

A few years ago, DCPS decided to make the counselor position optional at elementary schools. The recommendation instead was to have a social worker on staff. In looking at the differences between the roles and responsibilities of both positions and the needs of the Lafayette community, we decided to continue having a counselor. And as the school continued to grow, we added a second one last year. They have had a very busy beginning to the school year. Here is just a little of what has been going on so far in the Oasis, as Jillian Diesner and Rashida Mosby have named the counseling suite on Team 3.

During the first week of school, special lunches were held for all new students. It's comforting to some of our new students to find out that they are not the only newbies at the school. In fact we average around 60 new students each year, not counting our PK children. But when you are spread out over 27 classrooms, you can sometimes miss out on that fact. So the counselors invite all the new students to meet with them and have an information sharing session about Lafayette and how it operates. Who the counselors are and how they can help. Golden L's and straight quiet lines. School colors and mascots. Stuff that you need to know and sometimes are a little too shy to ask. As new students arrive during the year, they also get a visit with the counselor.

It's also time to start thinking about how we are going to transition our fifth grade students on to what I like to call wider opportunities for school year 2013-14. Ms. Mosby is already setting up the date for Deal Buddy Day and our visit from the Deal principal and Lafayette alums. She works closely with the Deal 6th grade staff throughout the year as we set up other visits and finally move on to scheduling in the spring. Getting to Deal takes a lot of work at Lafayette.

Classroom visits have also been on the schedule. Each counselor plans biweekly classroom visits. Most of these visits involve character education centered on the word of the month. Words like caring, teamwork, honesty, and responsibility. Words that go with our be safe, be kind, be responsible, and work hard school values. This month the word is teamwork, very appropriate for the beginning of the school year. Teachers are working on instilling routines that make the classroom work efficiently. Moving from place to place in the school needs teamwork. Learning to be messenger partners or lunch box carriers requires teamwork. So the spotlight this month is on seeing how we can learn to work together throughout the school day.

Last Thursday and Friday, Ms. Diesner and Ms. Mosby held the first character education assemblies of the year. That's right: three assemblies, each tailored for the particular grade levels. While the main topic was teamwork, words like caring and honesty were also emphasized. Using a version of Jeopardy, students answered questions and demonstrated how teamwork is accomplished. The cutest moments were when the younger students created short skits with puppets for their classmates showing how to work together. Everyone seemed to be having a great time as well as learning some important skills.

Throughout the school year, our counselors are working each day to make sure that each and every day at school contains as much success as well as fun as possible. And when a

day or two doesn't go the right way, they are there to help fix what is wrong. But they are not just there to help students. They are an integral part of our student support team, supporting students with academic, social or behavioral challenges. They work with students with serious illnesses. They work with parents who come to school wanting some advice in helping their child with both school as well as family concerns.

We're glad that when so many schools cut counselors from their budgets, we did not. Every school needs a place like our Oasis. Every school needs caring professionals like Ms. Diesner and Ms. Mosby. To listen to little cares and fears. To make things better when feelings are hurt. To be on the playground helping children learn to play together, especially those that seem to need a little help making friends. We know at Lafayette the emotional life of our students is as important as the academic one. Our counselors are here to make sure that we create a nice balance between both kinds of learning. Because when we get close to that balance, lots of learning can occur. And that is what we are all about at Lafayette.