

Date : 9/27/2017 2:43:52 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Jodi Rhoden"

Cc : "Shaunda Sandford" , "Martha Geitner" , "James Lee" , "Patricia Griffin" , "Joyce Brown" , "Denise Patterson"

Subject : Re: Bree Newsome Event

Dear Jodi,

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns. We value your feedback and we understand how this contributes to strong school communities as well as the success of our students.

As part of its collaboration with Asheville Middle School (â€œAMSâ€), Americans Who Tell the Truth (â€œAWTTâ€), a project that, through portraits and narratives, highlights citizens who address issues of social, environmental and economic fairness, informed AMS that the author of *Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly, would be available to speak with the eighth-grade class on September 29, 2017. *Hidden Figures* is the non-fiction, biographical novel and recent motion picture which chronicles the lives of three African American women working at NASA during the space race in the early 1960s.

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In preparation for Ms. Shetterly's visit to AMS, eighth graders attended a screening of *Hidden Figures* and copies of the novel were purchased for eighth graders to read. In addition, using *Hidden Figures* as its primary text, AMS aligned its curriculum with AWTT to implement a Paideia project. The project resulted in students learning about active citizenship and their future selves. Additionally, several students created portraits of local heroes that will be displayed at the YMI Cultural Center in Asheville.

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Late this summer, AWTT notified AMS that Ms. Shetterly had a scheduling conflict and would not be available to speak at AMS on September 29th. As an alternative to Ms. Shetterly, AWTT invited Bree Newsome; she was not invited by Asheville City Schools. Ms. Newsome is a filmmaker, speaker and activist from Charlotte, North Carolina. In July 2015, Ms. Newsome was arrested in Columbia, South Carolina for removing the Confederate battle flag that was on display on the grounds of the South Carolina State House.

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School Board Policy 3535 states that the involvement of any visiting speaker regarding citizenship issues must be "correctly structured" by the school's professional staff. The policy also states that the advocacy of illegal acts by a speaker is not permitted. This Paideia project was specifically based upon Ms. Shetterly's novel and its themes regarding citizenship. The policy strikes a balance between the vital role of our schools in exposing students to differing viewpoints with the need to present those viewpoints within the school curriculum. Given these considerations, the Asheville City Schools declined the offer of Ms. Newsome to participate as an alternative to Ms. Shetterly.

Thank you again for passion and commitment to Asheville City Schools, and I hope we can all work together to ensure the success of each one of our students.

Best,

Shaunda

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On Tue, Sep 26, 2017 at 6:24 PM, Jodi Rhoden <Jodi@jodirhoden.com> wrote:

Dear members of the school board,

I am the parent of an Asheville Middle School student. I was very disheartened to hear that activist Bree Newsome's scheduled appearance this week at Asheville Middle has been cancelled. I am writing to urge you to reinstate the talk and align yourself and the school with the ongoing movement for civil rights and racial equity, rather than against it.

My 6th grade son recently wrote a biography of Bree Newsome as a school assignment about someone he admires. He spoke of her bravery and her act of justice in taking down the Confederate flag from the State House of South Carolina. What must he make of his hero being barred from entering his school? (I'll tell you what he makes of it: he's confused, disappointed, and frustrated). I have heard that you feel that she would be an "inappropriate" speaker for the school since she has been arrested. Would Martin Luther King be considered "inappropriate"? Rosa Parks? Gandhi? Nelson Mandela? Desmond Tutu? Susan B. Anthony? Dorothy Day? The faces and stories of these heroes line the halls of your school. You cannot, in good faith, stand before the students and praise those activists while repudiating the one among us who walks in their footsteps in every way.

Civil disobedience is an effective, time-honored human tradition and a sacred obligation. Bree Newsome's actions at the State House that day ultimately lead to South Carolina removing that symbol of slavery, racism, and hate from their grounds permanently. She is changing the world. Her example is exactly the kind of brave leadership our children are called upon to exhibit in these fraught and tumultuous times.

I've also heard that there was a concern about white supremacists showing up to the event. Cancelling the event because

youâ€™re afraid of hate groups is absolutely acquiescing to their agenda, letting them control the narrative, and essentially
â€œnegotiating with terrorists,â€ which ultimately always gives them more power.Â

Please do the right thing and reverse the decision to cancel the Bree Newsome event. Our kids are watching.Â

Sincerely,

Jodi Rhoden

www.jodirhoden.com

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Asheville City Schools
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"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."

