

**From:** Wendy Haner <wendyhaner@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** 1/31/2021 3:38:32 PM  
**To:** sandrakilgore@avlcouncil.com  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Letter for support of Pepi Acebo for Asheville City School Board of Education

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Dear Councilwomen Kilgore,

I am writing to endorse Pepi Acebo for Asheville City Schools Board of Education. I have worked with him for almost 10 years as we developed educational manipulatives for the early childhood market focusing on infants through 5th grade. He manufactures these wooden products here in Asheville. He had to meet all of the necessary CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) standards necessary for all educational products plus additional voluntary standards for FSC certification (Forest Stewardship Council). He embraced these standards and complied with the necessary testing to pass the rigorous requirements. This is not an easy task and he met this head on to ensure that all children will be safe when playing and learning with these products. He believes that protecting the children from unreasonable risks or injury or death associated with the use of his products was paramount in his decision to manufacture these products.

I know that he would be a natural as a school board member. He is dedicated, level-headed and works well with a wide variety of people. He has excellent qualities that a school board member should possess. Having been in education my whole career, it is clear as to the priorities that a school board member should understand and be willing to accept as a challenge and work for solutions. There are 5 areas that come to mind.

1. Advocacy - Our voice for public education has never been more important. It is an essential role of any board member to learn to share strategies and implement them when possible. It requires time to do the necessary homework and fully understand the issues. Pepi will work hard to gather input from parents, teachers and other citizens concerning what they think is working and what is broken in our schools. He will be very open to input from a wide array of sources. We need a school board who understands the current political climate in our city in terms of education policy, curriculum assessment and funding. Our school board takes very seriously their role as the voice of community members, parents, teachers and students, as Pepi will as well.

2. Experience is crucial and Pepi can fill this position by having had experience working and collaborating with colleagues, coworkers, business leaders, parents, teachers, administrators and children. He is familiar with the city policies, procedures and protocols along with understanding how to navigate the complex and challenging dynamics that are often found in multicultural communities that exhibit wide socioeconomic disparity.

3. Knowledge is another area that our school board members must exhibit. Pepi has a strong and balanced understanding of the current educational challenges and opportunities that are present in our city school system. He has the ability and willingness to identify the academic and financial implications associated with issues such as special needs education, equal access, state mandated educational requirements, standardized testing assessments, and North Carolina education reforms like Common Core, STEAM and examinations, to name a few.

4. Community Recognition and Outreach is paramount and Pepi has already exhibited this by attending almost all of the Asheville City School Board of Education meetings since 2014. He has served on various school district

committees and leadership positions in PTOs. He has supervised volunteers working on school projects and volunteered in our schools with Read2Succeed. He has also spoken publicly in support of the needs of the students, parents, guardians, teachers, of the district and he has shown to be involved in the community, is approachable and has the respect of stakeholders in our schools. The bottom line is he continues to put forth effort to promote higher levels of involvement and community engagement.

5. Innovation is the last quality that Pepi has that I believe is critical for a new successful appointment to the school board. Asheville City needs school board members who are forward-thinking - individuals who take initiative to identify challenges, dive into research, and propose viable, real-world solutions that mesh with the current climate in education today. Pepi will listen to the concerns of the parents, guardians, teachers, students, and be able to articulate these concerns in ways that bring about clarity and resolution, even when the issues are complex. He is adept at managing conflict, understands the value of developing consensus across small and large groups. Lastly, he has a reputation for developing innovative solutions that can be implemented and adapted for long-term success.

To close my letter of recommendation, I would like to stress that Pepi has enormous energy and brings problems to the surface and finds workable solutions. He is passionate about our City Schools and I have seen him work when the times have been tough and he has always come out on top. He will always continue to find time to turn up regularly in various volunteer capacities as we can always trust that he knows the bottom line is our children and their education. I hope that you will join me in giving Pepi one of your votes for school board representative. We are in dire need of a person who can hit the ground running in this regard given the timing of this placement. Your decision is an important one to make as to who is the best candidate for this position, please keep in mind that your decision will have ramifications for many years to come in our city. Please make the right choice.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Wendy Haner,  
Asheville Neighborhood Advisory Committee, Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods, State Treasurer of American Association of University Women, Region 1 Director of Democratic Women of North Carolina, County Delegate for Democratic Party of North Carolina, Board Member of the Buncombe County Partnership for Children, Validator for National Association of Young Children, Retired Director of Merchandise and Product Development for Kaplan Early Learning Company, Retired President of the Democratic Women of Buncombe County, Retired Board member of YWCA, Retired Board member of the Jewish Community Center, Retired President of America Association of University Women of Asheville.

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"At present, our country needs women's idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else." - Shirley Chisholm