

## **MINUTES**

**Committee Members in attendance:** Al Whitesides, Brandy Bowman, Chavaun Letman, Glenda Weinert, Jane Hatley, Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, Kidada Wynn, Kit Cramer, Leslie Anderson, Mistie Reising-Cogbill, Philip Belcher, Rich Johnston, Susan Mims, Wendy Wieber

**County support staff in attendance:** Amanda Edwards, Angelyn Johnson, Avril Pinder, Brad Watt, Burnett Walz, Jennifer Barnette, Kimberly Fullerton, Rachael Nygaard, Rafael Baptista

**Asheville City Schools representatives:** Dr. Gene Freeman, Superintendent; Melissa Hedt, Deputy Superintendent of Accountability and Curriculum; Susanna Smith, Preschool Program Director; Sarah Cain, Director of Elementary Education; Georgia Harvey, Chief Financial Officer; Shane Cassida, Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services; Ian Nelson, Director of Testing and Accountability; Laura Parks, Director of Secondary Education

**Other Guests:** Sunshine Request, Marcia Whitney, Pepi Acebo, Ami Siler, Mary Arnold, Kaitlyn Guyer, Derek Lacey, Brian Repass, Daniel Walton

**Welcome** and agenda review by Jasmine Beach-Ferrara. She explained that this is a special called meeting for discussion purposes only and no official business or votes will be conducted. Since it is a special called meeting, there will be no public comment.

**Virtual meeting reminder:** Identify yourself when speaking. This is a public meeting. Please keep yourself muted when not speaking. This meeting is being recorded.

### **Asheville City Schools Discussion**

Asheville City Schools staff presented an overview of their proposal. A copy of that presentation is included as part of these minutes. After the presentation, there was the opportunity for Early Childhood Committee members to ask questions of Asheville City Schools.

**Q:** Where is your original data coming from? Have you spoken with families specifically in identifying their needs or is this an estimate from your site administrators?

**A:** Dr. Freeman said that anecdotally, he has spoken with many parents in the community that have expressed the need, and they want it to be home grown and have access to the facilities. He deferred to others who have 20+ years' experience here. Anecdotally for 20+ years, parents of the students, students who are now parents, who have lived in public housing, have asked and questioned why they can't have access to full day preschool in their community. In the last few years, she has started digging into the reasons for that, and she thinks a lot of that is due to location and being in communities where they see people who look like them, that they know. Their community pods are a great example of what happens when programming is located within public housing communities with the input of the families in developing the programming. Dr. Freeman acknowledged it will be very important to do a very robust and rigorous enrollment campaign to educate people to what is being offered to get more families involved. Melissa said

that they have also heard from families that transportation is a barrier and that is why it is such a key piece of this plan.

Q: Did you say that using the Lonnie D. Burton center won't displace any of the Community Action Opportunity classrooms? and Why is the existing building not being kept even with this expansion since there is such a huge need for slots?

A: If they only relocate 2 classrooms to Lonnie D Burton, they will not be displacing any existing classrooms. If they relocate additional classrooms to Lonnie D Burton, they could potentially be displacing classrooms. They are working on a plan with the Housing Authority and Community Action Opportunity to minimize displacements. This would mean spreading classrooms out instead of doing their original plan, which was to put all 4-5 preschool classrooms there. They are agreeable to a solution that works out for everyone, and it sounds like that will be limiting their classrooms at Lonnie D Burton to 2 or 3 classrooms and cohabitating with Community Action Opportunities.

At Hall Fletcher and Lucy S Herring Elementary, which are within a half mile of the existing building, they currently only have half of their capacity. They also have to look at the budget. To be fiscally responsible, why do they have 2 large buildings at half capacity when they are both in much better shape than the Asheville Primary building. They spend about \$300,000-\$400,000 per year doing bandaid approaches for that building. To address the critical and high priority needs at Asheville Primary, which would have to be addressed within the next 2 years, it would cost \$6M. They were recently awarded a large capital fund project to revamp the Lucy S Herring campus, which is one of the schools at half capacity. At this point, it is much more fiscally responsible for them to make sure they are investing in buildings with longer life. Even if they put the \$6M into Asheville Primary, they would still be left with a 60-70 year old building that wouldn't have a lifespan much beyond another 10 years. The worst parts of Asheville Primary would be things that are very COVID specific, such as windows that don't open to allow ventilation. To replace those windows, it would require a complete remediation of asbestos and lead that would take some time and probably require them to vacate the building for 6 months to a year. That doesn't include the HVAC and water that is a major issue that has to be addressed. There is a ton of research that says why would you have a building that close to a major highway in terms of air quality. They could potentially mitigate air quality issues within the building by address the items Shane listed, but they still have a playground. Why would they go against what science says about the transmission of fumes to small children.

Q: Curious about the timing, why now this shift?

A: Dr. Freeman said that when he first arrived, he met with Dr. Cassida and their first conversation was about what to do with this building. This is not a right now scenario. He has been here for almost a year and as soon as he arrived, he was informed of the issues with this building. They also have a huge achievement gap, and what they have been doing isn't working. Every moment they don't do something differently, that gap grows stronger. The big issue was, those kids now have gone through COVID, a year without traditional classroom settings, how far behind are they now? This is just one part of the plan to close that gap. Part of that is to really look at the

foundation of what they are doing for children. Kids aren't coming into kindergarten prepared, so they have to change the rigor, do a better job of monitoring and reviewing the instruction to make sure it matches the needs of the children on a 9-week basis. They don't have a minute to spare to go from what didn't work to something different. It won't be perfect and there will be bumps in the road but they cannot keep doing what they have been doing. Teachers have been doing fantastic, but remote learning never takes the place of classroom teaching. Dr. Freeman's sole intention is to change the outcomes of kids of color. When they do that, it will change the outcomes for all students.

Q: Is there a timeline you can provide for there being assurance that no other preschool classrooms will be displaced?

A: They will work with Housing Authority to determine where they would want them. They would absolutely guarantee no displacement, but one thing they haven't been able to get yet is the number of kids that would be displaced. They are willing to take Asheville City kids in their program. But, if you are talking about 60 kids from Buncombe County, that's a different question. If you are talking about displacing 6 kids from Buncombe County, they would take those kids in also, even if they have to open another class. The Commissioners have made it very clear that they want Universal PreK. The only way to change the outcomes of their students is the foundation. They are willing to work to not displace any kid. They don't want that hanging on the backs of what they are doing. But they need a firm number of what the displacement is so they can have a better idea of if they can absorb those students if that is what those parents choose to do.

Q: Under this plan, the current Asheville Primary School would be vacated. Will that building sit empty or will it be repurposed for other programming or potentially for other local early providers needing home bases?

A: There are several things they feel this building has the potential to save. The best part of the building is the gym. It is the newest part. Currently, they pay \$60,000 per year on a maintenance space lease. They would love to relocate the maintenance department to the gym area to save that \$60,000 per year. At this point, the majority of the building is in the condition that they wouldn't feel safe having students in it. They did receive lottery funds to upgrade some of the areas, which allowed them to do mold remediation last year. They encapsulated the older pipes, but they are older pipes that will have to be dealt with. They could perhaps use it for some office space and storage. If the commissioners are willing to give the amount of money to redo the school, it still has the air quality issues. Why would you ever want to put money into a school that close to a highway?

Jasmine clarified the \$851,400 local allocation. The proposal is to for Commissioners to increase the general fund amount of the allocation to the Early Childhood fund in the amount of approximately \$851,000 to essentially replace the local tax allocation the ACS has been putting toward preschool for many year. When the fund was launched, they grouped all local dollars going to early education under the umbrella. What they are trying to do is segregate that local tax

dollar allocation and actually increase the general fund allocation to the Early Childhood program. This, in theory, would actually boost the overall level of early education funding under the assumption that Asheville City Schools continues to provide those level of funding from local allocation dollars to the preschool. She offered to have conversations around this with ACS staff if needed.

Q: Is there an intention to crosswalk what is happening in these childcare classes in terms of pre-literacy skills with what will happen in elementary school? Very concerned about consistency and easing the path as much as possible.

A: That is what they are trying to do with all of their curriculum. That is a big piece of this. They want to have a common language between their preschool teachers and elementary teachers and beyond. They want to see the language developed, and continue to be enhanced. The state is requiring the science of reading training for pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They have begun scheduling that so they are all talking the same language as far as pre reading skills and kindergarten readiness. They are looking at curriculum and materials around phonemic awareness, and they want that to be enhanced.

Q: It looks like the net gain is one classroom and 18 scholarship slots. This seems like \$620K for a net gain of one classroom. Can you respond to that?

A: That includes some initial items that are needed to go into the community. Also, personnel yearly increase. Notified retirement is going up 1.5%, hospitalization is going up approximately 3-350 per person and the state does not give them money for that – it comes from their local dollars. Most of the preschool staff are funded through the grants and local dollars (approx. \$2.2M in salary for preschool). Part of the money will cover the increase in personnel cost and teachers and teacher assistants in the new classroom. It will also support after care. The scholarships for 18 children for 12 months is \$167,000. Transportation with bus routes is \$10,000, but they think they may have underestimated this amount. Child nutrition is an increase of \$10,000. One additional classroom teacher with benefits is \$158,000. After care at 4 sites is \$90,000, and this is for parents that have extended work hours. They are not getting that now so that is an added benefit. Also planning to create more rigor in the classrooms to ensure continuity, so they need more consumables and supplies which is another \$15,000. Utilities will run approximately \$40,000.

Asheville City Schools would like the committee to allow them to submit a revised proposal, which would include a detailed line item budget. Jasmine asked them to submit that proposal to Rachael, but explained that the Committee would need to make a decision around accepting a revised proposal because that isn't something they would typically do. The county will keep Asheville City School staff informed of the status.

**Next Meeting:** Next meeting is April 6 at 12:30 pm.

# ASHEVILLE CITY PRESCHOOL *REALIGNMENT & EXPANSION*



## ORGANIZATION

- + Asheville City Schools serves approx. 4,250 students grades Preschool (3 and 4 year olds) through 12th grade (4,500 pre-COVID).
- + ACS Preschool program (ACSP) opened in 1992 with a total of 8 classrooms.
- + Since 2016, 80% or more of Preschoolers have met or exceeded developmental expectations each year as measured by the Teaching Strategies Gold tool.
- + ACSP classrooms are currently located at Asheville Primary School, Isaac Dickson Elementary School, Hall Fletcher Elementary School, and Ira B. Jones Elementary School.

## NEED FOR REALIGNMENT AND EXPANSION

- + Equity in Enrollment
- + Focus on Kindergarten Readiness
- + Remove Barriers to Preschool



# INCREASE EQUITY IN ENROLLMENT



## ACS PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT

| School year | Students of color | Black students |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 2020-2021   | 27%               | 21%            |
| 2019-2020   | 37%               | 27%            |
| 2018-2019   | 44%               | 27%            |
| 2017-2018   | 58%               | 30%            |

## EQUITY IN ENROLLMENT

- + Many ACS students residing in public housing communities are not currently enrolled in ACS Preschools, or any Preschool program.
- + Currently, 46 Preschool-aged students living in public housing communities are enrolled in programming through ACS or Community Action Opportunity
- + Only 19 of whom are enrolled in Preschool programming in the communities in which they reside.
- + Pre-COVID, those numbers were 96 and 43 respectively.
- + There are currently 147 three and four year olds living in public housing communities.



# FOCUS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS



## Asheville City Schools Brigance Universal Screening 2019-2020

|                   | <u>Above Gifted<br/>Cutoff</u> | <u>Within Normal<br/>Limits</u> | <u>Below Delays<br/>Cutoff</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| African-American  | 1%                             | 43%                             | 56%                            |
| White             | 12%                            | 77%                             | 11%                            |
| <i>Difference</i> | 11%                            | 34%                             | 45%                            |

## FOCUS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS

ACS students living in public housing communities, especially Black and Brown students, are in dire need of expanded access and enhanced programming focused on early literacy and kindergarten readiness.



# ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO PRESCHOOL



## ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO PRESCHOOL

Current ACS Preschool programming is limited to four school sites with transportation provided at only three of those sites. ACS families of color and families in public housing communities need expanded access to high-quality Preschool programming in additional schools and in their own communities.



# PROJECT PLAN



## ACS Traditional Preschool Classrooms 2019-2020

| Site              | Classrooms | Capacity | Details                                |
|-------------------|------------|----------|--|
| Asheville Primary | 7          | 126      | Does not include Montessori Classrooms |
| Hall Fletcher     | 2          | 36       |  |
| Ira B. Jones      | 1          | 18       |  |
| Isaac Dickson     | 1          | 18       |  |
| Totals            | 11         | 198      |  |

## ACS Traditional Preschool Classrooms 2020-2021

| Site              | Classrooms | Capacity<br><i>Reduced due to COVID-19</i> | Details                                   |
|-------------------|------------|--|---|
| Asheville Primary | 5          | 60   | Does not include<br>Montessori Classrooms |
| Hall Fletcher     | 1          | 12   |   |
| Ira B. Jones      | 1          | 12   |   |
| Isaac Dickson     | 1          | 12   |   |
| Totals            | 8          | 96   |   |

## ACS Traditional Preschool Planned Classrooms for 2021-22

| Site            | Classrooms | Capacity   | Details  |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--|
| Hall Fletcher   | 1          | 18         | Does not include Montessori Classrooms         |
| Ira B. Jones    | 2          | 36         | Expanded PreK site, Includes Developmental Day |
| Isaac Dickson   | 1          | 18         |  |
| Lucy S. Herring | 2          | 36         | Relocated PreK site                            |
| Maplecrest      | 1          | 18         | Relocated PreK site                            |
| Public Housing  | 4          | 72         | Relocated PreK site                            |
| TBD             | 1          | 18         | TBD based on enrollment                        |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>12</b>  | <b>216</b> |  |

## PRESCHOOL ALIGNMENT AND EXPANSION

- + Adding 18 full-day scholarship spots
- + Adding an additional classroom with full-services
- + Relocating to community-based sites
- + Increasing school-based classrooms
- + Removing transportation barriers
- + Enhancing literacy focus

# EQUITY

The district's vision is to empower and engage every child to learn, discover, and thrive. Our mission is to create learning environments that ensure excellence with equity for all students. Current ACS equity strategies include:

1. Make Preschool more accessible to the families who will benefit the most (families of color and families in public housing).
2. Transform disciplinary policies to minimize exclusionary practices and eliminate the disproportionate suspension of Black students.

## EQUITY

3. Provide free wi-fi access to all public housing communities with students in the ACS district.
4. Create an internal pipeline of Black teachers and provide opportunities for Black staff to pursue advanced degrees in education in partnership with ACSF and funding from the City of Asheville.
5. Implement a benchmarking and data analysis system in grades Pre- K-8 for literacy and math in the 2021-2022 school year, ensuring the academic growth of all ACS students.

# PRIORITIZE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

A primary goal of the realignment and expansion plan is to serve Preschool students in their community and school. Enrollment events will take place at the housing sites to support the enrollment of families in the housing communities in which they live. Additional family engagement nights are planned to support parents with early literacy development.

# PROPOSED BUDGET

- + Scholarships for 18 children for 12 months
- + Personnel
  - + One additional preschool classroom
  - + Loss of Title 1 Funds
  - + After-care for four sites
- + Transportations (3rd bus run with Emma Bus)
- + Child Nutrition
- + Consumables supplies and materials aligned to new literacy-focused curriculum (art, replacements, classroom libraries, classroom manipulatives, curriculum specific materials)
- + Curriculum Resources and Enhancements
- + Outdoor learning environment improvements at 5 sites

- + Community site upgrades (fence, steps, paint)
- + Utilities
- + Professional Development
  - + Reading Research to Classroom Practice
  - + Heggerty's Phonemic Awareness
  - + NCAEYC North Carolina Association For the Education of Young Children
- + Family Engagement and Community Events for all new sites
- + Literacy Night for all sites x 6 sites x 2 per year

TOTAL Requested: \$693,280

TOTAL ACS: \$2,838,960

(ACS Total includes Head Start, NCPK, Developmental Day, Tuition, Subsidy, SFQ, and Local Funds)

Questions?

