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NICKAJACK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR NAMED SCHOOL COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR

Nicole Pflieger from Marietta, Georgia Wins National Award

Alexandria, VA, January 30, 2012 – Nicole Pflieger, a school counselor from Nickajack Elementary School in Smyrna, has been named the top school counselor in America. Pflieger is one of more than 270 elementary, middle, and secondary school counselors nationwide who were nominated for the School Counselor of the Year award. The award, which is presented by the American School Counselor Association, honors the professionals who devote their careers to serving as advocates and often lifesavers for the nation's students.

"School counselors play an integral role in ensuring that all of our students are both college- and career-ready, and that together we are able to reach the President's goal of once again leading the world in number of students who graduate from college," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "I am so grateful for Ms. Pflieger and other school counselors who, like her, make a difference in the lives of students every day."

As a professional school counselor, Pflieger has developed and implemented numerous innovative student support programs. She sees character education as the guiding force behind all she does, as she works to create an environment where students are respectful, responsible and able to work cooperatively with others. In support of this goal, Pflieger implemented Rachel's Challenge, a character education program focused on creating a culture of compassion through acts of kindness and service projects. The school-wide character education program includes a curriculum, class meetings, service projects, student recognition and a Kindness and Compassion Club.

Pflieger was also instrumental in developing a close working relationship with a community homeless shelter for women and children where some of her students live. She helped set up a learning center in the shelter where students can complete homework and have access to tutors, supplies, and books. Another way Pflieger has helped address the unique needs of her students is through development of the D.R.E.A.M. Team (Demonstrating Respect Everyday to Achieve More). This sponsor program for at-risk male students promotes positive behavior and character development through small group counseling and a mentor relationship.

"Ms. Pflieger's unique actions have a direct impact on her peers, students, and the entire school climate," commented Carolyn Glaze, Homeless Education Tutor, Cobb County Schools. "Her actions help students who might flounder to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally in school, and motivate all of us who work in education to strive for success."

Pflieger is a leader in her profession and admired and relied upon by her peers. She serves as professional recognition chair for the Georgia School Counselors Association, is a member of the Cobb County Counselor Advisory Team, and received the Mayor's Award for Education in 2008. Pflieger is also actively involved in community outreach and service. In 2010, she raised over \$1,250 for the Haiti Relief Efforts through "Hearts for Haiti," a student in pin making project, and has led a number of additional relief drives and community outreach efforts.

The School Counselor of the Year awards program was open to the more than 107,000 members of the school counseling profession. The top six school counselors were nominated by their peers and administrators and judged by a select panel to be the “best of the best.”

The candidates were judged on several criteria, including: creative school counseling innovations, effective counseling programs, leadership skills, and contributions to student advancement.

“School counselors make significant contributions to the overall well-being of students and their success,” said Richard Wong, Executive Director, American School Counselor Association. “They have unique qualifications and skills that allow them to address students’ academic achievement, personal/social and career development needs.”

The five finalists for the 2012 School Counselor of the Year are: Kenneth Elliott, Sunset Elementary School, Edmond, OK; Dave Forrester, Olympia High School, Olympia, WA; Michael Kane, Starlight Cove Title I Elementary, Lantana, FL; Shelley Klaas, Neil Armstrong Elementary School, Bettendorf, IA; and Anne Ogilvy, Vickery Elementary School, Cumming, GA.

Pfleger, along with the five finalists, will be flown to Washington, D.C., on February 1, 2012, for three days of celebratory events. The honorees will have meetings with their members of Congress, attend a congressional briefing, tour the White House, participate in a briefing at the Office of the Vice President and be formally recognized at a black-tie gala.

Co-chairs of the 2012 School Counselor of the Year program are U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), U.S. Rep. Tom Petri (R-WI – 6th), and U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL – 23rd).

For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, please visit www.schoolcounselor.org.

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 professional school counseling through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. ASCA helps school counselors guide their students toward academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning to help today’s students become tomorrow’s productive, contributing members of society. Founded in 1952, ASCA currently has a network of 50 state associations and a membership of nearly 30,000 school counseling professionals.

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