

Strategic Forum Testimony Walt Whitman High School-.5 Guidance Counselor Thursday, October 12, 2006

Good evening, President Haughey distinguishes Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. My name is Beth Isen and I am the Co-Chair of the Guidance Advisory Council for Whitman High School. I come before you tonight speaking on behalf of the students of Whitman cluster to request that the hiring of additional guidance counselors be made a priority in this year's operating budget.

Several years ago you set a goal of one guidance counselor for every 250 students. But, as of the summer of 2006, only 3 of the county's 25 high schools have achieved this goal. The student to counselor ratio at Whitman is a staggering 269 to one .In actuality the ratio is much higher because the Resource Counselor, in light of her other duties, carries a case load of 165students and the other 6 counselors are assigned 300 students. This situation is not unique to Whitman and exemplifies the dire need for additional counselors in all county high schools.

A Guidance Counselor is charged with:

Providing individual and group services;

Assisting parents and students in knowing how to benefit from special referral and community services;

Interpreting the student's school records

A Counselor's responsibilities include:

1. Assisting teachers and parents in helping all students achieve increased self- awareness and feeling of self -worth;
2. Assisting students in acquiring decision-making skills re: career, educational and personal decisions;
3. Meeting with each secondary student, beginning in Grade 8, to plan an educational program.

Due to the number of students that each counselor is responsible for, they are very often running from one crisis to another.

Consequently, as of the last Whitman analysis, school counselors were not fully able to provide the services for prevention and intervention, including:

1. A plan in place for delivering the developmental program to all special populations.
2. A plan for measuring student mastery of program content;
3. Conducting pre-incident education with school staff to explain mental health needs following a crisis;
4. Analyzing data to be used to develop written program goals which address the academic success and personal growth of all students.

It's time to finish what was started at the beginning of the century. We need to be able to adequately address these pressing issues: gang violence, increased teen depression and anxiety, and a larger immigrant population. We want to be able to challenge our students along with what their abilities are and match them with accelerated courses. We leave you with the challenge of providing additional counselors for our high schools so that they can do their jobs and meet the needs of all students in an ever complex world.

Thank you for your consideration.

A Day in the Life of a Walt Whitman Guidance Counselor

7:00 a.m. Arrive at Whitman.

7:00-7:10 Turn on computer and review email.

7:10-7:25 2 students come in to drop classes. See Assistant Principal for override.

7:25-8:00 meet with student who is crying about an interim report sent home. Email the teacher.

8:00-8:30 Meet with parent of a Junior to answer college questions.

8:30-9:15 College meeting with Senior.

9:15-10:00 Meet with 8th grade parents of a private school student. They are considering Whitman for grade 9.

10:00- 10:15 Teacher drops in to discuss concerns about a student.

10:15- 10:45 Return phone calls; Start emails. Send for two students who are failing and receive interim reports. Meet briefly with students about interim reports.

10:45 -11:15 College meeting with Senior. two interruptions from students with questions.

11:15- 11:35 Student drops in upset about breakup with boyfriend.

11:35-12:00 Lunch

12:00- 12:30 Reply to email and return phone calls.

12:30- 1:15 Meeting with a therapist working with two of my students

1:15-1:35 Go upstairs to see teacher about a student; then see administrator about a student suspension.

1:35-2:10 meet with parent of student about to return to school from a hospitalization.

2:15-3:00 Staffing (Parent conference with counselor and all 7 teachers on a student who is struggling academically).

2:45 -School day ends.

3:00-3:15 Send out teacher reports for a meeting next week; Send out email about today's staffing.

3:15-4:40 Write a college recommendation.