Jennifer Kline Named 2020 School Counselor of the Year Finalist by the American School Counselor Association

ALEXANDRIA, VA – Jennifer Kline, a school counselor at Festus High School in Festus, Mo., has been named a 2020 School Counselor of the Year finalist by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

Kline, a graduate of Lindenwood University, Stephens College and Southeast Missouri State University, has been a school counselor for eight years. She has worked at Festus High School, her alma mater, since 2014.

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.

Festus High School principal Karl Shininger says Kline does not limit herself to just one idea or group of students. “She leads and serves on multiple building-level teams that address a multitude of issues ranging from truancy to the transition from middle school to high school,” he said, noting Kline has developed and organized special events such as Freshmen Kick-Off, Parent Curriculum Night and the College Planning Night at the school.

Kline spearheaded the first trauma-informed, suicide prevention and mental health training for the staff at Festus. “We have seen an increase in youth mental health issues and suicidal ideation, especially in a county with no adolescent psychiatrist,” she said.

Collaborating with her school counselor colleagues, Shininger and local
community agencies, Kline also has implemented programming to tackle this issue. In addition to several staff presentations on trauma awareness, she also has provided information sessions in all school health classes to help students understand the signs of suicide and self-harm. She also led a districtwide parent information night to provide families with important resources to help them support students. Staff referrals to the school counseling office increased, and following the student sessions, more than 12% of students expressed that they would like to talk to someone about themselves or a friend.

Kline’s passion for helping others led her to pivot from a potential career in athletic training to school counseling. “Because of that revelation, thousands of young people’s lives have been enriched,” said Amanda Esparza, school counselor, Festus High School.

Breanna Stephen says she and many other Fetus High School students are inspired by Kline. “When I was in rough moments, she talked me through them. She was one of the people that helped me get back on track,” said Stephen, who plans to follow Kline in her professional footsteps. “Because of Mrs. Kline, I hope to someday be a school counselor or social worker so I can work with students who have had similar backgrounds.”

The four School Counselor of the Year finalists were selected based on their ability to create lasting change within the profession through leadership, collaboration and advocacy. Kline and the other finalists will be in Washington, D.C., Jan. 28–30, 2020, where they will be honored and formally recognized at a black-tie gala.

###

**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 more than 36,000 school counseling
professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.