

Good evening Council President Andrew Friedson and members of the County Council.

My name is Heidi Garcia, and I am the lead English Language Development teacher at Burnt Mills Elementary, a community school committed to serving and empowering our community.

There are many stories, experiences, and memories I could share that have impacted our school community, but they told me I only have 3 minutes. So I will be blunt, honest, and get straight to the point and hope that you will remember Burnt Mills when it is time for you to get into your cars to drive home to be safe and warm with your families.

As a teacher, I will drive home to be with my family too, but the difference between you and I is that I carry the weight of knowing Families walk through our doors almost everyday in search of basic needs such as healthcare, disability assistance, internet, employment, english language classes, getting a driver's license, or walking in with eviction notices and wondering when their next meal will be. Yes, as a teacher this is the job I signed up for. It is the selfless work that God reminds me of everyday as to why I chose this profession. However, we all know that if your social, emotional, and physical wellbeing needs are not met, your chances at being available to learn are pretty low.

My purpose or my WHY is our students and families. I fight everyday alongside all Burnt Mills staff to make sure our students and their families have what they need to just make it through to the next day when they walk through our doors. But our staff can only handle so much at once. With our FARMs population currently being 74% and projected to be 84% next year - our current resources are limited. We have spent late nights, many weekends, and countless hours looking for resources and calling organizations to find the right support for our families on top of our roles as educators to provide our students with a quality education. We try our best everyday to serve our community with the support we have, but there are many days our best is just not enough. Our resources and our current support in place is just not enough.

My ASK is for you to provide funding in this year's budget for a Linkages to Learning program for Burnt Mills Elementary. A qualification for Linkages is an EVER FARMs rate of over 60%. Burnt Mills is currently at 74% this year with an anticipation of our % to only raise higher. An opportunity for a Linkages at Burnt Mills will not only be laying the foundation of resources that will help our students and their siblings in middle and high school, but also supporting our families as a whole and our entire community to get the proper support they need to be successful when they walk through our doors, but also when they leave to go home every day to be with their families.