

A Big Milestone



Katie Meixner, Assistant Director

This year, Side by Side is passing a significant milestone. Children who began our program as kindergarten students at Family Academies in 2009 are going on to middle school. These children are moving forward thanks to teachers that commit to more than the minimum, planning lessons for parents and gathering data to show student progress. These children are entering sixth grade thanks to the reading skills they gained from books you helped to purchase. These children are passing their tests thanks to the hours their parents put in checking homework and playing math games at the kitchen table after work. The seeds we helped to plant years ago are growing. Every year, as Great Start children move on to middle school, high school, and college, we have confidence that your donations, volunteer hours, and support have strengthened the academic foundation of every student. Beyond the students, your support has empowered teachers, principals, and schools.

Families Reaping the Benefits

These parents spoke at our sixth annual breakfast on March 7 about the Great Start program. Great Start is a series of workshops where parents of pre-kindergarten through second-grade students learn home activities that help their children succeed in school.



David Quintanilla, James H. Harrison Elementary School

Where are the benefits that we see everyday? Thanks to Side by Side, I learned Magic 1-2-3, the behavioral program. I use it with my children. It works. Tomorrow they will leave me and they will go into society, and what they've learned is what they're going to show. But, thanks to what they've been showing, at James H. Harrison I was recognized as Father of the Year. Thanks to the teachers in Side by Side and the ideas they gave with cards, dice, games, and ways to educate children, one of my children is in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program for Prince George's County. One of my children just brought home honor roll and citizenship awards. The third child is in pre-K and had to continue learning his ABCs, as he was a little bit behind from the group. But, with the same teachings Great Start taught me, I was able to apply it to him and now he knows his ABCs.

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Joe Murchison, Executive Director

Side by Side's Great Start program showed impressive results in the 2013-14 school year.

- We greatly increased the number of workshops. Last school year we provided 79 workshops, more than twice the number offered the previous year. This school year, we will host 121.
- We had almost 1,300 parents and children attend our workshops last year, three times more than the previous year. This included 34% of all kindergarten families.
- Our program is boosting learning. Last year, kindergarten students whose parents participated in at least half of the offered workshops progressed 35% further on reading comprehension tests than the students whose parents came to fewer workshops, or none.
- The quality of our program is being recognized in the wider community. We just received our second United Way grant in January. We were one of seven grantees in Prince George's County out of almost 80 applicants.

424 Main Street, Laurel, MD 20707

Legima Doh, Laurel Elementary School

When my daughter came back to this country, we were quite worried about how she was going to fit into the new education system.

We got into Great Start and we learned a lot from Mrs. Fowlkes. She combined her skills as a teacher and as a parent as well. I think that the value of a system can be found in its results. The last report card we had for my daughter, she was 100% in mathematics, 300% in reading, and already ready for first grade. It's been a huge success for my family.



Jermaine Shields, Laurel Elementary School

This was my first time ever participating in this type of program. I was coaching football too, but this was very important. My daughter's vocabulary is getting better now. Her math is okay, but I work with her on the weekend. On Saturdays I work with her on sight words. I have games, but my daughter comes first.

Teachers Need Parents

Jennifer Fowlkes, Laurel Elementary School Teacher

We're here for the families because we believe in them. They might not have everything they need to get students where we need them to be. We as teachers don't have everything we need for the students to succeed if we don't have the parents. We're fighting a losing battle right there. With Side by Side, we can be better together.



We have a great task on us now with the Common Core curriculum. With Common Core comes a big test called PARCC, and with PARCC comes technology. Our kids aren't writing with a pencil, they're typing. Third graders aren't coloring in answer bubbles, they're dragging and dropping answers into cells. It's not what we were taught. It's not how we were taught. We as teachers have to reteach ourselves how to teach these kids, so how can we expect our parents to know what to do? They don't. But with Side by Side, we can do better together.

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You can further our mission by volunteering or donating! See our website, sidebysidelaurel.org.