Julie Taylor Named 2020 School Counselor of the Year Finalist by the American School Counselor Association

ALEXANDRIA, VA – Julie Taylor of Starr Elementary School in Oregon, Ohio, has been named a 2020 School Counselor of the Year finalist by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). A graduate of Bowling Green State University, Taylor has served as a school counselor at Starr Elementary School for 19 years.

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.

Despite being Starr Elementary School’s only school counselor, Taylor remains focused on providing individualized support to the 450 students she serves. Principal Tricia Soltesz says Taylor’s tenacity, integrity and creativity make a difference in students’ lives.

“With the ever-changing needs of our student population, Mrs. Taylor has had to customize plans for students to gain success,” Soltesz said. “She gives that individual attention to her students to be successful in the classroom, home and outside of school.” Among other things, Taylor volunteers to teach art classes after school because elementary art educators are not employed by the Oregon City school district.

Second-grade teacher Debra Kowalski said Taylor’s “progressive approach to implementing new programs that benefit all students is highly motivational for all, including our educators.”
After reading Barbara Gruener’s “What's Under Your Cape? Superheroes of the Character Kind,” Taylor collaborated with Soltesz to create Starr School’s Superhero Character Education Program. The all-inclusive program focuses on a different character trait each month, and students and staff members are nominated for superhero awards based on each month’s theme.

“Teachers, aides, cafeteria staff, recess monitors and custodians have nominated students, and staff members have even nominated other staff members, parents and district personnel for the superhero awards,” said Taylor, who was contacted earlier this year by another school seeking information on how to replicate the program in their classes.

Taylor works with the school’s families and local community leaders in planning college and career readiness programs such as Career Days and Career Cafés. More than 300 community members have participated in the events at Starr over the past several years.

Parent Kari Atcheson, who has worked on Career Day for four years, said she didn’t understand why college and career readiness was a focus for elementary school students until she started working with Taylor on the program. “At first, I was confused as to why they are looking at careers so early, but I now understand that she is opening the children’s eyes to options – not just options of careers but options of secondary schooling,” Atcheson said.

Taylor believes in sharing her knowledge, skills and experiences with other school counselors. She is a frequent presenter at state and national school counseling conferences on topics such as incorporating children’s literature and creative arts in school counseling lessons as well as strategies for supporting grieving students and creating grief-sensitive schools. She has also lead professional development webinars for ASCA and provides trainings developed by the American Federation of Teachers to help school personnel recognize and support grieving students in their school districts. She was selected to serve on the Ohio Department of Education’s school counselor standards writing team, school counselor evaluation writing team and behavioral health and wellness education advisory group. Through this involvement, Taylor has advocated for the school counseling profession and for students’ academic and social/emotional well-being.
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. Taylor 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.

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