

PRESS RELEASE



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Statement by Courtney Andrews at Mountain Brook Schools BOE Meeting on July 12, 2021

Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Courtney Andrews - I am a graduate of Mountain Brook Schools, and I have two little girls at Mountain Brook Elementary. My remarks pertain to the topic at hand, but I did want to begin with a personal statement of gratitude to you all for your tireless work navigating us through a global pandemic and for keeping our kids safely in school over the past year. Considering that was not the case for the vast majority of children around the country, I am eternally grateful to you for figuring out how to make that work.

Now, it seems, we have arrived at a new moment of crisis and a new set of unprecedented circumstances to navigate. No rest for the weary, I guess. As you think about how to move forward, I implore you to consider a letter from Mountain Brook alumni that expresses support for diversity-related efforts in our schools. This letter reflects the perspectives and experiences of individuals who were children at one time in our school system and who have built on their Mountain Brook education and gone on to establish themselves as parents, professionals, and community members both here and around the world. Signed - at this point - by nearly 2000 individuals (the equivalent of about 6 graduating classes), this list includes former valedictorians, homecoming queens, star athletes, and talented artists.

There is much to celebrate in this testament of alumni experiences in Mountain Brook Schools and so much for which we are grateful. As with any district, there are also shortcomings. We appreciate the Board's willingness to reflect on what those shortcomings are and to establish strategic goals to address those problems and do better - for our students, our teachers, and everyone that enters the halls of our schools. To that end, our letter expresses support for continued efforts related to strategic goal #4, specifically anti-bias training for teachers and broader diversity and inclusion initiatives in Mountain Brook schools. And I want to be clear - we do not conceive of these efforts as a blanket accusation of racism or antisemitism or intolerance on the schools or the community as a whole. In fact, for every story of bigotry or meanness in Mountain Brook, there are ten stories of love and acceptance and kindness. But it's important that the voices and experiences of people who did - or might - encounter bigotry in our schools don't go unacknowledged just because it's discomfiting and difficult for some of us. Anti-bias trainings are designed to help us navigate those difficult situations, to learn more about where people are coming from, and to be better towards one another.

As alumni, we appreciate Mountain Brook's focus on academic excellence and we certainly don't want to sacrifice that. But we also recognize that our schools have always provided quality teaching on social and emotional development as well. These two areas of focus are not mutually exclusive; in fact, I believe that prioritizing both only enhances the learning experience and provides maximal benefits to our students - both in terms of creating safe and supportive learning environments for all students and preparing students to live and be successful in the modern world. This is not to say that "politics" should be taught in math class or that everyone will have to "walk on eggshells," only that students are given guidance and opportunities to develop and practice social skills, skills that are consistent with the values that are being taught in their homes, that will be useful to them in the classroom and beyond for the rest of their lives.

Finally...This is a difficult moment. It's tense and it's challenging and it's exhausting and it's hard. But that's okay. We can do this. We can use this opportunity to build a better, stronger, kinder, and more inclusive school system and community. We do not have to let this division and this hostility and this anger define us, and we certainly don't have to let it defeat us. A lot of that work falls to us as parents. To Dr. Barlow and the Board, thank you for your leadership as you thoughtfully and respectfully consider the different viewpoints that are being expressed here today. And thank you for your ultimate commitment to always doing what you think is right and what is best - not for us - but for our children.

About MB Listens

MB Listens is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, grassroots organization that is striving to ensure that everyone is accepted, welcomed, and treated equally in Mountain Brook. To learn more about MB Listens, please visit us at www.MBListens.com or www.facebook.com/MBListens.