

Report on Guidance and Counseling Meeting  
September 25, 2007

Present were: Ann Gallagher, Jackie Confrey, Debbie Fink, Risa Sandler, Joyce Wootten

The meeting lasted from 10 until 11 AM in the conference room at Carver in Rockville, Maryland.

Given the extensive information provided by Kent Weaver, of Supervisor of School Counseling Services Unit (MCPS), and our own work plan we reviewed our goals. Mr. Weaver completed 2 of our 3 goals with his documents.

Our third goal was” to explore the need for, and possible production of, a reference/ resource booklet, listing available programs linking counselors with programs”. In our action steps we agreed to “review local PTA testimony ... in order to determine if MCCPTA should lobby for more counselors”. Since the committee values the education of the whole student, both head and heart, we focused our time on considering how counselors could best reach their students.

At this meeting we considered budgeting. We were struck by the disparity in number of students per counselor at the elementary school level. As a committee we embraced the need for more elementary school counselors. We would argue that some are expected to do double to triple the work of other counselors. As a matter of equity we would like the counselors to be treated as professionals with the tools and support to meet with success. Our principle argument is that overwhelming numbers lead to burn out and disillusionment of the trained and educated counselors, a waste of taxpayer investment at the very least. Other counties in the area have established methods of reaching equity between schools with principal contribution if the ratios are still not low enough for the particular school. For example we understand that in Fairfax County each elementary school has 1 full-time counselor for up to 550 students. After that number is reached there are 1.5 counselors for 551-800 students and finally 2.0 counselors for 801-1050 students. For schools with higher needs for counseling services principals have the option to use their funds to purchase .5 time counselors and other counselors can be shared between two schools. Given that in some cases counselors in MCPS are expected to attend to 900 students this alternative appears attractive to us. We would like to have MCPS embrace this position.

Next we turned our attention to how to best assist counselors in reaching the students at any grade level. There were several points that we considered:

- Teachers need to support the counselors but re-emphasizing the counselor's lessons.
- Counselors need to review the tips from other counselors.
- Counselors need assistance in identifying school based needs.

- Parents need to have recourse if a counselor is too overworked to address a local problem.

We understand that counselors have methods of: identifying problems within the school, finding programs to address these problems, networking with the county counselors for advice, and reaching to parents for suggestions. Therefore we are searching for ways to increase the effectiveness of these already existing support structures. Under consideration are:

- Using the county's SIP process for solidifying counseling goals
- Taking Baldrige goals to hold counselors accountable to local needs
- Constructing feedback loops keeping counselors, administrators, and parents connected to solve problems
- Re-instituting local Guidance Advisory Committees

Before proceeding with any one plan the committee is considering the various directions we could take. We have a few questions that could be answered by MCPS and would influence our future plans. At the moment we are processing how parents would like to see counselors address local problems combined with how counselors are already able to address these problems with an eye to finding areas that are particularly weak.

Lastly please note that counselors of middle and high school students have stated that they have serious problems with the county's (computer?) programs to assign children to classes. This is further complicated by staffing shifts of during the summers when classes are supposed to be created.