity. Despite staff's best efforts, discipline referrals climbed. "We had to do something," Ruff said. "Then it came to me – arts integration. Our students needed a space to express themselves artistically while learning and practicing coping skills.

With the administration's support, I built a team of school counselors and teachers passionate about arts integration to develop a sensory hall infused with the arts and social/emotional learning." The team drafted plans to add mirrors, colorful paintings and textured walls to a mundane back hallway. They enlisted expert help to design interactive arts integration experiences and called upon the wellness specialist and special education supervisors to incorporate mindfulness and sensory play. Their proposal resulted in nearly \$9,000 worth of grant funding to build the Powder Springs Elementary School Regulation Station.

When the Regulation Station was ready for its big reveal, community and school stakeholders attended the grand opening. The hall reverberated with mutterings like "this is incredible." However, the real magic happened when the students stepped into the hall. The students let their guards down while playing a beat in the drumming room or hopping down the sensory path. Not long after, teachers began to report its positive effects and witnessed increased student self-management skills and decreased classroom behavior problems.

"ASCA's School Counselor of the Year program shines a valuable spotlight on the school counseling profession, bringing attention to exceptional school counselors who are supporting K-12 students every day," said Jill Cook, CAE, ASCA executive director. "School counselors are vital to students' academic achievement, social/emotional development and plans for life after graduation. The 2023 finalists have demonstrated their commitment to the values and mission of the profession to help all students succeed."

The School Counselor of the Year and finalists will be celebrated in Washington, D.C., in February 2023 and will participate in webinars and additional online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 6-10, 2023.

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**About the American School Counselor Association**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) professional organization based in Alexandria, Va. ASCA promotes student success by expanding the image and influence of school counseling through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. ASCA helps school counselors guide their students toward academic achievement, career planning and social/emotional development to help today's students become tomorrow's productive, contributing members of society. Founded in 1952, ASCA has a network of 50 state and territory associations and a membership of approximately 43,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org).