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Books are meant to be personal. According to Albert Camus, “After all manner of professors have done their best for us, the place we are to get knowledge is in books.”

After all of the classes that we take, the library is the place where students are meant to do their own personal learning. Eliminating library media staff positions will deny students of the ability to research and discover beyond the crutch of their teachers.

It’s not hard to imagine why an elementary school student who can barely read would pass over a book in favor of video games or television. You can’t just teach a kid to read and expect them to suddenly discover the merits of *A Tale of Two Cities* or *The Great Gatsby*. While it may be the teacher’s job to show students how to interpret the written word, it’s the job of the library staff to show students how to enjoy reading and how to use it to their advantage.

If this year’s Non Recommended Budget Cut plan passes, forty full-time elementary school media assistant positions will be eliminated. While media specialists are responsible for the library as a whole, media assistants are often those responsible for creating individual relationships with students that help them to learn and achieve within a library setting. Without media assistants, not only will our school libraries lose personality, but our media specialists will be left overworked and unable to reach individual students. Without media assistants, students will begin to slip through the cracks.

School library media programs have already lost 21 full time positions over the last two budget cycles, and loosing 40 more will continue to deplete our school libraries.

Our libraries are already less staffed than those in both Howard County and in Charles County. We have never settled for mediocrity before, and there is no reason for us to do so now.

Libraries are important. Higher reading literacy has always been associated with higher test scores and more access to books raises reading literacy. If our school libraries lose as many library media assistants as the plan proposes, some may have to remain closed during lunch time and during class periods to many students. At my school, Churchill High School in Potomac, during any given lunch period there can be up to 500 students in our media center. This doesn't count the number of students that may be, during this same lunch period, participating in a library-associated activity such as the Media Center Teen Advisory Group or the Churchill Book Club.

As a student who has gone through the MCPS system, I can appreciate how much I have been helped by the staff of my school libraries. In fourth grade I used to love historical fiction, and, per the recommendation of my librarian, I became addicted to the *Dear America* series, a set of historical fiction books about important American events written from the point of view of kids living at the time. There were about twenty of them when I first started reading them, so instead of dragging my mother to the book store, my librarian would pick a new one out for me each week after school. With her help and encouragement, I finished all of them before the end of the year, and the next year, when I started fifth grade, she was the first to tell me that Scholastic had just published a whole slew more.

I remember a surprising amount about those books. The events in them came to life in a way that helped me better understand many of the topics in my high school

classes, particularly in US History. It was those books and that media staff that made me begin to look forward to visiting the library each week.

I would hate for any student to be denied the opportunities I had because of over-worked staff or limited accessibility. I would hate for future generations to undervalue the potential of reading because current students weren't able to discover their love for individual learning. According to bestselling author James Patterson, "libraries are not a luxury." They're not. They represent not only a culmination of knowledge, but the ability of individual students to research and discover. If our school libraries lose the staff that they need, then we will be facilitating the development of students who only know what they are told and who do not have the capacity to learn more. But don't take my word for it. Do you really believe that elementary school students will choose books over television if someone doesn't show them why they should?

Thank you.



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