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### **Carmen Larson Selected as 2025 School Counselor of the Year®**



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Carmen Larson, Ph.D., as the 2025 School Counselor of the Year® (#SCOY25). Larson is a school counselor at Sarasota Middle School, Sarasota, Fla.; the school serves 1,298 students, grades 6–8. Larson, who has been a school counselor since 2002, earned her bachelor’s degree from St. Leo University and her master’s and doctorate degrees from the University of Florida.

“Her passion for and extensive knowledge in school counseling are remarkable,” said Jennifer Nzeza, Sarasota Middle School principal. “Dr. Larson is calm, centered, possesses strong foundational beliefs and maintains a passion for child advocacy, which guides everything she does. She is articulate, intelligent and keenly able to connect with colleagues, parents and community members.”

Beginning in the 2021–2022 school year, Larson collaborated with district leaders to lead a two-year action research project resulting in the school board’s approval to reduce student-to-school-counselor ratios and remove non-school-counseling duties from the school counselor’s role. Larson then led the school counselors in Sarasota County in implementing comprehensive, data-informed school counseling programs at all schools. Notably, the same year, Sarasota County Schools improved an impressive 49 points on the Florida Department of Education’s overall district

accountability metric for learning gains. In 2022, Larson was recognized for the impact she made in her school community and was honored with a Ripple Effect Award by the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation. She was awarded \$5,000 to spend on professional development experiences that would help her continue innovative school counseling practices. She used the money to purchase and train a goldendoodle named Winston to become a school therapy dog and earned the Certified Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist credential. The therapy dog program Larson created has made a tremendous impact on her school environment, as she provides canine-assisted interventions with students to decrease symptoms of anxiety, alleviate crisis situations and promote a positive school culture.

“Through her extensive and varied experiences, Dr. Larson illustrated that advocacy is imperative to the profession,” said Lauri Benton, School Counselor of the Year® Selection Committee member. “Her submission and interview process reflected her inspirational work to support today’s students and school communities, develop the next generation of school counselors and lead efforts to ensure every student is heard, valued and empowered to succeed.”

The School Counselor of the Year® and finalists will be celebrated in Washington, D.C., in January 2025 and will participate in online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 3–7, 2025.

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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 53 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).