

Dear County Council Members,

As the Parent Community Coordinator Wheaton Woods ES for over 3 years, I have been on the frontlines of seeing how vital our Linkages Community School Coordinator is to our community.

Our Linkages Coordinator implements annual community needs assessments, looking at the unique assets and needs of our school community, working hand-in-hand with the principal, our Community School Liaison, and myself, to support students and families. They do this by creating a unique community school plan and then providing much needed programming and services. At Wheaton Woods, we have created a solid team providing much needed wraparound services for staff, students and families.

Our Community School Coordinator (CSC) connects with our local businesses, churches, synagogues, universities, non-profits and volunteers, bringing in much needed services at no cost to our families and students. They have built long-standing relationships with these organizations and residents – enabling our school to provide extension classes, ESOL and computer literacy classes for our parents, after school activities such as Lego club and ballet classes and summer camp programming. In addition, the parent coffees implemented by the CSC have become support groups for our parents, discussing a variety of topics including how to read the MCPS report card, how to help their children with their homework and further on topics like domestic violence, spotlighting the close relationship built between the CSC and our parents. The CSC has been the glue for these families – knowing that when they walk through that Linkages Suite, the CSC will be there for them. Our families face a myriad of challenges and the trust placed in the CSC is crucial for these relationships to flourish - without this trust and relationships, families will not take advantages of the services that Linkages and the school provide. Further, our Community School Coordinator established a Parent Governance Committees at our school. Linkages recognized that our parents have great strengths and would be vital leaders in our school and community once given the resources and education to do so.

This is an economic issue as well – in past calculations, we know that the donations, in-kind and pro-bono specialists brought into our school community, specifically by the CSCs, brought in almost half of each County dollar supplied to the larger Initiative.

When the Community School Liaison was added to our school, these two individuals came together to work in tandem. How? They recognized that now more families could be served if they pooled their resources. More families could be covered for weekend backpacks and holiday giving and our school could finally serve additional families that needed assistance. Specifically

at Wheaton Woods, Linkages was able to cover additional families that were unmatched with holiday donors for both Thanksgiving and December holidays. At our school, the CSL and the CSC do not duplicate services or duties; they complement each other to better serve our community.

Our school will no longer be able to provide many of these much-needed programs and services once we lose the Community School Coordinator. At a time when the many families are still struggling as we emerge from the Covid-19 Pandemic, and youth mental health crisis is at an all time high, how can we reduce a position as vital as the CSC? At Wheaton Woods, years of relationships and trust will evaporate as we will no longer be able to provide the same level of assistance and programming to our families if we do not have the CSC position. Our families will suffer and most of all our students will suffer.

As you consider the County Executive's budget for FY24, I urge you to consider re-instating the Community School Coordinator position as part of the Linkages Initiative.

Sincerely,

Helen Winder

Title 1 Parent Community Coordinator

Wheaton Woods Elementary School