

Courtney Krajesky

School Visit

My school visit took place on Wednesday, February 1st. My school(s) of choice to visit/review are Cloud Springs Elementary and the McCallie school. Cloud Springs Elementary school is a public school located at 163 Fernwood Drive Rossville, GA 30741. The McCallie School is a private all boys school located at 500 Dodds Avenue, Chattanooga, TN 37404. I had the pleasure of setting up time and learning many different aspects of the GA school sector with Danielle Pettyjohn, MSW.

Erin Swinney who is the school counselor at Cloud Springs allowed me to be an observer while she presented a safety presentation with one of her fourth -grade classes. The idea was to teach the students of the “safe” adults and individuals in their lives. The school consists of one social worker and one school counselor. The social worker works alongside the parents and mentioned not doing any individual therapy with the students and leaves this role to the counselor Erin who sees individuals as well as hosts classroom presentations weekly. McCallie’s middle school consists of one full-time counselor and a middle school chaplain. They are available to the boys and their families to address specific issues or concerns, or the general adjustments associated with a new school and the ups and downs of the ‘tween years. The upper school consists of two full-time counselors, one part-counselor, and the school chaplain, all of which hold a master’s degree in counseling or pastoral care. The middle school principal Scotty Jones, meets and greets the boys each morning and shakes their hands as they walk in.

As a former Cloud Springs Elementary student, I was astonished by the decline in the school. I chose the school as it was a fantastic education when I was young and I wanted to witness the difference in GA and TN schools now that I intern in the Hamilton County system.

As much as I hate to admit it, Cloud Springs was completely different. It no longer felt warm and inviting and appeared dark and gloomy inside the doors of a school that used to feel like my home away from home. I can't imagine my son going there as the climate has vastly changed over the years. I was told that it is now a Title 1 school, much like the surrounding county elementary schools. It is a very low-income school with a majority of families receiving free or reduced lunch. The social worker explained that they have a Children's Community Fund which provides families with electric, water, internet, etc. assistance. CSE Mission is: To ensure high level of learning for all! The CSE Vision: We, the staff of Cloud Springs Elementary School, recognize that the purpose of our school is to ensure high levels of learning for all. Parents aren't very involved and therefore the children tend to have academic struggles more so than those of private institutions where the parents are greatly involved. McCallie has a beautiful ambiance with an inviting presence. Their mission statement is dedicated to preparing young men to make a positive difference in their world. Diversity is present at both of these schools.

Both of these schools appear to have clean and safe grounds. Cloud Springs has a nice playground and gym. McCallie has a beautiful campus that looks a lot like a college campus. Cloud Springs public school system is committed to providing a website that is accessible to the widest audience, regardless of technology or ability. CSE is a Title 1 school that makes adequate yearly progress in order to close the gap for disaggregated student groups. Title 1 schools are models of best practices for schools of similar demographics identified for school improvement. From academics to athletics, wellness to internships and service opportunities, advisory to enrichment classes, McCallie programs are designed to motivate boys to expand boundaries and explore topics in depth.

After visiting and reviewing school grounds and dynamics, I believe that it is imperative that all schools public as well as private have a school social worker. All students and families will have issues arise at some time or another and could use the assistance of a school -based therapist. It was interesting to find that many private schools that I reached out to did not have a school therapist at all. Public school therapists expressed that the needs for a low-income school are grandiose and where there is poverty comes a trickling effect of poor parent involvement, hunger, lack of sleep, etc., which in turn affects academic success. It appears to be a domino effect of problems that arise. From an atmosphere and educational standpoint, I would give CSE a score of 7. The social worker and counselor deserve a 10 as I witnessed the love they have for their career and the progress they are making with students as well as assisting families with their needs. The students in Catoosa County have a high rate of suicidal and homicidal ideations. This was beyond disheartening to me as times have vastly changed since I was a child, technology has evolved, and mental health needs appear to be higher. The needs post Covid-19 are high and social workers are desperately needed in order to assist with social emotional learning. A lot of CSE families lack insurance which leads to inadequate physical and mental needs being met. I would give McCallie a score of 10 all around as the teachers, staff, and counseling department do a beautiful job at assisting boys and their families each step of the way.