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### **ASCA Announces 2026 School Counselor of the Year Finalists**

ALEXANDRIA, VA – The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is pleased to announce the five finalists for the 2026 School Counselor of the Year awards program (#SCOY26). The program honors exemplary school counseling professionals who devote their careers to serving as advocates for the nation's students, helping them achieve success in school and in life. The five finalists are:

- Leka Anitema, Maui High School, Kahului, Hawaii
- Danielle R. Crankfield, Crofton High School, Gambrills, Md.
- Annie Goldberg, ACSC, Broadview Middle School, Burlington, N.C.
- Lydia T. Larimore, Neabsco Elementary School, Woodbridge, Va.
- Summer Royale Whittington, Ernest Gallet Elementary School, Youngsville, La.

ASCA will announce the 2026 School Counselor of the Year in late fall.

Nominations for the School Counselor of the Year awards program were submitted by ASCA-affiliated state/territory school counselor associations.

The School Counselor of the Year Selection Committee includes principals, school counselors and representatives from education-related organizations. 2026 selection committee members included representatives from Advance CTE; Arlington Public Schools, Arlington, Va.; The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; The Common App; Holton-Arms School, Bethesda, Md.; The National Association of College Admission Counselors, The National Association of Elementary School Principals; National PTA; Sarasota Middle School, Sarasota, Fla.; South County Middle School, Lorton, Va.; Strategic Questions Consulting; and Watson Mountain Middle School, Leesburg, Va. The panel selected the finalists based on several criteria, including school counseling innovations, exemplary school counseling

programs, leadership and advocacy skills, and contributions to student outcomes.

“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 2026 finalists have demonstrated their commitment to the mission of the profession to help each and every student succeed.”

An in-person celebration is planned in Washington, D.C., Jan. 29, 2026. The School Counselor of the Year and finalists will be celebrated in a series of virtual events during National School Counseling Week, Feb. 2-6, 2026.

#### **About the American School Counselor Association**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a nonprofit 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 53 state and territory associations and a membership of approximately 43,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit [schoolcounselor.org](https://schoolcounselor.org).