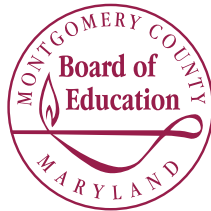


BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL AWARDS  
FOR

**Distinguished Service  
to Public Education**

in Montgomery County



*May 9, 2023*  
*Program 6:00 p.m.*



## PROGRAM

### *Welcome*

Ms. Karla Silvestre  
President, Board of Education

### *Program*

Members of the Board of Education

### *Closing Remarks*

Mrs. Shebra Evans  
Vice President, Board of Education

## PURPOSE

The Montgomery County Board of Education established the Awards for Distinguished Service to Public Education in 1997 to recognize and show appreciation to individuals, groups, and organizations that have made exemplary contributions to public education in Montgomery County. This program is a celebration of all the award recipients who have dedicated their time and effort on behalf of public education and the children of Montgomery County.



## 2023 HONOREES

### **Community Individuals**

Jewru Bandeh  
Ricardo Loaiza

### **Community Groups**

EBlack Ministers Conference of Montgomery County Maryland  
CTE Healthcare Professions PAC and Sara Walker President  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
Luis Cardona and Street Outreach Network (SON)  
Huayuan Chinese Academy

### **Business**

CAVA

### **Montgomery County Public Schools Staff**

Aranda Brown  
Cheryl Sellitti  
Farzaneh Nabavian  
Marianne Hamerski  
Sara Lucas-Dreiss  
Sofia Vega-Ormeno  
Steven Lightman

### **School Service Volunteer**

Hannah Lucas-Dreiss

### **Individual Pioneer**

John J. McCarthy



### *Jewru Bandeh*

Jewru Bandeh, regional director of the East County Regional Services Center, is known as the “mayor of East County.” He is an ambassador to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) by providing a key connection between the East County community and the school system. He rallies members of the community from across the county to support all of our learners and is masterful at using communications systems to share information about the activities of both the local schools and in systemwide efforts. In particular, these networks help the school system reach traditionally “hard to reach” immigrant populations – especially Black and Brown immigrant communities.

Jewru Bandeh has assisted the school system to conduct dialogues with community leaders in trusted spaces. These leaders help inform, educate, and engage the community. Last year, he paved the way for MCPS leaders to attend a prayer service on Eid at the Muslim Community Center. Half of the Muslim communities in Montgomery County pray in East County on Fridays. Through Jewru’s work, the large Muslim community in the county now feels more connected with the school system and helped to promote the Superintendent’s “All Together Now” event at Paint Branch High School. He connects families with services that are key to students’ ability to learn. A partnership with the Kingdom Cares network, which provides meals for families experiencing food insecurity, links students to East County food hubs. Thousands of families have been able to eat at night thanks to the partnership that Jewru Bandeh cultivated with nonprofit food providers.

Jewru Bandeh’s work has gone a long way toward helping the school system rebuild trust with the Burtonsville community. He has participated in organizing meetings where community members to discuss the need for a new building.

Jewru Bandeh has also provided key support for safety and security efforts— helping the school system develop the fall athletic safety plan to keep students, athletes, and coaches safe; working with families to help them understand why certain bus routes were not on time; and collaborating with school system officials and the police to understand dynamics threatening school safety and security in the community.

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## *Ricardo Loaiza*

Ricardo Loaiza, founder and executive director of the After School Dance Fund, Inc., is an individual and a visionary team builder—in Montgomery County. He enriches the lives of thousands of MCPS students and their families through Latin Dance programs in Montgomery County high schools and the Annual MCPS Latin Dance Competition at Strathmore.

Since 2010, Ricardo Loaiza's after-school Latin Dance clubs and classes enable students to learn Latin dance and culture, embrace teamwork and self-development, and adopt healthy lifestyles, while encouraging students to maintain a high level of academic achievement.

Ricardo Loaiza, a champion Latin Dance competitor himself, has successfully solicited significant financial and in-kind contributions from public and private sponsors to support these Latin Dance clubs and the annual MCPS Latin Dance Competition at Strathmore.

The After School Dance Fund's (ASDF) mission is to provide artistic, technical, and financial support for the establishment and maintenance of after-school Latin dance clubs to strengthen the social-emotional development of youth by promoting health, exercise, and cultural unity through Latin dance education. The program helps to support a consistent and strong culturally proficient performing arts program for students, which are safe, equitable, and inclusive spaces. Students get to participate in a positive group activity with peers and discover the importance of working together toward a common goal as well as leading a healthy and fun lifestyle. The participants learn the steps and the cultural background of the four most popular Latin dances—Salsa, Merengue, Bachata, Cha Cha—and get to showcase them through choreographed performances at the annual MCPS Latin Dance Competition, held at the Music Center at Strathmore.

ASDF's annual MCPS Latin Dance Competition has become Montgomery County's signature annual event for the Latino community. This program has increased cultural awareness and school pride in MCPS. Students represent their school while participating in a safe, equitable and inclusive school activity with peers free of bullying. County council members, school principals, and Board of Education members get to actively participate and meet the 250+ student competitors, the community, and parents of the competitors.

Ricardo Loaiza and the After School Dance Fund, Inc. have provided a unique and exceptional forum for MCPS students to showcase their talents as Latin dancers. Not only do the programs bring together, in common purpose, students in each of the participating high schools to learn the dances and to perfect their art, it brings together other students, and their teachers, instructors, and principals. The annual competition is regularly supported by nearly 1500 audience members (always a full house!).



### *Black Ministers Conference of Montgomery County Maryland*

We often say that it takes a village to raise our children. The Black Ministers Conference of Montgomery County, Maryland are the leaders of the village. They provide Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) students with the academic, social-emotional, mental health, nutritional, and material supports that are necessary for learning at the highest levels.

The Black Ministers' Conference "is an alliance of predominantly Black churches in Montgomery County, Maryland, that have joined together to promote the causes of the Black community," including economic prosperity, equal education opportunity, racial justice and equality, equal access to quality health care—while fighting against "threats to black people and the black community," including COVID-19 and other health-care issues, racial prejudice, hatred, bigotry, discrimination and injustice, and poverty for Black people.

Fighting these issues is critically important for learning at the highest of levels, and MCPS is fortunate to have the Black Ministers' Conference championing those causes.

The Black Ministers' Conference member churches provide an invaluable source of community, pride, and joy for the Black community of Montgomery County. The churches promote spiritual uplift, social development, dedication to educational advancement, and economic mobility. In addition to leading their churches, the Conference serves as a leading advocate for MCPS, through events such as the Back to School Clap-in for Redland Middle School, prayer breakfast to show support for the school system and superintendent, fundraising to support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), testifying multiple times before the Board about the importance of fully funding the school system, advocating in front of the county executive and County Council to fully fund the budget.

The Black Ministers' Conference has worked hard to enrich the lives of the citizens of Montgomery County. They have partnered with the NAACP and various other organizations, attend countless meetings, and advocate on behalf of the underserved. They have hosted backpack drives, served as testing sites during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, served as food distribution sites, and clothing closets—raising thousands of dollars and clothing for hundreds of children.

The Conference has helped rebuild trust between the school system and the community in the aftermath of the pandemic, as the school system seeks to

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improve mathematics and literacy, re-engage students in learning, and lead from an antiracist stance. The Conference will serve as valued partners to call on the County Council to fully fund the school system's budget, reminding elected officials that they have an obligation to the students of this county.

## ***CTE Healthcare Professions PAC and President Sarah Walker and Healthcare Professions-PAC***

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Healthcare Professions Program Advisory Committee (PAC) has served Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) students and staff for many years. They are a small, but mighty group of committed industry leaders and postsecondary partners who volunteer their time, talent, and resources, which enable the success of our programs and students. The passionate members of the Healthcare PAC who contributed to these successes are Mark Asch, Domonique Banks, Lisa Bouknight, Lisa Burrell, Tina DiFranco, Levietta DuBerry, Laura El Shafei, Jana Goodwin, Ann Hoffman, Richard Martinez, Marty McGeein, Bonnie Neibauer, Brenda Rice, Melissa Sprague –convenors, Sarah Walker, president, and Alan S. Weisman.

Sarah Walker led the PAC in providing more than 754 students with work-based learning experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These opportunities not only support CTE program completion but provide invaluable hands-on experiences to MCPS students in a high demand, high wage, and high-skilled career field. The Healthcare PAC's commitment to MCPS students extends beyond the classroom. They provide access to field trips and experts in the field to increase the exposure of various jobs and individuals within the field. The Healthcare PAC members have demonstrated a heart to serve not only MCPS students, but the staff as well. They meet with MCPS CTE instructors annually to hear their needs and discuss ways to support their individual efforts.

The Healthcare PAC has done a great deal to support CTE programs of study, including Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA), Physical Rehabilitation, Pharmacy Technician, Healthcare Dual Enrollment, and Allied Health. During the past three years, they have established internships; supported public relations; provided input on grant funding; provided guidance and support on implementing best practice and ensuring safety adherence; and provided personal protective equipment (PPE) for students.

As the leader of the Healthcare PAC and the Montgomery College co-convenors, Sarah Walker and Melissa Sprague have ensured the voice of the group is heard and represented in the Montgomery County Collaboration

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Board and at the table with MCPS and Montgomery College leaders, whenever needed.

During the first wave of the pandemic, an increasing number of internship sites/sponsors notified MCPS internship coordinators that they would not be able to host interns. Sarah Walker jumped in to provide support. She communicated with the internship coordinators to take on an additional 120 students from across the county. She facilitated training of 30 o CCMA students to administer COVID vaccinations, as they worked alongside Holy Cross health volunteers and employees. When clinical placements fell through in spring 2022, she again assisted MCPS CNA clinical instructors at Watkins Mill, Kennedy, and Edison High Schools by offering clinical hours to 131 students in hospital. The students completed their 40-hour requirements and gained valuable observation experiences around the hospital.

The Healthcare PAC members' service and work has impacted and benefited students and staff within Montgomery County in both tangible and intangible ways. Through their industry perspective, leadership skills, desire to support all students, and passion to serve, they have helped more than 6,000 students. They provide guidance to central service staff every year regarding programmatic implementation and industry credentials, and provide opportunities for students to complete their clinicals and internships to meet the requirements to earn their industry credentials. PAC members have participated in special events at schools, joining the classrooms as guest speakers, and providing referrals/recommendations that helped dozens of students advance to postsecondary education and employment opportunities. They have increased the awareness of students, staff, and stakeholders about the healthcare professions and postsecondary options; informed and supported staff about industry trends and validating the importance of their work, built the knowledge and confidence of students who dare to dream of being caregivers, and increased the pathways that allow for their dreams to come true.

## *Jewish Community Relations Council*

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) works for social justice and advocates for Jewish institutions and values. They have been integral to efforts to stem a rising tide of antisemitism in the Montgomery County, educate the community about key issues of concern, and assist with community relations whenever antisemitic incidents occur.

JCRC leadership have worked with MCPS leadership to respond to antisemitic incidents at our MCPS schools over the past few months. They have also arranged town meetings to initiate deeper conversation between MCPS's Jewish

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students, parents, and families and to ensure that Jewish voices are heard, and their issues understood and reported, while helping to tamp down hate bias.

Their efforts have increased students' ability to speak up and report incidents of hate-bias, and to ensure that incidents are reported and properly handled. This has raised student comfort levels to report without fear, and has given parents a level of comfort that their children will be supported in these efforts in MCPS classrooms.

### *Luis Cardona and Street Outreach Network (SON)*

Luis Cardona, administrator of Health and Human Services (HHS) Positive Youth Development, He oversees the Street Outreach Network, whose mission is to prevent, neutralize, and control hostile behavior in high-risk youth and gangs through the development of positive relationships between youth/community stakeholders, outreach workers, and families. SON is always reachable and willing to help MCPS students.

Luis Cardona and SON are highly respected by MCPS and other agencies for their daily work with MCPS students/families and staff in the schools and also in the community to help students who face hostile environments in and out of school.

This past summer, the group led several evening meetings with MCPS staff, HHS staff, religious stakeholders, parents, and Montgomery County Police Department officers who worked together to stop the gun violence in Germantown. Luis Cardona and SON then led a Peace Walk of more than 300 community members, parents, and students.

Luis Cardona and SON are tireless workers who believe in every child should have the right to learn and remain safe in school and in the community. Communities are safer places for the children, due to the work of Luis Cardona and his staff, who are committed to helping/serving students and children.

SON also gives students, who would otherwise not be able to attend or afford, the chance to attend professional sporting events, summer camps, and a variety of events year-round. Luis Cardona is a former gang member who was going down a wrong path as a kid He turned his life around and truly understands what at-risk kids are going through. SON has helped keep MCPS schools and communities safer with their dedication in serving Montgomery County communities and schools.

### *CAVA*

Since the creation of the Foundation for Hospitality and Restaurant Management (FHRM) with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), in 2019, the CAVA leadership has graciously donated their time, skill sets, kitchens, and staff to help MCPS students gain authentic experiences within the hospitality and restaurant industries. The founders of CAVA, Ike Grigoropoulos, Chef Dmitri Moshovitis, and Ted Xenohristos, faithfully live and practice a Mediterranean lifestyle, where the importance of good food and gracious hospitality is ingrained in their words and their actions.

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As the children of first-generation immigrants, Ike, Dmitri, and Ted have a deep understanding of the struggles within the service industry. After watching their parents and recognizing that the service industry requires long hours and are usually “jobs” people take, they wanted to create an atmosphere of generosity to both their guests and their employees.

The CAVA founders recognized that the 2020 pandemic had a severe impact on educational training and high school seniors were not being prepared for their post-graduation endeavors. In order to ensure that graduating seniors had authentic industry related experiences, CAVA opened up an apprenticeship with their executive chef. They invited students into their own establishment, teach, train, and allow them to execute tasks attests to their desire to support a strong pipeline of prepared and knowledgeable students seeking a career in the hospitality and restaurant industries.

In addition to providing direct student support, CAVA's leadership shared their inspirational story on MCPS TV about how their passion for cooking and family helped them to create unique restaurants to allow others to experience the Mediterranean culture that shaped their lives and dreams. Their hope is that their CAVA story would inspire the next generation of students.

In February, FHRM sponsored a “pop-up cafe” experience at the Falls Road Golf Course Bistro. CAVA was one of the biggest champions for the event providing chefs, training, and their own time to help students create a menu, plan for the evening, cook a four-course meal, present it, and serve members of the community.

In order to prepare for the pop-up bistro, Ted Xenohristos met with MCPS staff and teachers to engage and encourage them to participate in this opportunity. Ted went to Sherwood HS to help with the planning and teaching students how to execute the event in a professional kitchen. In one of his MCPS seminars, Ted said, “At CAVA, caring, hospitality, warmth and generosity are our pillars. Giving students the skills to succeed in the restaurant industry and nurture their passion is key to our vision. Mediterranean families have been perfecting healthy eating for 4,000 years. We hope to inspire a new generation to continue this great legacy.”

Chef Dmitri Moshovitis worked behind the scenes to plan with teachers and provide on-site training to students at Sherwood HS. He brought additional chefs from his restaurants to provide more individualized support for students. After training in the classroom, Sherwood students were prepared to participate in the event at the Falls Road Golf Course. Through their efforts and monetary support, the Falls Road Bistro was a great success, surpassing the fund-raising expectations from the FHRM Board of Directors.

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Regardless of the circumstances, CAVA leaders are always finding ways to give back to the students and help to ensure authentic culinary and hospitality experiences. Whether CAVA members are going to MCPS locations, inviting students and teachers into their kitchens, or bringing their teams to off-site locations to support students, CAVA is the epitome of an ideal partnership between MCPS and the local business community.

Ted Xenohristos and the CAVA partnership allow students to make direct and lasting connections within the hospitality and restaurant industry. Through mentorship, authentic experiences, apprenticeships, and other opportunities, they have helped students make industry connections that may lead to employment. Through their words, actions, and commitment, CAVA is leading by example and very deserving of this Distinguished Service Award.

### *Aranda Brown*

Aranda Brown, an English Speakers of Other Languages teacher at Gaithersburg High School has been the sponsor of the Gaithersburg High Schools Latin dance team for more than 11 years. She has been a second mother to many students who crossed paths with her. She supports and engages the power of culture and unity as well as community with the different hats she wears.

Aranda Brown created a safe space for many students to walk throughout their years in high school. Many alumni return to support her and the new kids that join the club and team. She supports and encourages and would always talk to someone about how they feel and encourage them when they are down. She has definitely changed people's lives and perspectives and has made a big impact on everyone with her kindness and caring nature.

Aranda Brown has supported and pushed the Latin dance team because she cares about them and they have been able to succeed and reach their goal with her help.

### *Cheryl Sellitti*

Cheryl Sellitti has dedicated 33 years of service to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). She began her career with the Creative Initiatives in Teacher Education (CITE) pilot program in 1998. She has worked at Flower Hill Elementary, Lakewood Elementary, and then Cold Spring Elementary, where she has remained for 31 years.

Cheryl Sellitti has used her life experience, child development expertise, and research on the highly gifted child to deliver the very best of herself to her students. Those that are close to her know the enormous amount of time and the endless hours spent meticulously planning, researching, and honing her skills. Even now, at 70 years young, she remains extremely dedicated to providing students with rigorous and robust instruction to ensure they leave her care ready for the next step.

Cheryl Sellitti has served in many different capacities during her time at Cold Spring, including the Center for Enrichment literacy teacher, grade-level team leader, and patrol sponsor. She has mentored three high school interns. She has led the school social committee for 15 years, supporting the creation of a strong school culture. She has implemented and run the Spelling and Geography Bee since 1995, with many students from Cold Spring moving on to the National



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Spelling Bee. Cheryl Sellitti has also further enrich the learning of MCPS students by coordinating annual field trips to Williamsburg, Philadelphia, Monticello, and Mt. Vernon.

Each year, Cheryl Sellitti's Gemstone Project Center for Enrichment students perform one of Shakespeare's plays for the community. This experience enables students to showcase their talents—from costume design and set making to directing and acting.

Cheryl Sellitti has a lasting impact and legacy on her students, as seen by the sheer number of students that have stayed in touch with her or have come back to visit her, even as adults. They often come back to share stories of success and how Cheryl Sellitti has impacted their lives. In 2017, she was selected for the University of Chicago's Outstanding Educator Award. One of her former students nominated her as an educator who has influenced them, challenged them, or helped them along the path toward intellectual growth. Most recently, one of her former students who studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, named her, "As a teacher who has been especially influential in their development." It is clear that Cheryl Sellitti is a true change agent in the Montgomery County public school system.

## *Farzaneh Nabavian*

Farzaneh Nabavian has over 15 years with MCPS and has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to supporting students and families at Montgomery Blair High School. She goes above and beyond to ensure that every child has access to the resources and support they need to succeed. In particular, Farzaneh Nabavian's development of the Kindness Corner, a free store for students to get coats, clothes, shoes, school supplies, toiletries, snacks, and other necessities. The Kindness Corner has become an invaluable resource for families in need, providing much-needed support and assistance to students who might otherwise struggle to access basic essentials. Farzaneh Nabavian is currently working with Shawn Yancy, NBC4 news reporter and the Founder of the Girls Night Out organization to host a free Prom dress drive for Blair students.

In addition to her outstanding leadership with the Kindness Corner, Farzaneh Nabavian has also organized lunchtime mindfulness rock painting sessions, providing students with a creative outlet to express themselves and promoting mental health and well-being. Farzaneh Nabavian has also gone out of her way to pick up parents who may have difficulty attending school meetings, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard.

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Perhaps most impressively, Farzaneh Nabavian has provided meals to sick students and families, demonstrating a deep sense of compassion and generosity that has touched the lives of countless families in our community. Farzaneh Nabavian has been an outstanding advocate for students and families at Montgomery Blair High School, embodying the spirit of community and kindness that we strive to foster in our school.

Farzaneh Nabavian's work has benefitted many students and families at Montgomery Blair High School.

## *Marianne Hamerski*

Marianne Hamerski has worked for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for 27 years. She has shown exemplary professionalism and grit and has an ongoing positive impact on thousands of students, staff, and community members. She is a highly committed, hard-working, highly knowledgeable, personable, skilled, tried and true leader among her peers. Her commitment and passion to work over the years have reached a plethora of schools, offices, and communities across MCPS. Marianne is often called upon for information, advice, and support because of her experience, willingness, and eagerness to help. She exhibits both a personal and professional touch to her position. She is efficient, detail-oriented, and extremely skilled in all that she does. She has always treated everyone she encounters with kindness and respect.

Marianne's impact on MCPS students, staff, and the community at large spans many roles throughout MCPS. She has been the 'glue' holding together key aspects of the school system during a periods of significant transition. Over the past 10 years, she has worked with two deputy superintendents, two associate superintendents, and one chief of staff. In every role, she has been viewed as the "go-to" person, due to her commitment to students, her depth of knowledge and experience, her positive mindset, and her willingness to help no matter the circumstances. Her breadth of experience is unparalleled in the school system.

For many years, Marianne played a key role behind the scenes in supporting all high schools with preparations for graduation ceremonies, from preparing the annual MCPS guide to coordinating schedules to finding answers to all of the most difficult questions.

During COVID-19, staff was required to work from home. This was not an easy transition, and many of her constituents turned to Marianne for guidance and support, and leadership turned to her as a resource and for assistance in helping to ensure things ran smoothly and on time. Marianne was skilled at distilling

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priorities and managing the flip from running the 14th largest school system to a virtual workspace. She made the necessary changes and adjustments needed to be responsive to our schools and other central offices. Marianne supported the discussions and management to identify which schools and communities needed resources and a different approach to offering resources as we responded to the community during the pandemic.

Marianne deals masterfully with a variety of constituents and diligently responds to every inquiry, including county government officials, parents, community members, and other stakeholders. She always makes the stakeholders feel respected and valued, even if they may disagree with her response.

Over the years, the Central Office has gone through many reorganizations. With that, Marianne's position changed. Not only has she remained personable, positive, and professional in the face of often deep changes through these reorganizations, she has supported other staff members' offices in transition. She has demonstrated that she is highly adaptable to changing situations, and the versatility of her skills ensures that with all that she does, it is done exceptionally.

When we think about the impact on services, the first thing that comes to mind is schools. Marianne's last three roles in MCPS, come down to school support. With her work in the Office of School Support or Deputy Superintendent, Marianne was the first line of communication for 211 schools. This could be a school emergency, community concern, or support for a principal. All these stakeholders know Marianne Hamerski is the person who can make those connections in a large school system.

## *Sara Lucas-Dreiss*

Sara Lucas-Dreiss is one of those people that knows educators and families across the county and is always looking for ways to help others. She is an adapted art teacher and special educator at Longview School, having previously worked in LFI, Autism, and as a reading specialist within MCPS. Sara Lucas-Dreiss goes above and beyond the requirements of her position. She partners with local disability groups to bring fun and engaging activities and events to MCPS students and Longview School. She is also the sponsor on the Special Needs Alliance Group, which supports students with disabilities across Montgomery County. She is the winner of the Maryland Art Educators Association Advocate (MAEA) for Inclusivity Through Art Teacher of the Year for MCPS, 2022 and MAEA Career Teacher of the Year for MCPS, 2021. Every facet of her professional and personal life is dedicated to aiding the most vulnerable population of students, and their families, that MCPS serves.

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For the past five years, she has served as the MCPS trainer for other art teachers who have ALO students and does yearly systemwide training. She also troubleshoots the concerns of other art educators to make sure best practices are being implemented with special needs students.

During COVID her art lessons and video recordings were shared widely across the county. Sara also created daily content of read-alouds, and held weekly virtual adapted yoga and meditation classes that were attended by students, staff, central office personnel, and community members. She has helmed food and clothing collections and collected dozens of toys that were switch adapted during Longview's Adapt-A-Thon. She partnered with Strathmore in 2019 to have students' art represented in a public forum, and has continued that partnership.

Mrs. Lucas-Dreiss has created and supported opportunities for volunteers and peers to develop skills, emotional intelligence, and a greater understanding of disabilities. Her work at Longview and across the county has served as a model and beacon to others needing assistance. As a special educator, she facilitates multiple meetings each week in which her niche knowledge informs the understanding and education planning for students. Her outside-of-the-classroom dedication to her students, Longview, and the community is evident in her constant and unending volunteerism, creation and facilitation of support opportunities, and her sponsorship of SNAG.

## *Sofia Vega-Ormeno*

As one of the few Afro-Latina secondary administrators in MCPS, Sofia Vega-Ormeno offers our students representation, strength, and hope, especially those belonging to our Black, Brown, and English learner communities. In October of 2022, she spearheaded the county's inaugural Latina Legacy Conference and is currently working with Montgomery College to bring to life the second annual Latina Legacy Conference to take place in October 2023.

The purpose of the event was to build trust, bridges, and roads for MCPS's Latina scholars, lift them up, and inspire and empower them. Through workshops, a career panel, discussion groups, and more, Latina leaders within the community mentored students and provided resources tailored to students' needs that informed them of various opportunities within and outside of MCPS to help prepare them for their future. More than 300 students of every MCPS high school and approximately 100 Latina leaders of all levels of MCPS attended.

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As the Magruder High School (Magruder) assistant principal, Sofia Vega-Ormeno has recruited various out-of-school programs to partner with Magruder and offer social-emotional well-being support and resources to Emerging Multilingual Learners (EMLs) and the student body at large.

The impact Sofia Vega-Ormeno has made on students, the school system, and the community at large is unmeasurable, yet constant. To the school system Sofia Vega-Ormeno offers guidance and education on antiracist policies and the needs of our high-impact schools and for our community at large, she has offered multiple safe spaces for scholars to be mentored by our leaders in order to recruit and build from within.

## *Steven Lightman*

Steven Lightman has been an MCPS teacher for 11 years, and has been dedicated to his students, staff, and the school community from the start. In his fourth year at Greencastle, he won the prestigious Simon A. McNeely Award for outstanding teaching and a dedication to the school community. Last year he led the Let Me Run group, a club that mentors 3rd-5th grade boys, while teaching them about commitment.

Over the past two years, Steven Lightman has been a member of the CARES group that works with low-level math students before school. After school, he is the physical education representative on the Council for Teaching and Learning. This allows him to make sure that his peers are represented among other classroom teachers. He is the commissioner of the MCPS Teacher Softball and Kickball Leagues. These leagues comprise more than 20 schools that network and play on Fridays in the spring and fall.

Steven Lightman has sponsored safety patrols at Bayard Rustin Elementary School since 2018. He sets up meetings with the Montgomery County Police Department and creates monthly meetings to teach and reward Patrol students. He has worked with Nourish Now over the past three years. During COVID, he organized food drives to help students receive boxes of food. This past fall, Mr. Lightman helped organize the Thanksgiving Family Meal at Bayard Rustin, with the help of Nourish Now, which donated fruits and vegetables as well as turkey. He also worked with Nourish Now during Fitness Night to ensure students had access to healthy snacks.

Steven Lightman has had a wonderful relationship with Leveling the Playing Field (LPF) since 2013 when they were founded. Alongside CEO Max Levitt, he has consistently received donations and helped other schools receive donations of all sorts of Physical Education equipment.

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Steven Lightman comes early to tutor, does a great job with his students, goes above and beyond with his safety patrols, then looks for ways to think outside the box after school. Steven Lightman has created different lessons for his students, ranging from being the first school in MCPS to partner with the First Tee so students can learn golf, to the Washington Capitals Hockey School, so students can learn to play hockey. He has students create their own gymnastics routines and, instead of a line dance unit that many teachers do with their students, he worked with his administration to purchase yoga balls so students could learn and create cardio drumming routines.

Steven Lightman is one of the faces of Bayard Rustin. He loves his community, his students, and their families. He has seen the road they have to travel and he loves sharing that with his students. He knows the key to a strong school is a strong administration, which he always raves about, and a strong community, which is says has been given a great foundation by his administration and he is happy to be a part of. After 22 years, Steven Lightman still enjoys going to work every day.

## SCHOOL SERVICE VOLUNTEER

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### *Hannah Lucas-Dreiss*

Hannah Lucas-Dreiss has demonstrated a commitment and aptitude toward working with exceptional students within the county (especially at Longview), all of whom are complex communicators with severe and profound disabilities. As a volunteer at Longview, Hannah noticed the tremendous support needs that the school faced. She subsequently formed the Special Needs Alliance Group (SNAG). Hannah's calling to support our community is close to her heart. She has multiple siblings and other family members with lifelong profound disabilities. She has treated her position with the reverence it requires, always leading others to act respectfully and providing students with autonomy.

Hannah has proven to be an inquisitive and innovative person, researching current best practices for students with complex needs and implementing them within the comprehensive educational supports and experiences she creates. She has formed collaborative relationships with the school's administration and faculty as well as with the families and students, other community-based disabilities organizations, and local businesses.

As a disabled Latina, Hannah has chosen to pursue a career in which she can better serve those populations. She will attend the University of Pittsburg next fall, where she intends to double major in Neuroscience and Rehabilitative Science, with a focus on assistive technology. She will be on a pre-med track and will minor in Hispanic studies.

Hannah began her efforts at Clemente Middle School as a sixth grader volunteering with LFI students. She would come in early and stay late aiding teachers and paras to make adapted materials. She would support students during school functions, such as dances, assemblies, and performances. That energy evolved into SNAG and followed her to high school. SNAG began helping students at Longview, initially just Hannah and a few friends making copies and adhering Velcro to picture symbols, but it has grown into an organization that will be of sustainable support to Longview after she graduates. SNAG currently has partnerships with foundations and businesses, regularly draws volunteers from across two districts and countless schools, as well as secured the donation of innumerable materials for Longview students and families.

This year alone, Hannah has organized service efforts for every month of the school year to raise money and collect toys and clothes for Longview and make adapted materials to support communication and instruction, including MCPS's first Adapt-A-Thon, in which MCPS and non-MCPS students came together to switch adapt toys and electronics to meet the unique communication needs of Longview students. In collaboration with Project Lead the Way at Poolesville

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HS, she is currently heading an engineering initiative to create adapted gardening beds and equipment that are accessible for individuals with physical disabilities. Hannah has planned ANOTHER Adapt-A-Thon for later in the year, as well as additional service activities.

During the covid pandemic closure, she produced daily content for Longview—video weather reports, read-a-louds, etc.—all for the sake of creating more robust and accessible instructional materials at a time when even teachers struggled to create engaging content. Her content was shared across special schools and discrete programs. Hannah created a video library of grade-level texts being read by non-disabled peers as well as video pen pals, and countless other technology-based supports and resources.

Hannah has supported the learning and engagement of MCPS students through myriad projects and undertakings. Through SNAG, she has brought together students from across the county to work toward common support goals. She has mobilized her school's National Honor Society, Hispanic Heritage Alliance, and Project Lead the Way peers to participate in her efforts. During the covid pandemic she enlisted the aid of other teens to give them an avenue in which their own mental health would be supported.

Hannah is a friendly face for families, students, and peers and raises awareness of the needs and challenges the disabled community face, especially those facing racial, language, or financial barriers.



## INDIVIDUAL PIONEER

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### *John J. McCarthy*

State's Attorney for Montgomery County John McCarthy is a shining example of a devoted public servant and advocate for the people of Montgomery County, and a stellar partner of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Foremost in his mind, as he leads the State's Attorney's Office, is the importance of education. He is keenly aware that education and engagement can lead to safer neighborhoods. His programs to promote diversion and prevention are two outstanding examples of his dedication to working with communities.

All these activities are conducted with the goal of helping to reach what John McCarthy calls his "favorite number—zero": He wants zero prosecutions, zero overdoses, and zero gang-related offenses. His office handles about 25,000 cases a year, including ones related to MCPS's activities. Mr. McCarthy seeks to handle MCPS cases, especially those involving young people, through nontraditional methods, including mental health court, drug court, and diversion programs.

Under Mr. McCarthy's leadership, the State's Attorney's Office has extended its relationship with MCPS in new directions encompassing areas beyond its traditional responsibilities. The State's Attorney's Office has developed and runs a truancy prevention program in MCPS to mentor students who are chronically absent; provides presentations on cyberbullying prevention and responsible use of social media; gun violence and the use of ghost guns; and an annual countywide workshop program, including presentations on Speak Up and Save A Life, regarding the dangers of opioid use in our schools.

The State's Attorney's Office also has participated in the Truancy Review Board, the Kennedy Cluster Project, the Watkins Mill Cluster Project, and the Paint Branch/Springbrook Cluster project for years.

John McCarthy is a key ally in building the Montgomery Goes Purple Alliance, which has helped the county lead in the nationwide fight against fentanyl, particularly fentanyl in youth.

First, more than 2,000 MCPS students have participated in the truancy prevention program in 18 schools since Mr. McCarthy launched it with then-Superintendent Jerry Weast. The program is now a national model on how to work with community allies to understand why students are not attending school, partner to encourage students to attend more frequently, and reengage them in the learning process. This program is particularly important as MCPS seeks to confront attendance challenges in the aftermath of the pandemic and reengage students in the learning experience.

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Another impactful program was the Teen Court program, which began in around 2006, but ceased operating approximately three years ago. The Teen Court served as a diversion program in which first-time juvenile offenders presented their case in front of a peer jury.

For more than 40 years, John McCarthy has continued to build new and pioneering programs, play an active role in the community, and respond to the county's evolving needs. In particular, he has a unique recognition of the role of education and innovative programs in increasing public safety and bringing about a fair and just criminal justice system. Mr. McCarthy has overcome significant personal challenges—including fighting a bout with neck cancer in 2021—demonstrating resiliency, courage, and determination in his continued fight for the people of Montgomery County.

John McCarthy's philosophy to educate, prevent, and offer diversion services whenever possible has led to more secure environments for schools and the community, and helped provide brighter futures for thousands of students.

MCPS and the broader Montgomery County community are extremely fortunate to have benefited from John McCarthy's profound and wide-ranging contributions.

*The descriptions noted for each awardee were taken from the nomination submissions.*

# PREVIOUS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD WINNERS

## 2022

Clarence McNeary  
Catherine Navarrete  
Alexandra Robbins  
Foundation for Hospitality and Restaurant  
Management  
Paisano's – Rockville  
Sharon Asro Faber  
Cara Grant  
Marney Jacobs  
Matthew Kamins  
Kristin Secan  
Daniel Evans

## 2021

Byron Diaz  
Susan Douglass  
Kate Haydon  
Starbucks Coffee Company – Maryland  
Region  
Jessica Berrellez  
Jeffrey Donald  
Daryl Howard  
Jennifer Lowndes  
Robin McCue  
Kenneth Nwocha  
Morris Hudson  
Jack R. Smith

## 2020

Craig Koralek  
Zoe Tishaev  
Community Group  
Building Foundations for the Future  
Difference Makers  
Pro Power Foundation  
Volunteers in Science and Technology  
DARCARS Automotive Group  
Educational Systems Federal Credit Union  
Elite Soccer Youth Development Academy,  
Inc.  
Rina Chaves  
Lana Haddad  
Margaret “Peggy” Mannhaupt-Khoury  
Richard “Dick” Lipsky, Ed.D.  
VaRysa Williams  
Anne Baldini  
Sheila Chandler  
Ruthanne Stoltzfus  
Nancy Navarro  
Elizabeth Spencer

## 2019

Romina Byrd  
Byron Johns  
Priscilla Fritter Peterson  
Craig Rice  
Kimberly Szummers  
Partnership for Excellence  
Carol Trawick  
Chaunetta Anderson  
Sarah Fillman  
Taylor Garber  
Randi Gritz  
Elizabeth Nardin  
Sarah Delphus Neubold  
Sean Pang  
Lola Rogers  
Laurie Tarner  
Osar Alvarenga and Sarahi Segura  
Joan Paull  
Marshal Greenblatt  
Mike Michaelson

## 2018

Nancy Floreen  
James Garrant  
Daniel Riddle  
Milagro Flores—Gaithersburg Mothers'  
Club  
Kristen Eccleston  
Sulma Flores  
Genevieve Floyd  
Matthew Johnson  
Kevin Shindel  
Barbara Woodward  
Mary Gross  
Karen Ward  
Michael A. Durso  
Odessa Shannon

## 2017

The Highwood Theatre  
Code.org  
Richard Reynolds  
Kids in Need Distributors  
Steven Boden  
Michael Shpur  
Carol Petersen  
Nicholas Saadipour  
Daman Harris  
Lisa Büttner  
Gary Temple  
Patricia B. O'Neill

## 2016

Dottie Fitzgerald  
Joe Hooks  
Melissa McKenna  
Montgomery County Business Roundtable  
for Education  
Bruce Crispell  
Geoffrey Edgar  
Patricia Janus  
Fernando Moreno  
Jeanette Simmons  
Paul Geller  
Anthony Giles  
Larry A. Bowers

## 2015

Joe Kessler  
Robert Thomas  
Arthur Williams  
Conflict Resolution Center of  
Montgomery County  
Liberty's Promise  
Montgomery County Alliance of  
Black School Educators  
Passion for Learning, Inc. (Cynthia  
Rubenstein)  
Strathmore Education (Lauren Campbell)  
Imagination Stage (Bonnie Fogel)  
Stephanie Brant  
Patricia Hurd  
Mary Scott  
James Lipton  
Stuart and Marilyn Morrison  
Sherry Reba  
Emily Talaga  
Isiah Leggett

## 2014

Susan Gardiner  
Steve Peterson  
Neal Wilson  
Commonweal Foundation  
Down Syndrome Network of  
Montgomery County, Inc.  
Carl Stein-RE/MAX Pro's Realty Company  
Washington Area New Auto  
Dealers Association  
Leroy Hyson  
Octavia Jeffries  
Michelle Newton  
Charles Overly  
Kris Secan  
Mario Parcan  
Hank Heller

## 2012–2013

Richard Edelman  
Larry Edmonds  
Antonio Hernandez-Cardoso  
Katya Partan  
Savers, Inc.  
Leo Schwartz  
Michael Calvert  
James A. Distler  
Ronald Frezzo  
Kevin Ambrose  
Victoria Couch  
Kelly and Thomas Giblin  
Irene Coleman and Siham Eldadah

## 2011

Laurie and Steve Augustino  
Pamela H. Moomau  
Kaiser Permanente  
Shulman, Rogers, Gandal, Pordy &  
Ecker, P.A.  
Whole Foods Market–Kentlands  
Marla Caplon  
Eric A. Davis  
Denise Stultz  
Tuyet B. Tran  
Don Hauprich  
Isabella Mia Lee  
James McMann  
Bruce Adams  
Bonnie Cullison  
Stewart Edelstein

## 2010

Samantha Lint  
Kay Romero  
Monte Tarbox  
Montgomery County Students Information  
Technology Foundation, Inc.  
Potomac Valley Alumnae Chapter of Delta  
Sigma Theta Sorority  
Audubon Naturalist Society—GreenKids  
Michael Priddy/Intervise Consultants, Inc.  
Michael Campbell  
Erick Lang  
Joe Rubens, Jr.  
Building Services Team  
College Gardens Elementary School  
Pamela Slater, Vivian Nation, George  
Powell, Opral Samuels, Rico Wims, and  
Yu-Lan Yinlin

## 2009

Officer Marcus Dixon  
Emily McDonell  
Admissions and Enrollment Management at  
Montgomery College  
Junior Achievement of the National Capital  
Area Montgomery County District Office  
Montgomery County Students  
Construction Trades Foundation, Inc.  
Deloitte  
United Communications Group  
Karen Crawford  
Susan Freiman  
Daric Jackson  
Susan Marks  
Linda Wanner  
Bernard Warfield  
John Burley  
Mark Freedman  
John William Smith

## 2008

Ana Brito  
Thomas M. DeGonia, II  
Patti Twigg  
The Christ Episcopal Church of Kensington  
College Tracks  
PALA: Padres y Alumnos Latinos en  
Acción—  
(Latino Parents and Students in Action)  
Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.  
Montgomery County Teachers Federal  
Credit Union (MCTFCU)  
Giles R. Benson  
Andrea Bernal  
James M. Douglas  
Gail Fribush  
Karen C. Woodson  
Pat Adam  
Anjan Choudhury  
Joan Karasik  
George B. Thomas, Sr.

## 2007

Joan Donovan  
Evelyn Liu  
Karen Benn Marshall, Ph.D.  
Chinese American Parents and Students  
Association (CAPSA)  
IMPACT Silver Spring  
Project Change  
Jon Enten, Enten & Associates  
Riderwood Village Retirement Community  
Lockheed Martin Corporation  
Aggie Alvez  
Dianne Jones  
Elaine Petrulakis  
Michael A. Thomas  
Aashish Dewan  
Rebecca (Becky) Faherty  
Paul Rockwell  
Dr. Gabriel Jacobs

## 2006

Matt Boratenski and the American  
Film Institute (AFI)  
Choice Hotels International,  
Office of the General Counsel  
Julie Bennett  
Glenn Kikuchi  
Chinese Culture and Community Service  
Center, Inc.  
Montgomery County Police Community  
Outreach Section  
Project Reboot  
Douglas Duncan  
Robert Barnes  
MCPS Green Building Program  
Darryl Norwood  
Diana Sayago  
Bernice Albert  
Robert Paulsen

## 2005

Mark Drury and Shapiro & Duncan  
William Schlossenberg and The Gazette  
Art Billings  
Nguyen Minh Chau  
The African Immigrant and Refugee  
Foundation  
Conquista tus Sueños (Realize Your  
Dreams)  
Hospice Caring, Inc.  
William Porter  
Michael Subin  
Robert Barnes  
Nivea Berrios  
Virginia Bumblis  
Susan Bain  
David Lechner

## 2004

Gene Kijowski  
Melvyn Leshinsky  
Eileen Lavine  
Identity, Inc.  
Progress Club of Rockville  
Rotary Club of North Bethesda  
Ana Sol Gutierrez  
Teresa Wright  
Joseph J. Lavorgna  
Jerry M. Marco  
Joan Rackey

## 2003

AmeriDream, Inc.  
Lockheed Martin Corporation  
Dr. Yvette Butler  
Theodore W. Urban  
Linkages to Learning  
Margit Meissner  
Susan Barrett  
Dedra H. Greene  
James J. Laws

## 2002

Fitzgerald Auto Malls  
Startec Global Communications  
Esther P. Gelman  
John Lopes  
Ruby A. Rubens  
The City of Gaithersburg  
Interages  
Mental Health Association of  
Montgomery County  
Blair G. Ewing  
Joseph Howard  
Owen Nichols  
John F. Brooks, Jr.  
Carol Burke  
Richard Sprecher

## 2001

The Nellis Corporation  
Nextel Communications  
Dr. Alan Cheung  
Diane Cockrell  
Marina McKee  
Career Transition Program of St. Luke's  
House  
The Washington Opera  
Lillian B. Brown  
Robert Hines  
Larry A. Bowers

## 2000

Wanda Brown of PEPCO  
Elida Vargas-Carrasco  
James and Linda Cafritz  
Lois Stoner  
Michelle Turner  
Benjamin Banneker Honors Math  
and Science Society  
Hispanic Parents Committee at  
Albert Einstein High School  
Mary Ann Bowen  
Lawrence Shulman  
Richard Wilson  
Betty Collins  
Sandra Shmookler

## 1999

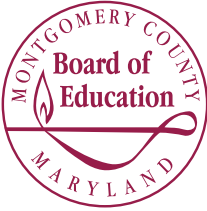
Pennie Abramson and Barry Scher of  
Giant Food  
GE Information Services  
Ron Leung  
Lois Robertson  
Montgomery County Branch of the  
NAACP Parents Council  
After School Activity Coordination  
Program (ASAC)  
Gene W. Coughlan  
John L. Gildner  
Ronald M. Feffer  
Kevin Keegan  
Madeline Griffin

## 1998

Douglas Schiffman  
Montgomery County Students Automotive  
Trades Foundation  
African American Festival of Academic  
Excellence  
Sharp Street Hosts an Academic Resource  
Program (SHARP)  
Hanley J. Norment  
Carol M. Hyatt  
Samira Hussein  
Phillip F. Gainous  
Dr. Dawn Thomas

## 1997

Marriott Suites of Bethesda  
General Electric Information Services and  
Elfun Society  
Howard Hughes Medical Institute  
I. Austin Heyman  
Hugh Packard  
George B. Thomas, Sr. Learning Academy  
American Coalition for Assistance and  
Mentoring Program (ACAMP)  
National Institutes of Health (NIH)  
Lucille Maurer  
Roscoe Nix  
Gerard F. Consuegra  
Amado "Sonny" Narvaez  
Juanita Sweadner



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*We inspire learning by providing the greatest public education to each and every student.*

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*Every student will have the academic, creative problem solving, and social emotional skills to be successful in college and career.*

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Respect  
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