

October 10, 2007

Topic: School Counseling

To the Board of Education:

Good evening, my name is Lucia Leung and I have four kids that range from 5 to 10 years of age that attend Little Bennett Elementary School in Clarksburg. Little Bennett is a big school with incredible and dedicated teachers. However, I feel that students who attend largely populated schools are at a disadvantage because many classrooms are overpopulated and the staffing is not proportional to the student body. I am here to plea for more staffing assistance for our larger public schools, especially in the counseling department.

This year, we have had such an enrollment increase with a current total of 775 students that my school needed to add portables for one whole grade level, keep in mind that this school has only been open for two years. Currently, North Chevy Chase Elementary has an enrollment of 315 students and Seven Locks Elementary has 242 students. The county needs to be more aware of the increased population in both new and old schools. Our community is growing, therefore, the number of schools built needs to increase as well. The higher student enrollment numbers place a major stress on everyone, such as principals, teachers, the student body, and other staff. All have to organize more, prepare more, supply more and have more time in order to help students and families. Right now, many schools are confronted with the same issues. Various schools need more staffing to fit the increase in student body. Unfortunately, without this enhancement in staffing numbers, the students are the ones who will be at a disadvantage.

Last year, our counselor, Mrs. Helton was a great assistance to my family and to the school. First of all, she assisted one of my children feel accepted by her classmates when she skipped kindergarten six weeks later into the year where most kids have already made friends. Then, she researched information I needed regarding "transitional growth issues" for my two older children. We also had many conversations when I needed someone to listen about issues on dealing with my eldest son. Mrs. Helton was always available.

Last year, Mrs. Helton also held education workshops for parents interested in gathering more information about certain topics such as, positive parenting tips, limit setting and discipline, peer pressure and bullying awareness, and also how to support your child in reading? I know that many of the parents appreciated the time and effort to provide such valuable information. I recognize that this is an asset to our school because other parents I have contact with from different schools wish their school had this available to them. Mrs. Helton also taught character themes each month, with topics such as respect (oneself and others), responsibility, self-discipline, compassion, perseverance, acceptance, honesty, courage, cooperation, and pride. She met with classrooms to target the needs of

students, to teach the monthly character trait, and to reinforce the anti-bullying program at school. My kids would love it when she came to the class to teach them. They enjoyed what was being discussed and taught. Now, they miss seeing her as often due to the increased number of students.

The counseling program at Little Bennett has been a great attribute to the Little Bennett community. Parents that I have talked to love the workshops being held. They tell me they are happy to know that their child(ren) are learning to have good character traits, which is an important part of being an adult. This type of program should be embedded into all elementary schools and I believe that Mrs. Helton has done an excellent job being a counselor, but with the increase in student body, she does not have enough hours in the day to do all that she would like to accomplish.

Therefore, I ask that you consider helping larger schools such as Little Bennett obtain extra staffing so all are able to complete their jobs successfully, in a timely manner, and to provide an appropriate education for all students.

Thank you for your time.

Lucia Leuna