

# **Montgomery County, Maryland's**

## **Linkages to Learning Six-Year Strategic Plan: FY 2015 – FY 2020**

**September 2013**

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>History and Characteristics of the Linkages to Learning Initiative ...</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Why Linkages to Learning is Still Needed in Montgomery County ...</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Priorities: FY 2015 – FY 2020.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>20</b>

## I. Executive Summary

The 1991 County Council resolution that resulted in the creation of Montgomery County's Linkages to Learning initiative declared that:

*“If the problems of at-risk children are ignored, the County will incur additional financial and social costs in the form of lost productivity, social welfare costs, and greater pressure on the criminal justice system.”<sup>1</sup>*

For the past 20 years, Montgomery County's Linkages to Learning initiative has focused rapt attention on the “problems of at-risk children” and their families, bringing together public, private and community assets and resources in assisting them to become successful students and contributing members of the community. Its work has helped young people and their families obtain the health, behavioral health, educational support, and social services. Linkages has been widely acknowledged by families, community members, and County leaders for the way it has *linked* public and private services, forged partnerships among agencies and organizations, and recruited a broad array of resources to enhance the skills of disadvantaged children and strengthen their families. Initiated as a partnership between the County's Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools and non-profit providers, Linkages served over 5,000 individuals in FY 2013 at 26 schools<sup>2</sup> across the County, providing comprehensive mental health and social services to 3,700 of these individuals in alignment with the following County Executive mission statement priorities:

- Children Prepared to Live and Learn
- Healthy and Sustainable Communities

The purpose of this document is to reflect what LTL has achieved in those 20 years and describe how it plans to apply those lessons in the years ahead. In the fall of 2011, Linkages leadership held a retreat to begin the strategic planning process for Linkages' Third Six-Year Strategic Plan. This plan delineates Linkages' priorities for FY 2015 through FY 2020, which includes rebuilding the Linkages sites with highest needs that suffered cuts during the recession as well as priorities for the selection of future Linkages sites. The strategic priorities approved by the LTL Advisory Group in June of 2013 are:

- A. Develop and implement a new evaluation plan to measure the impact of Linkages across the initiative
- B. Maintain quality services to families by strengthening the partnerships within the Linkages collaborative
- C. Build capacity through County support to meet the needs of County residents
- D. Strengthen the fundraising capacity of Linkages to bring in new revenue from diverse sources

---

<sup>1</sup> Article #10 of the County Council Resolution No. 12-502, December 10, 1991 (Appendix #1)

<sup>2</sup> For a list of Linkages schools, see Appendix #2

## **II. History and Characteristics of the Linkages to Learning Initiative**

In the late 1980s, a group of concerned educators and community representatives came together to discuss new demographic and social trends they were seeing in their daily work. Their concerns centered on the growing number of working poor families in the County, many of them new residents, who needed extra supports in order to develop the skills that would help their children and themselves become stronger citizens and contributors to their communities.

On December 10, 1991, as a way of consolidating a fragmented system of social and mental health services within the County, the Montgomery County Council passed Resolution No. 12-502. This resolution urged the County Executive and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to create a network of school-based social, educational, and mental health services aimed at supporting at-risk children and their families as one way of helping them become successful learners and productive citizens (see Appendix #1—Montgomery County Council Resolution No. 12-502.) The obstacles to success for children and families specifically mentioned in this resolution included: deep poverty, poor healthcare, lack of English language ability, emotional issues, and unfamiliarity with American mental health and social service systems.

Responding to the Council's determination to improve service integration to vulnerable families through a comprehensive, interagency initiative, the County's Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS), MCPS, and several private-sector social service agencies joined forces in 1993 to pilot "Linkages to Learning" (LTL) at Summit Hall Elementary School, Harmony Hills Elementary School and at the Rocking Horse Road International Student Center, where families newly arrived from other countries enter the school system. A core tenet adhered to in the creation of the LTL initiative was the belief that before new programs or services were created, existing services and supports—both public and private—should be linked together at school sites within local communities and connected to the children and families who need them. LTL's vision is that *children will be healthy, safe, and successful within their families, schools, and communities*. To that end, the mission of the initiative is *to improve the well-being of Montgomery County's children and families through a collaborative delivery of comprehensive school-based services that support success at home, in school and in the community*.

From 1993 to 2006, Montgomery County's booming economy continued to draw workers from around the country and world, vastly increasing the number of low-income families with significant needs for health and human services. In response, funding from the County fueled LTL's expansion from its original three sites to 15 sites by 1999.

### **Research Documents Impact of LTL**

It was also in 1999 that the results of a four-year longitudinal research and evaluation grant from the U.S. Department of Education, carried out by the University of Maryland, were published. This in-depth research project assessed children and families participating in LTL at Broad Acres Elementary School and compared them with a group of children and families at another County elementary school. Data about both populations was collected in a rigorous way and the

evaluators' conclusions about the outcomes of Linkages' approach and services on children and families was definitive:

“Although differences existed between the communities served by the two schools, there were several positive outcomes for the 119 children and 69 parents tracked over three years and served by the Linkages to Learning (LTL) Program. Among other things, parents of children in LTL reported significant decreases in their children’s negative behavior over time. A related finding was that while children at the comparison school showed an increase in negative behaviors over time, similar gains, which might be expected among children at-risk in the Linkages school, did *not* occur. Other outcomes occurred, such as a decrease in emotional distress by the children at LTL and improved parenting practices among parents receiving services.”<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the need for this program to grow even further, in 1999, the County Council asked that LTL expansion be done within the framework of a strategic plan. A multi-agency planning group came together to develop a six-year expansion plan, which was submitted by the County Executive and Board of Education to the County Council. This plan was approved for FY 2001-FY 2006 and resulted in new site selection parameters based on the plan’s guidelines (primarily indicators of poverty) as well as on available funding. In 2006, a second strategic plan was submitted and approved for the years FY 2008-FY 2013, and by 2007, LTL was providing direct services to 3,500 children and 1,700 families at 28 schools. Strategic expansion priorities outlined in the FY 2008-FY 2013 plan were not met, however, due to the economic recession. As with many county initiatives, LTL experienced reductions in sites and staffing both in the central office and on the ground at LTL schools during this time. Regardless, since its inception, Linkages has retained and improved on the salient programmatic features that define it and make it unique.

### **Population Served**

Families in Poverty: LTL has historically selected school sites based on the percentage of children enrolled in a particular school who have qualified at any point in time for the federal government’s Free and Reduced-price Meals Service (EverFARMS). In order to qualify for FARMS, families must earn less than 185% of the federally defined poverty level. Within this framework, LTL has also considered schools’ ability and readiness to devote space to house LTL staff. LTL works in tandem with the MCPS and HHS CIP processes to take advantage of cost savings in building LTL facilities on school campuses whenever possible.

Belief in Early Intervention: Because LTL believes that children can best be reached when they are young, LTL works primarily through elementary schools, but also at some middle schools in order to ensure continuity of services for those children and families who engage with Linkages at the older grades at the elementary level and are in need of ongoing services.

---

<sup>3</sup> Final Report on the Linkages to Learning Program and Evaluation at Broad Acres Elementary School, December 2, 1999, University of Maryland, College Park, funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant.

## **Essential Programmatic Elements**

The Concept of “Linking” The name “Linkages to Learning” reflects the core tenet of the program: LTL staff are expected to LINK children and families to existing public and private services in the community, providing direct services *only* if those services are unavailable or inaccessible. This approach maximizes the utilization of services already in place: libraries, literacy groups, tutoring programs, health care providers, mental health services, recreation programs, child care agencies, church- and synagogue-based programs, businesses that involve themselves in the community, and ESOL classes.

Using this “connect-the-dots” philosophy has brought a broad array of public and private services into partnerships with school communities and has greatly expanded the resources and opportunities available to the students and families who most need these supports. At the same time, this model promotes civic engagement by creating opportunities for current and former participants to give back to their communities through volunteer efforts. (See Appendix #3 for a “picture” of services linked around children and families through this program.)

Each Site is Unique: Because the needs of specific schools and community populations vary and the exact same services are not always available or easily accessible within each neighborhood, each school’s LTL program strives to be responsive to the needs and priorities identified by that school’s students and families and its community stakeholders. For example, one Linkages school site may determine that employment readiness workshops are parents’ first priority, while another site may develop nutrition and parenting classes for parents in response to their requests for such training.

Cultural and Language Appropriateness: Every effort is made at LTL sites to hire staff who speak the language and understand the culture of the children and families in that school. Front-line staff members, with language skills and an understanding of cultural nuances and perspectives, are critical to LTL’s success because they recognize the issues and gain the trust of the students and families LTL works to support.

A Whole-Family Approach: From the beginning, LTL has chosen to serve the whole family, not just the child. LTL believes that you cannot successfully strengthen one student without also strengthening that student’s family. It is unrealistic to expect a student to be fully available to learn if his or her parents are about to be evicted, , or don’t know where to go for services, or can’t find transportation to their jobs, or can’t find a physician when that child’s siblings are sick. Whole families need to be strengthened so that a child’s progress has a framework within which growth can take place and so that the entire family - siblings, parents, and extended family members - can reinforce each other, building stronger family units that become able to contribute to the life of the neighborhoods in which they live. With LTL as the vehicle, parents and staff collaborate to find those resources they need to hold their family together: transportation to training programs and jobs; courses on parenting; assistance with the family’s budget; recreation programs for younger and older siblings; citizenship information; assistance in getting clothing, furniture, food, and housing; translation services; information on day care and summer camp programs; acculturation workshops; adult education classes such as ESOL and literacy; tutoring

programs; health and mental health services; hearing and vision screening; and assistance in finding and accessing social and other services.

Comprehensive Services: The areas within which specific services are either recruited from the county or surrounding community OR developed and provided by LTL staff include:

*Social Services:*

- Assessments of family strengths, assets and self sufficiency needs
- Linkage with income support and emergency services
- Assistance in obtaining clothing, furniture, food, housing, and other tangible aid
- Help with legal/immigration, medical/dental, and employment needs
- Assistance accessing health/mental health care and/or insurance
- Translation/interpretation services
- Transportation assistance
- Assistance accessing child care and summer camp programs
- Food/clothing/toy and book drives

*Behavioral Health Services:*

- Diagnostic evaluations and psychosocial assessments for children
- Child/family therapy and group therapy for children
- Psychosocial / skill-building groups for children
- Consultation with school staff and other support services
- Linkage to medication evaluations / psychiatric care
- In-service training for teachers and/or workshops for parents

*Community Education & Development:*

- Adult education classes (such as ESOL/computer literacy)
- Parent networking coffees and parenting programs
- After school and evening youth development, recreation and health programs
- Acculturation workshops
- On-site spring break and summer camps
- Family outings / field trips
- Parent involvement and leadership opportunities
- School-wide events and community development programs (gardening projects, parent to parent linking for individualized support, etc.)

LTL School-Based Health Centers are specialized sites of Linkages to Learning as well as service sites for the “Care for Kids” program. In addition to LTL staff, School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) have expanded school community health nursing time and partner health personnel (nurse practitioners and physicians) who provide comprehensive primary health services, including physical exams; immunizations; EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) services; diagnosis, treatment, referral, and case management of children with acute and chronic illnesses; treatment of minor injuries; dispensation of medication; lab tests; and health education. Dental screening and referral for off-site dental treatment also is provided. These centers have an additional organizational partner, Children’s

Pediatrician and Associates, LLC. SBHC planning proceeds on a separate track along with planning for the County's high school School-Based Wellness Centers, but is coordinated at the elementary level with LTL. LTL leadership is involved in the SBHC planning process and vice versa. Currently, LTL has seven SBHCs located at Broad Acres Elementary School, Gaithersburg Elementary School, Harmony Hills Elementary School, Highland Elementary School, New Hampshire Estates Elementary School, Rolling Terrace Elementary School and Summit Hall Elementary School, with SBHCs slated to open at Viers Mill Elementary School and Weller Road Elementary School in the fall of 2013.

## **Partnerships**

As stated above, a hallmark of the Linkages program is the way it links public and private programs with young people and their families. Linkages carries out this collaborative model at every level, creating partnerships on all sides—at the County level among agencies, within Linkages' program management staff and leadership team, and at its school-based community sites.

### Initiative Leadership: The LTL Advisory Group

The LTL Advisory Group consists of representatives from each of LTL's primary service partners; the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Association; Montgomery County's Local Management Board; the local business community; current LTL sites (school administrators and parents); and administrators from all relevant departments of MCPS and DHHS.<sup>4</sup> This group serves an advisory and advocacy role for the LTL initiative. This includes review, feedback and approval of strategic plans, general guidance and/or specific consultation on key issues, sharing best practices, providing links to resources and promoting LTL's mission within the larger community. The Programming and Planning Committee of this Advisory Group includes primary service partner agency administrators; the DHHS Director of Child and Adolescent School and Community-Based Services; DHHS' Public Health Services' Senior Administrator for School Health Services; and MCPS' Chief Engagement and Partnership Officer. This committee meets quarterly to review ongoing issues and lead internal planning and policy development for recommendations to the larger Advisory Group.

### Project Leadership: The Linkages Resource Team

Linkages created an innovative project leadership structure called the Linkages Resource Team (LRT). This team draws two administrators from DHHS (one from its Office of Child and Adolescent School and Community-Based Services and another from its Office of School Health Services), an administrator from MCPS, and an administrator representing the coalition of nonprofit primary service partners involved in LTL. The team members operate as equals, bringing their respective agencies' resources, experiences, and networks to the table. They lead the planning processes for expansion efforts to new schools, coordinate information from the service teams at each LTL site, guide the work of the LTL Advisory Group, and ensure the interagency initiative remains on track (see Appendix #5, Linkages to Learning Collaborative Structure)

---

<sup>4</sup> For a full list of current LTL Advisory Group members, see Appendix #4



## At School Sites

Teams drawn from LTL's four primary service partners operate the case management, behavioral health and community education/development programs at most school sites (one site has retained DHHS direct social services staff). A typical LTL team at a school is comprised of a site coordinator, a family case manager, and a child/family therapist. At some schools, a part-time community service aide is also available to assist parents with "hands-on" needs. Regular school staff supplements this team, including the school community health nurse, school counselor, and often the principal or their designee; all of whom work collaboratively with the LTL team to make sure that the services recruited through LTL to support students and families are coordinated with and integrated into the school's basic program.

## **Leveraging County Resources**

Linkages staff has worked hard over the years to use the core program funds provided annually by the County as a magnet to draw additional resources from a huge array of both public and private agencies and organizations. These additional resources come in the form of donations of goods and equipment, the services of volunteers and interns, funding through state and local grants, and partnerships with a wide variety of businesses, recreation programs, newspapers, early childhood centers, churches/synagogues, and arts programs. For example, in FY12, LTL's resource development efforts brought in 40 cents for every public dollar invested in LTL. Having stable and consistent funding from the County has made it possible for Linkages to offer services year after year to disadvantaged students and their families - services that can be counted on to help build successful students and strong families. These funds have been used effectively to leverage a broad array of other resources that enhance and enrich the services that LTL has to offer the community.

## **II. Why Linkages to Learning is Still Needed in Montgomery County**

Montgomery County continues to experience demographic changes and social trends among its residents that support the case for a continuation and expansion of LTL.

### **Population Growth & Socioeconomic Trends**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the County's population was 971,777; according to a Census Bureau estimate, the county's population topped one million in 2012. Since 1990, all of the County's population growth has been due to increases in non-White race groups and the Hispanic ethnic group:

- White, non-Hispanic population: 2% decrease
- African American population: 75% increase
- Asian American population: 118% increase
- Hispanic population: 197 % increase

Two factors drove these demographic changes: 1) resident births outnumbered deaths by more than two to one and 2) immigration from outside the United States that countered the outflow of

county population to other places. The percent of foreign-born residents in Montgomery County increased from 18.6 percent in 1990 to 32.2 percent in 2010, a greater percentage than in any other Maryland jurisdiction and second only to Arlington County, Virginia, in the Washington metropolitan area. As a corollary of this trend, the percent of county households that do not speak English at home increased from 21.2 percent to 37.5 percent between 1990 and 2008.

Student population changes in MCPS mirror the trends in resident births, migration, and immigration. The result is an expectation that long-term enrollment increases will occur and that the student body will become increasingly diverse. The current racial/ethnic composition of the student population of MCPS is as follows:

- White 33%
- Hispanic 26.7%
- African American 21.3%
- Asian American 14.3%
- Two or more races 4.6%
- American Indian or Alaskan Native 0.2%
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander 0.1%

At this time, a greater number of MCPS students require specific services and support to ensure their success. For example, nearly 20,000 students (13.3% of enrollment) receive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services, a measure of student ethnic and language diversity. This number has practically doubled since 2000.

### **Student Mobility**

Records of MCPS student entries and withdrawals show that about 12,000 to 13,000 new students enter and exit the system each year (not including those entering Kindergarten or those graduating from high school). During the past five years, however, entries into MCPS have significantly exceeded withdrawals for a net increase in enrollment. During the 2011-2012 school year, more students from international sources as well as domestic ones entered MCPS. This was a change from previous years when there had been net out migration due to domestic locations. This pattern may be attributed to the weak housing market, which has made it difficult for residents to sell their homes, and to Montgomery County's unemployment rate, which is lower than that in other parts of the metropolitan area. These factors have encouraged residents to "stay put" in their current locations. Economic difficulties due to the recession which began in 2007 may also account for the increase in students who now attend an MCPS school rather than a private one. In 2012, 85 percent of students enrolled in Montgomery County schools were enrolled in MCPS, up from 82 percent in prior years.

### **Poverty**

Student participation in FARMS is MCPS' best indicator of student socioeconomic levels. Between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of students participating in FARMS increased from 21.7 percent of enrollment to 33.2 percent. Today, close to 49,400 students receive FARMS, an increase of more than 20,000 students in twelve years.

## **Enrollment Growth**

The six-year forecast for total MCPS enrollment as of 2012 projected an increase of 10,634 students to a total of 159,433 students by 2018. This includes a projected increase in K-5 students to 70,515 and an increase in Grades 6-8 enrollment to 37,180. Enrollment this school year is nearly 149,000 students, an increase of more than 11,000 students in just five years.

### **III. Linkages to Learning's Third Strategic Plan: FY 2015 - FY 2020**

On August 16, 2011, the Programming and Planning Committee (PPC) of the Linkages Advisory Group gathered for a strategic planning retreat to review the current status of the LTL initiative; identify strengths, assets and challenges of the initiative; engage in re-visioning; and come to consensus on initial themes for priorities to be included in Linkages' third strategic plan (see Appendix #6 for summary of retreat minutes). The Linkages Resource Team (LRT) then engaged other stakeholders in different formats in order to gain input into the plan throughout the ensuing school year. These activities included a survey of LTL site staff, four LTL parent focus groups, a strategic planning meeting with all principals of LTL sites and a survey of all school-based staff who collaborate with LTL site staff (see Appendices #7 through #10 for survey results, parent focus group reports, and meeting minutes). The LRT worked with consultants to gather and synthesize this information and, in doing so, kept in mind that the recent economic climate placed more emphasis on the need for a simple, flexible system for making decisions and creating success. Linkages leadership worked to propose a plan that focuses on deepened collaboration; that looks at the wider picture and is flexible in choice of its means. In doing so, the LRT adopted the perspective that the initiative should capitalize on goal congruencies and move forward on multiple priorities over the next six years simultaneously.

On June 6, 2013, the LRT presented to the Advisory Group draft strategic plan priorities based on the top issues that emerged from all stakeholder groups— those so significant to the overall well-being of the initiative that they require the full and immediate attention of the entire management team. All Advisory Group members had the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft priorities and goals through June 28<sup>th</sup>, and per a consensus decision-making process, approved the following priorities for FY 2015 – FY 2020:

- A. Develop and implement a new evaluation plan to measure impact of Linkages across the initiative
- B. Maintain quality services to families by strengthening the partnerships within the Linkages collaborative
- C. Build capacity through County support to meet the needs of County residents
- D. Strengthen the fundraising capacity of Linkages to bring in new revenues from diverse sources

## Full Discussion on LTL Priorities

At the June 2013 LTL Advisory Group Meeting, the LRT presented recent LTL activities related to each priority area as well as suggested goal(s) within each priority that were most recurrent from stakeholder input. Each identified goal was discussed in this meeting, some in group breakout sessions, to identify both cost neutral strategies and resources that are needed to accomplish the goals. The results of this discussion are presented below.

### PRIORITY A: Develop and implement a new evaluation plan to measure impact of LTL across initiative

*Goal: Devise and Implement the Use of a New Logic Model to Guide Services, Data Collection and Future Expansion*

As LTL has evolved, the initiative has collected different data to measure the impact of its services. At times, the collection of comprehensive data has been limited by policy barriers (such as the implementation of HIPAA and updates to FERPA) or technical barriers related to different and changing IT systems within MCDHHS and MCPS. Regardless of these changing policy or systemic dynamics, Linkages has always collected data directly from recipients of services and school staff on the initiative's ability to impact non-academic barriers to student success. Tools for collecting this data have evolved from "homegrown" surveys to standardized, validated tools that are administered by licensed clinicians. For FY13, LTL captured the following outputs and outcomes from these efforts:

- 3,698 mental health/family case management records
- 68,100 client encounters across the initiative. This breaks down to:
  - Over 2,600 client encounters per site for the year
  - Over 200 encounters per site per month
  - Approximately 55 encounters per site per week
  - 1 in 4 encounters were delivered in a language other than English due to client needs; over 60% of parent encounters were delivered in a language other than English.
- Parent Survey Feedback:

Satisfaction		Language Access	
Served in a timely manner	96%	Language or sign language assistance needed	75%
Needs were understood	97%	Assistance needed and received	92%
Treated with respect	96%	Assistance received and satisfied	93%
Overall satisfaction	95%		

- 74% of children exiting behavioral health services maintained or improved classroom behavior
- 71% of children exiting behavioral health services maintained or improved psychosocial functioning
- 29% average *increase* in family self-sufficiency scores after 6 months of case management (FY12 pilot data)

In the past few years, Linkages has undertaken a number of activities to strengthen data collection and measure the impact of services. These have included: (1) the implementation of family self-sufficiency measures; (2) an assessment of existing collaborative-wide data sources and technical/resource barriers; (3) the utilization of technical assistance from Casey Family Programs; and (4) participation in MCDHHS’ Process Technology Modernization planning for a future electronic integrated case management system (that would include client assessment and quality participation records, client outcomes management and reporting, and electronic service coordination with other MCDHHS programs). The LRT has also reviewed existing literature and best practices, and identified the following areas in the nationally recognized Coalition for Community Schools’ results framework<sup>5</sup> as those which LTL strives to support or impact:

Short-term Result Areas (possible proximal measures):

- Students attend school consistently
- Students are actively involved in learning and their community
- Families are increasingly involved in their children's education
- Schools are engaged with families and communities

Long-term Result Areas (possible distal measures):

- Students succeed academically
- Students are healthy: physically, socially and emotionally
- Students live and learn in a safe, supportive, & stable environment
- Communities are desirable places to live

Most recently, LTL has also benefitted from Casey Family Program’s expertise in envisioning tools for sharing and tracking information across the collaborative (such as an electronic “partner dashboard”).

At the June LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following cost neutral strategies and resources needs were identified as critical to the attainment of this goal:

<i>COST NEUTRAL STRATEGIES TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Creating new logic model
Utilizing existing research and best practices
Continuing MCDHHS Process Technology Modernization (PTM) efforts
Decide on data elements critical to an electronic “partner dashboard”

<i>RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Data/evaluation specialist at LTL central office
Administrative specialists in LTL site funding formula to support data collection efforts (preserving direct service time at LTL sites)
Resources to implement and maintain electronic “partner dashboard”

<sup>5</sup> *Community Schools: Promoting Student Success - A Rationale and Results Framework* (Coalition for Community Schools)

Since the Advisory Group meeting, LTL hosted Casey Family Programs to facilitate our first logic modeling session with key administrators and evaluators from MCPS’ Office of Shared Accountability (see Appendix #11 for a list of meeting participants). The LRT and MCPS’ Office of Shared Accountability are currently working with the information gathered in this session to propose a new logic model and evaluation framework to the LTL Advisory Group this year.

PRIORITY B: Maintain quality services for families by strengthening partnerships

*Goal #1: Strengthen school and community partnerships by decreasing staff turnover*

The urgency in keeping qualified staff in this unique initiative cannot be overstated. This priority surfaced in LTL’ last strategic plan and remains a critical goal. Data provided by school administrators and partner agencies show that turnover and vacancies can compromise the provision and ongoing development of school-specific services. In addition, the processes of advertising, interviewing, hiring, and training new staff takes valuable administrative time. In 2012, the LRT conducted new salary studies that confirm that Linkages site staff remain underpaid compared with professionals conducting similar work in the metro D.C. area. It is with this knowledge that LTL incorporated a “minimally reduced work year” staffing option in MCDHHS contracts with partner agencies, allowing no more than a 4% work year reduction for school-based staff only during days that schools are not in operation. This option required the maintenance of a year-round program at Linkages schools, with partner agencies ensuring that coverage for emergencies and urgent family needs were provided at all times. This option was implemented to both attract members of the work force who are working parents and would consider it a “benefit” to have some automatic days off of work when schools are not in session and as a retention incentive in years where salary increases were not an option. LTL’s experience with the partner agencies that chose to exercise this option has been that turnover was reduced. As stated earlier, LTL has been involved in MCDHHS’ Process Technology Modernization planning and hopes that the future implementation of an electronic integrated case management system will relieve administrative burden for staff, thereby increasing job satisfaction. At the LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following additional strategies and resources were identified for the attainment of this goal:

<i>COST NEUTRAL STRATEGIES TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Build on reduced/flexible work year model (effective hourly wage increase) as incentive to further reduce staff turnover
Recruit ex-military (work force population that may not have same salary requirements)
Continue MCDHHS Process Technology Modernization (PTM) efforts

<i>RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Administrative specialists in LTL site funding formula to lessen administrative burden
Increase in base budget to make site staff salaries more competitive
LTL site funding formula that ensures supervisor/staff ratio no greater than 1:12

*Goal #2: Build stronger ties among MCPS, MCDHHS, and primary service partners*

In recent years, the LRT has made numerous efforts to deepen the collaborative work of LTL, such as ensuring that LTL site staff are represented in schools’ improvement teams; promoting best practices to align yearly School Improvement and LTL Program Plans; implementing new standards and improvements to LTL’s yearly school/community needs assessment process; holding yearly meetings to review LTL site MOUs at each LTL school; and implementing a yearly anonymous electronic survey format for school staff feedback directly to the LTL central office. At the LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following additional strategies and resources were identified as critical to the attainment of this goal:

<i>COST NEUTRAL STRATEGIES TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Conduct annual briefings to County Council and Board of Education to inform and update policymakers about Linkages
Be explicit about benefits of program and communicate this message to multiple audiences to build broader support
Continue MCDHHS Process Technology Modernization (PTM) efforts
Integrate with Excel Beyond the Bell initiative at Middle Schools
Increasing shared professional development opportunities among LTL site and school staff
Make explicit program connections with new MCPS social/emotional learning goals
Align LTL site staff into Collaborative Problem Solving process at each school
Systematizing LTL on SIP teams
Updating LTL site and system MOU to further addressing/align processes

<i>RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Reinstatement of program manager position in LTL central office with communications duties
Upgrade “Site Coordinator” job description and salary range to attract and retain staff with more experience and/or abilities in creating school/community partnerships
LTL site funding formula that ensures supervisor/staff ratio no greater than 1:12 (to ensure close supervisory/administrative collaboration with individual schools)
Resources for new collaborative website with updated communication tools for all partners

*Goal #3: Build on family involvement practices to formalize youth/family leadership structure*

LTL has been recognized for its ability to forge parent networks and mutual support, increase parent/school involvement and support parents to be leaders within the initiative as well as in their community. Ongoing parent empowerment groups, parent volunteer roles and other involvement/leadership opportunities have ensured that our partnership with parents is strong across all sites (close to fifty parents participated in focus groups for input into strategic plan). While parental involvement and input has been critical to the startup of each new school site, as well as to the operation of the Linkages Advisory Group, it is time for Linkages to build on these successes and formalize a youth/family leadership structure across all sites. At the LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following strategies and resources were identified for the attainment of this goal:

<i>COST NEUTRAL STRATEGIES TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Allocate LTL operating dollars for consultant to work with Site Coordinators and parents to build on current family involvement strategies and co-design formal parent/youth leadership model
Invite parent “graduates” of LTL to become presenters @ parent coffees, formalizing their role (monthly community meeting – train/certify as community advocates)

<i>RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL</i>
Family involvement/leadership funds in LTL site funding formula to support parent/youth leadership structures

This summer, LTL contracted with a consultant to conduct focus groups with site staff and parents to examine current family involvement strategies and shape recommendations for the Advisory Group on a formal parent/youth leadership model. The LRT is currently working with this consultant to analyze findings and craft initiative-wide recommendations.

PRIORITY C: Build capacity through County support to meet needs of residents

*Goal #1: Expand to new school sites and restore current sites which have the highest levels of poverty*

The LTL Advisory Group has agreed that the driving criterion for expansion of the initiative remains the percentage of students in a school community that have *ever* qualified for the Free and Reduced Meals Program Service (FARMS).<sup>6</sup> This is based on literature indicating that high rates of poverty can influence performance in school for both a low-income student *and* his peers. Research shows that the higher the percentage of students from impoverished families in a school, the lower the test scores of the students in that school are likely to be. “Most research finds that the effects of classmate poverty are nonlinear: there appears to be a ‘tipping point’ at which the cumulative impact of classmate poverty becomes much worse . . . A study conducted by the U.S. Dept. of Education found that 50 percent of FARMS-eligible [students] presents a clear threshold . . . and that test scores gradually decline as one moves from schools with fewer low-income children to those with more . . . It is also important to note that poor children appear to be more heavily influenced by their school environment than children from wealthy or middle-class households.”<sup>7</sup> This research leads to the conclusion that the poverty of some children impacts school performance among their peers, a cycle which educators and community leaders want to halt with prevention and intervention programs such as Linkages. The LTL Advisory Group also agreed that a school’s readiness to devote operations space to Linkages staff must continue to be considered along with this driving criterion.

The Advisory Group concurred with initiative-wide stakeholder feedback regarding the need for more LTL programming in middle schools. Due to the sheer population of middle schools, it is

<sup>6</sup> FARMS is a nationally recognized indicator of poverty.

<sup>7</sup> Richard D. Kahlenberg, All Together Now: Creating Middle Class Schools through Public School Choice (Brookings Institution Press, 2001. Pages 39-40.)



more difficult for a middle school community to qualify for Linkages expansion based primarily on Ever FARMS percentages. As such, the Advisory Group approved a recommendation to implement one exception to the driving criteria that may allow for more LTL programming at middle schools in the future: middle schools with three or more LTL elementary feeder schools receive priority consideration for new program funds, moving ahead of otherwise eligible elementary schools. With this in mind, resources are needed to fund LTL expansion in the following order (this includes the restoration of “full teams” to current sites that experienced reductions in staffing during recent years. Please note 2012-2013 school year Ever FARMS percentages next to each school named):

1. Annualize operations at Arcola ES and Georgian Forest ES (funded for startup in FY’14)
2. Fully staff sites with Ever FARMS > 85%:
  - New Hampshire Estates ES SBHC, 90.4% (add full-time Community Service Aide)
  - Harmony Hills SBHC, 90.4% (add part-time Community Service Aide)
  - Highland ES SBHC, 88.4% (add part-time Community Service Aide)
  - Wheaton Woods ES, 86.4% (make part-time Site Coordinator full-time)
  - Weller Road ES SBHC, 86.1% (make Site Coordinator full-time and add part-time Community Service Aide)
3. New Site at South Lake ES, 85%
4. Fully staff sites with Ever FARMS > 79.4%:
  - Summit Hall ES SBHC, 83.7% (add part-time Community Service Aide)
  - Kemp Mill ES, 79.7% (make part-time Site Coordinator full-time)
5. New Site at Clopper Mill ES, 79.4%
6. New Site at Col. E. Brooke Lee MS, 78.3%
7. New paired site team at Cresthaven ES, 77.2% and Dr. Roscoe E. Nix ES, 74.3% (*one K-5 population*)
8. New Site at Jackson Road ES, 77.1%
9. Fully staff site with Ever FARMS rate  $\geq$  75.7%:
  - Washington Grove ES, 75.7% (make part-time Site Coordinator full-time)
10. New Site at Francis Scott Key MS, 75.7%

*Goal #2: Strengthen availability of School Community Health Nurses to participate on LTL site collaborative teams*

The early success of LTL was due in part to the close collaboration between human services and health staff in the school building. While this is still a hallmark of LTL, especially at the LTL School-Based Health center sites that allow for expanded primary health care provision on-site, the growth of LTL from 1999 to 2007 did not account for or preserve the original amount of school nurse time allocated to LTL schools. As such, an increase of school nursing time at each LTL school site that is *not* a School-Based Health Center is required in order to increase school nurses availability to attend school-based LTL team meetings and fully collaborate with LTL peers. This goal was stated in the last strategic plan but was not able to be realized, and remains a priority today. At the LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following resource need for attainment of this goal was approved:

**RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL**

Increase school nursing time at each LTL site that is *not* a School-Based Health Center to meet ratio of 1 School Community Health Nurse per every 2 LTL sites

*Goal #3: Implementing evidence based practices (EBPs) across initiative*

LTL’s ability to provide professional development opportunities for staff has remained strong, however resources to provide training in specific evidence-based practices (and to monitor their ongoing implementation) are not currently available. In recent years, the LRT has offered the American Psychological Association’s Violence Prevention Office’s “*Effective Providers for Child Victims of Violence Community Workshop*”; an overview of evidence-based assessments and practices for children exposed to trauma. LTL site staff have certainly been directed to community opportunities for other EBP trainings, however with the exception of those that have been sponsored by partners such as the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth & Families, these trainings prove costly and are typically not accessible to LTL site staff. It is well known that training and implementation of EBPs in any community setting increases’ staff professional skills and abilities, career satisfaction, and most importantly, supports standardized quality service delivery, ultimately creating efficiencies maximizing the impact of services to clients. At the LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following resource need for an upfront investment in implementing EBPs across Linkages was approved:

**RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL**

Staff Development dollars to support training of LTL staff in EBPs and ongoing implementation

PRIORITY D: Strengthen capacity to bring in new revenue from diverse sources

*Goal #1: Expand capacity at LTL central office to obtain and manage outside grants*

Despite LTL central office reductions in recent years, the LRT has re-aligned central office staff to devote part of one position to resource development via private and corporate donations for seasonal drives. LTL has also deepened its partnership with the MCPS Educational Foundation to examine new opportunities for grants, apply for more grants, and obtain additional funding in traditional grant partnerships (such as via the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy). At the June LTL Advisory Group meeting, the following strategies and resources were identified for the attainment of this goal:

**COST NEUTRAL STRATEGIES TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL**

Continue working with MCPS Educational Foundation and MCDHHS Grants Resource & Acquisition Unit to identify and pursue grant opportunities

**RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL**

Grant writer/implementation specialist at LTL central office

## Bibliography

*Community Schools: Promoting Student Success - A Rationale and Results Framework  
(Coalition for Community Schools)*

*Richard D. Kahlenberg, All Together Now: Creating Middle Class Schools through Public School Choice (Brookings Institution Press, 2001. pages 39-40 )*

*Final Report on the Linkages to Learning Program and Evaluation at Broad Acres Elementary School, December 2, 1999, University of Maryland, College Park, funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant*

*FY 2014 Educational Facilities Master Plan and the Amendments to the FY 2013–2018 Capital Improvements Program (Chapter 2: The Planning Environment), Montgomery County Public Schools*

*Montgomery County Public Schools At a Glance, School Year 2012-2013, February 20, 2013*

## **APPENDICES**

- #1 Montgomery County Council Resolution No. 12-502 adopted December 10, 1991
- #2 Linkages Site List
- #3 Children/Family and Community Links Diagram
- #4 Linkages to Learning Advisory Group 2013
- #5 Linkages to Learning Collaborative Structure
- #6 Summary of Recommendations from Linkages to Learning's Advisory Group's Program & Planning Committee August 2011 Retreat
- #7 Results of August 2011 LTL Staff Survey
- #8 Parent Focus Group Reports
- #9 LTL Principals' January 2012 Meeting Minutes
- #10 Results from Survey of MCPS Partners
- #11 List of Participants in first Logic Modeling Session (facilitated by Casey Family Programs in August 2013)