

From: Katy Estrada <katyestrada76@gmail.com>
Sent: 3/9/2021 11:14:13 AM
To: gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com
Cc:
Subject: Asheville School Board

Dear Councilwoman Wisler,

I write to you as a parent of three Asheville City School children with concerns about the effectiveness and accountability of the current Board of Education. As you know, there is a huge and widening achievement (and I believe opportunity) gap between brown-bodied children and white-bodied children in this school system.

Though I do not place full blame on this board, as I am aware of the many hurdles and the need for systemic change and an intersectional approach for effective solutions, I am deeply concerned because I desire school board members that are creative, outside the box thinkers, who are actively working to dismantle white supremacy culture while deeply immersed in the underserved communities listening to those community members, working with local agencies to impact lasting change, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with its teachers and parents. I do not believe our current board members are doing this!

Unfortunately, our Board of Education, some of whom are serving their second, 4-year term, has been ineffective in reducing this achievement gap or recruiting superintendents willing to invest long term in this community and school system. When my children struggle, I always suggest that they try a different strategy. What seems consistent from the School Board and Central Office, is a continually revolving door of superintendents, additional oversight and micromanagement of our exceptional, qualified teachers and an ever-increasing and traumatizing level of incredibly expensive testing of our students. Since 2013, the superintendent has changed 8 times! 8! It seems nearly impossible to enact lasting change without more consistency in leadership. As none of these strategies are helping to decrease the achievement gap, I'm left wondering isn't it time we try new strategies.

With the current appointed Board of Education, they do not have to listen to parents and teachers, for they are not being held accountable as they would be if their position was an elected one. Therefore, I am advocating that the Asheville City Council support a hybrid model, that would allow 3 elected positions and 2 appointed positions. If possible, I would also advocate for a larger board with 4 elected and 3 appointed positions. I support a hybrid model over a fully elected board, since statistically elected school boards overrepresent whiter and wealthier neighborhoods/schools. I am also advocating that the 2 appointed positions be made after the elections and that the appointed positions be filled by underserved community members not represented by the elected members.

If you are leaning in the direction of a fully elected board, then I ask that you please consider implementing the following recommendations **"targeted recruitment of candidates from underserved areas, removing barriers to candidate entry (e.g. requirements to pay filing fees and collect signatures from other voters in their district, or to be U.S. citizens registered to vote), and building sources of support for candidates who may have less access to financial resources"**

<https://journals.sagepub.com/.../10.1177/2332858418818074>

I understand that these changes will not take place until 2022 and thus will not affect the upcoming appointment of

new members. Therefore, I urge you to take the advice of the Asheville City Association of Educators and to recommend that Libby Kyles and Pepi Acebo be appointed to the School Board. As a parent at Isaac Dickson, I witnessed firsthand the dedication, experience and passion Libby brings to education and specifically to the education of black and brown children. As the CEO of the YWCA, she has also gained budgeting and systems experience and through working within Asheville's underserved communities has developed the relationships and knowledge of the unmet needs of children within these communities.

My children have also all benefitted from the tireless work of Pepi Acebo, first at Isaac Dickson and now at MNSA. He is a fierce advocate for parents, teachers and all students within this school system. He takes a systemic approach and views problems through an equity lens.

I urge you to support these recommendations and the hope for lasting, much needed change within Asheville City Schools.

Thank you,
Katy Estrada