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Kirsten Perry Named 2018 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association



ALEXANDRIA, VA – Kirsten Perry, a school counselor at Lawndale Community Academy in Chicago, Ill., has been named the 2018 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). She is the 11th person to receive the award from ASCA since the program started in 2008. Perry, a graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University, has been a school counselor for six years and has been at Lawndale 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.

Lawndale Principal Willard Willette says Perry was the missing link that helped lift Lawndale, a Pre-K-8 school, out of academic distress. When she joined the school counseling team, Lawndale's ranking had been at level three — the lowest in the district — for the previous five years.

In her role, Perry has focused on improving student attendance, implementing restorative justice and providing college and career readiness. At the end of the 2015-16 school year, Lawndale's ranking had improved to level two among Chicago's public schools.

Without Perry's "tireless work to improve attendance, increase community partnerships and revamp the school culture, Lawndale's level two status would not have been possible," Willette said. Students past and present and fellow staff members agree.

Former student Kyla Evans says she learned lessons from Perry when she attended the school counselor's peace circles. Before that initiative, Evans says girls in the school fought frequently.

"I would get in a lot of fights too," Evans said. "Ms. Perry helped us to work on ourselves. We learned not to react to the small things and that if something was bothering us, we should talk it out. Ms. Perry has done a lot to help us. She makes all the kids at Lawndale feel loved and like we can do anything we dream of."

Nikki Brown, a social studies and science teacher at the academy, says Perry has created change throughout the school. Brown says Perry supported her during a social studies unit called "Reparations Won," in which students discussed topics such as police torture and community building in Chicago.

"She brought in police officers to speak with students about the community relations, incarceration and gun laws to encourage positive relationships and responsible decision making," Brown said. "She strives to provide students with information, support and resources to encourage on-track behavior. She will do any and everything for students and the school."

Six finalists were selected for School Counselor of the Year based on their ability to create systemic change within the profession through significant leadership, collaboration and advocacy. All six finalists achieved increased student success through their comprehensive school counseling programs.

Perry and the other finalists will be in Washington, D.C., Jan. 31–Feb. 2, 2018, where they will be honored at a special recognition ceremony 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 associations and a membership of more than 34,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.