

From: Shaunda Sandford <shaunda.sandford@acsgmail.net>
Sent: 1/31/2021 6:22:21 PM
To: Ashley Cooper
Cc: Joyce Brown, James Carter, Patricia Griffin, Martha Geitner, Gene Freeman, Brownie Newman, Alfred Whitesides, Amanda Edwards, terri.wells@buncombecounty.org, Jasmine Besch-Ferrara, parker.sloan@buncombecounty.org, Robert Pressley, Debra Campbell, avril.pinder@buncombecounty.org, Esther Manheimer, Sheneika Smith,
Subject: Re: Question about public comment

Ashley,

First, I'd like to thank you for sharing your point of view and feedback. I'd also like to say that in no way am I emailing you on behalf of, or as a representative of the ACS school board, nor do I wish to suggest that I am speaking on behalf of every black person in Asheville. Just like our white counterparts, we as a black community have all been on our own journey and have different thoughts and opinions based on our own life experiences.

I will start by addressing the upcoming board meeting from my point of view. As a school board, the only directive given to the superintendent was to research various options as it pertains to the APS building. The board has not voted to discontinue or eliminate any programs, and it would be irresponsible of any governing body or organization to entertain conversations about keeping children and staff in a building that has been deemed unsafe. In the past, the school board has held board meetings during breakfast hours as well as lunch hours because equity does not mean accommodating only those who are the most vocal. We also have parents that would rather participate during their lunch break or their child's nap time. We also have single mothers that have to pick up their children after an 8 hour workday, get dinner ready, make sure school work is done and then prepare for the next day. I was this mother. I can, therefore, assure you that that schedule doesn't leave much time to attend or log on to a school board meeting. I can also say from the 100 or so emails I've received, and the chatter shared with me about Facebook, that the community you're representing is well aware that they have multiple vessels to share their thoughts and opinions about sustaining programs and systems that perpetuate the very opportunity gaps they claim to want eliminated. There is no shortage of feedback reacting to information they've heard and distorted. Often, the truth of the situation is overlooked or inaccurately expressed.

While I agree that it is important to make sure every community within Asheville feels heard, represented and valued, I also believe it's important for the community that prides itself on its push towards equity to understand that those loudest voices you're representing are rarely the majority. These are always the loudest voices. Those who are accustomed to privilege, hoard resources, and monopolize the time of those of us who are actually out here daily doing the work to ensure the success of every student and family in every community of Asheville. It is those voices that created "The State of Black Asheville" and the oppression in the black community, putting us in a constant state of survival mode. Our voices are silent because we, as an oppressed minority, are too busy fighting to survive as the oppressors grow louder and continue to thrive. It is overwhelming and exhausting.

If your objective continues to be racial equity in the Asheville community, my ask of you is to pay attention to those voices you're representing. Make sure you're truly representing underserved black and brown people, and not the voices of those that speak on behalf of black and brown families just to keep the systemic inequities flourishing. These are the very voices that are working against people of color by keeping their knee on the necks of our black and brown children, families and communities.

Privilege is not a color, but POWER, that in Asheville tends to speak loudly FOR practices and systems that continue to perpetuate the inequities. Sadly, most people don't realize the poverty mindset is not just those experiencing poverty who feel their worth is based on their assets, privileges and/or lack of resources. It also encompasses those who have money and privilege who wish to remain comfortable and not share, but maintain their sense of power. The voices are only getting louder as we push harder for equity. People with privilege really don't like what true equity feels like. The push for an elected school board is a prime example. If elected, will the voters choose individuals with life experiences who can truly relate to the students of color in the Asheville community? How do you have equitable impact without having some of the shared lived experiences of the people you intend to serve? Looking back on the history of elected bodies, what has it done for the black community? As a native black woman I can tell you first hand. They have dismantled, separated and destroyed the once vibrant and progressive black communities that existed, and continues to ensure certain groups of people remain in power. Some of us appointed officials are working harder than ever to ensure our students and families of color are not just surviving, but given the same access and opportunities to thrive as those accustomed to privilege.

As always, you have my number, so please feel free to call or text me anytime.

Shaunda

On Fri, Jan 29, 2021 at 2:22 PM Ashley Cooper <Ashley@easilyamazed.com> wrote:

Dear School Board members,

As I know you've been made aware, there are parents and teachers that have questions and the desire to participate in public conversation with you. I know you have also heard that there is concern with these important meetings happening at a time that is not accessible to teachers, parents who work, and parents who are juggling work and supporting their students in virtual learning during the time that this Feb. 1 meeting will be happening.

With today's announcement I notice that the Board is only taking 30 minutes of public comment unless you approve otherwise (10 people with the 3-minute rule). If there are parents and teachers who take the time to sign up and wish to be part of the important conversations impacting their children and students' lives, will you be approving additional time?

The [sign up form](#) also gives mixed messages. It says:

- To participate in Public Comment, you will need to be sign up on our virtual Google Form and **be present in the Zoom call**. When it's your turn, you will be able to unmute yourself and give your comment.
- In order to make a public comment, **individuals must be present and make their comments in person**. Upon arrival and prior to the meeting, individuals who wish to make a public comment should sign-up via the public comment sheet, which is located in the Board Room. Should attendance exceed current Buncombe County room capacity numbers, we will provide additional seating in the Training Room and will move people in and out of the Board Room to complete public comment.

I continue to pray that, as a community, we can recognize when we are on the same side as each other, that hearing from each other can actually strengthen our capacities to influence change together, and that we can work together to make a positive difference for our youth. These are incredibly intense times for so many that we are all living through and, I believe, we need the wisdom and collaboration of each other now more than ever.

In community,
Ashley

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

