

Date : 9/27/2017 3:17:28 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Meredith Singer"

Cc : "Shaunda Sandford" , "Martha Geitner" , "James Lee" , "Patricia Griffin" , "Joyce Brown" , "Denise Patterson"

Subject : Re: Strongly object to disinvite of Bree Newsome

Ms. Singer,

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns. We value your feedback and we understand how this contributes to strong school communities as well as the success of our students.

As part of its collaboration with Asheville Middle School (â€œAMSâ€), Americans Who Tell the Truth (â€œAWTTâ€), a project that, through portraits and narratives, highlights citizens who address issues of social, environmental and economic fairness, informed AMS that the author of *Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly, would be available to speak with the eighth-grade class on September 29, 2017. *Hidden Figures* is the non-fiction, biographical novel and recent motion picture which chronicles the lives of three African American women working at NASA during the space race in the early 1960s.

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In preparation for Ms. Shetterly's visit to AMS, eighth graders attended a screening of *Hidden Figures* and copies of the novel were purchased for eighth graders to read. In addition, using *Hidden Figures* as its primary text, AMS aligned its curriculum with AWTT to implement a Paideia project. The project resulted in students learning about active citizenship and their future selves. Additionally, several students created portraits of local heroes that will be displayed at the YMI Cultural Center in Asheville.

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Late this summer, AWTT notified AMS that Ms. Shetterly had a scheduling conflict and would not be available to speak at AMS on September 29th. As an alternative to Ms. Shetterly, AWTT invited Bree Newsome; she was not invited by Asheville City Schools. Ms. Newsome is a filmmaker, speaker and activist from Charlotte, North Carolina. In July 2015, Ms. Newsome was arrested in Columbia, South Carolina for removing the Confederate battle flag that was on display on the grounds of the South Carolina State House.

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School Board Policy 3535 states that the involvement of any visiting speaker regarding citizenship issues must be "correctly structured" by the school's professional staff. The policy also states that the advocacy of illegal acts by a speaker is not permitted. This Paideia project was specifically based upon Ms. Shetterly's novel and its themes regarding citizenship. The policy strikes a balance between the vital role of our schools in exposing students to differing viewpoints with the need to present those viewpoints within the school curriculum. Given these considerations, the Asheville City Schools declined the offer of Ms. Newsome to participate as an alternative to Ms. Shetterly.

Thank you again for your passion and commitment to Asheville City Schools, and I hope we can all work together to ensure the success of all students.

Best,

Shaunda

On Wed, Sep 27, 2017 at 11:17 AM, Meredith Singer <[mtivona@gmail.com](mailto:mtivona@gmail.com)> wrote:

As a parent of an Asheville Middle student I am deeply disappointed by the move to disinvite Bree Newsome to speak to the students at the school. This is not a time to teach children to turn a blind eye to controversy. This is also not a time to show kids a lack of respect for an individual standing up and speaking for what they believe is right. We are a Caucasian family with three sons and it disturbs me that this is a strong African-American woman who is not allowed to shine and serve as an example to our kids, both as a person of color and a woman. I have always been proud of the education my children are getting at the Asheville City Schools but am ashamed of the decision by the board. The decision on whether our kids should hear her speak should be left up to the parents. If parents object, then they can keep their children out but it is a disservice to the other students who do want her message heard.

Please reconsider your decision.

Regards,

Meredith Singer

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Shaunda Sandford  
Board Chair  
Asheville City Schools  
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"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."

