

Hello, my name is Megan Wilson I have been a School Counselor in MCPS for over 20yrs at the ES and Secondary levels. I am deeply committed to our students and their social emotional needs.

School Counselors are highly specialized resources, resources our students rely on. Yet there is only 1 School Counselor in most Elementary Schools, and at the 2ndary level Counselor caseloads are 250-300. This is just not enough to meet growing student needs when Counselors are tasked with significant administrative and non Counseling duties such as 504 plans.

504's are student accommodation plans based on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) law. Schools must hold 504 meetings for any students potentially eligible, which includes students with frequently diagnosed conditions such as ADHD, Anxiety, Depression, and Diabetes. 504 Coordinators manage 504 needing an average of 20hours of time per student plan.

The 504 process is a legal process of documentation. There is no "School Counseling" skill or asset required for this process. Yet this unpaid, time heavy task is frequently forced onto School Counselors, diverting School Counseling resources away from students.

The American School Counseling Association recommends Counselors spend 80% of their time in direct student services, most importantly providing social emotional support to students. Yet data shows MCPS counselors are spending up to 55% of their hours on 504 coordination. Other school Districts handle 504 Coordination by having a paid, separate 504 Coordinator position, or other staff manage 504s. When all administrative and non Counseling duties are tallied, many Counselors spend more than 40% on these non Counseling duties. Which diverts time away from direct Counseling services to students.

An example of time spent: It takes approximately 20 hours to manage EACH 504 plan. 1 Counselors has approximately 1,350 hours in a school year to work with students. 20- 504' equals 400 hours dedicated just to 504s, leaving 950 hours. This leaves only 1.6 hours per student for ES Counselors and 4hs per student at the secondary level for all from essential direct counseling services. 1:1, small group counseling, classroom lessons, working with parents and staff to support students, these are essential specialized Counseling tasks.

Students in Montgomery County have always had significant social emotional needs. School Counselor ratios have been insufficient to meet those needs. These needs continue to grow exponentially. Schools must have their School Counselors available to all students and not tied to 504s or other administrative duties. The 504 Coordinator position must be a separate staffed position to ensure Counselors are available to meet the needs of our students. Counselor to student ratios and Counseling duties should be structured to focus Counselor time on direct service to our students.