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WILTON MANORS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR
NAMED AS FINALIST FOR
SCHOOL COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR
Ana Maria Leon from Coral Springs, Florida Among Top Ten

Alexandria, VA, January 22, 2009—Ana Maria Leon, a school counselor from Wilton Manors Elementary School, has been named one of the top ten school counselors in America. Leon is one of more than 400 elementary, middle, and secondary school counselors nationwide who were nominated for the School Counselor of the Year award. The program, which is sponsored 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.

A counselor for over fifteen years, Leon inspires positive change in her school and community. She is widely respected for the development of several programs, most notably the Passport to Peace program, which helps create an atmosphere of citizenship in the school by having students learn, practice, and demonstrate positive character traits. Both Parents and teachers are involved in the program and there is an annual Walk for Peace, which engages the local community in the program's mission. The Passport to Peace program led to Wilton Manors being recognized as one of only ten National Schools of Character in 2008. In addition to her nomination for School Counselor of the Year, Leon was named Florida Elementary School Counselor of the Year in 2007.

Leon is also an Adjunct Professor at Florida Atlantic University in the Department of Counselor Education where she shares her knowledge and experience with others. Originally from South America, she recognizes the great disparity between counseling in the United States and South America and is passionate about bringing quality programs to those countries. She recently traveled to Ecuador to consult with the Universidad Tecnologica Particular de Loja about the planning and implementation of a Masters program in counseling. This February, Leon will be traveling to Spain to share the Passport to Peace program.

“Ana has been a great ambassador for promoting comprehensive school counseling programs and is positioned to have even greater impact,” said Greg Brigman, Coordinator, School Counseling Program, Florida Atlantic University. “She is a true advocate for children and is a model for the professional school counselor.”

The American School Counselor of the Year contest was open to all 100,000 members of the school counseling profession. The top ten 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.”

Leon, along with the other nine finalists, will be flown to Washington, D.C., on January 28, 2009, for three days of celebratory events. The honorees will have meetings with their Members of Congress, attend a Congressional briefing and reception, and be formally recognized at a black-tie gala.

Co-chairs of the 2009 School Counselor of the Year program are Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-Cal.) and Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-Mich.). The 2009 program is presented by Naviance, a provider of planning and advising systems for secondary schools, and the American School Counselor Association.

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 more than 25,000 school counseling professionals.

About Naviance

Naviance is the leading provider of planning and advising systems for secondary schools. Nearly 40,000 educators and counselors serving more than 3.5 million students in schools across the U.S. and in 60 other countries use Naviance products to manage academic and post-secondary advising, communicate with students and families, and analyze data. For more information about Naviance, visit www.naviance.com.

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