



## 2022 School Counselor of the Year

### Alma Lopez

Lead School Counselor  
Livingston Middle School  
Livingston, Calif.



A graduate of California State University – Fresno, Alma Lopez has been a school counselor for 15 years and serves as Livingston Unified School District’s school counseling coordinator.

Lopez embodies the full spirit of school counseling. “The deep commitment she has to her community, her relentless focus on providing equitable outcomes for her students and her implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program were evident throughout her application and interview process,” said Valerie Hardy, a member of the independent judging panel that selects the School Counselor of the Year finalists and winner of the award. “As a first-generation college attendee, Ms. Lopez serves as an inspiration for her students, her community and the profession.”

All 804 students at Lopez’s rural school, which serves grades 6–8, receive free or reduced-price lunch. The 2,500-student district had only two school counselors when Lopez started working there; her advocacy efforts in 2015 contributed to the district’s decision to expand the number to five.

“Ms. Lopez provides an excellent example of school counseling advocacy,” said Jill Cook, ASCA executive director. “By using data and articulating the impact of a comprehensive school counseling program, Ms. Lopez

demonstrated the benefits of reducing student-to-school-counselor ratios, ultimately improving student outcomes.”

“Alma is passionate about supporting our students in succeeding in middle school,” said Jorge Arteaga, Livingston Middle School principal. “As she plans and organizes support services, Alma always thinks of equity and access to ensure our neediest students get the support they need to be successful.”

Superintendent Andrés Zamora said Lopez is “a positive, humble and strong advocate for school counseling programs.” She was the first to approach him about expanding the district’s school counseling services when the California Department of Education introduced a new funding model based on the concepts of local control.

“She was diligent in advocating for the ASCA framework as a model to most effectively and directly impact students,” Zamora said, noting that, as a result, Livingston became Merced County’s first district to have full-time school counselors at all its elementary schools.

Lopez, a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) reviewer, serves on the California Association of School Counselors Board of Directors. In 2018, she received the city of Livingston’s “You Make Us Proud Award” and also helped her school achieve RAMP status the same year. “What is unique and special about Ms. Lopez is her heart and the passion by which she serves our school community,” Zamora said.

“She is a voice of reason, a kind human and the protector of students and their rights,” said Markella Tsatsaronis, Livingston Middle School teacher and athletic director.



# 2022 School Counselor of the Year Finalist

## Matthew Berry

Lead and District School Counselor  
Ritenour Husky Academy  
Overland, Mo.



Matthew Berry has been a school counselor since 2007. He currently works at Ritenour Husky Academy, Overland, Mo., which serves 736 students, grades 6-8. Berry received his bachelor's degree from Southwest Missouri State University and his master's degree from Missouri Baptist University.

"He enriches the lives of his students not only through his innovative ways but also his commitment and compassion, which is evident every single day," said Kimberly Sagakhaneh, school counselor, Ritenour Middle School. "He is a true champion for kids and sets a beautiful example of how educators can build meaningful relationships with students throughout Missouri."

When Berry wanted to expand the small-group counseling opportunities at Ritenour Husky Academy, he was limited by the lack of space, time and resources for small groups to meet. By advocating for the need to provide more direct services to students, he was able to convince administration that the school counselors needed their own school counseling office space. This new wing of the building features more spacious counseling offices and a lobby connecting the offices for students to relax and regulate. The department created a goal of implementing small-group interventions to 20% of the student population. Through creative, targeted small groups offered in a variety of ways, they surpassed the goal, and 30% of students participated.

"He is seen as a rock of positivity for all staff ... and does more than any other teammate to positively impact our culture and climate," said Dr. Brian W. Rich, principal, Ritenour Middle School, where Berry worked until recently moving to Ritenour Husky Academy.

## Teshia Stovall Dula

School Counselor  
Hull Middle School  
Duluth Ga.



Teshia Stovall Dula has been a school counselor since 1998 and with Hull Middle School since 2017. The school serves 1,352 students, grades 6-8. The author of "STEAM for the School Counselor," Dula earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from Hampton University and is currently working on a doctorate degree.

A firm believer in the power of data, Dula and her team have built on student data to invite students who need some extra help into the LIONS Mentoring Program. The LIONS Mentoring Program collaborates with the Gwinnett County Public Schools Community-Based Mentorship Program and connects caring community members with students. The program's focus is building resilience, character and leadership. "My team and I identify the students using our district's academic, behavior and course content report and The Student Engagement Instrument," Dula said. "Parents may also request their child receive a mentor and participate in the program." Each month, Dula invites community members to speak to the students in the program about their career and life skills. The program results show improvement in behavior, attendance and course content in many students.

"Mrs. Dula is an enthusiastic, passionate and committed school counselor and leader," said Denise P. Showell, Hull Middle School principal. "Her continued dedication to her profession is prevalent and does not go unnoticed."

"She is an advocate for students and a role model for school counselors and educators. Her accomplishments are eclipsed only by her heart for kids," said Erin Sprinkle, school counselor, Hull Middle School.



# 2022 School Counselor of the Year Finalist

## Marianne Matt

School Counselor  
Capital High School  
Madison, Wis.



Marianne Matt has been a school counselor since 2014 and currently works at Capital High School, Madison, Wis., which serves 185 students, grades 9-12. Matt received her bachelor's degree from Edgewood College and her master's degree from Concordia University.

A firm believer in helping students discover their best postsecondary options, Matt spearheads a college and career fair every year. "I bring in members of the community from various careers students have expressed interest in as well as our local community college, apprenticeship recruiter and workforce development office," Matt said. "This event provides students and staff with connections to our community and more ideas about what they would like to pursue in their futures. Students reflect on their hopes and dreams after the event and start to make moves on their futures."

Capital High School is a 90-90-90 school, with 90% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, 90% BIPOC students and a 90% graduation rate. "As a school counselor committed to disrupting systems of oppression, Marianne has committed to the personal work of examining white supremacy culture and how it permeates her professional and personal life," said Karyn Stocks Glover, principal, Capital High School. "She has remained deeply curious about the characteristics of white supremacy culture and how those characteristics impact working with BIPOC students and their families. Students who work with Marianne can expect asset-based, student-driven coaching that focuses on the students' dreams first and the pathways to those dreams second."

## Ashley Wright

School Counselor  
Lucille J. Bradley Elementary School  
Spring, Texas



Ashley Wright has been a school counselor since 2017, currently at Lucille J. Bradley Elementary School, Spring, Texas. The school serves 1,018 students, grades pre-K-4. Wright is a graduate of Sam Houston State University for both her bachelor's and master's degrees.

"Ashley demonstrates a tireless work ethic and dedication to school counseling that is truly exceptional," said Denise Cipolla, Conroe ISD coordinator for guidance & counseling. "She is resourceful, seeking clarification and input whenever needed, looks for ways to think outside of the box when given challenging situations and is always first and foremost led by her heart."

A firm believer in collaboration, Wright works with administration, parents and community members on a parent education virtual talk show. After realizing how few parents were attending her in-person educational sessions, Wright changed direction and developed a more successful way to educate parents about important family topics. Her talk show, "Get Right with Mrs. Wright," addresses crucial topics such as grief, holiday safety, the importance of reading as a family and other issues important to elementary school families. As the host, Wright brings in a parent as well as an expert from the community or school district to address each topic. "The talk show has helped bridge the gap between understanding the role of the school system and personal family academic success," Wright said. "Parents have confidence and now understand my supportive role and have contacted me regularly."

"Mrs. Wright is a bright smile, listening ear, dancing friend who makes your day better just by saying hi and checking on you," said Dr. Christine Butler, principal, Lucille J. Bradley Elementary School. "It is a privilege to have her serve as the school counselor at Bradley Elementary, and I am proud to be her principal."



# 2022 State School Counselors of the Year

## Alyssa Barson

Lead School Counselor  
Fort Herriman Middle School  
Herriman, Utah

A school counselor since 2016, Alyssa Barson has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Utah State University and a master's degree in school counseling from the University of Phoenix.

After a tragic year for the community when Fort Herriman Middle School lost seven students to suicide, the school counseling department implemented a social/emotional learning program called Choose Kind. This program focuses on helping students make the choice every day to be kind to themselves and others. Since its inception, the program has grown to more than 200 student members schoolwide and has since spread to other schools in the district. The program helps students understand their emotions and learn to express them in healthy ways. Lessons are taught twice a week to support students in developing coping skills, understanding brain development and practicing empathy with themselves and each other.

Fort Herriman Middle School also has dedicated a space in the building as a student mindfulness room called the Diamond Mind. This mental health room has been the model for several other schools. Additionally, the school counseling department has organized schoolwide student coping skills days. During these coping skills days, community volunteers come to the school to talk to the students about how they personally calm down when they're stressed and ways to live happier lives. Volunteers include doctors, parents and others from the community who understand the value of helping students.

"I love to see the students working through their challenges," Barson said. Watching them develop the skills to regulate and express their emotions is the most rewarding experience. Each student is unique, and I love to find what makes each one so special.

Barson is a member of ASCA, the Utah School Counselor Association and the Utah Association for Career and Technical Education.

## Heather Berg

Pre-K-12 School Counselor; 7-12 Career Development Counselor  
Midway Public School  
Inkster, N.D.

A school counselor since 2012, Heather Berg has a bachelor's degree in psychology with a sociology minor and a master's degree in school counseling, both from North Dakota State University.

One of Berg's main school counseling program goals every year is to help students become college and career ready with whatever path they decide to pursue after high school. The career development program at Midway ensures students can explore various career options through classroom activities, by taking part in job shadowing within the community and touring businesses and colleges during small-group or class field trips. Students also have an opportunity to apply to one North Dakota college or university for free on the school's college application day. This event is sponsored by the Bank of North Dakota and available to all North Dakota high schools.

Another passion of Berg's is making sure students who need extra support can receive help, especially in the areas of dealing with trauma, abuse and mental health.

"The most rewarding part about being a school counselor is being able to help students who lack self-esteem and confidence to see their potential," Berg said. "There are so many students who struggle to see themselves in a positive light and use extremely damaging coping skills. When students can recognize that they need help or are willing to accept help, big positive changes are just a few steps away."

Berg is a member of ASCA, the North Dakota School Counseling Association, the North Dakota Counseling Association, the North Dakota Career Development Association, the Association for Career and Technical Education and North Dakota ACTE.



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## Michelle Blanchard

School Counselor  
Redland Elementary School  
Oregon City, Ore.

A school counselor since 1999, Michelle Blanchard has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Oregon State University and a master's degree in counseling psychology and school counseling from Lewis and Clark College.

In her time at Redland Elementary School, Blanchard has implemented a number of successful programs, such as peer mediation, buddy/mentor program, social skills training, No Place for Hate Club, behavior support plans and more. Additionally, she secured grants to fund a self-regulation room, a motion and return room, a wildcat walk and calm corners in every classroom.

Blanchard is a member of ASCA, the Oregon School Counselor Association, the Oregon Counseling Association, the American Counseling Association, the Oregon State University Alumni Association, the Lewis and Clark Alumni Association and the National Board of Certified Counselors.

## Nicole Blomberg

School Counselor  
Pohakea Elementary School  
Ewa Beach, Hawaii

A school counselor since 2005, Nicole Blomberg has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in school counseling, both from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

One of the programs Blomberg is proudest of is the development of the school's Check and Connect, a Tier 2 attendance intervention. The program partners targeted students with a trusted adult on campus for daily check-ins. Students create monthly goals and discuss challenges they face and possible solutions regarding their attendance. Most importantly, the program creates a positive relationship with these students to make coming to school feel safe.

The Pohakea Elementary School counseling department continues to build Tier 1 systems to strengthen the school's culture. The school encourages and emphasizes positive behaviors using a schoolwide SEL curriculum and has begun using reflective journals to give students a chance to think about their behavior. Blomberg has also started using

bibliocounseling to reinforce SEL topics with virtual read-aloud sessions, giving students a fun, engaging way to build on the concepts previously taught as well as an additional opportunity to socialize with others.

"The thing I find most rewarding about being a school counselor is watching our students grow up," Blomberg said. "The beauty of being an elementary school counselor is that we have students for seven years, and it is amazing to see how they change. We have an opportunity to be a part of their everyday lives and set a foundation for who they want to be."

Blomberg is a member of ASCA, the Hawaii School Counselor Association and the Hawaii State Teachers Association. Instagram: nicoblom6

## Dr. Lyndsey Brown

School Counselor  
Maize South High School  
Wichita, Kan.

A school counselor since 2014, Dr. Lyndsey Brown has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in school counseling and a doctorate in counselor education, all from Kansas State University.

After noticing many students struggling with the ability to regulate their emotions, the Maize South High School counseling department decided not only to teach students regulation skills but also give them a safe, trauma-informed space where they could practice their coping skills. Brown wrote a grant and received funding to create the Maslow's Room. The space offers sensory activities, snacks, comfortable seating, mindfulness activities and calming items. Data has shown students leave the room more regulated than they came in.

"Building relationships with students is my passion," Brown said. "I truly believe all students can be successful when they have access to a school counselor who believes in their resilience and is always in their corner. Being a school counselor is such a gift because not only do I get to give students space, but I also get the chance to hear their stories of resilience, their triumphs, laugh at their stories and be on the receiving end of their hugs when they are having a hard day - or when they are getting ready to walk across the stage. These relationships that I build with kids are the most rewarding part of my job."



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Brown is a member of ASCA, the Kansas School Counseling Association, the American Counseling Association, the Kansas Counseling Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the Kansas Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and the Kansas State University Alumni Association. Twitter: @lyndseybrown89 Instagram: @lyndseybrown1

## Heather Leigh Bushelman

School Counselor  
Longbranch Elementary  
Union, Ky.

A school counselor since 2008, Heather Leigh Bushelman has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Morehead State University and a master's degree in elementary counseling and rank 1 secondary counseling from Western Kentucky University.

For the past 19 years, Bushelman's passion has been whole-child education. When she transitioned from an elementary teacher to a school counselor, she was determined to understand her students' overall well-being and ensure their academic and social/emotional success. Bushelman developed three comprehensive counseling programs at the elementary level for a variety of student populations. Social/emotional learning (SEL) became a vital piece of her school counseling program. Using the MTSS model, Bushelman trained her staff on SEL and how to embed it into their daily routines. These research-based initiatives included school-wide emotional check-ins, calm corners, community circles and more. From these Tier 1 initiatives, SEL-driven interventions for Tiers 2 and 3 have grown to focus on whole-child needs and moved beyond a behavior chart.

"In our profession, it is most certainly a marathon and not a sprint when working with students," Bushelman said. "The skills we are focusing on are not quick fixes. When students are able to independently use the skills we have been working on weekly/daily within my office, that is truly the most rewarding. The students have now developed a life skill to overcome a challenge in their life that will have an impact on them each and every day."

Bushelman is a member of ASCA; the Kentucky School Counselor Association, where she is elementary vice president; and the Kentucky Department of Education Counselor's Advisory Council. Twitter: @hbushelman

## Timothy Elliott Chamberlin

Director of School Counseling  
Lake Region Union High School  
Orleans, Vt.

A school counselor since 1998, Timothy Elliott Chamberlin has a bachelor's degree in aviation management from Daniel Webster College and a master's degree in counseling from Johnson State College.

Recognizing the importance of personalized learning and flexible pathway experiences for students, Chamberlin facilitated a three-year school development initiative using an action research model to promote systemic change. This initiative fostered the progression of personalized learning plans (PLPs) at Lake Region Union High School. Through a partnership with a regional university, Chamberlin was able to offer the teachers graduate credit and the students undergraduate credit for their participation. These classes teamed Lake Region teachers and students to develop a PLP process. PLPs allow students to take ownership in and self-direction of their path through high school as they develop college- and career-readiness skills and a growth mindset. The initiative focused on creating, evaluating, revising and refining the school's PLP process, resulting in a robust PLP process and expanded flexible pathway opportunities for all students.

"It is exciting to watch students grow and rewarding to know I played a part in their path to postsecondary college and career readiness," Chamberlin said. "I believe that given the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential students gain the skills for ongoing growth through lifelong learning. It is gratifying to witness the development of a growth mindset as they journey through high school believing that I influenced this transition"

Chamberlin is a member of ASCA, the Vermont School Counselor Association, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation Board of Directors and the University of Vermont Advisory Board.



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## Terri Coleman, ACSC

School Counselor  
Trace Crossings Elementary School  
Hoover, Ala.

A school counselor since 2011, Terri Coleman has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in elementary education, both from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Additionally, she has a master's degree in school counseling from the University of West Alabama. She is an ASCA-Certified School Counselor

Coleman developed a community service club, BUC's Club, which stands for Believe Unite Contribute. The school partners with Youth Serve of Birmingham to provide community service opportunities for grades 3-5 students while educating them on these issues. Coleman meets monthly with the students to teach them about their specific service project for the month and educate them about the underlying issue. Students have participated in, among other projects, a food drive as they learned about food insecurities and a homeless shelter visit as they learned about homelessness and possible reasons for homelessness. Students end each year with a service project they have brainstormed and developed on their own for a targeted group of their choice, leading them to a sense of connection within their community while learning the importance of helping others.

"What I find most rewarding about being a school counselor is seeing the impact some of the things I do have in a child's life," Coleman said. "It is a blessing to get to do what I love and feel called to do each day. I love seeing students implementing tools I have taught them and sharing them with others."

Coleman is a member of ASCA, the Alabama School Counselor Association, the University of Alabama at Birmingham Alumni Association, the Leadership Hoover Class of 2021-2022, the Board of Directors for Childcare Resources and the Leadership Council for the Boys and Girls Club of Central Alabama. Instagram: @telynn08

## Elizabeth Congdon-McGee

School Counselor  
Whaley School  
Anchorage, Alaska

A school counselor since 2003, Congdon-McGee has bachelor's degrees from the University of Alaska - Fairbanks in criminal justice as well as psychology, as well as a K-8 teaching certification.

As a separate day school, Whaley School students have limited access to activities, specialized courses and programming due to their behaviors. Congdon-McGee takes pride in her ability to network and advocate for her students. She recently worked with a school that provides career and vocational tech coursework for the district's students. Because of Congdon-McGee's advocacy, Whaley School students are now participating and thriving in this afterschool program. Students are learning carpentry, construction, electrical and emergency trauma technician skills. As a result of this success, other doors have been opened to the student population for further career tech partnerships with this school.

"My passion for school counseling lies within the ability to become an advocate and confidant for children during any stage of their life," Congdon-McGee said.

Congdon-McGee is a member of ASCA, the Alaska School Counselor Association, the Anchorage Education Association and the University of Alaska - Fairbanks Alumni Association.

## Curtis R. Darragh IV

School Counselor  
Westside Middle School Academy  
Danbury, Conn.

A school counselor since 2015, Curtis R. Darragh IV has a bachelor's degree in child and youth psychology from Eastern Connecticut State University and a master's degree in educational psychology: school counseling, from the University of Connecticut.

Darragh constantly advocates for his students and provides leadership opportunities for them. In 2018, Darragh collaborated with business partners and helped students fundraise so they could go to London, Paris and Berlin to study the influence of technology, providing his students with a once-



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in-a-lifetime opportunity. At the global leadership summit, one of Darragh's students was crowned a Nobel Peace Prize Museum winner; his project, Savor, is placed in the museum in Stockholm, Sweden.

"Being a middle school counselor is simply the best," Darragh said. "The growth and journey from sixth to eighth grade is my favorite part of looping with students. You see an 11-year-old come in excited, nervous and anxious about middle school and leave as a 14-year-old who is independent and ready to take on high school. These are the most intense years in maturity, and you can mold and reflect with students who make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Building relationships is key and the biggest component of being a middle school counselor."

Darragh is a member of ASCA, the Connecticut School Counselor Association and the National Education Association. Twitter: @rickercd

## Lezlie DelVecchio-Marks

School Counselor  
Burchfield Primary School  
Allison Park, Pa.

A school counselor since 2000, Lezlie DelVecchio-Marks has a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in school counseling, both from Duquesne University.

A passionate advocate for school counseling, DelVecchio-Marks has met with local legislators and currently has her local senator as a member of Burchfield's school counseling advisory council. She also helped lead the efforts for schoolwide positive intervention and multitiered system of supports in her school. DelVecchio-Marks has presented several times locally regarding the importance of the school counselor/administrator relationship, marginalized grief in children, technological innovations in school counseling and the innovative groups/programs she has created.

"I love being able to connect with and support students on a daily basis by being an advocate, systemic change agent and champion of safety and trust for our youngest learners," DelVecchio-Marks said.

DelVecchio-Marks is a member of ASCA, the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, the Allegheny County School Counselors Association and the Pennsylvania State Education Association. DelVecchio-Marks serves as a re-

gional representative on the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association (PSCA) Governing Board and has held many leadership roles in her regional school counseling association. She was named as one of the 2021 National Certified School Counselor of the Year Award recipients. Twitter: @lezzliedm, Instagram: @schoolcounselordm

## Jessica Descartes

Director of Student Services/SEI School Counselor  
TechBoston Academy  
Dorchester, Mass.

A school counselor since 2014, Jessica Descartes has a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from the University of New Hampshire and a master's degree in counselor education/school counseling and guidance services from the University of Massachusetts - Boston.

To support the English-language learners in the school's SEI program, Descartes helped introduce an SEI-to-general-education transition plan. The plan involved connecting students who were exiting the SEI program with general education students, or "allies." SEI students were able to meet with and shadow their allies. They visited classrooms, met their new teachers and gradually became familiar with the changes that were going to happen when they transitioned to their new classes. This, in turn, helped to lessen any anxiety or fears that came with transitioning out of the SEI program.

Descartes also helped lead the school counseling team in building a detailed counseling scope and sequence and curriculum to be used alongside the school's newly implemented MyCAP (My Career and Academic Plan) advisory program for all students in grades 6-12. The curriculum was used in weekly advisory meetings, where teachers and staff had the opportunity to lead students in lessons covering the three major domains: academics, social/emotional wellness and career/college readiness.

"The authentic, lasting relationships that are built with our students and families are what are most rewarding about being a school counselor," Descartes said. "With these relationships, our students know that they are loved, cared for and supported."

Descartes is a member of ASCA and the Massachusetts School Counselor Association. Twitter: @jdesca01





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## Lisa DiMurro

School Counselor  
Franklin Elementary School  
Vancouver, Wash.

A school counselor since 2016, Lisa DiMurro has a bachelor's degree in psychology, with a history minor from Washington State University and a master's degree in school guidance and counseling from the City University of Seattle.

DiMurro's passion for kindness has given her many opportunities to teach students about the power of kindness and model how to treat others with kindness and prevent bullying. In her first year as a school counselor, she implemented a schoolwide kindness week and has continued it every year since then.

The culture of kindness at Franklin Elementary School has grown and has even made local and national news. In 2020, one of the students started a fundraiser to help pay off students' unpaid lunch debts. This student raised more than \$4,000, which was enough money to pay off lunch debts at Franklin Elementary as well as at several other schools in the district. This student has founded a small non-profit business called Keychains for Kindness and continues to give back to those in need in the community. "The way our students, staff, families and community members have responded to our Kindness Week events is, without a doubt, the highlight of my career," DiMurro said. "I am grateful to be a part of a school community that values the importance of being kind and helping our young learners grow in their empathy and compassion for others."

DiMurro is a member of ASCA, the Washington School Counselor Association and the Vancouver Education Association. Twitter: @lisalee720

## Rosalie Durazo-Ramirez

School Counselor  
Sports Leadership and Management Nevada  
Henderson, Nev.

A school counselor since 2017, Rosalie Durazo-Ramirez has a bachelor's degree in child and adolescent development from California State University - Northridge and a master's degree in counseling and human resources from South Dakota State University. She is Google Educator Certified.

When a recent academic needs assessment showed that students' academic morale and engagement were low,

Durazo-Ramirez spearheaded a schoolwide morale-boosting event, dubbed the Honk and Holla. For an entire month during the 2021-2022 school year, Durazo-Ramirez and other committee members planned multiple grade-level drive-bys to students' houses. School counselors, teachers, staff, administration and the school mascot all took part in the drive-bys. Teachers were excited to safely visit their students and check-in with parents and families who came outside during the Honk and Holla, and Telemundo and Fox 5 news stations shared videos from the event. The Honk and Holla allowed the school community members to connect with one another and spread joy even through the pandemic.

"I love helping students find the best version of themselves and being there to support youth during critical times in their lives," Durazo-Ramirez said.

Durazo-Ramirez is a member of ASCA and the Nevada School Counselor Association. Twitter: @bettertoday4unme

## Geolyn Diaz Egurrola

School Counselor  
Jose L.G. Rios Middle School  
Piti, Guam

A school counselor since 2009, Geolyn Diaz Egurrola has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in counseling, both from the University of Guam.

Egurrola helped develop and implement student-led conferences at Rios Middle School. As in most school districts, parent/teacher conferences took place every year at the school. However, Egurrola wanted to maximize students' involvement in their academic growth and introduced this alternative to administration and faculty. The purpose of the student-led conference is for the students to reflect on educational progress, set goals for the following quarter and secure parent support for their goals. The school started with a pilot group of three teachers for one quarter. The evaluations from parents and teachers were overwhelmingly positive, and teachers and parents had a new appreciation for students' honest perspective and confidence during the student-led conference. Eventually, student-led conferences were implemented schoolwide.

"The biggest reward of being a school counselor is seeing growth with my students," Egurrola said. "In our middle school, we follow our cohort of students from sixth through eighth grade; this allows me to see the most growth in such a short amount of time. The best thing is that during these



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years students are still open to the mentorship of adults, and I get the chance to support them through these academic, career and social/emotional developmental years.”

Egurrola is a member of ASCA, the Guam Association of School Counselors and the Guam Association for Career Technical Education. Instagram: @gdegurrola

## Elesha Ellison

Assistant Principal  
Silver Bluff High School  
Aiken, S.C.

A school counselor since 2009, Elesha Ellison has a bachelor’s degree from the University of South Carolina – Aiken and a master’s degree from Augusta State University.

During the 2020–2021 school year, Ellison was instrumental in helping the school district develop a comprehensive school counseling curriculum. She assembled a team of high school counselors who worked together to outline a high school counseling curriculum, complete with lesson plans aligned to both state and ASCA student standards. Although she no longer leads the group due to a transition in roles, Ellison continues to support the team in finalizing a viable curriculum to be used with high school students across the district.

“The most rewarding part of being a school counselor is helping students realize success,” Ellison said. “So many students come to us not believing in themselves, or even if they do believe in themselves, they don’t have the resources to achieve their goals. I have enjoyed working with students at all levels to help them build self-confidence, seek out and secure resources and ultimately become productive citizens. I also find it rewarding to support the adults around me in acquiring knowledge that helps them work more effectively with our students.”

Ellison is a member of ASCA, the Palmetto State School Counselor Association and the South Carolina Association of School Administrators. Twitter: @eleshaellison

## Allyson Evans

School Counselor  
Sycamore Elementary School  
Cookeville, Tenn.

A school counselor since 2011, Allyson Evans has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Tennessee Tech and a master’s degree in counseling from Trevecca Nazarene University.

As an elementary school counselor, Evans has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for life skills that will help students be successful in life. To gain student engagement in one of the most hectic and chaotic times of the school year while still helping students learn important life skills, Evans developed Mrs. Ally’s Cafe. Throughout December, she turns her classroom into a coffee shop. With the help and support of community agencies, she decorates her classroom and has supplies for every student to get a hot chocolate with extra marshmallows. During this time, she presents lessons built around having a good conversation, good manners and friendship. Students practice looking each other in the eye, talking to each other with appropriate voice levels for a public place, asking questions and listening to each other. They also practice good manners and respecting people’s differences.

“It is so rewarding to see students using the techniques learned in my class with their peers and in their classrooms,” Evans said. “I strive to teach the foundational life skills that will help those students be more successful in life.”

Evans is a member of ASCA, the Tennessee School Counselor Association and Tennessee Technological University’s Counseling and Psychology Advisory Council.

## Heather Fried

District Resource Counselor  
Albuquerque Public Schools  
Albuquerque, N.M.

A school counselor since 2001, Heather Fried has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of New Mexico and a master’s degree in counseling from the University of Phoenix. She is an ASCA U School Counseling Data Specialist and an ASCA U Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist.



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As a district resource counselor, Fried is responsible for creating and coordinating professional developments for the district's school counselors. One of her favorite professional development activities is the annual Elementary Make It & Take It. Make It & Take It brings elementary school counselors together for learning and hands-on activities they can take back to their schools. Designed with rotation stations, it also provides a space where elementary school counselors can talk to one another as they learn how to do some great activities that benefit students. Now in its fourth year, Make It & Take It has grown in popularity. Although the annual event is in December, last year it hit max capacity by early September.

"The most rewarding part of being a school counselor is the students," Fried said. "There was always that hope that I could make a difference in a child's life. In my current role, I like to think that by supporting our district school counselors it helps them become that person who makes the difference in a child's life."

Fried is a member of ASCA and the New Mexico School Counselor Association, where she is a board member.

## Barbara Gray

School Counselor  
West Monroe High School  
West Monroe, La.

A school counselor since 2010, Barbara Gray has a bachelor's degree in business education from the University of Louisiana at Monroe and a master's degree in school psychology and counseling from Louisiana Tech University.

Annually, Gray coordinates a campuswide College and Career Fair consisting of approximately 50 college and/or business recruiters. Students and parents are encouraged to attend and talk with representatives to get valuable information for postsecondary opportunities. Gray is passionate about career-related initiatives and believes a career-driven focus helps give students goals and direction when classes and daily life seem to be overwhelming for them.

She also advocates for CTE programs and helps provide students as many opportunities as possible to experience CTE programs at various levels. Gray's career-counseling objective is to change perceptions and expectations by immersing students and faculty in the CTE culture and impress upon all stakeholders that CTE should not be viewed in isolation of academics but as a means to an end – a career. As misconceptions are challenged along the way and all

students are viewed as career-focused students, they can embrace the opportunity to define success at a level they are willing and able to pursue.

"I am inspired by the resiliency my students show in many of the situations they face," Gray said. "I strive to be a voice for the ones suffering and help all students develop coping strategies to use throughout life. Meeting students where they are while encouraging them to meet academic standards, focus on career opportunities and believing with them that they can rise above any situation is but one of the many rewards of being a school counselor."

Gray is a member of ASCA, the Louisiana School Counselor Association and the Louisiana Counseling Association.  
Twitter: @barbara.t.gray.3

## Kristina Guy

Campus Counselor  
West-MEC Northwest Campus  
Surprise, Ariz.

A school counselor since 2012, Kristina Guy has a bachelor's degree in English education and a master's degree in school counseling, both from Northern Arizona University.

Being able to open a campus and literally build the school counseling program from the ground up has given Guy numerous opportunities to implement great programs. One such program is a schoolwide event for juniors, the Jumpstart to College and Career through CTE. The Jumpstart to College and Career through CTE is a conference-style event in which students have access to more than 25 sessions featuring Arizona universities, community and technical colleges, military information, career preparation, financial literacy and more.

Additionally, Guy began a Community of Growth program to help students and staff feel connected, respected and safe. Building both staff and student morale and culture has been an important part of campus life.

Guy has helped create a cohesive team with all the school counselors in the district, and a number of her programs and ideas for her campus have now been turned into district initiatives and projects.

"The most rewarding part about being a school counselor is helping students find the connection with what they are doing now to their future goals," Guy said. "I love it when students realize their worth, that all their hard work will pay off. It is a great moment."



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Guy is a member of ASCA, the Arizona School Counselor Association, the Association for Career and Technical Education, the Association for Career and Technical Education Arizona and the Rocky Mountain Association of College Admission. Twitter: @kristinaguy, Instagram @ksg328\_ and @ctecounselor\_inaz

## Joshua D. Hurley

Director of School Counseling  
Highland Springs High School  
Highland Springs, Va.

A school counselor since 2014, Joshua D. Hurley has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in school counseling, both from Virginia Commonwealth University. He is currently working on a doctorate in counselor education and supervision at VCU and is an adjunct instructor at VCU's master's program, teaching group counseling and counseling techniques classes.

Hurley's passion lies in small-group counseling, and he offers various small-group opportunities for the high school students at his school, including groups focused on topics such as stress/anxiety, LGBTQ+ support, students of color support, adoption/foster care support, grief, divorce, social skills, performance anxiety and more. He is a firm believer that small-group counseling is possible in any high school setting and is currently working on a book to help high school counselors overcome barriers to small-group implementation.

"As a school counselor, I have the opportunity to inspire students on a daily basis to make positive choices toward actualizing their hopes and dreams," Hurley said. "To be a part of a student's journey toward self-actualization is the most rewarding experience, and I thank my lucky stars every day that I am able to do this type of work."

Hurley is a member of ASCA, the Virginia School Counselor Association and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors. Twitter: @joshhurley14

## Amy Johannesen

School Counselor  
Centennial Elementary School  
Lewiston, Idaho

A school counselor since 2016, Amy Johannesen has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Colorado College and a master's degree in counseling psychology from the University of Denver

When Johannesen examined her school's data on behavior referrals, she discovered most were occurring in the classroom, meaning lost instruction time for students. To foster the development of self-regulation skills, all students received Tier 1 instruction about how the brain functions to manage the body's stress response. Mindfulness skills were taught, and all counseling lessons began with a mindfulness activity. Johannesen presented training to staff about the benefits of mindfulness and demonstrated activities students had been taught. Teachers received a set of materials for their classrooms, and they created their own colorful and unique mindfulness jars. When school shifted to remote learning because of COVID-19, Johannesen posted videos of mindfulness exercises to her school counseling website to encourage students to continue practicing at home. Following the implementation of these interventions, referrals for all classroom behaviors declined by 8%, and referrals for major classroom behaviors decreased by 54%.

"There is no better place to watch children grow, develop and discover what they are capable of achieving than at school," Johannesen said. "Kids are 100% potential, and you never know what's going to happen, so each day is an adventure with limitless opportunities. Working side by side with students and being a part of the process where they realize they have the tools they need within themselves to be the captain of their own destiny is the most incredible and amazing experience."

Johannesen is a member of ASCA; the Idaho School Counselor Association, where she is region 2 representative on the board; the Idaho Counseling Association and the Lewiston Education Association.



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## TaRael Kee

Assistant Principal  
Collinsville High School  
Collinsville, Ill.

A school counselor since 2011, TaRael Kee became an assistant principal in 2021. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri - Columbia and a master's degree in school counseling and an educational specialist degree in school administration, both from Lindenwood University.

As a school counselor, realizing work needed to be done to close achievement and opportunity gaps, Kee worked with others in his school district to set up a diversity and equity credential and a scholarship for the district.

The best part of being a school counselor, according to Kee, is building long-lasting relationships with students.

Kee is a member of ASCA, the Illinois School Counselor Association, the Southwest Illinois School Counselor Association and the Illinois Principal Association. Twitter and Instagram: @tkee06

## Leah Kersey

School Counselor  
Kenna Elementary School  
Charleston, W.Va.

A school counselor since 2016, Leah Kersey has a bachelor's degree in German, a master's degree in school counseling, as well as a master's degree in secondary education, all from West Virginia University.

One of the programs Kersey is most proud of is her work helping establish a successful multitiered system of supports at her previous school of approximately 400 students. Kenna and her former principal pulled together a strong team within the school to address mental health needs for all students. Within three years, the school had strong evidence-based interventions taking place within each of the three tiers. Through a schoolwide effort, the school increased its parent awareness of its mental health services from about 16% to 80%. Nearly 100 students participated in small-group counseling each semester. The behavior program, in conjunction with weekly SEL lessons, boosted positive outcomes for all students. Once the Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions were in place and running smoothly, the school noticed a drastic decline in the number of students needing Tier 3 services. The entire project was a huge suc-

cess and created a culture of warmth and security for the students and families.

"Working with little hearts and minds every day is the most rewarding part of being a school counselor," Kersey said. "They are thoughtful, creative, fun and wise - true inspirations."

Kersey is a member of ASCA and the West Virginia School Counselor Association. Instagram: @lkersey2

## Keela Kuhlert, ACSC

School Counselor  
St. Paul Music Academy  
St. Paul, Minn.

A school counselor since 2011, Keela Kuhlert has a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies and a master's degree in counseling and career development, both from Colorado State University. She completed additional coursework at the University of Minnesota for the requirements for a school counseling licensure endorsement. Kuhlert is an ASCA-Certified School Counselor.

When Kuhlert was the sole school counselor at the St. Paul Music Academy (SPMA), her school was the first K-5 school to achieve RAMP in Minnesota history. In the four years since SPMA's RAMP, the number of RAMP schools in Minnesota has quintupled. Kuhlert strongly believes that more RAMP schools in the state leads to a wealth of advocacy possibilities for the profession and is determined to use all available platforms to share stories of how students benefit from comprehensive school counseling programs.

"I am most rewarded by the incredibly unique opportunity a school counselor has to build such genuinely impactful relationships with so many people in a school community," Kuhlert said. "It's the small moments throughout the day: when I walk into the lunchroom or down a hallway and I am greeted with several enthusiastic waves or smiling hellos from students, when a usually quiet student seeks me out to talk about a struggle or when family members needing help for their student come to me and say 'I don't know what to do, but I knew I could come talk to you about it.' These moments and relationships often cannot be captured in results reports or outcome data, but the indelible trust they have in me is enormously reinforcing and humbling beyond words."

Kuhlert is a member of ASCA; the Minnesota School Counselor Association, where she is the elementary vice president; the St. Paul Federation of Educators and Education Minnesota.



# 2022 State School Counselors of the Year

## Catherine Christine Livingston

High School Counselor  
Henry Ford II High School  
Sterling Heights, Mich.

A school counselor since 2000, Catherine Christine Livingston has a bachelor's degree in child development from Marygrove College and a master's degree in counseling from Oakland University.

Being a student is stressful but trying to juggle schoolwork and other responsibilities while encountering obstacles to be successful makes it harder. Knowing school counselors alone can't address this need, Livingston worked to address the gap between students and community resources and to foster an environment where these obstacles could be addressed. In 2016, she collaborated with a community agency, which led to a community therapist coming to the school weekly to meet with students for short-term intervention. In 2018, the school expanded the program to also offer a teen substance usage group. Data showed the majority of students who accessed services increased their overall performance at school. This program continues to run with an ongoing waiting list and the therapist servicing students 2.5 days weekly.

"The most rewarding aspect of being a school counselor is the ability to interact with youth on a daily basis and witness their transformations," Livingston said.

Livingston is a member of ASCA, the Michigan Association of School Counselors, the Michigan Mental Health Counselors Association, the Michigan School-Based Mental Health Providers Coalition, the Oakland County Counselors Association and the Macomb County Suicide Prevention Coalition.

## Heather Machanoff

School Counselor  
Oyster River High School  
Durham, N.H.

A school counselor since 2002, Heather Machanoff has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Fredonia State University and a master's degree in counseling from the University of New Hampshire, as well as a master's degree in adventure education from Plymouth State University

Over the past decade, Machanoff and the rest of the school counseling department have built and refined a comprehensive school counseling program. They've advocated for students, educated administrators and faculty about the school counselor's role and their ability to support students

and families. Using data to drive decisions, they support students through classroom lessons, awareness activities and small-group and individual work. Oyster River High School's comprehensive programming was the foundation for the larger discussion of districtwide mental health awareness and support. Bringing a variety of stakeholders together to unite toward a common cause has allowed the program to grow and ultimately ensure equity and access for all students. Their mental health efforts have yielded student and staff suicide prevention training annually, students who recognize and report concerns about their peers and a community that appreciates the counseling program.

"Supporting students on their path to achieving their goals, no matter how small or how big is an incredibly rewarding experience," Machanoff said. "I benefit from a supportive school community and have enjoyed bringing stakeholders together to support student success."

Machanoff is a member of ASCA and the New Hampshire School Counselor Association, where she is president elect.

## Dr. Darlene Mack

School Counselor  
Donnell Middle School  
Findlay, Ohio

A school counselor since 2005, Dr. Darlene Mack has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Heidelberg University, a master's degree in school counseling from Bowling Green State University and a doctorate in educational research studies from Bowling Green State University.

Through her work in trauma-informed care, Mack has helped create systemic change districtwide. She co-led the transformative district change of Findlay City Schools becoming trauma-informed. She developed and delivered professional development to more than 5,500 certified and classified educators within the district, the state of Ohio and through ASCA and a TEDX presentation.

"There are many rewarding aspects of being a school counselor," Mack said. "First and foremost, making a positive difference in students' lives is the highest honor. Furthermore, creating systemic educational change to further advance and support the whole student and thus help them reach to their full potential."

Mack is a member of ASCA and the Ohio School Counselor Association. Twitter: @tocarematters, Instagram: @darlenejmack



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## Nicole Mayers

School Counselor/Dean of Students  
Batavia Middle School  
Batavia, N.Y.

A school counselor since 2006, Nicole Mayers has a bachelor's degree in psychology from St. Bonaventure University and a master's degree in counseling and human services, as well as a master's degree in administration and supervision, both from Canisius College.

Over the last few years, Batavia Middle School has worked hard to develop an PBIS/SEL program that not only supports students but also supports the staff and families the school serves. During the pandemic, the school and the school counseling department put systems in place to make connections with students and families and help them feel supported by the school. When the school reopened in September 2020, Mayers was able to lead the school counseling team in implementing a schoolwide SEL program. The team created 180 days of daily SEL prompts to be presented to all students in grades 5-8. The program consisted of a live prompt/presentation, a short lesson and then an opportunity to have a discussion with their classmates/teachers. Students at home participated and engaged with school counselors via Google Meet and Google Classroom. Mayers' goal was to help create a feeling of family and belonging in the school, allowing students, staff and families to feel supported as everyone worked to get back to school after the pandemic.

"I believe that the biggest reward is when my former students come back to see me long after they have left my building and share with me their success stories," Mayers said. "I know that as school counselors we do not always see the difference we make right in the moment. When students take the time to share with me how I helped to make a difference in their lives, I am reminded that we do this work for a reason."

Mayers is a member of ASCA and the New York State School Counselor Association. Twitter: @nicolemayers06

## Sarah Metro

School Counselor  
Ponaganset High School  
North Scituate, R.I.

A school counselor since 2010, Sarah Metro has a bachelor's degree in secondary English education and a master's degree in school counseling, both from Rhode Island College.

Seeing a need to help incoming freshman with their transition into high school, Metro drafted and advocated for a new program at Ponaganset High School, the Start Strong program. Start Strong is an equitable, research-based, data-informed program providing an optimal environment for students transitioning to high school. Due to her research and data collection, Metro was ultimately asked to have a pivotal role in the XQ + RI Statewide Competition for a grant to fund the Start Strong program at Ponaganset High School. The grant allowed the school to increase from 3.5 school counselors to four full-time school counselors (one freshman school counselor and three upperclassman school counselors), as well as fund a new director of student services position.

Metro is a member of ASCA and the Rhode Island School Counselor Association, where she and serves as an at large board member.

## Brooke Morgan

School Counselor  
Freedom Elementary School  
Colorado Springs, Colo.

A school counselor since 2017, Brooke Morgan has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Colorado State University and a master's degree in school counseling from the University of Northern Colorado.

Through implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program and tiered interventions, Morgan advocated for systemic changes to decrease discipline referrals and support emotional regulation across the school and community. Beginning with staff mindsets, Morgan provided trainings on trauma-informed care, restorative practices and PBIS. Through professional development, she focused on resources for setting classroom expectations, providing safe spaces and de-escalation strategies, and responding to student emotions in an empathetic and educating way.

Once staff was trained, Morgan supported their delivery of a weekly Tier 1 social/emotional curriculum. Through collaboration, students grew self-management skills and engaged in service projects to promote joy and care throughout a pandemic and period of isolation.

"There are so many rewarding aspects of being a school counselor; however, the one that stands out the most is experiencing the power of students' successes," Morgan said. "As a school counselor, I witness students overcome challenges and positively influence not only their own lives but the community that surrounds them. I am amazed at the



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resiliency students embody as they navigate through learning, emotions, social situations and daily hardships.”

Morgan is a member of ASCA, the Colorado School Counselor Association, the National Board for Certified Counselors and the Colorado Springs Education Association.

## Carolyn Normington

School Counselor  
Pinedale Middle School  
Pinedale, Wyo.

A school counselor since 1997, Carolyn Normington has a bachelor’s degree in psychology and political science and a master’s degree in counselor education, both from the University of Wyoming. She is a National Board Certified Counselor.

Every year, Normington focuses her efforts on the social/emotional, academic and career well-being of middle school students. She credits her success to a wonderful team effort. She is a member of the Sublette County Prevention Coalition. The coalition members train community members and students in the “Question Persuade Refer” program. This program helps in suicide prevention.

The best part of being a school counselor to Normington comes down to just one thing: The kids.

Normington is a member of ASCA and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in Counseling.

## Elizabeth P. O’Connor

School Counselor and Instructional Team Leader  
Centennial High School  
Ellicott City, Md.

A school counselor since 2012, Elizabeth P. O’Connor has a bachelor’s degree in business and marketing from the University of Lynchburg and a master’s degree in school counseling from Loyola University Maryland. She is also an ASCU U Legal and Ethical Specialist.

In her work at Centennial High School, O’Connor and the other school counselors were frustrated with their annual evaluation process, where they were evaluated as if they were teachers rather than evaluated for the full scope of their role. O’Connor and other school counselors were charged with creating a new evaluation process for the district’s school counselors. O’Connor advocated to prioritize

alignment of district school counseling programs with the ASCA National Model, including incorporating data into the evaluation. She led the discussion on making results-driven data weighted equally to the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. The new evaluation model was passed, in part due to O’Connor’s work.

“Kids need an adult in their life to see their potential and help bring it to light,” O’Connor said. “As a school counselor, I get to be the adult who sees a spark in children and challenges them to see it within themselves.”

O’Connor is a member of ASCA, the Maryland School Counselor Association and the Professional School Counselors of Howard County, where she is ethics chair.  
Twitter: chs\_studserv

## Kimberly Raymond

School Counselor  
Leroy H. Smith School  
Winterport, Maine

A school counselor since 2006, Kimberly Raymond has a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in counselor education, both from the University of Maine.

Raymond is passionate about helping ensure all students feel connected and included. Nine years ago, she realized her students didn’t have a lot of knowledge about differences such as race and skin color, religion, ancestry, gender, disabilities and families. After noticing trends in behavioral data showing some name-calling and teasing issues, she started a Civil Rights Team at Leroy H. Smith School in 2014. This group of third- and fourth-grade students works to educate the rest of the student body about ways to help everyone feel welcome and reduce bias-motivated behaviors in school. Since the introduction of this team, the school community has become a more positive and welcoming place.

“The most rewarding part of being a school counselor for me is being able to help empower so many students to recognize their own strengths and leadership potential,” Raymond said. “I love being in the classroom and teaching important skills that help students to reach their goals and build confidence. It’s incredible to see when students begin to recognize their own abilities and accomplishments.”

Raymond is a member of ASCA; the Maine School Counselor Association, where she is assistant chair; and the Husson University Counseling Program Advisory Committee.  
Twitter: @umattereveryday





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## Jillian Shadis

Director of School Counseling/School Counselor  
New Providence High School  
New Providence, N.J.

A school counselor since 2004, Jillian Shadis has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in counseling, both from The College of New Jersey.

When Shadis started in the New Providence School District four years ago, she had one mission: to transform their "guidance" department into a true, comprehensive school counseling program. Thanks to her work, the school counseling program is now designed to reach all students in a proactive, preventive manner and support those with specific social/emotional and/or academic needs using a tiered approach. The school counseling department works as a team with other departments, various school and town committees, and students themselves. The culture of a school, district and/or community does not change overnight, but the New Providence School District has come a long way from the guidance department it was four years ago thanks to Shadis' work.

"Knowing that I, perhaps in some small way, changed a student's life for the better is one of the most rewarding things about being a school counselor," Shadis said. "Sometimes, if I'm lucky, a student or parent will tell me directly that I've had a positive effect, but more often than not, I don't really realize it unless I stop to think about it. It's often in the progress of a student – academically, behaviorally, emotionally or otherwise – that I can see my influence. It may be minute, but that's OK. They may not realize it, and that's also OK. When it's there, it's the best feeling in the world."

Shadis is a member of ASCA, the New Jersey School Counselor Association, the Union County School Counselor Association, the Somerset County School Counselor Association, the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and The College of New Jersey Alumni Association. Twitter: @jillshadis

## Connie Kessler Sivertson

School Counselor and Department Leader  
Lawrence North High School  
Indianapolis, Ind.

A school counselor since 1996, Connie Kessler Sivertson has a bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry from the University of North Dakota and a master's degree in counseling from Northern Arizona University

As more and more students have been affected by mental health challenges over the past few years, Sivertson knew she had to be even more intentional with programming to address mental health education.

In addition to increased mental health curriculum and conversations, Sivertson also worked with the Indiana Canine Assistance Network to get an emotional support dog for Lawrence North High School. Nugget officially joined the school team in January 2021. Trained as an emotional support animal, Nugget is a daily presence at the school, available to all throughout the day, a regular classroom visitor and masterful in calming and helping to reset students (and staff) in crisis.

"Teenagers are awe-inspiring, courageous, creative, curious, kind, resilient, amazing people who constantly make me want to be the adult they need me to be and can rely upon," Sivertson said. "I'm humbled when I'm the person they reach to in their darkest moment; that level of trust is breathtaking. I'm humbled when I'm the person they seek out to celebrate a life victory, an honor I never take for granted. What a gift to be welcomed into the lives of others. I am grateful beyond words for the gift of being part of the lives of these amazing humans."

Sivertson is a member of ASCA, the Indiana School Counselor Association, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, the Indiana Association of College Admissions Counselors, the National Education Association and the Indiana Science Teachers Association. Twitter: @conniesivertson



# 2022 State School Counselors of the Year

## Nancy Stavrakakis

School Counselor  
Mills Park Elementary School  
Cary, N.C.

A school counselor since 2009, Nancy Stavrakakis has a bachelor's degree in child development from Meredith College and a master's degree in counselor education from McDaniel College. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and works at a RAMP school.

Stavrakakis values following best practices to ensure she does everything possible as the school counselor for students, families and staff at Mills Park Elementary School. She believes using data to support the programs she runs is critical to meet the needs of the school community. She shares programs and results frequently and values feedback from stakeholders.

"When students and/or parents come to me after their time in elementary school and tell me that I made a positive impact on their life, I feel like I have been impactful because they took the skills and lessons and have carried them through to other aspects of their lives," Stavrakakis said.

Stavrakakis is a member of ASCA and the North Carolina School Counselor Association. Twitter: @counselorstav

## Christi Sturgeon

School Counselor  
Broken Arrow High School  
Broken Arrow, Okla.

A school counselor since 1997, Christi Sturgeon has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in marriage and family therapy, both from Oklahoma Baptist University.

Over the past four years at Broken Arrow High School, Sturgeon has brought data analysis to the forefront of the school counseling team's discussions. She has led the team to be more intentional about the services they provide. Focusing on a data-informed program has led to the school counselors being able to spend more of their time on direct services for students rather than secretarial-type work. The language and culture at the high school is changing and now reflects the true work that school counselors can do to effect tremendous change in systems and students.

"The most rewarding part of my job is being able to connect with students and to see them realize their purpose and potential to achieve that purpose when they initially didn't see the possibilities," Sturgeon said. "It is so incredibly gratifying to know that I am able to play even a small role in students' ability to develop goals and to see themselves for the incredible gifts they are in their world."

Sturgeon is a member of ASCA; the Oklahoma School Counselor Association, where she is president elect; and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Instagram: @counselor\_christi

## Samantha Ryan Tilley

School Counselor  
Paragould Jr. High  
Paragould, Ark.

A school counselor since 2014, Samantha Ryan Tilley has a bachelor's degree in general science, a master's degree in school counseling, a master's degree in educational theory and practice and an educational specialist degree in educational leadership, all from Arkansas State University.

With the help of federal grant money, Tilley spearheads a Food Box Program in conjunction with the regional food bank. Each week all ingredients for a family-style meal are provided, along with recipes, parenting tips and general information. This provides families in need an opportunity to cook and eat together without the worry of securing food on their own. For those without transportation, the team members deliver the weekly food boxes. This has given Tilley more insight into the lives and backgrounds of the students in the district. In addition to this once-a-week program, Tilley and her team also prepare ahead of time to provide all holiday meals to these families throughout the school year.

"My students have needs that are as diverse as their lifestyles and backgrounds," Tilley said. "I love knowing I can help meet the needs of all of these students. If I can't personally help, I have a great network of resources through my school, community, region and state to provide what these students need in nearly every situation."

Tilley is a member of ASCA; the Arkansas School Counselor Association, where she served as conference chair and board member for two years; and the Northeast Region Arkansas School Counselor Association, where she is the past president. Twitter: @samanthatilley Instagram: @sryantilley



# 2022 State School Counselors of the Year

## Belinda Tutor

School Counselor  
Mooreville Elementary School  
Mooreville, Miss.

A school counselor since 2016, Belinda Tutor has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in school counseling, both from the University of West Alabama.

Five years ago, Tutor spearheaded a collaborative partnership with area churches, school staff and community members to provide Christmas presents for families in need during the holiday season. Parental requests and teacher referrals are used to identify students' needs, such as hygiene items, clothing, food and presents. In the last five years, the number of students who have received Christmas through this program has doubled.

In addition to this annual partnership, Tutor also works with the local Junior Auxiliary organization on an annual coat drive for those in need. The Junior Auxiliary partnership also provides clothing, dental and vision assistance. Tutor serves as the liaison between teachers and the Junior Auxiliary to identify which students need these services.

"The most rewarding aspect of school counseling to me is being a small part of helping children succeed in their educational endeavors," Tutor said. "The smile on their faces and the twinkle in their eyes when they begin to grow socially, emotionally and academically is priceless."

Tutor is a member of ASCA, the Association for Play Therapy, the Mississippi Association for Play Therapy, the Mississippi Counseling Association, Love on a Leash, the Mississippi Association of Educators and the National Education Association. Instagram: @belindatutor

## Nicole Weron

School Counselor  
Hill City Elementary School  
Hill City, S.D.

A school counselor since 2004, Nicole Weron has a bachelor's degree in human services and political science and a master's degree in counseling and human resource development, both from South Dakota State University.

In her work at Hill City Elementary School, Weron built the K-5 comprehensive school counseling program and presents biweekly, structured counseling activities in every class-

room. Her lessons are structured based on student need and are an integral part of students' total educational experience. The school counseling program also incorporates support and collaboration from administrators, teachers, students and the community. Teachers and parents value the program and consider it an equal partner in the educational process; it promotes the achievement of all students.

"I love caring for students and being a part of their support system," Weron said.

Weron is a member of ASCA, the South Dakota School Counselor Association, the South Dakota Counseling Association and the West River Counseling Association.

## Grace Wilhelm

School Counselor  
Mamie Agnes Jones Elementary School  
Baldwin, Fla.

A school counselor since 1990, Grace Wilhelm has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in counseling, both from Liberty University. She is an ASCA U Bullying Prevention Specialist and works at a RAMP school.

When schools moved to virtual education, Wilhelm created and led a team of 25 school counselors to develop more than 20 online SEL lessons for the district's online platform, which they then shared with 130 elementary school counselors across Florida. Wilhelm received the superintendent's Coin of Excellence for achievements in high attendance during COVID-10 and providing online resources for the district.

"It is most rewarding to teach students how to solve their own problems," Wilhelm said. "They might come to me in tears but leave with real solutions, homework and strategies they can use over and over. I love the excitement that is created in teaching careers to elementary students and the conversations they have with family members about college, technology or drone education. The excitement spills over to teachers, who share in students' aspirations and link academics to their goals."

Wilhelm is a member of ASCA, the Florida School Counselor Association, the First Coast Counseling Association, Duval Teachers United, the National Education Association, the Florida Education Association and Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. Twitter: @counselorgames and @gracewilhelm



# 2022 State School Counselors of the Year

## Heather Williams

School Counselor  
Big Sky High School  
Missoula, Mont.

A school counselor since 2003, Heather Williams has a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of California - Davis and a master's degree in psychology from Palo Alto University, as well as an educational specialist degree in school psychology with counseling emphasis from the University of Montana - Missoula.

As students came back to school after quarantine, first in a hybrid model and then full-time in-person, the school counseling team performed needs assessments to assess the highest areas of impact students were facing. Based on the responses, the school counselors chose two primary areas of focus: anxiety/stress management and time management/organization. The school counseling team created Google Classrooms and virtual lessons focused on these and other topic areas. Each lesson was short, with a suggested assignment/exit ticket in hopes they would be watched at home or shown in the classroom. The school counseling team shared the lessons with the teachers, posted them on their own Google Classrooms and emailed them to parents.

"When I can make a student feel accepted, seen and valued, if nothing else, that matters and makes all the difference," Williams said.

Williams is a member of ASCA, the Montana School Counselor Association, the Montana Educator Association and the National Educator Association. Instagram: hnwill713

## Angela Wittmer

At-Risk Coordinator/After-School Program Director  
Holmes Junior High School  
Cedar Falls, Iowa

A school counselor since 2009, Angela Wittmer has a bachelor's degree in secondary education/social studies from the University of Northern Iowa and a master's degree in school counseling and rehabilitation counseling from the University of Iowa.

In spring 2019, the Holmes Junior High School started a community mental health night, which has since become an annual event. The evening features a keynote speaker and multiple breakout sessions centered around current mental health issues within the community.

Another successful program at the school is their partnership with the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity at the University of Northern Iowa to offer a leadership event to the school's eighth-grade males. The event focuses on finding positive role models, issues related to gender and toxic masculinity, consent, integrity and setting attainable goals.

"As an educator focused on at-risk work, I strive to remove barriers to education and success for all of my students," Wittmer said. "The most rewarding moments are when students prove to themselves that they can do something they previously felt was impossible. Seeing students engage in school, work hard, make connections and overcome obstacles is truly the most rewarding part of being an educator."

Wittmer is a member of ASCA, the Iowa School Counselor Association and the Iowa Association of Alternative Education.

## Giovanna Zermeno

School Counselor  
George W. Norris Middle School  
Omaha, Neb.

A school counselor since 2014, Giovanna Zermeno has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Briar Cliff University and a master's degree in teaching from the College of Saint Mary.

To build a more positive environment at George W. Norris Middle School, Zermeno implemented the No Place for Hate program. Students involved in the program have performed community service at shelters; adopted families during Christmas; and created kindness trees, care packages and joy posters in the school building. This year, students are making kindness bracelets to gift one another. All proceeds will be donated to the Leukemia and Cancer Society.

"Knowing that every day when I wake up, I get to make a difference in the life of my students is what is most rewarding," Zermeno said. "I believe I have students who come to school because they know I will be there to support them, smile at them and work with them."

Zermeno is a member of ASCA and the Nebraska School Counselor Association. Twitter: gzschoollcounselor, Instagram: @giozercar79