



# LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

124 Willow Drive, Little Silver, NJ 07739

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Dear Parents,

Historically, employers have been faced with the difficult task of making decisions that are best for their respective organizations. It is no different for school superintendents. As Little Silver residents, you have elected to send your children to public school. As such, I am required to ensure that the program decisions for our school district meet the ever-changing demands of society.

Yesterday, after months of thoughtful consideration, I informed the Media Specialists that those positions were being eliminated, beginning with the 2015-16 school year, and being replaced with STEM (Science Technology Engineering & Math) programs. I want you to have a clear understanding of the decision and of the impact on your children.

As a public school district, every grade level and content area is required to teach particular standards. Our job as educators is to continually examine how we are delivering our curriculum and determine: what is going well; where we have shortfalls; and how we are going to address needed change.

I ensure you that the content of what is being taught in the Media Centers is being addressed in other areas. The majority of the standards are being taught within the English Language Arts curriculum. The research component, in particular, is addressed in Technology labs and in Science and Social Studies classrooms. So moving forward, your children will not be missing information. When difficult decisions have to be made, we look at the big picture and look at areas where there is instructional redundancy so that student education is not impacted.

Providing students with an opportunity to visit the library and check out books is an important part of a student's educational experience. That will not change. At the Point Road School, a Media Assistant will help to facilitate book checkout with the same frequency that it currently exists. At Markham Place, the book checkout process has been less prescribed because students circulate through their "specials" on a quarterly basis as opposed to a six-day rotation. Students will still have the opportunity to check out books with the same level of frequency at Markham Place as well.

The shifts in education have been significant over the years. School districts are challenged to provide their students with 21<sup>st</sup> Century readiness skills. Our challenge now is to reinvent schools for the sake of our children and for the well-being of our world. Therefore, we need to offer our students more opportunities with STEM instruction.

I often hear parents make comments about their taxes in Little Silver. Maintaining the 2% property tax cap only enables us to meet the demands of increasing salary and healthcare contributions of existing staff members, holding everything else flat. When issues arise that require additional staffing or unanticipated district expenses, something else has to change. Little Silver has become a very desirable district for all students, including special needs students. For the 2015-16 school year, we are increasing special education staff significantly (3.5 teachers) plus we are adding a part-time Behaviorist. These additions are necessary to meet the growing demands of our population and legislative requirements for program delivery.



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I share this budgetary information to give you a better perspective as to why we are not able to add STEM programs *in addition to* maintaining the Media programs. This is not a simple staffing “swap” (Media Specialists for STEM teachers). It is a budgetary decision to enable us to offer other needed programs.

Our district has been able to successfully maintain a balanced curriculum, offering students a comprehensive academic program, and extraordinary experiences in the Arts. We will continue to do so. Students will rotate through their programs in the arts as they always have, substituting STEM instruction for Media instruction. Library collections will continue to be replenished annually as they always have been.

I do understand than many non-educators may be unfamiliar with educational legislation and/or policy and may be unfamiliar with administrative responsibilities versus Board of Education responsibilities. In terms of timelines, there are legislative deadlines for informing teachers of renewals and it was necessary to do so at this time. In terms of job descriptions, it is my responsibility to make program and staffing recommendations to the Board of Education based on the “big picture” needs of the district. These are educational decisions, not community decisions. There are cultural aspects of this community that I have worked very hard to preserve including, but not limited to, maintaining relatively small class size, offering an extensive Arts program, maintaining numerous extra-curricular activities at no additional cost to the community, and much more. Realistically, the balance between what is legislatively required and programmatically desired is always very difficult from a budgetary standpoint. A few years ago we altered the way Spanish instruction was delivered, and there was an emotional reaction to that decision. We decreased the hours of Spanish instruction in 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade while increasing Spanish instruction in grades K-6. Little Silver still maintains a stellar foreign language program that is far superior to other districts that, due to budgetary constraints, eliminated Spanish instruction and moved to using *Rosetta Stone*.

Change is very difficult. I understand that. I prefaced this letter by stating that historically, employers have been charged with the difficult job of making decisions that are best for the respective organizations. It is *always* extremely difficult to make decisions that impact individual staff members, and I do not make these decisions lightly. However, it is my ethical obligation to make decisions on behalf of the 860 Little Silver students, and we believe that additional programming in several areas, including STEM, is needed to meet the expectations of preparing our students for College and Career readiness.

Sincerely,

Carolyn M. Kossack  
Superintendent of Schools