



Nwakaego Edordu Oriji Named 2019 School Counselor of the Year Finalist by the American School Counselor Association



ALEXANDRIA, VA – Nwakaego Edordu Oriji, a school counselor at The Dr. Billy Earl Dade Middle School in Dallas, Texas, has been named a 2019 School Counselor of the Year finalist by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Edordu Oriji is a graduate of the University of North Texas and Texas A&M Commerce. She has been a school counselor for 11 years and has been at Dade Middle School since 2015.

The School Counselor of the Year award honors professionals who devote their careers to advocating for the nation's students and addressing their academic and social/emotional development and college and career readiness needs.

Described as a "transformational leader" by Dade Middle School principal Tracie Washington, Edordu Oriji has earned district and state recognitions for her work as a school counselor. Her school counseling program was also recognized as a Dallas Independent School District School of Character for several years. "She has built a stellar reputation as someone who is committed to making a positive difference with our scholars, campus and district," Washington said.

Gabriela, a former student at Dade Middle School, agrees. Gabriela is grateful for Edordu Oriji's unwavering support as she navigated personal and academic concerns during her eighth-grade year. Gabriela met Edordu Oriji after experiencing conflicts with other students. She credits Edordu Oriji with helping her maintain her sense of worth and importance when her self-esteem was waning. Edordu Oriji's guidance also motivated Gabriela to apply to a high school that offered college credit. Gabriela is now a 10th grade scholar at an area college academy and is earning an associate's degree while completing her high school

diploma. "Without her I wouldn't have been given the opportunity to go to college," Gabriela said. "She's taught me that there are always doors of opportunity waiting for me and to never give up on my dreams."

Edordu Oriji, who believes collaboration is vital to a successful comprehensive school counseling program and community, seized an opportunity to rebuild a strained relationship between the local community and area law enforcement by inviting police officers to participate in Dade Middle School's Education Go Get It week. Through this collaboration, Edordu Oriji was selected to spearhead a Leadership Academy Texas program at Dade Middle School. Leadership Academy Texas is a school-based program for seventh and eighth grade scholars, intended to encourage and inspire today's student leaders. "The group proved to be a formidable tool for bridging the gap between our scholars and law enforcement," Edordu Oriji said. "As a result of the program, students have formed close relationships with the police officers along with a heightened sense of trust for law enforcement."

The School Counselor of the Year finalists were evaluated based on their ability to create systemic change within the school counseling profession. Through their significant leadership, collaboration and advocacy skills, the School Counselor of the Year finalists achieved increased student success through their comprehensive school counseling programs. Edordu Oriji, along with the additional five School Counselor of the Year finalists, will be in Washington, D.C., Jan. 30–Feb. 1, 2019, where they will be honored and formally recognized at a black-tie gala.

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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 52 state and territory associations and a membership of more than 36,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor

Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.