

APS Open Hearing Public Comments 3/16/21

-Veronica Sotolongo <veronicasotolongo@gmail.com>

Esteemed members of the Asheville City Board of Education:

I have a Kindergartener in the Montessori program at Asheville Primary School, and he loves it. Before my child was enrolled at APS, I had come to the conclusion through my studies in child development that child-centered learning (which Montessori is one example of) is the equitable, compassionate, and effective future of education. For a course that I was enrolled in at the time, I wrote this: “Child-centered education eliminates the need for harmful labeling of students and the inequitable investment of resources into AGI programs. In a child-centered educational setting, teachers meet students where they’re at and teach according to each student’s skill level. Students can consolidate their learning and practice leadership by supporting their classmates’ learning through collaboration.” Evidence indicates that Montessori students score higher on measures of academic achievement, executive function, social understanding, mastery orientation, and fine motor skills than students taught with traditional methods (Lillard & Quest, 2013. Bhatia, et al., 2015). Montessori students also report higher motivation and school enjoyment (Rathunde, 2003). Even more striking, research suggests that Montessori education greatly reduces income achievement gaps as well as achievement gaps due to differences in executive function, which involves things like impulse control and decision making (Lillard, et al., 2017). We know that executive function is associated with socio-economic status and race, and research indicates that executive function plays a large role in mediating racial and income educational achievement gaps (Nesbitt, et al., 2013). This comes as no surprise if you’ve spent time in traditional elementary school classrooms, where students are expected to sit still, stay quiet, and listen for spans of time that are not developmentally appropriate. Students who lack the impulse control to follow these misguided rules are sent out of the classroom, unfortunately missing out on the learning that they need in order to be successful in this setting. For many students, this starts in Kindergarten and snowballs over time. . .but I don’t have to tell you this, right?

In a Montessori classroom, students have freedom of movement. They get to choose what they work on. They work in small groups with individual attention from their teachers, and they are encouraged to collaborate with their classmates. Each student has individual learning goals, based on their interests and challenges, that they create with the help of their teachers. It’s not a question of whether or not students will succeed. It’s a question of how they can best be supported toward their growth and eventual success. Child-centered learning lights a path toward a more equitable future in education, and Asheville Primary’s Montessori program can serve as an example for our other magnet schools to transition toward more child-centered approaches. Shrinking our district’s public Montessori school and dispersing a thriving preschool would be a step backward.

I've been in Asheville long enough to see schools and programs come and go. I've seen district leadership disrupt students', teachers', and families' lives with new initiatives, then fail to give them the support and time needed for success, and eventually let them die. For example, in its beginning years, KIPP effectively obliterated Asheville's racial achievement gap in education. Over the years, as teachers grew weary from long hours and huge workloads, KIPP's efficacy went down, and the school was closed. What if, instead, district leadership had offered the support that KIPP needed and deserved? Another example: when district leadership decided to switch Hall Fletcher back to a traditional school calendar from a balanced (year-round) calendar, they hadn't even given it three years. And besides, it was going well! Parents were overwhelmingly happy with the balanced calendar, and student outcomes had improved. Let's not continue to make the same mistakes: if moving the Montessori program to Hall Fletcher is really the best choice, then I implore you to ensure the success of the program. So far, what I've heard from Dr. Freeman has been very discouraging: Not only will APS lose its space, but we will lose classroom teachers, enhancements teachers and likely administrators, as the Montessori program will be reduced. Enrollment will be limited to siblings of current students next year, and this may have long-term repercussions for Montessori classrooms, which are balanced by age. Dr. Freeman has given no assurance that the Montessori program will continue long-term, and instead he plans to collect data over the next few years in order to determine if the program is worth maintaining. Well, data are only as valid as your study design, and I need to point out that putting a school under stress for all of the above reasons and then giving them a few years to pick up the pieces while proving themselves worthy of their existence is not really valid. Or fair.

Members of the Asheville City Board of Education and Dr. Freeman, I ask this of you: if you are going to make a big change in our school district,

1. Do it thoughtfully, and make sure that what you put forth is of excellent quality.
2. Give it the long-term support it needs to be successful.
3. Give it the time it needs for that success to show up in the data you collect.

I understand that for now, Asheville Primary School's building and campus is safe for students. Let's all take a deep breath and give this planning process the time that it requires. Please allow students in the Montessori program and Asheville City Preschool to attend school at the Asheville Primary campus for the 2021-22 school year while you take your time creating a long-term vision and plan for APS that will move our district forward, rather than backward. Please include in your plan a commitment to expanding, rather than reducing, the Montessori program. Please take the time to visit Asheville Primary's Montessori classrooms and see our brilliant teachers in action. Ask them how you can support them, so that they may continue to do this important work, fostering the growth of our students and allowing them to flourish.

Thank you,
Veronica Sotolongo

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0885200613000628>
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01783/full>
https://www.public-montessori.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Lillard_science_article_9_29_2006.pdf
https://www.public-montessori.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Rathunde_Comparison%20of%20Montessori%20and%20Traditional%20MiddleSchools-small.pdf
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10409289.2015.995454>

-John Brigham <mrphysh@juno.com>

Kimberly,

I have a comment and am following your guidance; sending it to you.

Use the comment as you see fit.

School board comments. March 16 2021

A school consist of a teacher interacting with students. The rest is just fluff. A school has little to do with the building.

There are three elementary schools in West Asheville and if one was eliminated the two remaining could accommodate the existing students with room for another hundred students!

Clearly one of them should be abandoned and clearly the extra building is Asheville Primary.

What is the big fuss? People do not like change. That is certainly part of it. We are conservative by nature and distrust change. But there is more. Parents of kids in the Asheville City schools are disgusted with Asheville City schools. They see a small island of excellence at APS and am horrified at sending their kids to Hall Fletcher. And they do not trust Lucy Herring elementary either.

But I am confused about this: Why doesn't the School Board bother to defend this idea. APS needs to be shuttered. It appears as if this decision has been made and it appears that this is a good decision. It is pretty easy to defend, but the School Board just sits back and is quiet in face of opposition. I think that the Asheville City School board is used to making bad decisions and implementing them just on their authority. Defending a good idea implies accountability and the Asheville City School School board does not understand that.

John Brigham
44 Forest hill Drive

505 0964

-Susanna Cerrato <susanna.schell@gmail.com>

Dear Ms. Jones,

Could you please pass this comment along to board members prior to tomorrow's meeting? Many thanks!

My name is Susanna Cerrato and as you know I am the 20/21 ACS District Teacher of the Year, as well as the 2021 BWF Western Regional Teacher of the Year. I am also the VP of ACAE, a 3rd grade teacher of 5 years at Ira B. Jones Elementary and an ACS parent of a current kindergartener. I am writing today because I do not support the closure of Asheville Primary School. APS is a 5 star preschool and demonstration site for the state. It has been a strong and consistent safe place for hundreds of families and has a strong community formed from the dedicated families of students past and present. The unique public montessori option has attracted families to the public schools who may not have engaged prior. It has offered an alternative for those who have struggled in a traditional classroom environment. APS families have been asking to be a part of the process and have been asking for more information, but still feel they have not been included. Please share with stakeholders the reasoning behind the decision to close the school and please consider proper engagement with stakeholders so that we can all contribute to the decision making process.

Sincerely,

~Susanna Cerrato

Susanna Cerrato, MA Ed
3rd Grade Teacher
Ira B. Jones Elementary Schools
2021 Asheville City Schools District Teacher of the Year
2021 BWF Western Regional Teacher of the Year
susanna.cerrato@acsgmail.net

-Diana Toledo <diana.toledo@gmail.com>

Ms. Jones, thank you for sharing my comments with the BOE members in advance of Tuesday's special meeting and hearing on the potential closure of Asheville Primary and relocation (and decrease in capacity) of its Montessori program to Hall Fletcher.

I strongly urge BOE members to reconsider this decision. Please commit to supporting the Asheville Pre-School and Montessori Primary programs, to keeping them at the Asheville Primary School building, and to maintaining the programs at their current capacity.

These programs are unique in our city and in our region and provide quality education using the Montessori model to kids that would otherwise not be able to access them. These are precisely the approaches we need to expand if we stand a chance to make a dent in ACS's opportunity gap and the racial inequities in educational outcomes that our school system now is known for.

This decision is precisely the sort of opportunity for you, as BOE members, to show the kind of leadership that our community has been asking from you. Please support these programs, please engage in dialogue with parents and teachers about this decision (ideally, earlier in the process), and please step up as leaders to help address the multiple crises facing our school system.

Respectfully,

Diana Toledo
ACS Parent

-Jenny Westrick <jennywestrick@gmail.com>

Members of the Board and Dr. Freeman:

I am writing to express my support for keeping Asheville Primary and Preschool open in its current location. My daughter, Maggie, was part of the first Montessori cohort at Asheville Primary; she's now a fifth-grader at Claxton and heading to MNSA in the fall. Our experience with Asheville Primary was wonderful—the school and its staff are committed to helping children thrive—but that's only a small part of why I'm writing to you today.

If Asheville City Schools is truly committed to closing the opportunity gap and pursuing education with equity, then we need to expand free and affordable early childhood programs, not reduce them. We need to create more free and affordable Montessori programs, not close enrollment on the one we have.

Not only that, but the district has already invested in Montessori materials and training, and the current preschool classrooms are equipped to meet 5-star rating standards. When we begin and then quickly abandon educational initiatives, we waste already-scarce resources. We also lose the opportunity to collect truly longitudinal data that would let us better understand how we're helping students.

I urge you to reconsider your decisions regarding Asheville Primary and Preschool for at least the 2021–22 school year. This will allow time to create a more thoughtful, sensible, and long-term strategy for building early childhood education and closing the opportunity gap.

Sincerely,
Jenny Westrick
jennywestrick@gmail.com
(919)593-6586

-(null) (null) <cdwarch@yahoo.com>

I am an ACS parent and I have concerns about the closure of the Asheville Primary School and Asheville City Preschool classrooms at the Haywood Rd Campus.

I have read the Draft Study linked to in the meeting announcement. I would counter that this draft study has not included construction estimates to build a facility of equivalent size in a similar geographic area. I expect that a new building would far outpace the price of renovation and rehab of this facility. There will always be cost associated with maintenance of school buildings. That cost increases exponentially when upgrades and repairs are delayed. The community should not be punished with the loss of a beloved facility due to unnecessary delays of regular maintenance and repair.

Placing Asheville Primary classrooms at a neighboring school is a temporary solution with the foregone conclusion that the school will be phased out. A public Montessori model is highly desirable in this region. I believe if it was supported by the School Board and Superintendent it would thrive and grow. APS should have that opportunity.

I am greatly concerned by the closure of Asheville City preschool classrooms. It is my understanding that only half those classrooms will be reopened after they are relocated to Asheville Housing Authority properties. Many districts across the country are moving to universal Pre-K because it is shown to improve student outcomes and narrows the racial achievement gap. Why is our district moving backwards making Pre-K less accessible to the students and families?

Thank you

Chrissy Burton

-Morgan Marshall-Clark <morgan.marshall.clark@gmail.com>

Hi,

I am Morgan Marshall-Clark from West Asheville and I am writing because I do not support the closure of Asheville Primary School. Our city is growing, and neighborhood schools and diverse options for different learning experiences is crucial to keeping our communities healthy and educating everyone in our city equitably. As a graduate of Asheville High School, who plans on sending my own children to ACS and a resident of West Asheville for over 20 years, this school is one of the many reasons why I am here and not in the county. While budgetary constraints are always an issue, closing a school that has increasing interest and support from the community and eliminating preschool options is not the right solution.

This is not just about APS; it's about the integrity of our entire district.

Sincerely,

Morgan Marshall-Clark

-Carol Craig <carolhancockcraig@gmail.com>

Dear Ms. Jones and ACS Board Members,

I am writing in support of keeping Asheville Primary School open and maintaining their present Montessori curriculum.

I have personal experience with the Montessori method, as my three children all attended a local private Montessori school through their elementary years. Two of my children graduated from Asheville High School (Class of 2018 and 2020) and I have a junior at Asheville High School now.

My husband and I firmly believe that the Montessori method was instrumental in providing a safe and exploratory environment for their early learning years. As a former public school teacher with Buncombe County Schools, and after much research and direct observation, we chose to put our kids in a Montessori classroom, because we saw the overwhelmingly positive benefits of that learning environment. We saw our children, as well as the others, thriving! Their love and curiosity of learning has never faded.

As a Montessori parent, I became more involved and ended up spending about 10 years on the Board of Directors at this private school, and several times we explored developing into a public charter school. We wanted so much for all children to have the opportunity to be in a Montessori classroom. When I heard about the Montessori curriculum at APS, I was ecstatic! Now, I am hearing about the potential loss of a Montessori classroom and possible closure of APS.

I do not support this. (In fact, I support expanding to more Montessori-based classrooms!). Though I am not directly affected by these proposed changes, I am saddened to think of the loss for our youngest students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carol Craig
Asheville, NC

-Christina Mason <christinaemason@gmail.com>

Board of Education:

I urge you to vote against closing Asheville Primary School, Asheville's only 5-Star public pre-school. APS serves a diverse student body and offers quality, unique learning options. Its beloved and highly successful Montessori and Pre-K programs should be expanded, not contracted as proposed by ACS leadership. Vote NO.

We need more Pre-K spaces and choices in Asheville, not fewer. There are woefully few full-day, affordable, high-quality Pre-K programs in Asheville, and even fewer offering income-based tuition or aftercare. Limited access to childcare burdens working parents and those struggling financially. Expanding pre-school promotes racial and economic equity and prepares the next generation for success. Research bears out that quality Pre-K improves lifelong learning, graduation rates, and health, and provides ROI for communities. Pre-school helps level the playing field for disadvantaged families. Yet closing APS would displace 100+ pre-schoolers and cut pre-school enrollment by 90+ slots. I can attest that demand for ACS Pre-K was high last year and enrollment was extremely competitive. Many schools moved to lottery enrollment because demand outpaced spaces. Some children could only enroll because COVID suddenly reduced demand, which had been growing year over year. APS has high demand to GROW its programs. Rubber stamping its closure could be the death knell for its growing Montessori program and would reduce educational choice and opportunity for Asheville families.

Buncombe County Commissioners have committed to moving toward universal access to Pre-K. Yet ACS projections submitted to the North Carolina Department of Instruction (attached) indicate that preschool enrollment will be cut from 288 pre-COVID slots to 108 in 10 years, a reduction of over 60%. WHY would you shut down APS' highly walkable, central campus that attracts students of all races, neighborhoods, and incomes? Some classes would be forced into other schools, effectively closing their existing (or pre-COVID) pre-school classes, while others would be set up anew at Housing Authority sites. We choose Asheville City Schools over private/charter partly because we value racial and economic diversity in the classroom. This new plan seems likely to worsen school segregation - is this 2021 or 1951?

Shuttering the 5-Star program at APS does not make financial sense. It would forfeit State and Federal funding for the APS Principal and support staff and disqualify it from Stimulus Bill funding for a new HVAC system. It's hard not to see closing APS as a prelude to selling off the campus - a shortsighted bandaid for ACS' financial difficulties. The building at 441 Haywood Rd. is in the heart of West Asheville, walkable, and accessible by public transportation. From a real estate perspective, it's irreplaceable. And if the building is repurposed as a storage facility, the money and time spent on prior renovations will be wasted.

Asheville families demand expanded access to public pre-school. The Buncombe Board of Commissioners has signed on. Thousands of Asheville residents have signed a petition opposing the closure of APS. While you are not elected (yet), you have a fiduciary duty to promote the interests of your constituents. Vote NO on closing APS.

Sincerely,

Christina Mason

West Asheville

[Attachments area](#)

-Christina Mason <christinaemason@gmail.com>

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Sincerely,
Christina Mason
West Asheville
[Attachments area](#)

-Sophie Mullinax <sophie.mullinax@gmail.com>

Hello Ms. Jones,

My name is Sophie Mullinax. I'm a parent to two future ACS students and oppose the closure of Asheville Primary School. I live in East West Asheville, and this school is an incredible resource to our neighborhood and community. I am concerned about any effort that would reduce the number of pre-k classrooms, especially the extremely successful and highly-rated Montessori ones at APS.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sophie Mullinax
828-713-7318

-Kellyrichardsavl <kellyrichardsavl@yahoo.com

Good afternoon,

>

> My name is Kelly Richards and my daughter is a preschool student at Asheville primary school. We have the great fortune to live only three blocks away from the school, and were really looking forward to keeping her at Asheville primary so that she could experience Asheville's only public Montessori school.

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> The news that Asheville Primary was no longer going to be a site option for the 2021/2022 school year, and that no new students were going to be able to enroll into the Montessori elementary program was beyond upsetting and disappointing.

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> This decision seems to have been made with very little concern for the students, community, teachers/staff, and without any planning before the announcement. We were told that we would know where the preschool classrooms would be moved to by mid to late January. It is now mid March and no final word has been shared about where our children might possibly go to school next year.

>

> I strongly urge everyone involved to reconsider this decision, or at least postpone closing the campus for one more school year. The community of Asheville Primary School is an invaluable, irreplaceable piece of our city's public school system.

>

> Kelly Richards

>

> Sent from my iPhone

-Susan Muehl <susanwmuehl@gmail.com

We are concerned about the decision to close Asheville Primary School and the Preschool Program. Making this decision during a pandemic is rushed and unfair. Please consider hitting "pause" on this decision in order to make the best decision possible for everyone - students, teachers, parents, and the community as a whole.

Charlie and Susan Muehl

Sent from my Smarty Pants phone which is responsible for any typos or auto-corrects I don't catch.

-Amy Siler <asheville129@yahoo.com>

To Gene Freeman and the Asheville City School Board,

Please reconsider the closing of Asheville Primary School at the 441 Haywood Rd. site. Restructuring and moving a school during a pandemic will be detrimental to the socioemotional health of our students and staff. To me it is irresponsible to add to the upheaval that our families have felt during this past year. I am not sure why it is so important to do it for the upcoming school year, in the midst of a pandemic when space and safety are supposedly the utmost concern. After losing my wife to ALS at the very beginning of this pandemic, to having my son's whole world turned upside down with the loss of his mom and the closing of in person school, I want to do anything in my power to maintain any shred of consistency in his life. Please do not move Asheville Primary School to Hall Fletcher for the 2021/2022 school year. Please consider how keeping a 5 Star Preschool and WNC's only public Montessori school at 441 Haywood Rd. could be an example as to how excellent a public education can be. Expanding Asheville Primary School to 4th and 5th grade would make it one of the most sought after schools in the district. As you already know, much to your chagrin, Asheville Primary School is small but fierce. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy Siler

Cecil Bothwell <cecilbothwell@gmail.com>

Members of the ACS Board,

I'm writing today to express my strong opposition to abandoning the Asheville Primary School building, and particularly to making that decision at this time.

President Biden has just signed the \$1.9 trillion Covid relief bill which specifically includes money for "Repairing school facilities, especially ventilation systems." It seems only rational to wait and see how that money is apportioned and what facilities are eligible before deciding to abandon a building due to a need for repairs.

Furthermore, Montessori staff members have indicated that while the analysis of needs is arguably accurate, the school isn't really in much worse shape than other buildings in the system. Spending the money on a move instead of addressing what can be addressed immediately with the same funds is a waste.

While you are not considering the sale question today, vacating the building would certainly be a thumb on the scale when sale is considered in future. So for the record, I strongly oppose sale.

Best regards,

Cecil Bothwell

Former Asheville City Councilor

-Tristan Winkler <twinklervelo@gmail.com>

Hi Ms. Jones,

I hope this email finds you well. I just wanted to voice my opposition to the closure of the Asheville Primary School. We have a little one in West Asheville and another on the way and would love to be able to walk our kids to Asheville Primary some day soon. Having the school there helps to make West Asheville a (more) complete community and we would love it if it could stay.

Thank you,

Tristan Winkler
44 Vandalia Avenue
Asheville, NC

-Sara Shea <sarashea79@gmail.com>

Greetings Kimberly Jones,

I wish to speak at tonight's hearing regarding APS.

Unfortunately I have to be up early Wednesday morning because my child has in-patient hospital procedure Wednesday. We will be in the hospital all day Wednesday for tests. I do not want to expose myself to Covid in a public meeting right before I have to be in the hospital with my child, and I also need a good nights sleep tonight (For myself and my child) Prior to her hospital stay.

For this reason I am sending my comments via email. I am hoping that someone can read them on my behalf.

**Thanks in advance!
Sara Shea**

Greetings Asheville City Council Commissioners,

My name is Sara Shea. I live in Asheville. I'm a single mom to a four-year-old child with special needs/rare genetic disorder who is enrolled at Asheville Primary School preschool program.

I deeply wanted to comment during the last "public comment session" but the session was held at 6pm on a weeknight, making it impossible for me to attend.

Instead, I took the initiative to write multiple letters. I've tried to comment with Superintendent Gene Freeman and left messages three separate times with his secretary to discuss my daughter's return to school, and the future of her preschool program and special services within the program.

I've never even received a call back from his secretary. I'm disappointed that no one returns my calls or seems to care about my daughter's success. I keep hearing about equity for impoverished, black and brown, and special needs children, but it seems like a lot of talk when no one even gives you the courtesy of a return call.

I'd like for Asheville Primary School to maintain its current location and configuration of classrooms. The Montessori program is ideal for students with learning differences. The care and concern that each individual has shown to my daughter is vital to her success in this world. APS teachers and staff should be applauded, not relegated to a program within Hall Fletcher.

I want to emphasise that my child has THRIVED at APS preschool. This preschool was the TOP recommendation of my child's therapists when she was in the birth-to-three program.

My child was traumatized by school shutdown during the pandemic. The interruption of her daily routine was devastating to her, and she lost a year of critical early services/therapies within her preschool class.

As a parent I am extremely anxious about more major changes and interruptions to her preschool experience. This is part of the reason I've strived to have a direct conversation with Gene Freeman. Following the pandemic, I believe preschool children need familiar routine and stability. I don't think this is the right time for major changes to this preschool or primary school.

The prospect of massive changes to my child's beloved APS preschool has weighed heavily on me. It has led me to consider moving away from Asheville in search of a stable preschool program with in-class therapies/services for my special needs child. This is a sad consideration, because Asheville is my home.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for listening to my concerns.

**Sincerely,
Sara Shea
(860)883-8566
Sara Shea <sarashea79@gmail.com>**

-Lara Lustig <laralustig@gmail.com>

I strongly oppose closing Asheville Primary School.

When my twins were barely 3, their dad and I put huge backpacks on their tiny backs and carried them into their new school, Asheville Primary. It was new to us and just plain new, as it was the first year the school began. They cried, I cried, it was hard! But what happened in the following days, months, and years has been nothing short of amazing.

My kids are nearing the end of their first grade year now, and they have grown with the school, in its peaceful, prepared environment. They are in first grade now, and even with the challenges of the past year of remote learning, they've had long-term relationships with their teachers and their peers in their multi-age classrooms. Just like every student at APS, they are known and valued. They have autonomy and an intrinsic sense of themselves as learners because of this school. And they have so many skills for living in community and respecting everyone's different experiences, abilities, and viewpoints. Academically, they are always working at their personal highest level because the Montessori approach is so individualized and tailored to meeting each child's needs and supporting each child's growth.

Since Fall 2020, when the closure of our building was first suggested to be an impending reality, APS families have been asking for dialogue. For space to hash out unintended consequences and attempt to mitigate them. To make this process, if it is necessary, as beneficial as possible for all involved.

I believe that ACS as a district is capable of facilitating this kind of engaging process because the Communications department did it with the task of renaming Vance to Lucy Herring. From my perspective as a community participant, that process seemed well-paced, deeply thoughtful, and inclusive. Why was the process so different for this huge change affecting over 250 Pre-K and elementary students?

Critical maintenance needs for the building are about \$200,000. I ask that you spend this money and keep our Montessori and Preschool students in the building for at least one more year.

Use this year to undertake a truly collaborative process and make long-term plans, including strong, supported transitions to new locations for Montessori and PreK classrooms, educators, and students. And plan to include the voices of students, staff, and families at any school that might be asked to take in another school within its physical building and school community. This kind of change affects them, too.

If and when the time comes to make a move to another location, I ask that the Montessori school keep the school number and the state funding opportunities that come with it. SILSA is a school within a school, and APS can be, too.

I ask that we be allowed to remain at our current number of three Early Childhood Education classrooms (Mixed Age PK-3 through Kindergarten) instead of being reduced to only 2 and that new preschool students be allowed to enroll in Montessori Pre-K. The ECE students are the future of our school, and cutting that classroom will restrict our future success as a school, and will cause us to lose our most valuable resource--our educators.

I ask that in place of the one eliminated Lower Elementary (Grades 1-3) classroom, we open an Upper Elementary (Grades 4&5) classroom. We already have a teacher on staff certified for upper elementary, and we have a cohort of third-graders who could seamlessly move to fourth grade at APS instead of being made to choose other schools.

Board Members and Dr. Freeman, please take the time to look over the attached response to the Spring Study (bit.ly/ResponseToStudy). Once again, I hope you will see this response as it is intended--an invitation to dialogue among and between Montessori and Preschool families, prospective families, teachers, staff, school administrators, central office administrators, the board, and the superintendent, and other community members. We will make our best long-term decisions when we come together.

Let's take the time to discuss the differences in our understandings and clarify the numbers at play. Let's widen the circle to include meaningful participation by more stakeholders and come up with the best possible path forward for the long term. It will benefit our entire district, not just a few families.

Our ACS kids are worth it.

Thank you,
Lara Lustig

-monahegarty <monahegarty@hotmail.com>

Asheville Primary was a lifeline for my granddaughter, Zoe Wever, school years 2018 and 2019.

As a career educator with a PhD from the University of Florida in Educational Leadership, I was heavily involved in Zoe's education from pre school and continuing today.

From the start of 2nd grade, it was obvious that Zoe needed a more enriching environment than what was being offered. I was spending 5 to 10 hours a week in the 2nd grade classroom observing, as I am trained to do. In December 2017, we were granted permission to transfer Zoe from Hall Fletcher to Asheville Primary.

To say there was a world of difference would be an understatement. Zoe prospered at Asheville Primary. The Montessori program is superior in innumerable ways. The teachers and administrators at Asheville Primary are dedicated, and engaged, scholarly in their pursuits, and compassionate and child oriented.

My research found that there were few of these programs in the state of North Carolina. How blessed we are to have such a wonderful alternative and how appropriate that it be in forward-thinking Asheville.

Looking at the numbers and at the unique situation that has been this Covid year, I see no reason to consider closing Asheville Primary. The educational community needs this Montessori alternative.

Thank you.

Mona Hegarty, PhD

Aaron Brumo <aaronbrumo@gmail.com>

To the School Board and Superintendent:

Please take time to understand the all the facts before making a rushed decision:

- Asheville Primary is an extremely popular and successful school - both the preschool and Montessori programs had waiting lists for the 2019-2020 school year.

- If you add the enrollment numbers from the 2019-2020 school year for APS + Hall Fletcher together, it exceeds the capacity for Hall Fletcher. HFE: 346 + APS: 106 = 452. HFE Capacity is 446. Enrollment is down now because of the pandemic. Students may fit in the building for the '21-'22 school year (because of the enrollment restriction for APS), but there is no room for future growth.

- Asheville's population is growing. We will eventually need more schools.

- You better have a really good reason to close this school and limit the growth of a really popular program. No good reason has been articulated to the parents, teachers, staff, or the community.

- It is easy to close a school, it is very hard to reopen a school.

Please don't make short-sighted decisions. Please take the time to understand all the facts and make a decision that serves the district's children now and in the future.

Thank you for reading this.

Sincerely,

Aaron Brumo (Parent of a first grader at APS and of a preschooler who will enroll in the fall.)

- Eileen Comerford comerforde1@gmail.com

Hi there,

I'm a resident of East West Asheville and I'm writing in opposition to the closing of Asheville Primary School. Please do what you can to keep it open for our community and our kids!

Thank you,

Eileen Comerford

Eileen Comerford
Marketing and Communication Specialist
MA in Rhetoric and Writing
[\(618\) 973-3951](tel:6189733951)

Michele Delange delange_michele@hotmail.com

Members of the ACS Board,

Regarding Asheville Primary School (APS), thank you for not placing the property for sale. It would be shortsighted to sell this valuable asset. Our school population and Montessori program will continue to grow. If the safety of staff and students is the reason for the move, ACS would be wise to facilitate help from the community- both in moving the programs and returning. But it isn't clear if this is the intention. It seems several critical questions haven't been asked—or at least the answers have not been disclosed to the public.

In the PFA assessment several issues are listed as "critical needs." Certain APS staff and community members have stated publicly that the building is in no greater need of critical attention than other ACS buildings. They've said the 2020 Town Halls were not presented as discussion forums, but were informational meetings regarding decisions already made. Has ACS responded to these community claims and concerns? Is there a plan for a second opinion regarding the property's immediate critical needs?

What is the precise reasoning for moving the programs at this time? Are lives at risk? If so, this should be made more clear to the staff and community.

If lives aren't at risk, why are the programs being relocated? Is the move is being initiated to facilitate repairs? Is the intention to do so, then bring the programs back?

Though the precise details aren't known, the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act includes money designated to upgrade school structures—particularly for air quality issues. Can this money be used to address needs at APS? If not, is it possible to move the Montessori classes to Hall Fletcher temporarily and explore innovative ideas for third-party use and maintenance of the building for a specified period of time to reduce ACS near-term costs? One possible example: a creative leasing arrangement for the APS building with a non-profit or a commercial organization, with renovation/repair included in the lease terms. A local model for this kind of plan restored the Reed Center in cooperation with Green Opportunities—providing an educational opportunity for construction workers as well as improvement to the building. The resulting, renamed, Arthur R. Eddington Education and Career Center, has become an effective part of Asheville's education landscape.

It would be great if a creative solution such as this could be implemented to keep ACS ownership of APS, ensure repair and maintenance, allow an

organization time to implement a project in an ideal location, and eventually allow ACS to reinstate educational programs in the improved building.

If a move is unavoidable, there are some silver linings. If APS is deemed unsafe, a move brings an opportunity for our community to come together to help the Montessori and daycare programs relocate. Another upside of a temporary move would be the chance for the staff and students of Hall Fletcher to gain understanding of the Montessori method. It is a terrific program with educational ideas well worth sharing districtwide.

Sincerely,
Michele Delange

Brittany Wager <brittanywager@gmail.com>

Good evening, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Asheville Primary School. My name is Brittany Wager and I am a parent of two children. My seven year old is a second grader in the Montessori program and my five year old attended the Preschool program last year, prior to Covid. So I have a deep love and appreciation for both wings of the building.

I am deeply concerned about the closure of the building and the demotion of the Montessori school to a program within Hall Fletcher. I am speaking out of concern for all ACS students, but especially those with different learning profiles, who don't quite fit in, and who have found a home where they are loved and accepted for who they are at Asheville Primary School.

I am here because I care about all ACS students, but I can only speak to my own family's experiences.

My own two children are both diagnosed with ADHD and Autism. When the time came to choose an elementary school for my oldest (now second grader) I was terrified. He had an incredibly difficult experience in private preschool and had already decided that he hated school. I knew from our preschool experience that a loud building would aggravate his sensory issues, that behavior charts would trigger his anxiety, that punitive discipline would exacerbate his behavioral challenges, and that a visually stimulating environment would overwhelm his ADHD and keep him from being able to focus and learn. I knew that the choice we made for elementary school was a make or break moment for him.

Enter Asheville Primary School. From the second my husband and I walked through the door we knew we were home. We chose APS not because of the Montessori aspect, which we knew nothing about, but because of the overall atmosphere in the school. It was quiet, peaceful, didn't use extrinsic motivation or behavior charts, was a small tight knit community, and was generally an amazing fit for my child. Montessori was just a huge bonus. Flash forward almost three years and I have a child who is thriving at school.

I am very concerned that the overall energy of APS will not make the transition. How could it? As a program within a school, APS will be at the mercy of the climate within Hall Fletcher. ACS children who need something different will no longer have it as an option.

I have reviewed the study on the closure of APS. It cites low enrollment as well as costly repairs as reasons to move students to Hall Fletcher. In the school year prior to Covid, APS was really just beginning to pick up steam and went to a lottery, with families who wanted to attend being turned away. I have heard district wide concern that this move will create overcrowding at the consolidated school, a less than ideal situation in the midst of a public health crisis. I grew up attending an overcrowded school and the sensory stimulation alone was incredibly taxing on my nervous system. I do not want the same for the children of Asheville.

I would like to ask the board to Press Pause on closing the APS building. Allow our school community to recover and regrow after the Covid disruption, let us show you the amazing things we can do with public Montessori in the City of Asheville. If closure is still the best option, allow a year for planning when the community can come together in the best interest of all ACS kids.

My best,
Brittany Wager

Jessica deBettencourt jeskadebettencourt@gmail.com

Hello my name is Jessica deBettencourt and I am here speaking on behalf of the Asheville Primary Parent Teacher Collective.

As advocates for what is best for the community that is served by Asheville City Schools we have consistently used our collective voice to encourage the Board and District leadership to fully commit to the Asheville Primary Montessori school and Asheville City Preschool.

Over the past 2 and a half years the PTC has shared multiple studies with the Board that give data on how public Montessori education is very successful in meeting the needs of black and brown as well as economically disadvantaged students. Public Montessori education has been shown to improve academic outcomes and decrease discipline referrals. APS has shown this through greatly reduced disciplinary action needed each year it has been open. We see the Montessori method of APS as a way to decrease the opportunity gap in Asheville City Schools and hope the Board will demonstrate their commitment to this mission by expanding and supporting the school.

Ultimately, our goal is to keep both the Montessori and the Preschool on the campus at 441 Haywood Road, continuing to grow our school community there and creating a space where students thrive.

If APS Montessori is to be temporarily moved to the Hall Fletcher campus, we will embrace the opportunity to collaborate with Hall Fletcher families and staff as we work together to make this temporary solution a positive learning experience for all. The APS PTC and HFE PTO have already met together twice and during those meetings families from both schools have shared their concerns about the district's plan to move APS to HFE. Though families of both schools see the challenges ahead of us, it is clear we have a shared goal of staying deeply engaged in supporting our teachers, staff, and students and creating a positive space where we find ways to grow and learn together.

If APS is to be temporarily moved to the HFE campus, we would like the following options to be considered:

- We request that APS keep its school number and its enrollment over 100 students by expanding to 4th grade and opening enrollment in the ECE classrooms for the 2021-2022 school year and expanding to 5th grade in the 2022-2023 school year. We understand that open enrollment is complete, but there are likely many families still hopeful for a chance to enroll their child in APS. Keeping APS students in the Montessori program through 5th grade will allow the district to collect data on students who have benefited from Montessori learning since preschool or Kindergarten. This data will be essential for the district to see the benefits of public Montessori when making decisions regarding the future of the program.
- We request that APS continue to be held to the same racial make-up requirements of the other elementary schools and not have the student numbers combined with HFE so that APS can continue to grow as a racially balanced school and provide access to public Montessori education to all.
- We request that our teachers and staff remain in their current positions. Without them, our school would not be the place we are all fighting for. They are one of the biggest reasons everything runs so smoothly, with grace and courtesy every day and we cannot imagine our school community without each and every one of them. We are aware that you are going to continue to employ each of them within ACS, but we ask that they be able to continue within APS. Asheville Primary students deserve to have consistency with teachers and staff who are familiar with them as well as the Montessori method they have been immersed in.

- We request a seat at the table to create solutions together. We want to work collaboratively with our district leaders. We hope that you will create a committee to engage parents in further discussions about the future of APS and to discuss how long term longitudinal data will be collected to assess the outcomes of APS.
- We request that a long term plan be created to move APS to its own building as soon as possible and no later than 2027 when the district has completed its data collection and sees the successful outcomes of public Montessori and how it is implemented by the incredible educators at APS.

Based upon our own experiences at APS over the past 4 years as well as mountains of peer-reviewed evidence-based research, some of which we have shared with you, we believe that Montessori education provides a unique style of learning that can serve diverse learners. Differentiated learning happens naturally in Montessori classrooms so that students who are at risk of disengagement are able to experience meaningful learning daily and consistently grow as learners. The PTC therefore wants to see this public Montessori school expand into 4th and 5th grade in its own building so that it can offer more students its valuable resources. While we welcome the opportunity to grow a new, strong relationship with Hall Fletcher Elementary and are excited about the ways HFE and APS can support one another in excellence in education and community building, the PTC holds on to its vision of an expanded public Montessori school in its own space.

Jessica deBettencourt jeskadebettencourt@gmail.com

The Asheville Primary PTC would like to submit the text of our petition including the current list of 2,672 people who have signed and all of the comments under “Reasons for Signing”.

Please view the petition at the link below:

<https://www.change.org/p/asheville-city-schools-board-of-education-save-asheville-primary-school-the-building-the-preschool-and-the-montessori-school>

Eric Sullivan eric@obscurenouns.com via gmail.com

Kimberly Jones,

My daughter is in first grade at Asheville Primary School. It was our first choice in the lottery, and we were overjoyed to get a spot. I am very disappointed to hear that you're considering closing it, and I beg you to reconsider.

The primary school and the preschool are both excellently performing programs, well rated by the state, successes by any measure. It's baffling that our district receives the most money per student of any district in the region, but is still thinking about closing one of its finest schools. This hurried decision will have huge ramifications for my family, for the future of your careers, and for the district and city as a whole.

Thank you,

Eric Sullivan

--Eric Sullivan
Designer | Builder | Handyman
Tel 832.865.0063
www.ObscureNouns.com

Matthew Holton mholton763@gmail.com

Dear Kimberly,

I am a West Asheville resident and I am opposed to closing the primary school. Our friends child attends that school and they are very happy with it.

Matthew Holton.

kathleencking@gmail.com

I reside in West Asheville and oppose closing Asheville Primary School. All programs, including Montessori and pre-K, should be preserved. We should be expanding pre-K, not cutting spaces and schools. This harms working families. As a single mother of two young children, 2 and 4, I have struggled to keep up with rising child care costs. This is deeply upsetting and short sighted.

Jennifer Farley jennifer.farley@premiersir.com

Hello. I reside in West Asheville and oppose closing Asheville Primary School. All programs, including Montessori and pre-K, should be preserved. We should be expanding pre-K, not cutting spaces and schools.

Thank you,

Jennifer Farley
Broker Associate
Premier Sotheby's International Realty
10 Brook St. Suite 130 | Asheville, NC 28803

o 828.277.3238 | c 828.545.1383

jennifer.farley@premiersir.com

premiersothebysrealty.com

Taysia Elliott <morenita.1423@gmail.com>

To the Asheville City School Board:

I am writing in regards to closing Asheville Primary School. The closing and relocation the school has come to my attention. There have been many mixed discussions about the school shutting down for good and possibly being sold. I can understand the children being relocated temporarily to insure the safety of staff and students; however, I do not understand why closing the school would be a permanent decision. We, the parents and guardians, have children who have been at APS since preschool and have been removed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of them will not return until the next school year, and not only will they have to adjust being in a new school setting, they will have to learn a new school which can be traumatizing and overwhelming. Additionally, the relocation of the Montessori program could possibly lose the foundation it was built upon. The Montessori program and Hall Fletcher has different outlooks on education and community, and I doubt that the two will be able to coexist for a substantial amount of time.

Asheville Primary School has provided our students with a stable community of staff, and an environment for our children to grow intellectually and ethically. The teacher-to-student ratio has benefited our students significantly and I doubt that the relocation of the Montessori Program would have the same impact if they have size down to another school. At Asheville Primary School, the students and parents are able to have cultivating relationships with each other and with the staff members.

My concern for the relocation of the Montessori Program and the closing of the school is the children who will have to move their education to another school zone. APS has nurtured its students with proficiency in academics, arts, science, and social understanding. I have spoken to parents and volunteer staff who discussed their displeasure in how poorly the academics are at other schools because of the school size and teacher-to-student ratio. Also, some of the best schools in Asheville are not available to students who live in the West Asheville district due to transportation and distance. Asheville Primary School is known for having high ratings in academics and an enriching school culture. It would be unfair for the current students to have to receive education from other educational institutions that do not compare.

Lastly, our children of APS deserve a sense of normalcy upon their arrival into the 2021-2022 school year. There are decision makers who are losing sight of what is best for the students, and their mental and emotional welfare. If the school is permanently closed there would be confusion and an emotional loss for the students. Asheville Primary School and the Montessori Program deserve to keep its entity synonymous with each other because it was what APS is known for.

I ask the Asheville City School Board to reconsider closing Asheville Primary School so the students can continue to flourish in the environment they are growing from.

Sincerely,
Taysia Elliott
Phone: 828-545-6513
E-mail: morenita.1423@gmail.com
Education: A.A.S. in Office Administration, B.S.B.A. in Business Law

Honor Moor honormoor@gmail.com

Dear Asheville City Schools School Board Members:

First off, thank you for your dedicated service.

In light of the recent outbreak and staff quarantine in Central Offices, I am choosing not to attend tonight's hearing to avoid getting Covid. We are on the cusp of a fast vaccine rollout. Why take the risk?

I grew up in Asheville back in the 1970's. I attended Claxton Elementary and Newton Elementary Schools. Ms Sadie Cunningham and Ms Avery taught me to read in both kindergarten and 1st grade. My brother's best friend was Allen Robinson and Ci Ci Avery attended all of his childhood birthday parties. I was so lucky to be part of that first generation of fully integrated schools with both teachers and students. My mother was one of the 1st Asheville hippies.

After starting the Asheville City Schools District Wide Parent group 6 weeks ago, (*comprised of over 800 stakeholders*)

I have been fortunate to see beautiful support and dialogue in our community. I have been a vessel for many opinions and private conversations as have the other 4 administrators. I must say, that I am deeply concerned about the possibility of a desegregation order as well as moving preschools into our housing projects. That seems counterintuitive to everything our parents fought for. Shouldn't we keep Asheville Primary and expand it? It's 3 miles within 90% of our public housing. Kids can walk there from Pisgah View. It offers one of the very best models for early childhood education.

I am a former board certified k-12 art teacher and former ED of an educational non-profit that had 5 Superintendents on our board including Bobbie Short. Montessori education is famed for teaching a language of love and peaceful conflict which seems amazing for young students coming from trauma and extreme poverty. APS should be our leader in our district for early childhood education, rather than a line item to be moved around.

Our existing elementary schools are an oasis of learning. After a well known increase in domestic abuse in the past year, it would see our ACS children would need to get away each day into great schools with established accountability in place. Keep APS and add additional classes to our existing schools.

I sure hope we don't become schools of the "haves" & "have nots." That will only widen the Achievement Gap and create further divide. Our district has been great about evenly spreading around students in poverty to integrate into schools with a spectrum of economic diversity and special needs.

Finally, I would like to make a comment about name calling from our Superintendent. Let's not call parents racists, naysayers or act annoyed when we have concerns or questions. That is not the ACS's that I love and know. It's clear as day in our parent group that we are doing just fine without this divisive tactic. I think we do better when we listen, we support and do what is right for all of our children. I'm afraid that board members have become very isolated from the stakeholders. Our group is asking you all to acknowledge that we are living through a tough time with both the pandemic, the loss of many fine educators over the years, running through Superintendents & Principals and a complete lack of continuity. We ask you to look hard at Central Offices and look at who is being assigned the power and why is this happening?

Right now morale is low and it appears that our district is being run with fear rather than true collaboration. It really makes me sad. In the future, we ask that you hire a Superintendent within our own district family who is a true leader. Let's lead by what is right for our kids & kindness to our parents, teachers and administrators.

I am sure you all are very nice people and well intentioned. I am afraid though, that you can't see through the forest right now and that you do not have a true pulse of our community. Feel free to call me anytime. Thank you again.

Yours Truly,
Honor Moor
ACS Parent & Longtime Stakeholder

Daniel J danosphere@gmail.com

Hello Kimberly, as a parent of students at APS, I have been following the fast paced progress and changes of plans presented by the new superintendent and the school board in the past few months. First from proposing to sell the building to cover ACS budget shortfalls, now to simply shuttering the building and moving students (pre-k and Montessori) to various pods and the basement of another school.

The numbers that have been cited to justify such maneuvers are based on enrollment during Covid quarantine, which paint a skewed picture at best... When students return in full after the pandemic, the enrollment numbers will be on par with enrollment prior to Covid and most likely, growing higher as Asheville's population continues to grow.

I have to ask whether the inaccurate enrollment numbers that have been presented as data to justify these maneuvers are honest mistakes or intentionally misleading?
In either case, a public servant who would persist with this plan, rationalized by this faulty data, should be relieved of their duty because they are either incompetent or dishonest.

Thank you,
Daniel

Ruth Smith smith9757@gmail.com

Asheville primary school is such a important part of our children and grandchildren lives. In my humble opinion this school should be saved and remain in place with the necessary improvements looked at further rather than splitting up our children and wonderful educators. My granddaughter loves this school and I would rather her stay where she is than moved somewhere else. I have nothing against hall fletcher, Asheville high school was renovated so looking at the same thing for Asheville primary deserves the

same retrospect.

Respectfully
Ruthsmith
Grandparent

Sent from my iPhone

Brooke Heaton brookeheaton@gmail.com

Dear ACS Board Members,

The recently passed American Rescue Plan Act sets aside [\\$170 billion to help schools and campuses operate safely](#), including badly needed funds to address inadequate and antiquated HVAC systems that have been a cause of concern due to Covid spread. \$8.9 billion of this funding is for [State and Local Aid](#) in North Carolina. Closing Asheville Primary will forfeit this money.

Asheville City Schools is not alone in struggling to maintain and update HVAC systems in our schools. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, [more than 41 percent of school districts need to update or replace their HVAC system in at least half of their buildings](#).

Soon the ARPA funds will be distributed to state and local governments and it will be crucial that Asheville City Schools use these funds to improve school HVAC systems. Asheville Primary School has been specifically singled out for closure due to its need for an HVAC system and other upgrades that could be funded via the ARPA. Plans must be set in place NOW to utilize these funds.

Why permanently close this facility when millions of dollars in support funds have been SPECIFICALLY allocated for the most costly improvement to Asheville Primary?

Brooke Heaton
WAVL

J Breland cjbreland@gmail.com

I should have caught the fact that the email in FB had .com instead of .net, but I copied and pasted it! My email just bounced back as undeliverable.

Can you still include it with your group of emails, or should I mail it to the commissioners myself?

Thanks!

CJ

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **CJ Breland** <cjbreland@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Mar 15, 2021 at 4:28 PM

Subject: Asheville Primary School

To: <kimberly.jones@acsgmail.com>

I live in West Asheville, and I am totally opposed to closing the Asheville Primary School.

Asheville City Schools has an unconscionable achievement gap. Research shows that quality preschool experiences help all students begin school ready to learn. I have absolutely no faith that preschool, especially Head Start, will receive the focus it deserves if moved to elementary schools, even if the same number of classrooms can be devoted to preschool.

In addition, the Montessori school at Asheville Primary offers an additional magnet option not offered at the other elementary school.

Asheville Primary School sits on a prime piece of property. It is absurd to even consider selling the property to close a funding gap.

Finally, for years I drove past APS en route to Asheville High School. I saw parents and children walking to that school every morning. It is a neighborhood school for many, and neighborhood schools are important.

Sincerely,

CJ Breland
Asheville City Schools Retired Teacher

sarashea79@gmail.com

As a parent, I'll give you my permission to use this photo of my daughter Ivy Shea, for all your marketing needs for a Asheville Primary school preschool and beyond.

With love, Sara and Ivy



Sara and Ivy