

# School board approves part-time clerk for ASFMS library

By KENDRA PORT  
klolio@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — The Coventry School Committee voted 3-1 Thursday night to hire a 4-hour clerk for the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School library, which has been without a librarian since the district eliminated the position during a round of budget cuts late last year against many recommendations.

According to ASFMS Principal Joseph Lucian, the library has basically been closed to students since the start of the school year. Teachers can bring students down to the library, but students cannot check out books

or utilize some of the other resources the library might typical offer to students, such as help with research or finding grade-appropriate materials. The clerk the school committee approved to hire this week will not have the same responsibilities as a librarian, according to Coventry Superintendent Craig Levis, and will be primarily handling work with the students' Chromebooks. Levis said Thursday night having a clerk in the library part time is better than having nobody there at all, and the district still has lots of difficult decisions to make because of ongoing financial difficulties.

He said he hopes to be able

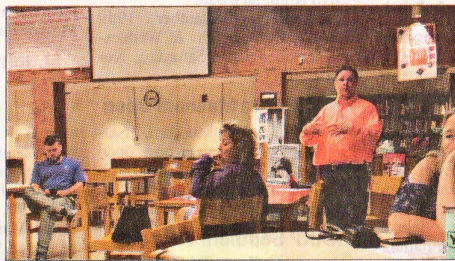


Photo by Kendra Port

**Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School Principal Joseph Lucian tells the Coventry School Committee why the school needs a part-time library clerk.**

to bring the position back if the funds become available in the future.

"Right now there's nobody in there," Levis told the

school committee. "There's nothing. As superintendent I need to do something. We have to provide some support."

Former teacher of the year for the district with 14 years at ASFMS Susan Murphy was the school's media specialist until the position was eliminated when the school department was faced with \$1.4 million to make in cuts during the most recent budget process.

Murphy, who is currently the district librarian at Blackrock Elementary and Western Coventry, and told the school committee Thursday night that she has serious concerns with the fact that there is no librarian at the middle school. Murphy said students and the profession of teaching are being placed at risk without an individual taking on the full

responsibilities of a librarian.

"There was a time when Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School had two professional librarians and an experienced full time clerk," said Murphy. "There are no librarians and no trained clerk there now. At the same time the technology systems and the services and resources libraries are supposed to provide have expanded exponentially."

Murphy pointed out that a Masters degree is required for a school librarian to achieve certification, and a clerk typically works under and reports to a librarian. She asked why the superintendent decided to

See CLERK, page A3

# Clerk

Continued from page A1

displace her, and Levis said the decision was purely based on the budget.

"We needed to cut \$1.4 million," Levis said.

Murphy described some typical interactions a library media specialist might have with a student on any given day — anything from a student asking for help finding research material to a student needing help selecting a book at their reading level.

"A clerk cannot match that student up with the appropriate books and Internet resources at his reading level," she said. "A clerk will not be able to request books from other school libraries. A clerk will not be able to defend books in the collection containing unsuitable subjects. A clerk cannot rid the collection of

outdated or inaccurate materials. There are strong reasons it requires a Masters degree. Students at AS-FMS have already lost the privilege of borrowing books from the more than 200 other libraries in Rhode Island."

She said a clerk without a librarian is like a surgical nurse operating without a surgeon.

"Having no librarian at the middle school is an atrocity," said Coventry Teachers' Alliance President Kelly Erinakes. "If you put a clerk in the school without a librarian I will let you know I'll have a grievance on your desk immediately."

Coventry School Committee Vice President David Florio said people think schools should be run like businesses, but they're not.

"They want us to do the most with the least and we can't do it," he said. "At some point there's going to be a crisis, either something catastrophic is going to happen or our

education system is going to fail. At some point we have to start thinking about putting funds into the system for our future. If we continue on this path trying to get the most for the least we're going to get the least."

Florio said Levis is trying to 'stop the bleed,' but added that the community needs to decide what it wants for its schools.

"It's a sad commentary on our society right now," he said. "I remember, and you remember, when it wasn't that way. We remember in the 90s and the early 2000s. It wasn't always this way, but it is now and unfortunately this is what we have to do in order to keep the system running."

Local parent and educator Joe Bishop said his daughter just started at the middle school less than two weeks ago and he's concerned she doesn't have access to the library.

"We went to open house last week and met some great teachers,"

he said. "She's really enjoying herself there, but she came home about four times and said when am I going to be able to go to the library and look for the big girl books? I don't have an answer for her. I don't know what to tell my daughter. It concerns me because I know as an English and special education teacher who has been in town 19 years that a school isn't a school without a librarian."

If his daughter wants to research something for a project, he said, he expects someone to be there to help with that.

The committee voted in favor of adding the position, with member James Pierson solely opposed and Ann Dickson not present.

That night the school committee also approved the addition of several other positions that Levis said are required by law and are necessary for student safety — including the addition of two .2 math positions at

Coventry High School, two 4-hour supervisory assistants for the AS-FMS cafeteria, two 4-hour teaching assistants for Tiogue Elementary School (funded through Title I grant money) and one .4 intensive support teacher at Tiogue. The committee also approved an increase in the hourly rate for Child Outreach Screeners in the district who were being paid under minimum wage.

Levis said there are nearly 1,200 students at the middle school, and over 200 students in each of the two cafeterias during lunch. There is currently only one individual to man those two areas, with substitutes filling in occasionally. The district by contract cannot ask teachers to give up their lunch to supervise in the cafeteria and there are no dedicated staff members for the job.

Pierson said he could not vote for a number of the new positions because funding was not already identified for them.