

Date : 9/27/2017 2:54:22 PM

From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Jennie Liu"

Cc : "april.dockery@ashevillecityschools.net" , "Shaunda Sandford" , "Martha Geitner" , "James Lee" , "Patricia Griffin" , "Joyce Brown"

Subject : Re: our community

Ms. Liu,

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 your passion and commitment to Asheville City Schools, and I hope we can all work together to ensure the success of all students.

Best,

Shaunda

On Tue, Sep 26, 2017 at 11:03 PM, Jennie Liu <starnesliu@me.com> wrote:

Dear Ms. Dockery and School Board Members,

As a parent of a 6th grader at AMS, I am extremely upset at the cancellation of Bree Newsome's appearance. Last year, in the process of transitioning to middle school my son saw at least half a dozen of his friend circle elect to go to private school. When my son questioned why he wasn't going with them, we explained that diversity and supporting the city community were extremely important to us. We even went so far as to attempt to persuade the parents of his friend circle not to abandon the community and public school system in light of the current political climate and emphasis on self interest.

It also saddens me that we I have only learned of the cancellation through Ashvegas/Facebook. I have been received many weekly update emails and reminders to dine out and such from AMS and you, Ms Dockery, so I am disappointed that this information was not given to us parents directly. This information is important to me, as is this speaker, for all the obvious reason for which she had been initially invited. From what I gathered again through indirect sources Ms. Newsome has been disinvited due a school policy that prohibits arrestees from addressing students. I am sorry, but this is really a pitiable and questionable reason, especially in light of information going around (again, indirect sources) that other civil disobedience protest arrestee (Terry Van Duyn) has spoken at school events.

My best hope is that Ms. Newsome will be re-invited to speak at AMS. At the very least I wish for some sort of understanding of how she came to be invited, then disinvited at such short notice.

Thank you,
Jennie Liu.

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Shaunda Sandford
Board Chair
Asheville City Schools
cell: 828-273-9445

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

