

Linkages to Learning

Linkages to Learning provides a unique approach to enriching the whole family's experience in Montgomery County through a three-pronged approach that focuses on individuals, families, and community. Based in 29 schools across the county, Linkages serves more than 5,400 individuals per year. A community school partnership, Linkages offers wraparound services for individual children and their families through behavioral health specialists, family case workers, and community school coordinators. Through its programs and by connecting students and families to county resources, Linkages strives to ensure greater family self-sufficiency.

For parents and adults in the community who do not speak English fluently, Linkages offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to build their English skills and enable them to be more engaged in their children's education. Conducting mock parent-teacher conferences and explaining report cards are just two examples of how Linkages to Learning gives parents the resources and tools to be more actively involved in their children's education.

With such a strong focus on community, Linkages to Learning does not stop at teaching adults and parents English. Linkages prepares adult learners and parents in many ways, encouraging and empowering them to participate in the broader community. With more parents becoming better equipped to be involved, there has been a rise in active parent volunteerism and stronger parent advisory groups. Linkages goes beyond *"supporting the process of them just knowing their rights, or just knowing how to do things,"* giving parents the knowledge on *"how to spread the impact"* explains Monica Martin, MCDHHS Administrator at Linkages.

"We are challenging them to do that more and more." -Monica Martin

The Linkages to Learning English program also connects adult learners to their community and the area around them. In 2016-17, adult learners went on a very successful fieldtrip to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. On this fieldtrip, they learned to use the metro and practiced speaking English in a real-world setting. This type of engagement can benefit entire families as parents realize the opportunities they have to enrich their children's lives by exposing them to activities and resources beyond their neighborhoods.

Linkages to Learning's ESOL program for adults really strives to reduce the barriers that prevent many from taking English classes. For many, childcare is a responsibility or cost that prevents parents and caregivers from attending English classes. All classes provide food and childcare services for children, at no cost to parents. Additionally, Linkages sometimes provides transportation assistance for students who need it.

In an effort to build on this program and expand childcare provisions, in 2017-18 Linkages is piloting a new family program to provide greater learning opportunities for the entire family. The pilot program will deliver age-appropriate curricula to children who are in onsite childcare while their parents are taking classes. Many of these kids speak English already, but they could benefit from more guided learning to be better prepared for kindergarten. This program will

improve reading levels of children, while promoting parents' reading as well. This will enhance family learning, making learning a priority and a collective process. Parents model behavior that make lifelong learning a family legacy giving their household more opportunity to succeed.