

Attallah School Counseling Alumni and Faculty Receive Highest Honor in Orange County

February 21, 2019

As the winners for this year's Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) Counselor Recognition and Counselor Advocate Awards were notified in early February, the news got better and better for the Attallah College of Educational Studies' [School Counseling graduate program](#). One after the other, Attallah alumni and faculty were notified they'd been selected for Orange County's high honor. In the end, four of the six 2019 recipients, one in every category, were Chapman alumni or current faculty.



Attallah award recipients with Dr. Kelly Kennedy and Dr. Lisa Sparks (OC Board of Education 5th District Trustee) at OCDE School Counseling Awards Ceremony

“That so many of our Chapman Panthers were recognized this year with OCDE awards speaks volumes about our school counseling program,” said Kelly Kennedy, Ph.D., Attallah College’s Associate Dean of Graduate Programs. “We are so proud of our alumni and faculty and how dedicated they are to their schools and communities.”

The OCDE awards are given to school counselors at the elementary, middle and high school levels in an effort to “celebrate amazing K-12 school counselors in Orange County who are working tirelessly to support the needs of our students in all three areas: academic,

social/emotional, and college and career development.” The goal of the OCDE recognition program is to spotlight Orange County’s top professional counselors and their contributions to positive school climates and student success.

The Role of the School Counselor

Although the daily routines and duties of an elementary school counselor may differ from their colleagues working in middle and high schools, their fundamental job descriptions are essentially the same: help students in all areas (academic, personal, and developmental) with an eye toward their overall well-being, now and in the future. While that certainly includes course scheduling and college/career planning, as members of the site and district leadership team, school counselors work collaboratively with teachers, administrators, parents, and students on a day-to-day basis.

At all levels, school counselors provide wrap-around support, making resources available to students, from mental health to college readiness, and helping them overcome obstacles to improve learning outcomes.



Beau Menchaca (MA '02) with OC Superintendent of Schools Dr. Al Mijares

“School counselors have a tremendous impact in helping students achieve school success and build a strong foundation for their future,” said Christine Olmstead, OCDE’s associate superintendent of Educational Services. “They are the students’ advocate when they need a voice, active listener when they need nurturing, and the compass when they need direction and guidance. It is certainly not an easy task.”

School Counselor Advocate Awards

Attallah College alumni were honored for their work in elementary, middle, and high schools this year:

- Katerina Sorrell (MA '14, [LPCC](#)), school counselor at Gates Elementary School and six other elementary schools in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District
- Andrew Fredriksz (MA '16, LPCC), school counselor at Aliso Viejo Middle School in the Capistrano Unified School District
- Beau Menchaca (MA '02), school counselor at Century High School in the Santa Ana Unified School District

Katerina Sorrell, who was one of the first Attallah graduates to also complete the LPCC (Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor) requirements while studying at Chapman, reflected on her award: “As school counselors, our highest honor is being told we’ve made a difference, not just in an individual, but in an entire family. For a counselor, life success is about improving the world ... one amazing person at a time.”

All the recipients were presented with their awards at a [recent OCDE board meeting](#). They will also be recognized at the Orange County Counselor Symposium later this fall.

Counselor Advocate Award

For the first time this year, OCDE also gave out the Counselor Advocate of the Year Award to recognize those who advocate on behalf of school counselors and support the implementation of comprehensive counseling programs that incorporate the [ASCA \(American School Counselor Association\) National Model](#). School counselor advocates support the use of data in making decisions that are in the best interest of students and promote positive school climate and culture for students and staff.



Katerina Sorrell (MA '14, LPCC) and OCDE Director of Educational Services Dr. Jami Parsons

One of the two 2019 Counselor Advocate of the Year Award recipients was Rebecca Pianta, Attallah College school counseling adjunct professor and coordinator for counseling and student support and foster youth liaison in the Capistrano Unified School District.

Pianta was the only nominee in any category this year to receive three separate nominations from her colleagues. Her nominees described how diligently Pianta advocates for those in her district. One colleague wrote, "We are fortunate to have such an influential leader at our district, continuously promoting advocacy, collaboration, and leadership, which in turn teaches us to create systematic change."

Attallah Program Recognition

With awards for elementary, middle, and high school counselors and school counselor advocate, Attallah College affiliates swept all four categories, demonstrating the maturity and impact of Chapman's program.

Pianta believes the field really recognizes that Chapman's school counseling program prepares students to really look at their school site's core issues and come up with a school-wide plan.

"Everywhere I go, when I do site visits or even when we interview students, Chapman alumni stand out," she said. "I think our faculty do a good job of ensuring that they're very knowledgeable in addressing the needs of the whole child."

[Cheryl Baltes](#)