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Agora Cyber Charter School Counselors to Speak at National Conference

Three school counselors will provide an overview of how Agora's counseling model is aligning with national standards and connecting with students one-on-one and in groups.

WAYNE, Pa. (June 5, 2015) — Three of Agora Cyber Charter School's professional school counselors have been selected to be presenters at the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national convention June 28-July 1 in Phoenix, Ariz., for approximately 2,100 school counselors and educators.

Agora Cyber Charter School Counselors Jill Palme, Whitney Patterson and Tara Quisito are scheduled to present "The School Counselor in the Cyber World" from 3:15-4:30 p.m. June 30 at the Phoenix Convention Center.

"We are the only cyber school in attendance this year to have a breakout session at the national ASCA conference," Palme said. "This is an invaluable opportunity for us to develop working relationships with other school counselors and highlight the inner dynamic and magic that occurs in a cyber-school setting."

The school counselors will provide an overview of a day in the life of an Agora Cyber Charter School counselor and share how the Agora Cyber Charter School Counseling Department is working to align its program to become one of the first cyber schools in the country to earn the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designation.

The presentation will include a slide show and interactive demonstrations of the communication methods and techniques used to counsel students, deliver lessons and information and respond to a crisis. Some of the modes of communication used include Blackboard Collaborate, webcams, instant messages, surveys, phone calls, face-to-face interactions, student-led clubs, psycho-educational groups, email and live videos, which sometimes feature props and music to motivate students to watch them. In addition, Agora's school counselors developed a dedicated website, which has become an invaluable resource when working with families and staff and during individual student planning meetings.

"Our team has worked very hard finding creative ways to engage and support our students in a virtual environment," Quisito said. "We are excited about sharing this information with other school counselors from around the country because it has been very successful with our students, family coaches and teachers."

The Agora Cyber Charter School Counseling Department provides a comprehensive program to approximately 10,000 students (Kindergarten through 12th grade) throughout Pennsylvania to enhance their personal, social, academic and career development. Agora has 21 high school counselors and one counselor for each the middle and elementary grades. The ratio of school counselors to high school

students at Agora is about 300-to-1, which is well below the national average of 450-to-1 and near ASCA's recommended ratio of 250-to-1.

"We are very flattered and honored to be chosen as presenters," Patterson says. "By promoting what we do on a national level, we hope to bring understanding to the fact school counselors play just as critical of a role in education in a cyber school as in a traditional brick-and-mortar school. The option for cyber school is continuing to grow, so it's imperative to align our program with best practices and show how students are being supported in this unique educational model."

Jill Palme of Horsham Township, Montgomery County, Pa., has been a school counselor at Agora Cyber Charter School based in Wayne, Pa., since November 2009. She was promoted in 2013 to Lead School Counselor, overseeing a 20-member team of school counselors. At Agora, she also is co-chair of a committee working to have the counseling department designated as a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). She also developed and implemented the Counselors on the Run program, an intervention program to identify the interests and learning needs of students on the verge of failing. She enjoys getting to know her students and their family structures to help build connections. She received a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Kutztown University in Kutztown, Pa., and Master of Education in Secondary School Counseling from West Chester University in West Chester, Pa. She is active in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), serving as chairman of the ASCA National Model Committee with Agora. She holds a School Counselor Leadership certification through ASCA and is working to become a Licensed Professional Counselor to work in private practice as a Play Therapy Specialist. She also is a volunteer at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She previously worked as a school counselor at Franklin Towne Charter High School in Philadelphia. She grew up in Montgomery County, Pa., graduating from Upper Moreland High School in Willow Grove.

Whitney Patterson of Pittsburgh, Pa., has been a professional high school counselor for Agora Cyber Charter School based in Wayne, Pa., since September 2009. She has been instrumental in developing and implementing innovative virtual communication tools to effectively communicate and build rapport with Agora's students. She and her school counselor colleagues also designed a dedicated website for Agora high school students, and she is also co-chair of a committee working to have the counseling department designated as a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). She holds a Master of Education in Counselor Education and a Bachelor of Science in Communications Media from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She is a certified Secondary School Counselor and recently sat for the National School Counselor Certification and National Counselor Certification exam. Her other certifications include Student Assistance Program, Mental Health First Aid, ASCA School Leadership Development Specialist, ASCA Legal and Ethical Specialist, ASCA Bullying Prevention Specialist and ASCA School Counseling Data Specialist. She has been a professional school counselor for eight years and is an avid supporter of programs that allow high school students to gain real-world experiences through internship and job shadowing programs. Patterson also has developed a part-time career performing voice-overs for corporate and educational training videos. She previously served as a counselor at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and as a therapeutic specialist for Wesley Spectrum Services of Pittsburgh. She grew up in the Pittsburgh area and graduated from the Penn Hills School District in Allegheny County.

Tara Quisito of North Wales, Montgomery County, Pa., has been a school counselor at Agora Cyber Charter School based in Wayne, Pa., since 2007. She was promoted to Lead Guidance Counselor in October 2014 to oversee the 11th- and 12-grade school counselors. She is co-chair of a committee working to have the

counseling department designated as a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) and also is a member of the Student Assistant Program team. Her duties also include organizing and monitoring the community service and job shadowing senior projects. She received a bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts from Towson University in Towson, Md., and a master's degree in Counseling and Human Relations from Villanova University in Villanova, Pa. Her certifications include Secondary School Counselor, Student Assistant Program, Mental Health First Aid and ASCA School Counselor Leadership Specialist. She grew up in Bucks County, Pa., and graduated from Archbishop Wood High School in Warminster, Pa.

About: Agora Cyber Charter School is a tuition-free public virtual charter school serving approximately 10,000 Pennsylvania students in Kindergarten through 12th grade under the authorization of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Agora Cyber Charter School inspires students to reach their highest levels of academic achievement that complements their learning style. Through an individualized learning plan using an innovative content delivery system, the proprietary Agora NextGen curriculum is driven by personalization, performance and early intervention. For additional information call 844-GO-AGORA or visit www.Agora.org.

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