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Diana Virgil Selected as 2024 School Counselor of the Year



ALEXANDRIA, VA – Diana Virgil, Ph.D., ACSC, of Alabama’s Daleville High School, has been named the 2024 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association. Virgil has been a school counselor since 2015 and works on a campus that serves 346 students in grades 9–12. She is the 17th person to receive the national recognition and the first from Alabama.

Virgil received her bachelor’s, master’s and educational specialist degrees from Mississippi College and a doctorate degree from University of the Cumberlands. She is an ASCA-Certified School Counselor, a National Certified School Counselor and a National Certified Counselor.

“Right from the start, Dr. Virgil demonstrated her deep knowledge of and commitment to a comprehensive school counseling program,” said Erin O’Malley, a member of the School Counselor of the Year Selection Committee and principal at St. Theresa Catholic School, Ashburn, Va. “Throughout the interview process, Diana presented as an energetic and caring professional, with a deep compassion for her students and desire for them to succeed.”

“In my opinion, Dr. Virgil is the epitome of what any school counselor should be,” said Lashundra Straw, Daleville High School student. “She is not only knowledgeable but also passionate about her field and is committed to making a difference in the lives of others. She is the heart of the school and makes the community feel

complete.”

Many Daleville High School students are trailblazers in their families, aiming to be the first to graduate from high school. When Virgil was hired, she noticed a significant number of students weren't participating in dual-enrollment classes due to a lack of awareness, limited college aspirations, transportation challenges and financial constraints. Virgil promptly established a partnership with the local community college to boost student enrollment. A significant turning point came when the college received a grant to provide eligible students with free tuition and books for dual enrollment, revolutionizing the opportunities for students to earn both high school and college credit. To address transportation challenges, Virgil worked with the college to implement online courses and enlisted teachers to teach dual-enrollment courses at the high school. Her approaches increased the number of students in dual-enrollment courses from four to more than 40 each semester. This year, the school is on the cusp of graduating its first student with a high school diploma and an associate degree in science, along with its first student with a mechatronics certification from the aviation college. As a result of Virgil's extensive collaboration and advocacy efforts, Daleville High School now offers dual-enrollment courses in science, English and math.

For Virgil, the most rewarding part of her work as a school counselor is the opportunity to be a support system for her students. “Each day that I have the privilege of going to Daleville High School and giving my students my best, that's where I find the most rewarding feeling,” she said.

“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 2024 and will participate in online events during National School

Counseling Week, Feb. 5–9, 2024.

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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 51 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.