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Stephanie Leibowitz Nelson Selected as 2025 School Counselor of the Year Finalist



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Stephanie Leibowitz Nelson, Ph.D., ACSC, as a finalist for the 2025 School Counselor of the Year® awards program (#SCOY25). Nelson is a school counselor at Garner Magnet High School, a RAMP® school in Garner, N.C., that serves 1,681 students in grades 9–12. Nelson, who has been a school counselor since 2007, earned her bachelor’s degree from the State University of New York at Oswego, her master’s degree from Syracuse University, her doctorate degree from

North Carolina State University and is an ASCA-Certified School Counselor®.

“Dr. Nelson consistently leads with kindness even in stressful situations,” said Matthew Price, principal, Garner Magnet High School. “The job of a school counselor, especially in a time of refocusing efforts to support students with multiple new initiatives and an increased, intentional focus on student performance, is multifaceted and seems to change from one moment to the next. It is a scenario that can lead to frustration and anxiety, but Dr. Nelson maintains a positive facade and outlook throughout each new stressor. Her demeanor allows for those around her (students, teachers and peers within her department) to respond in a similar manner.”

During the 2022–2023 school year, Nelson joined the school improvement team to work toward increasing the graduation rate from 75% in 2021–2022 to 90% by the end of 2024. Discovering that the lowest performing subgroup was Latino males, she focused interventions for those students failing one or more courses required for graduation at the end of first quarter. “We provided them with monthly individual counseling, small groups and classroom instruction but also strategic scheduling in an online credit recovery format for those whose limited English proficiency prevented them from being successful in the regular classroom,” Nelson said. “All 25 of our identified students graduated, and our graduation rate has increased by 13% since 2021–2022 as I have led our team in creating data-informed annual student outcome goals and interventions.”

“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 2025 and will participate in online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 3–7, 2025.

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About the American School Counselor Association

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) professional organization based in Alexandria, Va. ASCA promotes student success by expanding the image and influence of school counseling through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. ASCA helps school counselors guide their students toward academic achievement, career planning and social/emotional development to help today’s students become tomorrow’s productive, contributing members of society. Founded in 1952, ASCA has a network of 53 state and territory associations and a membership of approximately 43,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.