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Sent: 2/3/2021 8:58:59 PM
To: Brittany Wager <brittanywager@gmail.com>
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Subject: Re: Asheville Primary School issue

Thank you, Brittany. I appreciate you sharing your story. What a blessing you are for these kids.~

Sage

On Wed, Feb 3, 2021 at 2:30 PM Brittany Wager <brittanywager@gmail.com> wrote:
Hello to our esteemed school board, superintendent, and city council members,

I am writing to you out of concern for Asheville City Schools's Black students.

I am also writing out of concern for our Latinx students, our Ukranian students, our Mylasian students, our students with down syndrome, dyslexia, Autism, ADHD, and giftedness. I am writing out of concern for our students who experience homelessness, trauma, food insecurity, our gender non-conforming students, and trans students. I am writing out of concern for all ACS students, but especially those with different learning profiles, who don't quite fit in, and who have found a home where they are loved and accepted for who they are at Asheville Primary School.

Yes, this is another letter voicing support for Asheville Primary. I know you probably have APS fatigue, but please hear me out.

My own two children came to me via adoption with trauma and developmental delays. They have an alphabet soup of diagnoses related to their social-emotional health and learning differences. When the time came to choose an elementary school for my oldest (now second grader) I was terrified. He had a bad experience in private preschool and had already decided that he hated school. I knew that a loud building would aggravate his sensory issues, that behavior charts would trigger his anxiety, that a visually stimulating room would overwhelm his ADHD and keep him from being able to focus and learn.

Enter Asheville Primary School. From the second my husband and I walked through the door we knew we were home. We chose APS not because of the Montessori aspect (although that is great!) but because of the overall atmosphere in the school. It was quiet, peaceful, had a three hour work cycle in the morning, didn't use extrinsic motivation or behavior charts, and was generally a good fit for my child. Montessori was a huge bonus. As we learned more about it we realized that it is an educational philosophy that is a good fit for all children, but especially those who learn differently. Some kids need more time with something before they move on, others don't. Montessori allows for kids to move at their own pace and is the ultimate in individualized learning. Turns out my kid is great at math and science, and has a lot of ELA challenges. He is able to work at different levels in each subject without feeling like he is behind the group. The mixed age classrooms let him be a leader, but also give him peer models. He now loves school, and asks about when he can return to in-person learning daily.

This method of teaching and learning is wonderful for all students, but is essential for some of our student population. These students exist across all races, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. I don't need to repeat the research and articles that I know have been shared with you already, about how Montessori education helps to close the opportunity gap, or about how APS families and teachers have some of the highest satisfaction rates in the district. I know you have heard that information before. What I can share is my own family's story.

My younger child starts kindergarten in the fall, and although we have a coveted sibling spot for him at the relocated Montessori program, I am very concerned that the overall energy of APS will not make the transition. How could it? As a program within a school, APS will be at the mercy of the climate within Hall Fletcher. ACS children who need something different will no longer have it as an option. I am heartbroken that he will not have the same opportunities as his brother.

Has the district considered consolidating Hall Fletcher and Vance / Lucy Herring? Both are traditional schools with a similar magnet theme. APS Montessori and Preschool could move into the vacated building, the Montessori program could be expanded with the additional space, and ACS would continue to have this type of school available to families in the district. Considering that APS has gone to a lottery in recent years, the interest is there in the community for the school to grow. Adding 4th and 5th grade would ensure equity and would attract more families who chose other schools because of the uncertainty around the future of APS. The transition to a fully Montessori Hall Fletcher could even be gradual, slowly transitioning the entire school to that model. How many kids ended up at other schools (including Hall Fletcher) that had APS as their first choice and didn't make the lottery? How many chose HFE over APS because it was closer, but would prefer Montessori? If I was a HFE parent that had lost out on APS through the lottery, I'd be a little ticked off that the program was going to be in my child's school but they couldn't participate. Regardless of what is said, demoting the school to a program will eventually starve it. I would think twice about enrolling my child in a program that I didn't feel had full district support.~ ~

I would be happy to chat with any of you in greater detail about this issue. I haven't even started in on Preschool yet! (I work with low income families with three year olds, and they are universally dismayed about the dismantling of the preschool program to the point that they are no longer planning to send their children to pre-K!)

Thank you for your time and attention. I appreciate all you do for students in Asheville City Schools.

My best,
Brittany Wager