



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Michael Campbell

Coordinator of Communications and Public Relations

Phone: 804-733-2700

Email: mcampbell@pgs.k12.va.us

Prince George High School Counselor Anna Payne, Counseling Dept. Recognized As Part of VDOE's 'Virginia Kindness Week'

PRINCE GEORGE, Va. - The Virginia Department of Education has recognized Prince George High School counselor Anna Payne and the school's Counseling Department as part of the VDOE's first-ever Kindness Week across the Commonwealth.

Celebrated from February 14-20, 2021, [Virginia Kindness Week](#) shines a light on the simple day-to-day acts of kindness that enable schools, communities, and the state to be a kinder, safer, healthier, and more inclusive place to live, work, learn and play. The week-long recognition promotes positivity and supports a statewide culture where schools, localities, businesses, organizations, and individual citizens can come together to acknowledge, connect, and foster kindness in the community.

Wednesday, Prince George High School hosted First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam and Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni for a special Virginia Kindness Week ceremony. Held in the school's commons area, Payne was recognized as a "Kindness Ambassador" for her unwavering support of students' social-emotional wellbeing through a challenging year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the ceremony, First Lady Northam also recognized Prince George High School's School Counseling Department, whose members include: Edwina Clissa, Philip Jones, Anna Payne, Monica Curtis, and Tara Seely, presenting the department with a proclamation from Governor Ralph Northam honoring school counselors across the Commonwealth. The department has played a vital part in supporting PGHS students attending classes in-person and virtually since school reopened in September 2020.

"The Governor and I are so grateful to our administrators, teachers, counselors, and school personnel who have worked creatively and courageously to keep students healthy, happy, and learning throughout the past year," **said First Lady Pamela Northam**. "During Virginia Kindness Week, we are visiting schools across the Commonwealth to recognize and celebrate the outstanding educators whose kindness is legendary. Prince George School Counselor Anna Payne is one of these heroes who models kindness in words and deeds everyday."

"The Prince George Counseling Department does phenomenal work to support students' social-emotional wellbeing, provide critical mental health interventions, and organize schedules so every student has the option to

attend school in-person or virtually, depending on what is best for them,” said **Secretary of Education Atif Qarni**. “We are so thrilled to recognize Anna Payne as a Virginia Ambassador of Kindness, due to the way she supports her Department while spreading kindness throughout the Prince George community.”

Members of Prince George High School's Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), DECA, and student government were in attendance at Wednesday's special event, along with PGHS Principal Mike Nelson, Division Superintendent Dr. Lisa Pennycuff, and members of the Prince George School Board. Both Payne and Jones said they were humbled and appreciative of the special recognition during their remarks.

“We can’t do any of the things we do without your support,” **Jones said**. “And for that, we are thankful.”

“I am humbled and honored to work with such a wonderful team here at Prince George High School,” **Payne said**. “I want to thank the whole School Counseling Department and our team of administrators for all the great work they do to make this community a good place for students to learn and grow. It is a privilege to work with these incredible students.”

As the event concluded, the school division’s leadership congratulated Prince George High School’s School Counseling Department on being among the first honored as part of VDOE’s new Kindness Week initiative.

“We are so thrilled for Mrs. Payne and the School Counseling Department staff here at Prince George High School,” **PGHS Principal Mike Nelson said**. “It is a tremendous honor and it shows the compassion that flows from the school board central office to all of the employees and students.”

“During this pandemic, one of the things that has risen to the top as an area of importance for us all is kindness and being able to extend grace to others,” **Division Superintendent Dr. Lisa Pennycuff said**. “People are at a time where they’ve been living through a pandemic for nearly a year, limiting their relationships with others. At the end of the day, it is about how we support and treat each other through the hard days that we will remember once we are on the other side of this time in our lives.”

“It is always a pleasure to have Prince George County and Prince George County Public Schools recognized throughout the state, especially when it comes to kindness,” **Prince George School Board Chairman Rob Eley said**. “One of our top mottos here is being kind and helping one another. I believe that is what Prince George County Public Schools stands for and it was exemplified today by one of our staff members receiving this award and our School Counseling Department being recognized by the Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni and First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam.”

To learn more about the Virginia Department of Education’s Kindness Week, visit the department’s website at <http://doe.virginia.gov>.