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From : "Shaunda Sandford"

To : "Martha Geitner"

Subject : Possible statement

Two events within the last week have reminded us how important the community is to our schools, and how important the schools are to our community.

Last Friday, the principal of Asheville Middle School rejected a guest speaker's offer to meet with 8th grade students. The principal made that decision based on weighing the academic value of the speaker, who was a substitute for an originally scheduled speaker, and on her interpretation of citywide school policies.

One policy would have required the guest speaker, Bree Newsome, to script her remarks such that she could share her story of Civil Disobedience without inciting students to break laws. That script had not been discussed. Separately, there is a city-wide schools policy that parents sign permission slips to allow their students to participate in activities with guest speakers, and those permission slips had not been sent.

Aided by social media, the community's response was swift. By the day of our School Board Meeting this week, the administration and board members were hearing about these issues for the first time.

In an ideal world, that issue of the guest speaker would have been the only news to rally our community this week. In an ideal world, within this past week we could have deliberated on the topic, and either reaffirmed the decision and the interpretations of policy, or revisited the decision and extended an invitation to reschedule with Bree Newsome during her visit to Asheville.

It is with deep sadness that we remind the community that, instead, Asheville Middle School, our entire system, Asheville Catholic School, and our wider community was crushed this week by the tragic death of an AMS student and an ACS student, and the serious injury of an Asheville High student--all three of whom are the children of a beloved AMS teacher.

We are forever indebted to the community for its show of support to the surviving family, and the students, faculty, and staff of AMS.Â

With regard to policy and public engagement, the school board stands committed to engaging the public, to listening to the public, and to working with our administration, faculty, staff, students, and the public to review decisions and policies in a timely manner. Our first priority is meeting the needs of the students, and this week their well-being in the aftermath of tragedy was our focus.

Moving forward, we ask that the community continue being engaged, continue bringing forward constructive criticism, and continue being our partner in making the best possible decisions in service to our students and our community. We will be putting the policy regarding the conduct and message of guest speakers on an upcoming school board agenda for board and public review. Public Notices will be sent so that the community can participate.

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