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**Subject:** An Asheville Primary School Communications Update

Good Afternoon Mayor Manheimer, Asheville City Council Members, County Manager Pinder and Buncombe County Commissioners,Â

I'm sure each of you has received quite a few inquiries regarding the Montessori and Preschool Programs; therefore, below you will find our latest update.Â As you will see, much of the information is a [reiteration of communications](#) that were previously shared with staff and APS families as well as posted to the district's website.Â However, we as a district continue to receive similar frequently asked questions; therefore, in an effort to be as transparent as possible, Dr. Gene and the Asheville City Board of Education feel it's important to continue to answer them.Â Â

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Good Afternoon Asheville Primary Students, Staff and Families.Â This is Ashley-Michelle Thublin, Executive Director of Communications, with some information regarding your school community.Â

During the December 14th Special Called Meeting of the Asheville City Board of Education, the Board unanimously approved Dr. Geneâ€™s recommendation to begin exploring the possibility of selling the Asheville Primary campus.Â This decision means the Board has given Dr. Gene as well as district and school leaders the opportunity to start researching and planning.Â **No official decision has been made as to whether or not the Board will in fact sell the building and/or property.**Â The Board invites you to continue to [share your thoughts and feelings with them](#) by email as well as during the public comments portion of their next Regular Meeting, which is scheduled for February 1st.Â

Additionally, following previous communications and the December 10th Parent-Teacher Collective Meeting as well as after reviewing the circulating petition, Iâ€™ve received a few frequently asked questions.Â Below you will find the district and planning teamâ€™s most up-to-date responses:Â

**I understand Montessori students will be relocating to the Hall Fletcher campus next school year.Â But, I have a preschool student.Â When will they be moving?**Â

- Traditional Pre-K students will remain on the Asheville Primary campus through the end of the 2020-2021 school year.Â
- As shared, the district is currently assessing spaces both within our facilities and community to determine how many can be retrofitted into Pre-K classrooms.Â Our hope is to finalize new Pre-K sites by the end of January and begin classroom renovations at new sites in April 2021.Â Â

**It seems as though the decision to move the Montessori and Preschool Programs has been rushed.Â When did communications about Asheville Primary School first begin?**

- The physical structure and ongoing needs of Asheville Primary School has been a topic of discussion since its expansion back in 2017.Â As shared on October 2nd, â€œwhen we make rankings with Buncombe County Government, the number of students impacted and the level of return on investment must always be considered when going to the Capital Fund Commission for special projects.â€Â Its needs were communicated during both the December 2017 and December 2018 Board of Education meetings.Â
- In August 2020, Dr. Gene had the opportunity to walk through the schoolâ€™s parking lot as well as examine interior safety needs.Â This information was communicated with both staff and families, and [a web page](#) featuring all updates was created as a Top News Item on the districtâ€™s website.Â
- In total, **three virtual town halls were held in Fall 2020.**Â Topics discussed included curriculum and the buildingâ€™s capacity, the campusâ€™ current facility needs, how the district receives funding from Buncombe Countyâ€™s School Capital Fund Commission and information from the North Carolina Department of Transportation about its I-26 connector project.Â
- **Please know there will be additional opportunities for staff, parents and community members to express their thoughts and feelings.**Â

**Why now?Â What is the driving force behind the districtâ€™s decision to close Asheville Primary at this time?**Â

- As shared, the Asheville Primary campus presents multiple facility and safety challenges, and, unfortunately, funding is not available to fully renovate our current building or continue to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for yearly, costly quick fixes and temporary bandaids.Â [To see a list of Asheville Primaryâ€™s Five Years Needs Assessment, please click here.](#)
- As a district, we have spent nearly half a million dollars in Asheville Primary capital repairs and expenditures since August 2017.Â However, this does not fix the root of the problem.Â This only addresses the symptomatic consequences of a faulty, antiquated campus infrastructure that is increasingly costly to operate.
- The Five Year Needs Assessment mentioned above required, at minimum, \$202,000 worth of critical repairs this fiscal year alone to address water and sewer problems.Â The plan further suggests that we spend almost \$6 million over the next two years to bring the building up to minimum standards.Â Those needs are called â€œHigh Priorityâ€ in the assessment, and the most concerning involve the following:
  - o \$712,000 for new windows throughout the building
  - o \$939,750 for a complete electrical systems replacement
  - o \$859,200 for abatement, envelope repairs, a hot water system as well as water, sewer and electric lines
  - o \$2,741,393 for a HVAC system replacement including hydronic piping and insulation
- Due to the age of the building and materials used in its initial construction, the district could have a much higher abatement cost that requires a much more extensive renovation.Â

**Are Asheville Primary teachers and support staff part of the planning team?**Â

- The planning team currently includes Asheville Primary Principal Tima Williams and Preschool Director Susanna Smith.Â Â
- Discussions currently involve personnel decisions, which is why teachers and parents cannot be part of the committee at this time.Â However, please know there will be opportunities for additional participants to join based on where we are in the planning process this Spring.Â Â Â

**Are there more financial details that could be shared with the Asheville Primary community to help us understand how letting go of our building may potentially help the broader ACS community?**

- The general fund balance covers local positions, operating costs and unexpected expenses, such as emergency situations and state-mandated costs that are not otherwise covered with state/federal funds.Â According to Georgia Harvey, the districtâ€™s Chief Finance Officer, a responsible general fund balance for a district of our size from year to year is around \$5 million.Â Our beginning balance for the 2020-2021 school year general fund was \$5.1 million.Â Of that, we have allocated \$3 million to pay for this yearâ€™s expenses.Â Essentially, that only leaves a planned \$2.1 million to carry over, which means we would not be able to cover the same continuing expenses for the 2021-2022 school year.Â Â Â
- Should the Board of Education decide to sell Asheville Primary School, its revenue would go back into the districtâ€™s capital fund for facility improvements and upgrades.Â It would **NOT** go to the general fund.Â In fact, the Board of Education is not looking at selling the building in order to â€œcushion our budget.â€Â The Board is exploring the possibility of selling the campus because we cannot continue to pay for costly quick fixes year after year.Â Â
- Regardless of whether the Montessori Program is on Asheville Primary or Hall Fletcherâ€™s campus, the school district will continue to receive the same amount of money for personnel and per pupil expenditures.
- In regards to the Preschool Program, above and beyond what is received in tuition reimbursement, grants as well as local, state and federal dollars, the districtâ€™s budget supplements an additional \$1.2 million for operations.Â Â
- This is only a short overview; however, if you have additional questions about the budget, please visit the [Finance Departmentâ€™s website](#) or email [georgia.harvey@acsgmail.net](#).

**Selling the building will greatly affect our West Asheville neighborhood.Â Can you commit to sell to a buyer who will bring benefit to our local community?**Â Â

- At this time, no official decision has been made as to whether or not the Asheville City Board of Education will in fact sell the building and/or property.Â However, should they move in that direction, the new owner will be up to the Board.Â Dr. Gene can only make recommendations.Â However, his recommendation will be from a fiscal perspective.Â

**The information we have been provided says that there will be six Montessori classrooms at Hall Fletcher Elementary School, but we currently have eight. How will that work?**

- The planning team is reviewing Hall Fletcherâ€™s building capacity and has currently identified six classrooms on the first floor.Â They are continuing to review the buildingâ€™s floor plan and are looking at other potential spaces, keeping in mind the need to be as close as possible to the original six so that the Montessori community can continue to be built upon.Â Â

**Our rising fourth graders have been together from the beginning. It seems that creating one classroom for these children is in their best interest, as well as providing the long term data that Dr. Freeman wants to see.Â Is that a possibility for the 2021-2022 school year? Â**

- As shared in communications that first went out to staff and families on October 2nd, â€œno discussion regarding expansion has taken place.â€Â Â
- Echoing this sentiment, per our December 8th update, it was shared that â€œat this time, Montessori Programming will not be extended to 4th or 5th Grade,â€ as Dr. Gene believes itâ€™s important to â€œcollect our own data and have a true longitudinal study that gauges the programâ€™s successâ€ beyond anecdotal information and a positive school culture. This same process will be utilized across the district, not just for the Montessori Program.Â Â

To the staff and families that have already reached out, thank you!Â I hope we can continue to keep an open dialogue.Â Please continue to email me at [ashley.thublin@acsgmail.net](#) as additional questions arise.

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Thank you for your continued support!Â Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.Â

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