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Summer Royale Whittington Selected as 2026 School Counselor of the Year Finalist



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Summer Royale Whittington as a finalist for the 2026 School Counselor of the Year® awards program (#SCOY26). Whittington is a school counselor at Ernest Gallet Elementary School in Youngsville, La. The school serves 900 students, grades pre-K–5. Whittington, who has been a school counselor since 2018 received a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's degree with a double major in clinical mental health counseling and school counseling, all from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

"Summer is, without a doubt, an invaluable asset – not only to her school, but also to the greater Lafayette community," said Jardin Burleigh, site-based program manager, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Acadiana. "As a key partner in our mentoring programs, she goes above and beyond in ensuring students are matched with mentors who can make a meaningful impact on their lives. She is a proactive communicator, a tireless advocate and someone who consistently ensures the children's needs and best interests are prioritized."

To address concerns about student behavior, teacher morale and the need for a more trauma-informed environment, in the 2023–2024 school year Whittington

participated in the Behavior and Culture Team with the school's leadership team. Their goal was to empower teachers with tools to manage behavior in developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive and trauma-informed ways to create stronger relationships and fewer discipline referrals. Also, she helped implement a new campuswide SEL curriculum, CORE Essentials, and introduced the curriculum through professional learning communities, showing an alignment with positive behavior supports and school improvement goals. By year's end, the school achieved a more than 50% reduction in major office referrals and a measurable increase in teachers' confidence in managing behavior.

"Each year, the School Counselor of the Year® program shows us what the research tells us – that school counselors have a significant impact on students' academic achievement, social/emotional development and plans for life after graduation," said Jill Cook, ASCA executive director. "Through their dedication, contributions and excellence, these finalists have demonstrated their commitment to the values and mission of the school counseling profession."

The School Counselor of the Year® and finalists will be celebrated in Washington, D.C., in January 2026 and will participate in online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 2–6, 2026.

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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.