

ED COMMITTEE #1  
October 24, 2016  
**Briefing**

**MEMORANDUM**

October 20, 2016

TO: Education Committee

FROM: Craig Howard, Senior Legislative Analyst *CH*

SUBJECT: **Briefing – MCPS Counseling Programs and Services**

Today, the Committee will receive a briefing from MCPS staff on its school-based counseling programs and services. MCPS representatives expected to attend the worksession include Dr. Maria Navarro, Chief Academic Officer, and Dr. Jonathon Brice, Associate Superintendent.

Each MCPS elementary, middle, and high school includes certified, professional school counselors. School counselors play an important role in each school to help ensure the delivery of a high quality education for all students and to help remove barriers to learning. For today's worksession MCPS staff will:

- Provide the Committee with an overview of how MCPS organizes and structures its school-based counseling programs and services at the elementary, middle, and high school levels;
- Present greater detail and information on the academic/educational components of MCPS' counseling programs and services at the elementary, middle, and high school levels; and
- Briefly discuss the social/emotional components of counseling programs as a prelude to a joint ED/HHS Committee meeting that has been requested for this winter on mental health in schools. That worksession will likely cover how MCPS addresses the mental health needs of students and families internally and/or by linking to community-based services, how MCPS and DHHS coordinate mental health services, etc.

**Background**

MCPS describes school-based counselors as working "in partnership with school staff to teach skills that are necessary for academic success and to promote positive academic, personal, interpersonal, health, and career development for all students. Counselors equip students to embrace their full potential and to strive to achieve their personal and academic aspirations." Within all schools, MCPS counselors provide a variety of services such as:

- Provide the MCPS Comprehensive School Counseling Program to all students;
- Provide information to students and families about academic programs and opportunities;
- Inform families about community resources;
- Support students in their transition from one school level to another;
- Communicate with students, staff, parents, and community members about available school counseling services;

- Understand and support the unique needs of the diverse school population;
- Work proactively with students;
- Address problems that affect student success in the school setting;
- Support the school when there is a crisis in the school community; and
- Consult with staff and parents.

In FY17, MCPS has 488 counselor positions, an increase of 21 positions (4.5%) from the prior year. MCPS added eight of these counselor positions in FY17 as part of the \$37.9 million the Council and Board of Education redirected in MCPS' budget to reduce class size and address educational disparities. The table below shows the number of MCPS counselor positions each year since FY12.

	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
MCPS Counselor Positions	451.3	453.3	456.3	467.5	467.0	488.0
% change from prior year	--	+0.4%	+0.7%	+2.5%	-0.1%	+4.5%

A summary of MCPS' staffing allocation in FY17 as well as information on counseling programs are attached beginning at ©1.

### Discussion Questions

Some specific questions Council staff has asked MCPS to address as part of their presentation include:

1. How do counseling services vary as students move from elementary to middle to high school?
2. At each level, how much of a counselor's workload relates to working with students on academic issues versus social/emotional issues?
3. How are the 488 counselor positions distributed across the school system? What are the specific student to counselor ratios for elementary, middle, and high schools?
4. What specialty counseling programs and services does MCPS provide across the school system? For example, are there specialized counseling services for ESOL students, student with special needs, students in alternative programs, or for special programs like those offered through the Ewing Center?

**TABLE 5  
ALLOCATION OF STAFFING**

	<b>POSITIONS</b>	<b>BUDGET FY 2012</b>	<b>BUDGET FY 2013</b>	<b>BUDGET FY 2014</b>	<b>BUDGET FY 2015</b>	<b>BUDGET FY 2016</b>	<b>SUMMARY FY 2017</b>	<b>FY 16 - FY 17 CHANGE</b>
1	<b>Executive</b>	17.000	19.000	21.000	19.000	16.000	17.000	1.000
2	<b>Administrative</b> - (directors, supervisors, program coordinators, executive assistants)	199.000	195.000	196.700	204.700	199.700	197.600	(2.100)
3	<b>Business/Operations Administrator</b> - (leadership positions supervised by directors and supervisors)	92.000	92.000	91.650	90.650	88.650	86.650	(2.000)
4	<b>Other Professional</b> - (12-month instructional/evaluation specialists)	186.900	182.300	183.500	189.500	187.400	186.400	(1.000)
5	<b>Principal/Assistant Principal</b>	484.000	486.000	491.500	494.000	491.500	503.500	12.000
6	<b>Teacher</b>	10,281.220	10,475.070	10,759.420	10,984.160	10,940.304	11,486.264	545.960
7	<b>Special Education Specialist</b> (speech pathologists, physical/occupational therapists)	482.400	495.200	506.750	508.958	506.708	503.008	(3.700)
8	<b>Media Specialist</b>	189.200	190.200	192.200	195.500	195.500	196.500	1.000
9	<b>Counselor</b>	451.300	453.300	456.300	467.500	467.000	488.000	21.000
10	<b>Psychologist</b>	94.805	94.905	100.000	106.034	106.034	115.034	9.000
11	<b>Social Worker</b>	13.905	14.405	14.800	14.830	14.830	15.830	1.000
12	<b>Pupil Personnel Worker</b>	45.000	45.000	45.000	51.000	51.000	53.000	2.000
13	<b>Instructional Aide and Assistant</b> (paraeducators, media assistants, lunch-hour aides, parent assistants, instructional data assistants)	2,519.048	2,560.253	2,596.605	2,660.994	2,652.222	2,762.814	110.592
14	<b>Secretarial/Clerical/Data Support</b> (secretarial, clerical, personnel/transportation/fiscal/other lower grade program/data assistants)	997.250	988.100	986.625	983.250	963.225	967.850	4.625
15	<b>IT Systems Specialist</b>	131.000	131.000	131.000	133.000	109.000	108.000	(1.000)
16	<b>Security</b> - (includes all positions except those in lines 2,3,14 above)	227.000	227.000	227.000	229.000	232.000	232.000	-
17	<b>Cafeteria</b> - (Includes all positions except those in lines 2,3,14,15 above)	556.448	557.948	558.948	561.448	561.448	564.323	2.875
18	<b>Building Services</b> - (includes all positions except those in lines 2,3,14 above)	1,335.200	1,342.700	1,365.075	1,376.700	1,363.200	1,379.700	16.500
19	<b>Facilities Management/Maintenance</b> - (includes all positions except those in lines 2,3,14,15 above)	344.500	345.000	354.000	354.000	352.000	352.000	-
20	<b>Supply/Property Management</b> - (includes all positions except those in lines 2, 3,14,15 above)	53.000	47.000	50.000	51.500	51.500	51.500	-
21	<b>Transportation</b> - (includes all positions except those in lines 2,3,14,15 above)	1,687.650	1,685.650	1,685.590	1,685.590	1,673.153	1,693.153	20.000
22	<b>Other Support Personnel</b> - (business, technology human resources,communications, printing, and other support staff)	224.400	234.575	230.075	226.675	224.875	225.375	0.500
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20,612.226</b>	<b>20,861.606</b>	<b>21,243.738</b>	<b>21,587.989</b>	<b>21,447.249</b>	<b>22,185.501</b>	<b>738.252</b>

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# School Counseling Services

There are certified, professional school counselors in each elementary, middle, and high school within MCPS.

Find out about the **roles** of school-based counselors and get answers to **frequently asked questions** about:

## All School-based Counseling

- Elementary School Counseling
- Middle School Counseling
- High School Counseling

## About School-based Counselors

Professional school counselors are leaders who advocate, collaborate, and facilitate individual and system change to ensure every student has the knowledge and skills necessary for academic success and personal growth. More about School-based counseling

## About the School Counseling Services Unit

Counseling services are supported by the School Counseling, Residency and International Admissions (SCRIA) staff located in the Rocking Horse Road Center. The School Counseling Services Unit works to promote the academic success and personal growth of every student through:

- supporting the implementation of the MCPS Comprehensive School Counseling Program
- providing staff development, consultation, and resources that enhance the knowledge and skills of school counselors
- collaborating with other MCPS departments, higher education, and community agencies
- providing education and outreach to parents and other community members

# About School-based Counselors

There are certified, professional school counselors in each elementary, middle, and high school in the Montgomery County Public Schools. School counselors are critical partners in the delivery of a high quality education for all students and contribute significantly to the removal of barriers to learning.

They work in partnership with school staff to teach skills that are necessary for academic success and to promote positive academic, personal, interpersonal, health, and career development for all students. Counselors equip students to embrace their full potential and to strive to achieve their personal and academic aspirations.

## What School-based Counselors Do

### **In all schools, school counselors:**

- Provide the MCPS Comprehensive School Counseling Program to all students
- Provide information to students and families about academic programs and opportunities
- Inform families about community resources
- Support students in their transition from one school level to another
- Communicate with students, staff, parents, and community members about available school counseling services
- Understand and support the unique needs of the diverse school population
- Work proactively with students
- Address problems that affect student success in the school setting
- Support the school when there is a crisis in the school community
- Consult with staff and parents

# Elementary School Counseling Services

At the elementary school level, school counselors meet regularly with all students through school-wide programs and classroom guidance lessons. When needed, they also meet with students in small group or individual settings.

School counselors help students develop knowledge and skills appropriate to their age and grade in the areas of academic success, personal growth, career awareness, and interpersonal relationships such as making and keeping friends, how to handle peer pressure and how to safely resolve conflicts. School counselors also regularly consult with parents and teachers to discuss ways in which they can support students.

School counselors at the elementary school level are always available as a resource for parents to answer questions they may have about their child's development.

## Frequently Asked Questions at the Elementary School Level

### **How can the elementary school counselor help my child?**

School counselors at the elementary school level support students in five key developmental areas: academic, personal, interpersonal, career, and health. School counselors address how student concerns and needs impact a student's ability to access education and to succeed in the learning environment. If you are uncertain as to whether or not your child's school counselor can work with the concern that your child is having, contact the school counselor and set up a meeting to discuss the concern. If it is not an area in which the counselor has expertise he or she may be able to offer you some additional resources to explore

### **Is the behavior that my child is exhibiting "normal?"**

Many parents wonder if their child's behavior is "normal," especially if the child in question is their first child, or behaves differently from their previous children. During the younger years a child's development is often very individual. Therefore what constitutes "normal" may be very different for different children. Instead of asking yourself if your child's behavior is normal, consider these other questions. Is my child progressing in his or her interests and abilities? Has my child lost the ability to do something he/she could do before? Does my

child engage in activities and thoughts that are harmful/hurtful to him/herself? Is my child's ability to interact with others progressing? Answering these questions should give you a better understanding of whether or not your child's development is continuing at an appropriate pace.

### **Where can I get help if I have an academic or behavioral concern about my child?**

In the elementary school years behavioral and academic difficulties in children are often linked. Therefore, whether the concern that you have is primarily academic or behavioral it is a good idea to investigate all possible avenues of information to best understand what may be going on with your child. Several individuals can assist you in this investigation, including your child's classroom teacher, his/her school counselor, your pediatrician, other teachers who work with your child, and coaches or other adults who see your child on a regular basis outside of the school setting.

### **How can I help my child make improvements on his/her report card?**

A report card is a means of communication. It is a tool to help parents and students understand how students are functioning across certain areas, and where improvement is needed. It is also important to remember that it is only one measure of student progress. The first step in helping children to improve their report card performance is to look at other measures. Consider your child's daily progress in the area you are examining. Look at reports from teachers, comments on assignments, the quality and correctness of completed tasks, daily school interactions, attitudes towards school, tardiness, attendance, and any discipline concerns that have been mentioned previously. Examining these areas will help to broaden and deepen the picture of your child's achievement. Then, talk to people who have first hand knowledge of your child's performance, beginning with your child, and including your child's classroom teacher, and his/her school counselor. After gathering this information take some time to consider whether you need more information to fill out the picture or whether you have enough information to develop a plan of action.

### **How can I help my child to make friends?**

The first step in helping your child with friendships to talk to your child. Children, like adults, vary greatly in their opinions regarding friendships. Explore the following, and other similar questions with your child: What is your idea of a good friend? What kind of friends do you like to spend time with? What makes you a good friend? How do kids make friends? How do you know when someone is a friend? The answers your child provides during this conversation can guide you as you and your child work together to develop a plan to

improve their satisfaction with their friendship. Keep in mind that your child's ideas regarding friendships may not match your own. A child who enjoys having one good friend at a time may have parents who like to be social and maintain many friendships or vice versa. It is important to explore your own thoughts about social relationships as you help your child identify his/her own preferences. It is also important that your child help to determine any steps that are taken on his/her behalf, either by him/herself, or by another person. Involving your child in a meaningful way empowers self-advocacy and demonstrates that you have confidence in his/her abilities.

# Middle School Counseling Services

Middle School Counselors provide a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses the needs of students in grades 6 through 8. Counselors promote and enhance the academic, personal, social, health and career development of all students and guide students and their families in making informed educational decisions.

School counselors at the middle school level support students as they transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. Middle school counselors also serve as a resource for parents and teachers and as a liaison with community agencies.

## Frequently Asked Questions at the Middle School Level

### **What do middle school counselors do?**

Middle School counselors are knowledgeable about the unique developmental needs of young adolescents and apply that knowledge to their work with students, staff and families. Middle school counselors provide proactive leadership and advocacy to help their students succeed academically, personally, and socially. They work with students in classrooms, in small groups, and individually to build key skills and to address specific concerns.

### **How are students assigned to a counselor in the middle school?**

Typically, counselors in middle school are assigned to a specific grade level. As the students move from grade to grade during the three years, the counselor moves with them, so that students generally have the same counselor throughout their middle school experience. The guidance secretary usually coordinates student and parent appointments with counselors.

### **How do middle school counselors prepare fifth grade students and their parents for their transition to middle school?**

Middle school counselors visit the elementary schools during the spring of the fifth grade year to talk with students and parents about middle school and to provide strategies for making a smooth transition. The counselor works with the middle school staff to orient youngsters to their new school setting and to help students build the academic, personal,

and interpersonal skills necessary for success. The counselor is also available to work with small groups or individuals who may need additional support during the transition period.

**How do middle school counselors prepare eighth grade students and their parents for their transition to high school?**

Middle school is a time when career exploration expands and students begin to connect their aspirations with their academic achievement. Counselors nurture the career development process, working with school staff to equip eighth graders with the skills needed for success in high school, including goal setting, organization, and effective decision making. Middle school counselors collaborate with counselors at the high school to support students through the process of selecting high school courses and thinking about post-secondary possibilities.

**How do middle school counselors support middle school students with developing coping strategies regarding their rapidly changing physiological and psychological needs?**

Middle school counselors are sensitive to the developmental needs of young adolescents. Through classroom presentation, small group sessions, and individual counseling they help students understand their experiences and develop effective strategies for coping with them. School counselors at the middle school level also consult with school staff and with parents to offer suggestions for supporting youngsters during this period of rapid growth.

**Are other resources available if a student's needs are particularly intense?**

Yes. Middle school counselors regularly collaborate with the school nurse, the school psychologist, the school's pupil personnel worker (who acts as a liaison to many school system resources), and with private therapists and other community-based resources. With needed, middle school counselors act as case managers in referring students to alternative education and special education resources as well as community-based programs.

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# High School Counseling Services

At the high school level, school counselors meet with students regularly to guide and support them through academic and career planning. School counselors manage the process for students reviewing and updating rigorous comprehensive plans to support post-secondary educational and career goals.

School counselors also work with students to help them develop competence in decision making, interpersonal relationships, personal responsibility, and other skills essential for being a productive citizen.

## Frequently Asked Questions at the High School Level

### **Who is available in high school counseling offices to help students?**

The person responsible for coordinating all of the people and resources within a high school counseling office is the resource counselor. Counselors are typically assigned to work with students whose last names fall within certain sections of the alphabet. Some high schools have assigned particular counselors to work with 9th grade students. The guidance secretary coordinates student and parent appointments with counselors. The registrar maintains student records including report cards and transcripts. The college/career coordinator manages the resources available to students in the school Career Center.

### **What resources are available to students within the school's Career Center?**

Many print and electronic resources are available to students within school Career Centers. Examples of the available print resources are: college catalogs and handbooks; career planning guides; college and financial aid applications; and, college testing registration materials. Examples of available electronic resources are: the Choices and CX Online career and college planning applications of the Bridges.Com company; the Naviance online college admissions application; and, many other online resource. Of course, the college/career coordinator is a great resource within the school Career Center.

### **Do high school counselors meet with students to discuss issues other than scheduling and college admissions?**

Absolutely! High school counselors meet with students individually and in small groups to discuss a wide range of issues that impact teenagers. These issues can range from making

the transition to a new school, to interpersonal conflicts with peers and adults, to difficult decisions about social and emotional stressors.

**Are other resources available if a student's needs are particularly intense?**

Yes. High school counselors regularly collaborate with the school nurse, the school psychologist, the school's pupil personnel worker (who acts as a liaison to many school system resources), and with private therapists and other community-based resources. With needed, high school counselors act as case managers in referring students to alternative education and special education resources as well as community-based programs.