



Olivia Carter Named 2021 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association



ALEXANDRIA, VA – Olivia Carter, school counselor at Jefferson Elementary School in Cape Girardeau, Mo., has been named the 2021 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). A graduate of Southeast Missouri State University, Carter has been a school counselor for eight years. The School Counselor of the Year award honors professionals who devote their careers to advocating for the nation’s students and addressing their academic, career and social/emotional development.

Carter provides school counseling services to the suburban school’s 304 students, grades K–4, 100% of whom receive free or reduced lunch. “Nothing speaks louder than process, perception and outcome data,” Carter said. “When I use data to create school counseling program goals, it drives the program and it helps me create intentional interventions.”

As a member of her school’s leadership team, Carter used behavior data to encourage the implementation of a more trauma-informed approach at Jefferson Elementary. “She has single-handedly brought trauma-informed practices to our school and built a team of educators on our trauma team that has helped transform our school and better fit the needs of our students,” said Zech Payne, assistant principal.

“Quite simply, Olivia has a gift to reach our most traumatized students,” said colleague Kande Oliver. “Creating and building trust, chipping away at hurts and heartaches, inspiring and uplifting, Olivia pieces together an environment for our students that surrounds them like a comfortable old quilt.”

Carter taught teachers about trauma and trauma responses, sparking an interest among staff members for further training in anti-biased and anti-racist teaching, restorative practices and self-regulation. She also created *Trauma-Informed Tuesdays*, a newsletter focused on teacher wellness and best practices related to building resilience. “The cultural shift in the building toward all students feeling loved and respected, as well as teachers’ time being respected and valued, is palpable,” Carter said.

In addition to her work turning Jefferson Elementary School into a trauma-informed environment, Carter has also increased emphasis on career exploration at the elementary school. When a community partner reached out to Jefferson Elementary School about designing a project around financial literacy and giving back to the community, Carter saw it as an opportunity to align her program to Missouri's school counseling standards and ASCA's Mindsets & Behaviors Student Standards related to career exploration. Through this project, fourth-grade students complete an interest inventory and have an immersive experience with someone in their chosen field, culminating in a career fair for all students.

Carter has been a school counselor since 2012 and is an ASCA U School Counseling Data Specialist. She received her master's degree in school counseling and her bachelor's degree in psychology from Southeast Missouri State University. She is a member of ASCA, the Missouri School Counselor Association, the Missouri State Teachers Association and the Down Syndrome Association of Greater St. Louis and is a member and president-elect of the Southeast Missouri School Counselor Association. Carter was selected as the 2021 School Counselor of the Year based on her ability to create lasting change within the profession through leadership, collaboration and advocacy.

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 nearly 40,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.