

Good Evening Dr. Walts, Chairman Sawyers and members of the board, my name is Liz Vohar I am a school counselor in Prince William county and my address is on file with the clerk.

This week is National School Counseling Week a week that is near and dear to me as a school counselor. School counselors around the country will spend time advocating for their programs and the profession. At my school, Chris Yung Elementary, I hosted an open house and invited staff members for breakfast and to learn more about the school counseling program I am creating. I also spent time sharing information about the impact current ratios are having on our students in the state of Virginia and what changing those ratios could do.

This is why I am here tonight. I know you will be discussing the budget for next year and I am hoping you will consider reducing school counselor ratios in Prince William County. According to the American School Counselor Association the recommended ratio is 1:250 for school counselors from Kindergarten through 12th grade. In Prince William County at the elementary level that number is double the recommended ratio at a staggering 1:500, middle school is at 1:400 and the high school is at 1:350. These numbers have been the same since I started in the county 5 years ago while neighboring districts continue to reduce caseloads making school counselor ratios a top priority.

Each year that passes that these ratios remain the same is another year where students are slipping through the cracks, its another year of missed opportunities to help narrow the achievement gap, increase attendance rates, increase graduation rates and college enrollment and decrease student disciplinary referrals. Due to not having the recommended ratios counselors are missing out on identifying students that are having social and emotional difficulties, mental health issues and making those solid relationships with each and every student in the building. We are wasting time. But that can change if the school district would commit to providing a world class education and begin reducing school counselor ratios for this upcoming budget. Heck it might even save you some money in the long run like it did in the state of Colorado.

According to the Colorado Department of Education reducing school counselor to student ratios yielded a lucrative return to their state's investment totaling approximately \$319, 842, 750 dollars or \$20 dollars saved for every 1 dollar invested in school counselors.

I encourage you to take a look at the ratios both nationally and at the state level, take some time to look at neighboring counties and realize that we need to do better for our students. We need to make sure that our students are not only academically successful but we are also meeting the social and emotional needs of all students in the county.

Finally, if you get a chance this week send an email, give a shout out on a social media or even stop by and thank one of your school counselors for the work they do. Thank you for your time and have a great evening.