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Cc:
Subject: Asheville City Schools administration

Dear Mayor and Asheville City Council,

I first became involved with Asheville's City Schools when my son enrolled at Hall Fletcher Elementary in 2012, and three superintendents later, with a dismal racial equity gap, and a mismanaged budget, it is clear that the district is stuck in a state of crisis. We need new leadership, and I hope you will appoint Pepi Acebo, Kate Brewer Fisher, and Libby Kyles rather than incumbent school board members.

The Mountain Xpress's report on the school budget crisis highlighted disproportionate spending on ACS central administration, noting that "ACS spent 9.3% of its budget on "central expenses" for fiscal year 2018-19, compared with an average of 5.7% across the state. And 16 of Asheville's administrators are paid entirely using local tax revenues, the most of any area system." Why are we spending so much more on administration than other districts? This matter warrants consideration, as does a look at administrative accountability, for ACS central employees as well as the school board.

When my son attended Hall Fletcher, I volunteered in the school, was active in the PTO, and later I was hired as a temporary teaching assistant. I also did some substitute teaching. We saw one superintendent come and go, a popular initiative for a balanced school calendar get canned, and so much turbulence from upper administration that many first-rate teachers left for other positions. My son showed a need for accommodations, and we heard from teachers that they could see that what they were doing wasn't working for him but they were required to do it, one example being a particular reading curriculum that was made mandatory by the ACS central office. My son, an avid reader and highly motivated learner, became so miserable that he begged to drop out of school in fourth grade. The next year he attended ArtSpace Charter school, and the experience was dramatically different. First of all, teachers were willing to provide needed accommodations even without a 504 plan (my son was later diagnosed with autism and dysgraphia). School administration was more streamlined and teachers clearly had input into their teaching practices; they weren't forced to use packaged curriculum or methods that didn't work for their students. At ACS I saw teachers and school administrators shuffled around every year, but most of his ArtSpace teachers had been teaching the same grades and subjects for years; they not only loved what they did, but they were experts at it.

With superintendents, principals, and teachers coming and going, and one new initiative or plan after the other, how can Asheville City Schools be a stable, quality environment for our children to feel safe, much less thrive and meet educational standards? We need a school board that will restructure what may be a bloated upper administration and prioritize hiring and keeping talented teachers.

For years the board has been running in circles with no accountability. I hope you will investigate options for deeper structural changes, whether that be an elected board or merging the city district into the county district. Such an investigation needs to begin now, to be efficient, and to prioritize racial equity and the needs of families who do not have the resources to opt for other schools. There are so many amazing teachers at ACS; what might they accomplish with a stable, more streamlined administration that serves them and our students? We need administrative accountability.

Thank you,
Kristin Marsh Shepard

<https://mountainx.com/news/asheville-city-schools-on-path-to-budget-deficit/>

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I don't want a happy ending, I want more story. -- Frances Hardinge