Opening Doors to Possibility

A Conversation with County Executive Steuart Pittman

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“Trust comes easily. Learning follows.”

— County Executive Steuart Pittman

As STAIR celebrates its 20th anniversary, I have especially enjoyed recognizing and thanking the people and community partners who have helped make these two decades possible. We have much to celebrate, and we certainly have not done it alone.

With that in mind, I recently had the pleasure of visiting with Anne Arundel County Executive Steuart Pittman. I invited Teri Hussman, STAIR's Board Chair, and Jo ann Mattson, our Executive Director, to join me. We wanted to thank County Executive Pittman for his support and hear his thoughts on literacy, community partnerships, and the future of our young people.

Our conversation quickly became personal.

Reflecting on how reading and writing shaped his life, County Executive Pittman shared that being able to express himself on paper made an enormous difference in his career:

“Everything that I did in my career that I succeeded at was because of that.”

He spoke about the importance of helping children develop reading skills early, before difficulties begin to affect their confidence:

“Then those letters start to make sense, and everything else makes sense — and then you get your confidence.”

That is exactly what we hope to accomplish at STAIR, where caring volunteers work one-on-one with young readers. County Executive Pittman was especially complimentary of STAIR's 20-year history as a locally grown, volunteer-driven organization, calling it “really, really, really an amazing story.”

When we discussed the ongoing need for volunteers, he offered great advice: “The best people to sell the work are the people doing the work.” He encouraged volunteers to tell their stories and share what the experience means to them. We also explored ways to strengthen partnerships between nonprofits and county government.

During our visit, County Executive Pittman mentioned he might share STAIR's story in his weekly newsletter. True to his word, he featured STAIR in his October 9 letter, “Pride, GAN, MDOT, Fire, Roots, and Reading.” He reflected on his personal reading journey, recognized our volunteers, and wrote about the meaningful connection between children and the adults who help them learn:

“Trust comes easily. Learning follows.”

He also offered readers a wonderful invitation, saying that “STAIR can put you to work whenever you're ready.”

Before we concluded, I asked County Executive Pittman a question that matters a great deal to me. The question: “What gives you hope for our young people?”

He described students whose creativity, understanding of the world, and determination to make a difference had deeply impressed him. “There are some that are just so far beyond where I was,” he said, describing young people who understand the challenges around them and “are absolutely committed to making it better.”

He also recognized the value of STAIR's approach, observing that spending time with the same caring volunteer each week builds a child's confidence.

We ended our time together by thanking County Executive Pittman for sharing his story, supporting STAIR, and helping our students discover the endless possibilities that reading opens up. As we celebrate 20 years, I am grateful for his encouragement and for everyone who continues to believe in the potential of our young readers.