

From: Pepi Acebo <unitblocks@gmail.com>
Sent: 3/4/2021 12:23:09 PM
To: Daniel Withrow <withrowdaniel@gmail.com>, Esther Manheimer <esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com>, Brad Johnson <brad.johnson@acsgmail.net>, Margery Donahue <margery.wheelless@acsgmail.net>, Ruafika Cobb <ruafika.cobb@acsgmail.net>
Cc: Sheneika Smith <sheneikasmith@avlcouncil.com>, Sandrakilgore@avlcouncil.com, S. Antanette Mosley <antanettemosley@avlcouncil.com>, Kim Roney <kimroney@avlcouncil.com>, Sage Turner <sageturner@avlcouncil.com>, Gwen Wisler <gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com>
Subject: Re: FW: Asheville City Schools Board Nominee

Greetings, Mr. Withrow and Mayor Manheimer

Thank you for bringing this to my attention.

Yes. While I was sharing verified concerns about Superintendent Freeman directing staff to falsify documents, Gwen Wistler mentioned that a student had written a letter, but this is the first time I've seen it. Gwen mentioned that the student's identity was part of the public record and that I could request it. At that time, I felt it would be inappropriate for me to seek the name of the student or initiate contact with the student or request a copy of the letter which would include the student's name.

I do not remember this happening.

Not knowing anything, I can't deny his or her experience. I did express sympathy for the student.

At this point, I would ask that IDES Principal **Brad Johnston**, School Counselor **Maggie Donahue Wheelless**, and former Assistant Principal **Ruafika Cobb** look into this. Ms. Wheelless and Ms. Cobb appear to have been involved in caring for this student per the student's account. Because the student emailed Council, the letter and identity of the student, and the description below, are now public information.

If it is helpful to the student, I am available to hear whatever the student experienced or has to say in an effort to let the student reclaim his or her power.

Looking at the letter, I see that I said that I already knew my daughter was tardy and appeared to be angry or frustrated. If I am the person described, I suspect that she was the last of five students assigned to the car line to tell me the same thing. I'm pretty sure that I did not get in the student's face or move toward the student except to move toward the door to the office as required for tardy students.

It has been the practice at IDES for many years for 5th graders helping with the car line to go to their classrooms at the sound of the bell and not direct parents and families who are tardy walking in their children. Perhaps it was realized that it was not a good idea to ask students to skip class time to manage families that were running late.

For the past eight years that my daughter has attended Asheville City Schools, I have continuously advocated against bullying, intimidating, and man-handling of students. With tenacity, I have brought it to the attention of school leadership when staff have crossed this line, which could be seen unfavorably by some staff. I spoke about this during my interview before Council in 2019 when I earned the vote of Mayor Manheimer and Julie Mayfield, and this advocacy is described in my applications to Council and ACAE process.

The endorsement of the ACAE and BCAE implies that my strengths outweigh my deficits, and perhaps that my deficits are strengths in this moment, as I can stand firm against bullies and misinformation.

I am sure that I fell short of my goals during my short interaction with this student -- not because I remember doing so, but because this student remembers these events this way. And, by the student's account, I apologized the next day to the student when made aware of the student's experience.

It's been brought to my attention that a few (yes, white privileged) parents who wanted an earlier return to in-person learning last fall have propagated versions of this story based on outlines that Council members have provided. These variations may have legs, just as the accusation from Stephen Blount's coworkers that the Vice Mayor coached Mr. Blount to falsify his address has had legs.

But there are bigger issues at stake in Asheville City Schools. If Council does not rein in Superintendent Freeman, who really is a bully (with a record of retaliation and whistleblower complaints to back this up), and AHA Director of Services Shaunda Sandford's personal and professional conflicts of interest, Council will be growing a bigger mess. The Asheville City Board of Education needs new members desperately.

In any case, I will keep advocating for our students, families, and staff.

I ask that you join me and reach out to me with any concerns you may have.

Yours in service,

Pepi Acebo

828-450-0185 cell

Applicant for the Asheville City Board of Education and ongoing advocate for students, families, and staff in our Asheville City Schools

On Thu, Mar 4, 2021, 10:07 AM Daniel Withrow <withrowdaniel@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi, Pepi! I just received this letter from Manheimer. Would you be willing to comment on this letter?

----- Forwarded message -----
From: <esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com>
Date: Thu, Mar 4, 2021 at 10:00 AM
Subject: FW: Asheville City Schools Board Nominee
To: Daniel Withrow <ncae.acae@gmail.com>

Daniel â€” I am not sure if you all are aware, but council received a very disturbing email from a student about Pepi Acebo.â€” I thought you all were aware of this so I was surprised to see your endorsement of his appointment to the school board.â€” See below.

Even though this is technically a public record because it was sent to council, I have removed the studentâ€™s name.

Pepi is aware of this and itâ€™s my understanding that he doesnâ€™t deny that it happened, but you might have a discussion with him about it.

Thank you,

Esther

828-231-8016

â€”

From:
Sent: Wednesday, February 3, 2021 2:55 PM
To: esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com; sheneikasmith@avlcouncil.com; sandrakilgore@avlcouncil.com; antanettemosley@avlcouncil.com; kimroney@avlcouncil.com; sageturner@avlcouncil.com; gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com
Subject: Asheville City Schools Board Nominee

â€”

Dear esteemed Asheville City Council members,â€”

â€”

My name is -----. I am a senior at Asheville High School and have been a part of the Asheville City School district since elementary school. I am writing to you all as I have learned you will be voting for new members of the Asheville City School Board soon. I wanted to let you know about my experience with Pepi Acebo.â€”

â€”

When I was in 5th grade at Hall Fletcher Elementary School, we had morning jobs. I helped out in the office and they had me stand outside the door to let kids know they were tardy. I would smile and point to the office that was behind me and simply say, â€œtardyâ€œ. I would stand in front of the big glass windows to the office, and sometimes had the metal beams that held the window to lean against. One morning when I was working a man walked in with his little girl, and all I did was say "Tardy." And pointed at the office behind me.â€”

â€”

This man reacted by getting in my face and yelling "I know that my daughter is tardy! You don't have to remind me!"â€”

â€”

My back was against the metal beam and window. I was terrified of this man, so much that I didn't utter another word the entire time left in my office duties. All I did was point. When it was time for me to go to class, I was terrified to move as heâ€™d gone down to the kindergarten hallway which was the hallway I needed to use to get to the stairs to my classroom.â€”

â€”

Luckily a second grade assistant who knew me well walked towards the office, and when she said hello to me she could tell instantly that something was wrong. She asked me what had happened and right as I started to explain, the man turned the corner. When I saw him I immediately looked down at my feet to hide that I was crying and stopped speaking. The teacher assistant understood that he had something to do with how I was acting. She pulled me into the office, with the assistant principal, and school counselor. I told them what had happened and tried not to cry. They allowed me to sit in the School Resource Officers office as they tried to decide what they should do. The entire rest of the day, I kept looking over my shoulder and at the door to my classroom terrified that he would walk in and yell at me more. That man was Pepi Acebo.

â€”

The school and resource officer chose not to charge him but they did address the incident to him directly. My father also addressed the man the next morning and an apology was made to me. This man is a bully and our school district does not need him making decisions for our students and district. He bullies teachers and staff. He has done this in front of multiple people, to multiple people, and has never faced any real repercussions for his actions.â€”

â€”

I really wanted you all to know what kind of man he is. I felt that this was my responsibility to let you all know what he did to me as a child. I'm afraid of what that would do to the schools or other children. I feel he would not be a good fit for the Asheville City School Board as it is clear that he has not cared much about how his actions affect others, especially young children. Even now to this day, his actions have caused me to be fearful of men I do not know. I now make sure to look for available exits everywhere I go. I really hope that you will all consider what I have said in the interests of both the schools, staff, and students.

â€”

Sincerely,â€”

â€”
