

From: Kimberly Jones <kimberly.jones@acsgmail.net>
Sent: 3/16/2021 3:08:39 PM
To: Lara Lustig
Cc: gene.freeman@acsemail.net, Shaunda Sandford, Martha Geitner, Joyce Brown, James Carter, Patricia Griffin, Brownie Newman, Alfred Whitesides, Terri Wells, parker.sloan@buncombecounty.org, Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, Amanda Edwards, Robert Pressley, esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com, Sheneika Smith, sandrakilgore@avlcouncil.com
Subject: Re: Email comment for public hearing on closing Asheville Primary School

Your public comment has been received and will be apart of the public record.

Thank you,
Kimberly

On Tue, Mar 16, 2021 at 10:55 AM Lara Lustig <laralustig@gmail.com> wrote:
I strongly oppose closing Asheville Primary School.

When my twins were barely 3, their dad and I put huge backpacks on their tiny backs and carried them into their new school, Asheville Primary. It was new to us and just plain new, as it was the first year the school began. They cried, I cried, it was hard! But what happened in the following days, months, and years has been nothing short of amazing.

My kids are nearing the end of their first grade year now, and they have grown with the school, in its peaceful, prepared environment. They are in first grade now, and even with the challenges of the past year of remote learning, they've had long-term relationships with their teachers and their peers in their multi-age classrooms. Just like every student at APS, they are known and valued. They have autonomy and an intrinsic sense of themselves as learners because of this school. And they have so many skills for living in community and respecting everyone's different experiences, abilities, and viewpoints. Academically, they are always working at their personal highest level because the Montessori approach is so individualized and tailored to meeting each child's needs and supporting each child's growth.

Since Fall 2020, when the closure of our building was first suggested to be an impending reality, APS families have been asking for dialogue. For space to hash out unintended consequences and attempt to mitigate them. To make this process, if it is necessary, as beneficial as possible for all involved.

I believe that ACS as a district is capable of facilitating this kind of engaging process because the Communications department did it with the task of renaming Vance to Lucy Herring. From my perspective as a community participant, that process seemed well-paced, deeply thoughtful, and inclusive. Why was the process so different for this huge change affecting over 250 Pre-K and elementary students?

Critical maintenance needs for the building are about \$200,000. I ask that you spend this money and keep our Montessori and Preschool students in the building for at least one more year.

Use this year to undertake a truly collaborative process and make long-term plans, including strong, supported transitions to new locations for Montessori and PreK classrooms, educators, and students. And plan to include the voices of students, staff, and families at any school that might be asked to take in another school within its physical building and school community. This kind of change affects them, too.

If and when the time comes to make a move to another location, I ask that the Montessori school keep the school number and the state funding opportunities that come with it. SILSA is a school within a school, and APS can be, too.

I ask that we be allowed to remain at our current number of three Early Childhood Education classrooms (Mixed Age PK-3 through Kindergarten) instead of being reduced to only 2 and that new preschool students be allowed to enroll in Montessori Pre-K. The ECE students are the future of our school, and cutting that classroom will restrict our future success as a school, and will cause us to lose our most valuable resource--our educators.

I ask that in place of the one eliminated Lower Elementary (Grades 1-3) classroom, we open an Upper Elementary (Grades 4&5) classroom. We already have a teacher on staff certified for upper elementary, and we have a cohort of third-graders who could seamlessly move to fourth grade at APS instead of being made to choose other schools.

Board Members and Dr. Freeman, please take the time to look over the attached response to the Spring Study (bit.ly/ResponseToStudy). Once again, I hope you will see this response as it is intended--an invitation to dialogue among and between Montessori and Preschool families, prospective families, teachers, staff, school administrators, central office administrators, the board, and the superintendent, and other community members. We will make our best long-term decisions when we come together.

Let's take the time to discuss the differences in our understandings and clarify the numbers at play. Let's widen the circle to include meaningful participation by more stakeholders and come up with the best possible path forward for the long term. It will benefit our entire district, not just a few families.

Our ACS kids are worth it.

Thank you,
Lara Lustig

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"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.