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Matthew Berry Selected as 2022 School Counselor of the Year Finalist



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Matthew Berry, lead and district school counselor, Ritenour Husky Academy, Overland, Mo., as a finalist for the 2022 School Counselor of the Year awards program (#SCOY22). Berry has been a school counselor since 2007. The school 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, well away from the administration offices, which students often associated with disciplinary actions. This new wing of the building features more spacious counseling offices and a lobby connecting the offices for students to relax and regulate, proactively avoiding discipline issues. 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. At the end of each small-group session, Berry asks the students, "What are you walking away with today?" In response, one student answered, "Today, I learned I am not alone," illustrating the impact of the increased delivery of small groups.

"He is seen as a rock of positivity for all staff at Ritenour Middle School 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.

"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 February 2022 and will participate in webinars and additional online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 7–11, 2022.

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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 more than 42,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.