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Keisha J. Larry Burns Selected as 2023 School Counselor of the Year Finalist



ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce Keisha J. Larry Burns, Ed.D., school counselor, Shadow Hills Engineering & Design Magnet Academy, Palmdale, Calif., as a finalist for the 2023 School Counselor of the Year awards program (#SCOY23). Burns has been a school counselor since 2015 and was a social studies teacher for 13 years prior to becoming a school counselor. Shadow Hills Engineering & Design Magnet Academy, a Recognized ASCA Model

Program school, serves 899 students, grades 6–8, 100% of whom are on the free and reduced-price meals program. Burns received her bachelor’s degree UCLA, master’s degrees from Chapman University College and the University of La Verne and a doctorate degree from the University of Southern California.

“Because of her continued hard work and her data-driven focus on student learning and achievement, she is able to share with district, site and community stakeholders her dream of a cohesive, well-designed, district-level comprehensive school counseling program that addresses equity, access and success for all students,” said Stacy Love Bryant, Ed.D., retired deputy superintendent, Palmdale School District, Palmdale, Calif.

“Middle school can be awkward as students navigate the terrain, experience personal growth and build relationships,” Burns said. To address this need, she

implemented two programs: Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) and the Falcon Lunch Club. WEB assigns trained eighth-grade leaders to mentor sixth-grade students. WEB leaders plan and host activities to help sixth-grade students build rapport and a connection to the school. The Falcon Lunch Club builds on the need for a sense of community in the school, giving all Shadow Hills students a chance to interact with each other and practice their soft skills through play. Initially, the Lunch Club was only 20 students but quickly grew to more than 100 students. Today, the Falcon Lunch Club has evolved into a schoolwide intervention where teachers volunteer to host students in their classrooms. Interested students and teachers are matched based on preferences, such as art/drawing, computer games, reading, board games, Dungeons & Dragons, study hall and sports.

“ASCA’s School Counselor of the Year program shines a valuable spotlight on the school counseling profession, bringing attention to exceptional school counselors who are supporting K–12 students every day,” said Jill Cook, CAE, ASCA executive director. “School counselors are vital to students’ academic achievement, social/emotional development and plans for life after graduation. The 2023 finalists have demonstrated their commitment to the values and mission of the profession to help all students succeed.”

The School Counselor of the Year and finalists will be celebrated in Washington, D.C., in February 2023 and will participate in webinars and additional online events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 6–10, 2023.

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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 approximately 43,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.