

2021 AkSCA Advocate for School Counseling Award Nomination

I am eager to nominate Heather Coulehan as Advocate of the Year. Heather is employed by the Alaska Association of School Boards as part of the Alaska ICE Team which works to “deliver the message of Asset Building and Community Engagement to thousands of Alaskan teachers, students, school board members, parents, community members, coaches, faith community leaders and elders. Working closely with individuals and communities, ICE staff assist in developing sustainable local community engagement efforts guided and maintained by local community members”.

I first worked with Heather when she facilitated the CRESEL (Culturally Responsive Social Emotional Learning) grant that involved our district. I experienced, first-hand, her passion for community engagement and her expertise of bringing people together to work on a shared vision or project.

Her next step was to become a key facilitator of the creation of *Transforming Schools – A Framework for Trauma Engaged Practice in Alaska* as well as the tool kit for educators that accompanies the Framework. Heather and the leadership team brought together Alaskan educators of all varieties to share stories and lessons learned from trying to move forward to make schools more trauma informed in practice. Together, we created tangible materials and supports for others who wish to move forward in this work.

She has continued to build a state-wide community of people who are committed to champion the work to make education truly trauma-engaged by hosting two different monthly meetings designed to build collaboration, support and professional development.

While Heather’s work is not specific to counselors or the counseling departments in our schools, it is effective in bringing other stakeholders into the work we do to build SEL and trauma engaged practice. She is a torchbearer, casting the light wide and inviting everyone into that work. She is a trailblazer for counselors in our state, helping community members, school board members, administrators, teachers and folks from other agencies understand the importance of our work.

In my opinion, Heather is all about connecting and elevating our work! Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan R. Nedza
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