

Date : 9/27/2017 3:14:16 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Grayson Morris"

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

Subject : Re: Bree Newsome

Ms. Morris,

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 1:42 PM, Grayson Morris <morris.grayson@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello, I am writing to express that I am very disturbed that activist Bree Newsome was dis-invited to speak to Asheville Middle school. I have no doubt that AMC lauds Martin Luther King and other civil rights activists who were repeatedly arrested and jailed for their brave acts of civil disobedience while white onlookers disapproved. It is easy to look back at activist heroes in the past and see their virtue while it is difficult to look at activist heroes right now and recognize them as such because in reshaping our society they are rocking the boat. And comfortable people in a boat do not appreciate waves. I am asking you to recognize that some people are not in the boat at all. They are trying to get in, and Asheville Middle School is effectively saying, "No thank you. We are not interested in progress, we uphold the status quo. America [with all its white supremacy] is just fine as it is and there is no need for our black students to have a modern day civil rights activist visit their school and speak to them. This is B.S."

The principal cited the fact that Bree Newsome was arrested for civil disobedience when in fact Terry Van Duyn (a white woman) has visited and spoken with students after having been arrested for civil disobedience.

Please put your money where your mouth is and stand up for black students and black lives and black values instead of just paying them lip service.

Sincerely,

Grayson Morris

Asheville Preschool Teacher

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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."

