

Date : 9/27/2017 2:57:02 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Kristin Marsh Shepard"

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

Subject : Re: Bree Newsome

Ms. Shepard,

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 9:57 AM, Kristin Marsh Shepard <kristinmarsh@gmail.com> wrote:

As an educator and an Asheville City resident, I am terribly disappointed to learn of the decision made to dis-invite Bree Newsome to speak at Asheville Middle School. I hope the board will reconsider this decision.

According to the news report from Jason Sandford, this decision was based on the fact that Ms. Newsome was arrested for her act of civil disobedience. This reasoning makes no sense: anyone who engages in civil disobedience risks arrest--that is the point. Courageous people like Ms. Newsome risk their own liberty to stand up to social injustice. I see them as positive role models, for myself and for my child.

It is curious that state senator Terry Van Duyn, also arrested for civil disobedience, was previously allowed to speak to ACS students. The board members who made the decision to dis-invite Ms. Newsome on these grounds need to closely examine this inconsistency and any implicit bias in their thinking.

It happens to be Banned Books week, a time to focus attention on voices that some people want censored from public life and the motivation of those who seek to repress these voices. Most educators are keenly aware of how essential it is to create an environment that encourages the expression of diverse points of view, and this often involves amplifying marginalized voices and refusing to run away from controversy. If we hide and silence voices with which we disagree, we hinder critical thinking and foster oppression.

A free and just society needs people like Ms. Newsome. If you cannot bring yourselves to reconsider and rescind this decision, the Asheville community deserves a public statement with a full and honest account of your reasoning. Please don't evade the significance and potential repercussions of your choice in this matter.

Sincerely,

Kristin Marsh Shepard

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I don't want a happy ending, I want more story. -- Frances Hardinge

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Shaunda Sandford
Board Chair
Asheville City Schools
cell: 828-273-9445

"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."

