

Date : 9/27/2017 2:53:25 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Diana Toledo"

Cc : "April Dockery" , "denise.patterson@ashevillecityschools.net" , "Shaunda Sandford" , "Patricia Griffin" , "Martha Geitner" , "Joyce Brown" , "James Lee"

Subject : Re: Bree Newsome's appearance at AMS

Ms. Toledo,

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 Tue, Sep 26, 2017 at 8:43 PM, Diana Toledo <diana.toledo@gmail.com> wrote:

â€œPrincipal Dockery and Superintendent Patterson,

I just learned through social media that Ms. Newsome's appearance at AMS has been cancelled. My 8th grade daughter has been working diligently on the questions she was going to ask her, as assigned by her Social Studies teacher, and has been so excited to meet her social justice hero.

Please provide information to all parents regarding this decision, including the grounds on which it "has been made. It is true that as a social justice advocate, Ms. Newsome faced arrest for her actions. It is not the first time that our history books will include the name of a hero who broke the law in order to create much needed social change. If her arrest is the reason for revoking her invitation, I hope you can come up with a better reason than that. These times require courage, and courage is what we must model for our children. I encourage you and the school board to rise to the occasion and have the courage to allow Miss Newsome to speak at AMS so she may inspire the next generation to be the courageous leaders our country needs.

â€œFurther, it is incredibly frustrating to hear of this development through social media. It is also very much in keeping with the poor communications that the school system has with parents. Not only have parents not been informed, but neither have our children.

â€œI look forward to receiving your response,

Diana Toledo

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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."

