



**Statement read by Springfield resident and NJASL President-Elect Beth Thomas
at January 27, 2020 Springfield BOE Meeting**

At the January 6th BOE meeting, we learned that the district will be earmarking quite a bit of money to revamp the FMG media center. When we asked about staffing plans we were told there were none at this time. Furthermore, when speaking about the space at FMG, Mr. Clarke stated “it’s a library - when was the last time a library was functional in this day and age? In this day and age it is all about media centers.” First, I want to say that “library” is not a four letter word. Students who attend Union County College do their research at Union County College Libraries, not Union County College Media Centers. These libraries are staffed with academic librarians, not department professors or paraprofessionals. The same goes for Harvard, which has over 20 facilities, all with the name library in the title. And we all know that as Springfield residents we have the privilege of getting a card from the Springfield Public Library. I would like to share some statistics from a recent Gallup poll about library usage - you may have seen this because it has been making the rounds online. This poll found that:

- Almost 100 million more people visit their libraries (1.3 billion) each year than see a movie at the theater (1.2 billion)
- Libraries are visited over 1.3 billion times a year which is 10 times more than MLB (68 million), NFL (17 million), NBA (22 million), Hockey (21 million), and Nascar (4 million) events combined
- 5 million more people attend library programs than go to MLB (68 million), NFL (17 million), and NBA (22 million) games combined each year
- More than 172 million Americans have library cards. That means that more than half of the American public has a library card right now.
- Librarians answer around 250 million questions from the public each year
- Millennials use libraries more than any other generation

- Americans check out over 2.1 billion items from their public library every year. That's an average of 16 items a year for every American or 32 items a year for every card holder

These statistics do not support the idea that no one uses libraries. I think the board needs to consider why the media center at FMG is currently (and I am paraphrasing from the last meeting) a walled-off block of a room - could it have anything to do with the fact that there has not been a certified school library media specialist to maintain that space? I can't imagine you would devote over a million dollars to revamp a gym and not staff it with a certified physical education teacher. You didn't spend all of the money to upgrade the classroom kitchens at Dayton and not staff them with educators certified in food or consumer sciences. Imagine what would happen if you removed those professionals from the equation. What would you end up with? Square blocks cut off from the rest of the school.

Take a look at the strongest school library programs in New Jersey and beyond and you will most likely see that the libraries are rooms that could best be described as blocks - self-contained rooms with 4 walls. Some of these programs are lucky enough to be housed in newly-renovated modern open spaces with flexible furniture and all the technology money can buy. However, the one thing they all have in common is that they have a school librarian. School librarians go beyond the walls, literally and figuratively, to teach students how to be insightful and critical users of information, they guide students in becoming responsible digital citizens, they foster a love of reading in students because they know the perfect books to put in their hands at just the right time, and they provide students access to enrichment experiences like Maker activities. These school librarians also support their colleagues' professional development and the curricula of the entire school.

By not providing Springfield Public Schools students regular access to a certified School Library Media Specialist until they are in the 9th grade, you are short-changing them. This is an equity issue. As I mentioned at a meeting last year, the NJ DOE's School Performance Reports list the ratio of School Library Media Specialists to students. As a Springfield homeowner I am dismayed that we are in the bottom five in the county - the only district in Union County with a ratio worse than ours is Roselle. Linden, Plainfield, and Elizabeth all have ratios better than Springfield's. I am asking that the Springfield Board of Education and administration rethink the current mindset about school libraries and school librarians. One would think that a district that sees the value in renovating a dance studio and budgeting for a dance teacher would also see the value in hiring school library media specialists.