

Linkages to Learning Community School Coordinator Advocacy

My name is Elizabeth St. John. I have been a resident of Montgomery County for over 50 years. I have worked with Arcola Elementary's Linkages to Learning staff as a volunteer for the last 5 years, first with Janeysali and then with Emily. My link to the program is as a community volunteer and also as a volunteer with Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, a 700 member congregation that strives toward being a welcoming, loving, justice seeking, diverse congregation. Our congregation is known for its efforts to advocate for education.

During the Covid era, I personally witnessed your Arcola School Coordinator on the frontlines, in action to preserve the health, and well being and overall quality of life for an underrepresented portion of our Montgomery County Silver Spring community. I made more than a dozen deliveries of key supplies to Arcola that were then delivered to the parents of the children most in need who are students at Arcola, ranging from key extra groceries, hundreds of dollars of school supplies, feminine hygiene products for the girls in need of those, toiletry items such as soap, toothpaste, shampoo, toothbrushes and more. All so that the children's anxieties could be lessened and they could focus more on their studies and their long term success. Additionally, my church, Bradley Hills, was the source of years worth of deliveries of Smart Sacks. Our Smart Sacks affiliation with Arcola changed once the schools fully reopened, at the behest of Manna. We have also assisted Arcola with Thanksgiving Food and with some holiday gifts.

Another very important service which we provided, first via Janeysali and then via Emily, was a full complement of winter coats for close to 100 of Arcola Linkages to Learning students beginning in either 2017 or 2018. We have already been communicating with Emily to coordinate the coats for September 2023. Indeed, several dozen coats have already been funded and purchased with the intention of working with Arcola Community School Coordinator in August, September and October of 2023.

We 100% believe in the Linkages to Learning model. For the county to move forward with the Linkages program without the presence of its Community School Coordinators is stunningly shortsighted. There is simply no way that the depth of the required supportive services that give these important youngsters a fighting chance at success in a very competitive county.

Our church very much supports the Black Lives Matter mindset and is very much aware that the county has previously committed to equality for all minorities across the county. We have followed the county's efforts in this regard quite closely. DOES THE COUNTY REALIZE THAT IT IS PULLING THE RUG RIGHT OUT FROM UNDER THESE UNDERSERVED MINORITY STUDENTS BY EVEN CONSIDERING ELIMINATING THE VITAL COORDINATOR POSITION.

I have lived in this county long enough to notice the discrepancies in services provided to east county vs west county students. And I am well aware of how these discrepancies in services is tied to economic success and lack thereof.

PLEASE DO NOT ELIMINATE THESE COORDINATOR POSITIONS. THESE ESSENTIAL WORKERS ARE THE BEST FRONTLINE ADVOCATES FOR THE STUDENTS WHO NEED ADVOCACY THE MOST.

Respectfully yours,

Elizabeth St. John