

From: Sage Turner <sageturner@avlcouncil.com>
Sent: 12/14/2020 8:25:42 AM
To: Jessica deBettencourt
Cc: Pepi Acebo, Adrienne Bernardi Vance PTO, Adrienne828@gmail.com, Alfred Whitesides, Alli Seldman, Amanda Edwards, Amy Jones, Ashley Cooper, Ashley Thublin, Bettie Council, Bob Smith, Brownie W. Newman, Buys Matt, Curry First, Dalman Peggy, Damita Wilder, Esther Manheimer, Gene Casey, Gene Freeman, Guy Sayles, Gwer
Subject: Re: Asheville City Board of Education Special Called Meeting Notice and Agenda for December 14, 2020

Thank you, Pepi and others, for bringing this to our attention. Iâ€™m only learning of this situation over the weekend, as most are I suppose. Thereâ€™s a lot of folks copied on this email. Could someone with access to the buildingâ€™s needs and cost estimates send them to me, please? Iâ€™d like to better understand the potential real estate transaction and reasoning.

Martha & Shaunda, if you have a few minutes, could you please fill me in on the boardâ€™s position?

Gene, thank you for replying with your thoughts.

Sage

Thank you,

Sage Turner
Asheville City Council

On Dec 13, 2020, at 12:29 PM, Jessica deBettencourt <jeskadebettencourt@gmail.com> wrote:

I>¿

I write to you all as the Parent Teacher Collective Co-Lead for Asheville Primary, a concerned parent and a former educator who cares deeply about the children and families of our community.

I could write at length about the recent decisions made about the future of the APS Preschool and Montessori programs, but I will do my best to be brief. The overall consensus from the APS community and the entire Asheville community is a that these short-sighted decisions are being made hastily and without a long term plan for what is best for the community or an open dialogue with stakeholders.

The building:
After seeing the renovation needs of the buildings throughout our district sent to us by Shane Cassida, I understand the budgetary challenges are complex. Selling the building feels like a temporary solution where the district puts some money back into the budget but loses an asset for the long term needs of the district. It will also cause a major change to that neighborhood. Our community is very vocal about wanting more spaces that benefit our local community. The decision to sell will not be well received. Please consider continuing to renovate the building instead of selling.

The Preschool:
I find it dismaying and disappointing that the our beloved 5 Star Preschool program is losing its space and the sense of community that creates. The exemplary educators in that building benefit from constant collaboration and sharing best practices with each other. I disagree with Dr. Freeman about needing data to assess the potential of this program. There is endless data about the benefits of high quality early education in the academic success of students and the effect it has on closing the opportunity gap. Collecting data on these outcomes in our own district would be helpful in providing concrete information when advocating for Universal pre-K, but the future of the this program should not hinge on it having to prove that it is an essential component to student success in our community. We already know that it is.

The Montessori Program:
The families of APS have been advocating for the expansion of this program for over 2 years now. Public Montessori schools in other cities in the US have data showing the Montessori approach closes the achievement gap especially for children from low-income backgrounds. This study of 50 public Montessori schools in South Carolina shows the positive outcomes associated with public Montessori schools, <https://givingcompass.org/article/new-south-carolina-study-of-public-montessori-schools-shows-majority-low-income-students-outperforming-peers/>

For those of you who love research articles, here is another that has multiple links to studies on the benefits of Montessori education in communities across the US, <https://www.public-montessori.org/resources/making-the-case-for-montessori-in-the-public-sector/does-it-work-what-research-says-about-montessori-and-student-outcomes/>

If the district is serious about closing the achievement gap, it is time to give the Montessori program a chance and fully commit to the families who are currently enrolled as well as offering APS as an option to more families in Asheville.
The teachers and administrators shared a very informative video on the benefits they are seeing including a significant decrease in discipline referrals and positive academic outcomes during our recent Town Hall. I am happy to share that with any of you who are interested. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic Dr. Freeman has not had a chance to see the APS classrooms with students in them. We are certain that once he sees them in action, he will understand why our families have spent so much time and energy advocating for this exceptional program and its amazing staff and teachers.
At the very least, the students of APS deserve the same continuity in their education through 5th grade as the students at all the other elementary schools in the district. Studies show that changing schools can have a negative impact on a childâ€™s academic, social and emotional development. During this extra challenging time for all of our kids, they need to have consistency in their Montessori education and to be with the adults and peers they know and love. Please consider adding 4th grade for the 2021-2022 year and 5th grade for 2022-2023. Most of the current 3rd graders have been at APS since kindergarten and the data on their academic successes will be essential in seeing the benefits of public Montessori and making decisions regarding the future of the school.

Hall Fletcher Elementary:
HFE has seen constant upheaval and has not been able to benefit from a consistent plan for their school. The district has made so many changes in plans for that school over the past 8 years including middle schools plans, preschool additions, changes in the year round schedule and more. Now they will be making space and changes for a program that has an uncertain future. (HFE families and staff have been so gracious and welcoming of us already, but we know that this must be an added stress for them.) I feel that all of this uncertainty will cause a decrease in enrollment at both HFE and APS and teachers may be concerned about the future of their employment as their jobs become redundant.

Well, that wasnâ€™t brief. If you made it this far, I greatly appreciate your time and hope we can keep this conversation going to come up with creative solutions that center on the needs of our youngest learners.

-Jessica deBettencourt

On Fri, Dec 11, 2020 at 3:00 PM Pepi Acebo <unitblocks@gmail.com> wrote:
Greetings, Dr. Freeman --

The Asheville Preschool staff and families, and the community at large, were completely blindsided by your proposal to the Board on Monday to close all preschool classrooms in the Asheville Preschool building at [441 Haywood Rd](#), plus reduce from two to one preschool classrooms at Hall Fletcher, leaving only three preschool classrooms operating next year in the Asheville City Schools Preschool Program.

Former Asheville City Schools Preschool Director Dawn Meskill was available to provide data to the Board of Education when she last presented. Her words at the time: "We are finding no achievement gap for students who have two years in our program."

The ACS data you seek exists, but, yes, preschool history needs to be part of the data collected during enrollment.

Nationally, and even in North Carolina, we are drowning in data that shows NC Pre-K works to close achievement gaps. ACS Preschool Program already uses data-driven Best Practices with regular best practices assessments.

Here's a fairly recent study showing the impact of NC Pre-K programs on Middle School outcomes:

Evaluation of North Carolinaâ€™s Smart Start and NC Pre-K Programs: Follow-Up Through Eighth Grade
(Kenneth Dodge, Helen Ladd, Clara Muschkin, and Yu Bai, Duke University, 2018)

<https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/resources/publications/>

When I speak to the need to maintain and expand our access to quality Pre-K programs, I am data-driven and speaking with community goals in mind.

When you speak to selling a long-term asset and closing Pre-K classrooms, I ask you to provide data as well.

Early childhood education is a public good affecting our entire community. Two Zoom meetings with existing parents who will not be directly impacted is insufficient transparency.

I am available to you **at any time** to provide community feedback and historical guidance on proposals. I have attended more Work Sessions, Regular Meetings, and Board Retreats than any current member of the school board.

When there is misinformation about you, I act to shut it down. When you are doing right by students, staff, families, and community, I lift this up.

This spring, I and other like-minded individuals will be running for the three open positions on the Board of Education. Even though Board members are appointed, you are accountable to our entire community and the generations to come. Even if you are the smartest person in the room, you are smarter when you work hand in hand with the critics who tend to see potential issues with your ideas before you do. We do not want leaders who take only their own council.

Yours is a challenging job that I cannot do. You have earned both my respect and my headshaking frustration.

I look forward to working with you to bring more transparency and better outcomes for our students and community.

You would address many of my concerns by doing any or all of the following:

1. pledge and act to maintain the number of Pre-K slots and classrooms available pre-Covid-19, including promoting and accepting new enrollments for next year;
 2. not selling the existing Asheville Preschool building until you've laid out the case with truthful information, not misinformation about NCDOT plans, and provided accurate past, current, and projected maintenance costs with parallel information for our other school properties;
 3. learn about the positive impact of Pre-K on student success K-12, including closing achievement gaps;
 4. wholeheartedly join the Buncombe County initiative to close the preschool access gap and pursue grants for Universal Pre-K;
 5. maintain and promote the Asheville Primary School Montessori Program, in whatever location, as an option during Open Enrollment periods for Kindergarten and Pre-K for next year, not limiting new enrollments to siblings only;
 6. reconsider preventing the natural growth of the Asheville Primary Montessori program through 5th grade; and
5. meet with the Hall Fletcher community, staff and parents, to discuss these plans, particularly the equity issues of having segregated programs in the same building.

Hall Fletcher is still impacted by low enrollment due to a similar superintendent proposal from Dr. Pam Baldwin that decimated Kindergarten enrollment at Hall Fletcher when Asheville Primary was started. Hall Fletcher went from five Kindergarten classrooms down to one because of the uncertainty created by the superintendent and the Board at that time. I hope you will course correct to avoid this.

With gratitude for your reply and wishing you success,

Yours in service,

Pepi Acebo, president

(Text or email is best)
828-450-0185 cell
unitblocks@gmail.com email

Montford North Star Academy PTO
a 501(c)3 charitable organization
[90 Montford Ave](#)
[Asheville, NC 28801](#)

MNSA PTO page on Facebook:
facebook.com/mnsapto

On Fri, Dec 11, 2020, 1:21 PM Gene Freeman <gene.freeman@acsgmail.net> wrote:
Mr. Acebo,

There were two zoom town hall meetings with staff and parents concerning APS earlier in the school year. Those were advertised and well attended. In those meetings parents, staff and community were given a voice. The concerns and safety of the staff and children were discussed and the cost to maintain the current building which is an ongoing large expense. This is particularly relevant when you have a school that is half populated less than a mile away. Hall Fletcher is a wonderful building and is able to house the Montessori program as well as any expansion of that program if the board considers that in the future.

Our pre-k program is not being reduced and there was never any conversation about freezing or expanding the program. I agree that pre-k programs are terrific for students however we have no data on that or any programs to assess their potential. That is something that we need to do and start looking at outcomes that can be scientifically substantiated.

Best,

Gene Freeman

On Fri, Dec 11, 2020 at 1:07 PM Pepi Acebo <unitblocks@gmail.com> wrote:
Greetings, Board, Council, and Commission --

The Asheville City Schools Board of Education did not permit public comment at its December 7th Regular Meeting as required by law.

Public comment was nominally permitted only in-person and only for individuals who signed up for public comment, but the sign up sheet for public comment was in a room to which the public was denied access immediately before and during the meeting. The December 7th Regular Meeting lasted for less than 2 minutes and 40 seconds and was never broadcast in the overflow space provided.

I was present, in-person, to speak to the importance of maintaining and expanding our exceptional quality Asheville City Schools preschool program. Many other members of the community would have been present if the proposed agenda had included any information about the superintendent's report that was summarily referenced and approved without public comment or transparency.

I request that the Agenda for this Zoom meeting be amended to allow public comment before any action is taken and that the public be notified of the Board's intent to accept public comment.

The proposed actions include the permanent disposal of school property listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. This proposed sale of long-term assets in order to fill short-term funding gaps is couched as a disposal of excess property in need of maintenance. It is not excess property. It houses our Asheville City Schools Preschool Program and other programs. The property is not threatened by NCDOT widening of I-26, which will not encroach on the school property lines. The property does require maintenance, as do all Asheville City Schools properties.

In agreement with prior members of the ACS Board of Education, my position personally and as a middle school PTO president is that we cannot close the racial testing and assessment gaps we see in K through 12th grades without universal access to quality pre-K. While this is by no means the only need in our society, it is foundational.

What I'm hoping for is a school board and a superintendent that can look beyond the current Covid-19 crisis and work to build community support and secure funding for universal access to quality pre-K as the foundation for closing testing, achievement, and opportunity gaps.

Voting to sell the Asheville Preschool property with no forward-looking plan in place, and without public comment, is a step backward.

I hope the City and County will continue to recognize this as a foundation for equity and reparations, and that the Dogwood Health Trust will recognize this as a funding priority as they have done with ACS's PODS initiative.

My experience is that, if we build the right vision, the money will come. For me, that vision is providing universal access to quality pre-K so that every student *starts* Kindergarten with the skills they need to be ready to learn and every student succeeds K-12.

We will not close the testing, achievement, and opportunity gaps without closing the gap in access to quality pre-K.

The Public should have access to public comment to say as much in the public interest.

Thank you for all you do for our community!

Yours in service,

Pepi Acebo, president

(Text or email is best)
828-450-0185 cell
unitblocks@gmail.com email

Montford North Star Academy PTO
a 501(c)3 charitable organization
[90 Montford Ave](#)
[Asheville, NC 28801](#)

MNSA PTO page on Facebook:
facebook.com/mnsapto

Parents and Families of MNSA group on Facebook:
facebook.com/groups/mnsapto

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kimberly Jones** <kimberly.jones@acsgmail.net>

Date: Fri, Dec 11, 2020, 11:18 AM

Subject: Asheville City Board of Education Special Called Meeting Notice and Agenda for December 14, 2020

To: <amy@musicallies.com>, <jeskadebettencourt@gmail.com>, <mollyjrusssel@mac.com>, Adrienne Bell <Adrienne828@gmail.com>, Adrienne Bernardi Vance PTO <adriennebernardi77@gmail.com>, Ashley Cooper <ashley@easilyamazed.com>, Bettie Council <lionessdear@yahoo.com>, Bob Smith <rgsmith193@gmail.com>, Curry First <cfirst@mac.com>, Damita Wilder <redemmeddjw@yahoo.com>, Daniel McDowell <dbmcd49@aol.com>, Gene Casey <genework1@yahoo.com>, golissa@hotmail.com <golissa@hotmail.com>, Guy Sayles <guysayles@gmail.com>, Jim Abbott <sfjabbott@gmail.com>, John Brigham <mrphysh@juno.com>, Kaola Smallwood <spiritoflightkao@gmail.com>, Kate Shem <kateshem@gmail.com>, Linda Wilkerson <inderwilkerson@gmail.com>, Mahan Siler <jahan2226@gmail.com>, mary alm <fargogal@bellsouth.net>, Matt Menne <matthewjmenne@yahoo.com>, Nancy Ackerman Cole <nancyacole1@gmail.com>, Pepi Acebo <unitblocks@gmail.com>, rebeccastrimer@gmail.com <rebeccastrimer@gmail.com>, Todd Donatelli <toddm.donatelli@gmail.com>

Greetings,

Please find attached below the Special Called Meeting Notice for the upcoming Asheville City Board of Education Work/Closed Session Meeting on Monday, December 14, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. Via Zoom.

[Specific information for joining the meeting can be found here.](#)

Thank you and stay safe,

Kimberly

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Kimberly Jones
Asheville City Schools
Administrative Assistant
Superintendent Office
(828) 350-6145
(828) 785-8655 mobile
www.ashevilleschools.net

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education."
- Martin Luther King Jr.

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Best,

Gene Freeman, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Asheville City Schools
[85 Mountain Street](#)
[Asheville, NC 28801](#)

[Office: 828-350-6145](#)
Fax: 828-232-4185