

Dear Vicksburg Board Members, Keevin O'Neill , and Mike Barwegen ,

3/27/25

I am writing this letter to inform you that after much consideration, I am formally submitting my notice of retirement from my position as School Counselor with Vicksburg Community Schools, effective June 6th, 2025. I would like to receive the generous retirement incentive as of September, 2025.

First of all, I would like to thank you all for your hard work and dedication that you each continue to put into public education. For personal reasons, I feel this is my time to leave. I started my journey here at Vicksburg Community Schools back in Fall of 2002 at Vicksburg Middle School as a special education teacher. Years later I found myself at the highschool and then I chose to interview at Sunset Lake Elementary for my first school counseling position under Pat Moreno. I was hired and a few years later, Pat retired and Amie McCaw was hired as principal at Sunset Lake. Then, in 2021, an elementary school counselor position was added at Tobey Elementary and due to personal reasons, I decided to transition to a less populated school, under the leadership of Mike Barwegen. I have been at Tobey since Fall of 2021-Spring of 2025. It has been a true honor to work with such great elementary principals through the years. Pat, Amie and Mike were all very supportive of me and helped encourage me to grow in my area and duties of elementary school counselor (my passion ). I am so lucky to have worked for such a wonderful group of leaders.

If I can leave any advice behind to help improve our district, it would be that our school counselor department would no longer be responsible for the position of 504 Coordinator. Other districts have hired administrative positions in order to cover 504's and health plans and I believe that it is time that Vicksburg Community Schools explore this avenue. With the increase of emotional support needed by our student body, I feel in my experience and expertise that school counselors can no longer afford the time and efforts that a 504 Coordinator demands. 504's are legal documents and because of that take priority when it comes down to deadlines, leaving students emotional needs unmet. This increases frustration of students, families and staff and lands on the shoulder of the school counselor. I believe this shift of 504 duty occurred in the 2012-13 school year. When I was first hired as an elementary school counselor, this was not a duty of the elementary school counselors. We, elementary and secondary counselors alike, are not happy about this and feel defenseless when families and other staff members direct their frustrations at us for not meeting the emotional needs of our students as we are being required by our district to carry on the continuous, time consuming responsibilities of 504 Coordinator.

With our case loads being high above the 250:1, recommended numbers by ASCA (American School Counselor Association), we are already struggling to keep up with providing our best to our students. Vicksburg school counselors have brought this to the attention of administration through the union as well as just honest conversations at administration meetings through the years. Nothing has changed since the 504's were shifted to our desks with no extra pay or recognition of such a position. (Hours and hours of additional work)

**Please** consider encouraging the restructuring of the position of 504 Coordinator as a separate position than school counselor.

With that said, I have loved my job of being a school counselor. I truly appreciate being able to contribute to the growth and success of our students through the years at Vicksburg Community Schools. My connection to the students, families and some staff and administrators will live forever in my heart. Thank-you for giving me the opportunity to be an elementary school counselor!

Sincerely,

*Alyson J. Consway*