

Dear County Council Members,

As a Linkages to Learning Community school coordinator for 1 year, I have been on the frontlines of seeing how vital our Linkages Community School Coordinator is to all school communities that are served.

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 (or myself) to support students and families. They do this by creating a unique community school plan and then provide much needed programming and services.

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, afterschool activities 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.

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.

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.

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 folks could be covered for weekend backpacks and holiday giving and our school could finally serve additional families that needed assistance.

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 youth mental health crisis is at an all-time high, how can we reduce a vital position as the CSC?

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.

I have had the opportunity to be a CSC at Viers Mill Elementary School for a year plus and the work I do is so fulfilling. The impact I have made on my community cannot be vocalized enough and is fundamental for Linkages and the community to succeed. We help those in need with many things that other schools are not able to do, such as support with diapers, clothing, food, supplies, toiletries, after-school programs, holiday giving, necessary resources, partners, donors, and the list can go on, and on. Not only are we one of the only individuals in our school community to plan events and programs for students and families but we are the main ones facilitating these events. I am aware that this change is not affecting the VMES community, but to see it affecting my fellow peers and co-workers is disheartening because they have put their all into the work they do at their schools. We all love our jobs and our communities, and for the county to just take away this position from Linkages to Learning is absurd. You do not see the hard work we put in on a daily to provide our community with the best services possible. Without the CSC position, Linkages to Learning activities would not be able to succeed the way they are, and CSLs will experience burnout from having to juggle everything on their own with no support from CSCs. These two positions are fundamental for the school community because they work together to be able to help in ways only those who witness our services can see. It is discouraging to see that the county does not care about what these school communities as they say and many staff, and parents, can attest to this, CSCs help create the structure for Linkages to Learning and the overall school community to blossom. I ask you to please reconsider this proposal and reinstate the community school coordinator position. Thank you for allowing us to share our testimonials, it is much appreciated.