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From : "Ashley Cooper"

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Subject : Please clarify "correctly structured" and other questions

Dear Asheville City Schools.

I am sorry to be writing to you amongst a time that the ACS community is also dealing with a significant tragedy. There has been a lot of loss in our community lately and our children need such love and care during these times of navigating trauma and grief.

I am writing in response to the justification you have posted on your Facebook page about the decision to not invite Bree Newsome to speak. By making that social media post, you are sending a message to me that you care about communication. I imagine that you are aware that this situation has aroused much concern and conversation amongst the community and so you are making an effort to communicate with the public about why and how your actions unfolded. Communication is an important value to model for our youth. And, I would hope that our youth are also being taught the value of listening to view points that are different from their own and communicating in situations where there is tension. These are also essential skills in this time in our country. In order for that to genuinely be taught to students, it needs to be modeled by administration and those with power in this institution. Jodi Rhoden is asking some very clear questions that I am also curious about. What does it look like for a visit to be "correctly structured"? I am not a public school teacher so I do not know the specifics of your school curriculum, but I would be alarmed if in the United States of America, a country founded by revolvers and revolutionaries, there was not curriculum around the fight for civil rights. And why is this School Board Policy applied selectively, allowing NC Senator Terry Van Duyn to speak at AMS with her history of being arrested for activism and not Bree Newsome?

Additionally, I have had many conversations with ACS staff, and I hear repeatedly your commitment to making our schools more equitable. While I have been and continue to be heartened to see what some of the individuals in your institutions are doing to carry through with this commitment, it is instances like this where the skepticism rises about how genuine you are about this commitment. What would be amazing to me would be to see you as an institution not only model the value of communication, but to also model humility and the ability to take a learning stance. Perhaps there is wisdom in the greater community that could have helped you "correctly structure" a visit with a living civil rights hero if that was beyond your means to construct initially. Perhaps the process of accepting the invitation to have Ms. Shetterly visit and then being quiet when you learned that Ms. Newsome was coming and waiting until the last minute to voice your change of opinion was not ideal and you could model where you made a mistake here. Perhaps it is as it appears that there is some racial bias in who you choose to allow to speak to the children under the School Board Policy 3535 and you could model admitting that this is the case, and perhaps one of the areas that might show up in your Equity Audits, and thus an area where you can own that intentional work and change is needed.

There are community leaders that are clear and admitting that ACS is not currently operating as an equitable school system. The data is very clear that learning opportunities are not equitable. And the community impacted by these inequitable learning environments are without a doubt certain that there are things that need to change. Folks who study patterns of inequity and practice solutions for becoming more equitable know that addressing institutional and systemic discrimination and policies that further discrimination are an essential part of effective change. I really hope that this incident is one that opens up meaningful conversation and points to ways that the community and ACS can work together to do better... for the sake of all of the students that ACS serve.

I also look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,  
Ashley Cooper

[Terry Van Duyn interview: From Activism to Legislation](#)

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Ashley Cooper

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