

PRESS RELEASE



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Statement by Kevin Cornes at Mountain Brook Schools BOE Meeting on July 12, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Kevin Cornes and I have two children who attend Mountain Brook Junior High. I also have a daughter who just graduated from the high school this past May. Thank you so much for allowing so many from the community to speak today.

I am also the cofounder and chairperson of MB Listens - a nonpartisan, grassroots, nonprofit organization, founded by Mountain Brook residents with a vision that everyone, regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status; will be accepted, welcomed, and treated equally in Mountain Brook, AL.

I have recently heard a few misconceptions about MB Listens and our mission. It's not my goal today to address those misconceptions, but let me just say this: at our core we are simply trying to support those who have been marginalized because of their identity. It's as straightforward as that.

What does that support look like as it relates to diversity and inclusion in our schools? Well, it's twofold:

First, we are trying to raise awareness. Now let me say this, I do not think Mountain Brook or our schools are full of hate. I believe the majority of our community accepts and welcomes everyone, and they want to foster an environment that demonstrates just that.

However, there really are many in Mountain Brook and our schools that do not feel accepted and welcome - I have lost count of the personal experiences that have been shared with me just over the past 6 months. It's heartbreaking to hear how people and their children have been and continue to be hurt - just because of who they are. And, I do not believe that trying to help and support those people is a bad thing to do - as I said, it is MB Listens' core mission.

I also sincerely believe that raising awareness does not make Mountain Brook or our schools look bad. I think it has the opposite effect - it shows that we, as a community, understand and care. The response so far to our efforts to raise awareness, from within and from outside of Mountain Brook, has been overwhelmingly positive. I hope MB Listens is helping mitigate the negative stereotypes that some people have used to label Mountain Brook and our schools.

Second, we are trying to show our support for you - the Board of Education, Dr. Barlow, and all of Mountain Brook Schools' faculty and staff. To be clear, we do not see it as our role, nor our place, to tell you the specifics of what you should do.

Mountain Brook Schools already has in place good written policies, codes of conduct, sanctions, and strategic goals - especially #4:

Which reads to “develop structures to ensure that the school district honors diversity and that all who are associated with the school district are treated with respect” - and its desired results that state “Students, staff, parents, and visitors report that our schools and classrooms are physically and psychologically safe. There is evidence of mutual respect among students and staff. Students and staff find value in each other and feel they can openly express ideas and opinions. Students and staff are encouraged to respect and honor diversity.”

You also have written cultural practices - I'll highlight #6:

“To provide a climate that recognizes diversity and encourages respect for all persons.”

You know what to do, you have carefully and thoroughly documented it over the years, you have updated it recently - as evidenced in the 5 recommendations by your newly formed diversity committee. What we are asking and encouraging you to do - with transparency, determination, and resolve - is to act on and enforce what you have said you will do.

Of course I think you should listen to all stakeholders in the community, but ultimately make your decisions and take actions based on your written policies, codes of conduct, stated goals, and what the experts you have on staff - as well as experienced and proven partners you bring on board - decide is best for the safety and well-being of everyone in Mountain Brook Schools. In other words, do not make decisions that are not consistent with your written policies and stated goals, simply to placate any specific group or groups in the community.

Thank you for all you are doing and thank you for allowing me to speak.

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.