Pataskala Community,

We are aware of the concerns from parents at Kirkersville Elementary regarding the library's temporary relocation to the old Watkins Middle School. We have an agreement with the Southwest Licking School District to lease part of the building starting in June 2023 until our library project is complete. We have been communicating with the school district for a few months and a main topic of conversation has always been safety and security. With that in mind, we agreed to delay our opening each day to 10:00 am in hopes to not interfere with morning drop-offs at the school, we currently open at 9:00. We also have constructed separation walls in the middle school to separate the library space from the school space. There is a separate dedicated entrance to the library. We have agreed to monitor the parking lot and our entrance while children are outside on the playground. In addition to library personnel monitoring the entrance and parking lot, we are willing to provide funds for a resource officer on the property. We appreciate the partnership with SWLSD and appreciate their willingness to help the library.

We did a search for temporary space within the school district boundaries and upon the conclusion of that search, we felt the opportunity at the old Watkins Middle School was our best option. We agreed to a very fair monthly lease amount that helps the school cover the costs of utilities and maintenance for our portion of the building. Moving to a temporary location saves the library money by eliminating the costs of phasing the library expansion project. If we did not move to the old Watkins Middle School during our building project, construction costs and the time to complete construction will significantly increase.

We also want to take this time to shed some light on what goes on in the library on a typical day. Most mornings we have story times for children ranging in age from one month up to five years old. Parents also come in throughout the day to check out books and read to their little ones. Tutors use our facility to tutor students in the district. College students use our study room for a quiet space to work. Employers meet with prospective job applicants and conduct interviews. Adults use the public internet to fill out job applications, update resumes, complete tax returns, check email and social media, etc. Many others come in to check out materials for vacation and recreational activities for home. Others come in for free at-home COVID test kits. We also have many that come in to print out return labels, plane tickets, concert tickets, recipes, etc. We have many programs throughout the month including LEGO club, to Read to a Dog, book club, and other unique programs. We love our patrons and our community!

We are surprised at the turmoil this is causing the community and the school district. There are other public libraries that reside or have resided in public schools. Pickerington Public Library is located on the same grounds as Pickerington High School. Licking County Library has a branch in west Newark next to Cherry Valley Elementary. Alexandria Public Library was located next to Northridge elementary until recently. We are certain this partnership can be done and there are plenty of examples that shows it can be done. The safety and security of the students, teachers, library patrons, library staff, and parents is very important to us. We appreciate our partnership with the school district and will continue to work with them to provide a safe and welcoming environment in our temporary location.

Sincerely,
Jeff Rothweiler
Director/Fiscal Officer
Pataskala Public Library