RENAMING OF VANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

NSPRA - Public Engagement/Parental Involvement Campaign

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- Pre K thru 12th Grade District Comprised of 10 Schools and 4,400 Students
- Two Public Relations Staff Members
  - Executive Director of Communications
  - Communications Liaison
PROGRAM SUMMARY

Situational Analysis:
For more than 130 years, Asheville City Schools has prided itself on our constant desire to adapt to our changing world as we strive to best meet the needs of our students, staff, families and community.

In our district, excellence with equity is more than a motto. It is the driving force of every decision we make.

In the summer of 2020 - as the dual crisis of COVID-19 and social justice protests shined a spotlight on inequities both within our country and school district — the name of Vance Elementary School was brought before the Asheville City Board of Education during their June 30, 2020 meeting.

Dr. Gene Freeman, Superintendent of Asheville City Schools, explained “we would be remiss to the social and emotional well being of children, especially our students of color, if they were to continue to attend a school named after a slave owner, as his stance on racial equity does not match the current beliefs and feelings of our students, staff, families and community.” He received the Board’s approval to begin the renaming process; therefore, our district started an extensive campaign to receive feedback from as many stakeholders as possible, especially those who currently make up the Vance Elementary School family.

With that feedback, the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce presented the Board with five final recommendations, and the Board selects its new name - Lucy S. Herring Elementary School - on February 1, 2021.

This submission maps out how Asheville City Schools and our greater school community worked together to ensure students, their families and our staff felt seen, heard and empowered to rename a school from a former slaveholder to the district’s first Black administrator, a woman who dedicated 52 years, 35 in Asheville City Schools, faithfully serving students.

Problem Statement:
The problem our public engagement plan addresses is: In Asheville City Schools, we know that history cannot be ignored; however, we also know that some history should be in museums, as opposed to on the marquee of a school building whose main focus is creating a supportive, loving environment where all students can learn, discover and thrive.

RESEARCH
Research is the foundation for effective, strategic Public Relations planning. Therefore, I reviewed the following data when establishing the goal and objectives for Vance Elementary School’s Renaming Process:

- **Historical Research (Formal; Primary; Qualitative/Quantitative)**
  - I examined the district’s communications archives as well as North Carolina Historic Sites and media files (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) to learn more about Zebulon Vance. The prior namesake of the school was North Carolina’s Governor during the Civil War and U.S. Senator during Reconstruction until his death in 1894. In both positions, he fought...
vehemently against civil rights for Black Americans. Prior to the war, he and his family enslaved people.

- Once the Renaming Taskforce narrowed down their recommendations to five names, extensive historical research and background checks were conducted.
- As part of our strategic Crisis Communications Plan, Asheville City Schools continues to research, update and evaluate our responses to support our schools and community when a normal day is interrupted. Specifically, confederate flag communications, communications about removing a commemorative plaque featuring a slaveholder and communications about Mr. George Flody’s tragic death were useful in shaping our initial communications.

**Fact-Finding (Informal; Secondary; Qualitative)**

- I searched the NSPRA Gold Mine and the School Communications Pros Facebook Discussion Page to determine how similarly sized and geographically relevant school districts had communicated and engaged with their students, staff, families and community throughout their renaming process.
  - Charlotte Mecklenburg (1, 2, 3)
  - UNC Asheville (1)
- I interviewed fellow School PR colleagues who have gone through their own renaming process to “admire and acquire” the communications strategies they utilized as well as learn from their missteps.
  - Whit McGhee, the Director of Public Relations for Vestavia Hills City Schools, was especially supportive in explaining how they engaged the public when deciding whether their high school’s mascot would remain the Rebels.
- In addition to Asheville City Schools conducting its own renaming process, the City of Asheville and Buncombe County is considering the renaming and/or removal of Downtown Asheville’s Vance Monument. Therefore, I was able to collaborate with their Communications staff to determine successful (and not so successful) techniques.
  - Sample of Media Coverage Regarding Vance Monument (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

**Survey (Formal; Primary; Qualitative/Quantitative)**

- I surveyed Asheville City Schools staff, families, alumni, community members and those that lived within the Vance Elementary School neighborhood to determine what qualities they deem as most important when considering a new name for Vance Elementary School.
- Asheville City Schools also spoke with Vance students about their most desired characteristics by using age-appropriate questions.

**Virtual Public Input Forums (Informal; Primary; Qualitative)**

- The renaming of Vance Elementary School would not be a decision solely made by one or two people; instead, we wanted it to be a collaborative effort that includes feedback from as many stakeholders as possible while balancing the mass gathering mandates in place at the time. Therefore, four Virtual Public Input Forums were held to not only determine guiding principles and preferred categories but also solicit name ideas.
PLAN

Goal Statement:
Asheville City Schools students, staff, families and community stakeholders will feel informed, valued and heard throughout the Vance Elementary School Renaming Process.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Executive Director of Communications:** The Executive Director of Communications’ role was to execute the campaign as outlined by the Superintendent and Taskforce.
- **Vance Elementary School Principal:** The school principal served as our boots-on-the-ground expert and voiced all messaging specifically for her school community. She also served as the school’s Taskforce point person and engaged educators to gather additional student feedback.
- **Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce:** Representing a wide array of perspectives that make Vance Elementary School such a unique place to work, learn and grow, the task force was comprised of representatives from current Vance students, Vance alumni, teachers, staff members, district administrators, families, future families as well as community members. They determined our timeline, guided our communications strategies, determined qualities and characteristics needed in a new name, attended Virtual Public Input Forums, examined data and ultimately presented the Board with recommendations.

Identifying Our Publics:

- **Vance Elementary School Staff:** As explained in Effective Public Relations, 11th International Edition, “an organization’s most important relationships are those with employees at all levels.” Staff members needed to be informed in order for the process to be successful and trusted by the community.
- **Current & Prospective Vance Elementary School Families:** Asheville is home to two public school districts, ten private schools and six charter schools. Therefore, in addition to reassuring our current families and reinforcing their choice of Asheville City Schools, the way we handled our public engagement efforts could increase our enrollment numbers.
- **Asheville City Schools Students:** We would be remiss to the social and emotional well being of children, especially our students of color, if they were to continue to attend a school named after a slave owner. Therefore, it was imperative that our students not only had a seat at the table but understood we were making this change to reflect their future.
- **Asheville City Board of Education:** As the ultimate decision makers, we wanted to ensure the Board was well informed throughout the renaming process.

Objectives:

| The Asheville City Board of Education will unanimously approve a new name for Vance Elementary School by June 1, 2021. (Outcome Objective) |

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Our Messaging:

In an effort to streamline communication to our key publics, three key messages were created using data from historical research, survey analytics, community input sessions and public forums. They include:

- The Asheville City Board of Education needs public input to fulfill its goal of renaming Vance Elementary School.
- In order for our publics to make educated suggestions, we must update our stakeholders as soon as information becomes available.
- All feedback is welcomed, valued and will help drive our decision.

Our Timeline:

From start to finish, the campaign was carried out over a 16 month time period.

- **June 16, 2020:** Press Release is shared with Vance Staff and Families/The Local Media
- **June 30, 2020:** Asheville City Board of Education approves moving forward with renaming
- **August 3, 2020:** Meeting between Executive Director of Communications, Assistant Superintendent and Vance Elementary School Principal to determine next steps & who should make up Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
- **August 17, 2020:** Invitations go out to serve on Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
- **August 18, 2020:** Vance’s principal shares surveys with staff and families
- **August 25, 2020:** First Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
- **September 9, 2020:** Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
- **September 16, 2020:** Update goes out to our community about upcoming Virtual Public Input Forums
- **September 23, 2020:** Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce

200 students, staff, family and community members will ensure their input is heard regarding the qualities that are most important to them when considering a new name for Vance Elementary School. *(Outcome Objective)*

Asheville City Schools will ensure consistent correspondence throughout the Vance Elementary School Renaming Process by providing 25 communications to key publics throughout our campaign. *(Output Objective)*

75% of Vance Elementary School students, staff and families will understand its history and be able to identify the school’s new name by November 1, 2021. *(Outcome Objective)*
September 24, October 1, October 6 @ 10:00 AM and October 6 @ 5:30 PM: Virtual Public Input Forums
October 21, 2020: Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
October 28, 2020: Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
November 2, 2020: Executive Director of Communications provides Board Members with update
November 3, 2020: Election Day 2020; added opportunity to engage with Vance Elementary neighborhood
November 9, 2020: Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce narrows down future name suggestion from more than 20 to just five
November 18, 2020: Meeting of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Taskforce
December 7, 2020: Executive Director of Communications provides Board Members with update
February 1, 2021: Asheville City Board of Education unanimously votes to rename the school from Vance Elementary School to Lucy S. Herring Elementary School
February 15, 2021: Creation of a new recruitment video
Summer 2021: Design of a new school logo, sign, rugs, business cards, banners, buttons and t-shirts
August 23, 2021: The first day all students and staff members are back for in-person learning since the school was renamed
October 26, 2021: With students and staff back in the classroom, the school hosts its inaugural Lucy S. Herring Day

Our Budget:
The overall cost of the Vance Elementary School Renaming Process was $3,800. $299.99 was earmarked for Mentimeter, an online software used to solicit anonymous results during community forums. Additionally, $3,500 was spent to support the school with updated supplies, such as a new logo, sign, business cards for school administrators, staff shirts, banners and rugs.

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategies/Tactics:

- **Strategy # 1**: Ensure the widest dissemination possible across the City of Asheville.
  - **Tactic # 1**: Create separate student, staff & community stakeholder surveys.
  - **Tactic # 2**: Utilize social media (1, 2, 3, 4) to ensure stakeholders are aware that all are welcome & encouraged to share their feedback.
  - **Tactic # 3**: Ensure the media knows surveys are open and when virtual public input sessions are occurring.
  - **Tactic # 4**: Place flyers in daily lunch bags picked up by students and families because school is only occurring virtually. At this time, we’re unable to send home paper flyers, so it’s imperative to think outside the box.
  - **Tactic # 5**: Create posters announcing virtual community forums that are placed on local bus stops throughout our community.
• **Tactic # 6**: Utilize Mentimeter, an interactive presentation software, to elevate the **voices of all attendees**. Because mass gathering limitations make it impossible to host an in-person forum, differentiated times for virtual public input forums will be key to ensure a wide array of perspectives.

• **Tactic # 7**: Utilize social media (**Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**) and the **district website** to share contact information for Executive Director of Communications if community members are unable to attend a forum but would **still like to share feedback**.

• **Tactic # 8**: Because Vance Elementary is a polling place, have table/posters up for voters to learn more about the renaming process on Election Day 2020.

• **Tactic # 8**: Collaborate with Vance Elementary School’s principal to ensure accurate, timely information is included in Sunday messages to families.

• **Strategy #2: Educate the community and Board of Education on the purpose behind the renaming process.**
  
  • **Tactic # 1**: Each meeting is opened up with the following statement, which first appeared in the initial communications: “In Asheville City Schools, we know that history cannot be ignored; however, we also know that some history should be in museums, as opposed to on the marquee of a school building whose main focus is creating a supportive, loving environment where all students can learn, discover and thrive.”

  • **Tactic # 2**: Begin each forum with an explanation of why we are here:
    - School names are a way of honoring and communicating our values.
    - Current school name does not align with the values we want to elevate.
    - It is time for a name that is more reflective of our current beliefs.
    - Racial Equity/Justice will be at the forefront of our decision making process; it’s the reason we’re coming together.

  • **Tactic # 3**: With input from the Vance staff and families survey, the Taskforce determines its **renaming guiding principles**. These guiding principles are shared in updates as well as during each forum.

  • **Tactic # 4**: From the narrowed down list of names, create **spreadsheet** based on guiding principles, knowledge of local historians and Board attorney findings.

  • **Tactic # 5**: Present Board of Education with monthly updates regarding the Taskforce’s progress and **history of finalists**.

• **Strategy #3: Highlight the unique perspective offered by Vance Elementary School students.**

  • **Tactic # 1**: Invite **Vance alumni as well as current Vance Elementary School students** to serve on the **Renaming Taskforce**.

  • **Tactic # 2**: Collaborate with Vance Elementary School principal and 5th Grade teachers to **create a project** in which students learned about five finalists.

  • **Tactic # 3**: Invite Vance 5th Graders to share their projects with the Asheville City Board of Education during both a Work Session and televised **Monthly Meeting**.

• **Strategy # 4: Create opportunities to share that Vance Elementary School has been renamed Lucy S. Herring Elementary School.**

  • **Tactic # 1**: Share final name update via social media, email, phone call, website post and press release once the Asheville City Board of Education approves recommendation.
• **Tactic # 2:** Once students and staff are learning in-person, host Lucy S. Herring Day.
• **Tactic # 3:** Update school-based website.
• **Tactic # 4:** Create new recruitment video.
• **Tactic # 5:** Create new school logo.
• **Tactic # 6:** Create new recruitment brochure.
• **Tactic # 5:** Order new supplies and materials with updated name and logo; ie. signs, banners, business cards, staff t-shirts, rugs, etc.

### EVALUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Checkpoint</th>
<th>Final Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Asheville City Board of Education will unanimously approve a new name for Vance Elementary School by June 1, 2021.</td>
<td>Renaming Taskforce Recommendations; Monthly BOE Meeting Updates; Emails from Community Members; Virtual Public Input Forums Feedback</td>
<td>Baseline - June. 16, 2020</td>
<td>Conclusion - February 1, 2021</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>APPROVED DR. FREEMAN’S RECOMMENDATION TO SOLICIT INPUT &amp; BEGIN THE RENAMING PROCESS</td>
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<td>200 students, staff, family and community members will ensure their input is heard regarding the qualities that are most important to them when considering a new name for Vance Elementary School.</td>
<td>Renaming Taskforce; Survey Results; Staff Meetings; Board Meeting; Emails from Community Members; Virtual Public Input Forums</td>
<td>Baseline - June 1, 2020</td>
<td>Conclusion - February 1, 2021</td>
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<td>ZERO</td>
<td>ADDITIONALLY, WE RECEIVED 2,124 RESPONSES ON SOCIAL MEDIA</td>
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<td>Asheville City Schools will ensure consistent correspondence throughout the Vance Elementary School Renaming Process by providing 25 communications to key publics throughout our campaign.</td>
<td>District Emails Phone Calls and Texts; Social Media Analytics; Community Forums; Surveys; Media Interviews; Webpage; Lunch Bags; Flyers</td>
<td>Baseline - June 1, 2020</td>
<td>Conclusion - February 2, 2021</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ZERO</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>75% of Vance Elementary School students, staff and families will be able to understand its history and identify the school’s new name by November 1, 2021.</td>
<td>District Emails Phone Calls and Texts; Social Media Analytics; Community Forums; Surveys; Media Interviews; New Logo; Lucy S. Herring Day</td>
<td>Baseline - February 1, 2021</td>
<td>Conclusion - November 1, 2021</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ZERO</td>
<td>100%.</td>
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Naming of Vance Elementary School

Born to an enslaved mother, Isaac Dickson was an American civic and community leader as well as a champion of education, primarily in his adopted community of Asheville. He was the first person of color to serve on our School Board and instrumental in the creation of our district, which first opened its doors in 1887 to support education of students of color. With this as its origin story, it's perplexing that a school in our district was named after the Grand Dragon for North Carolina’s Ku Klux Klan in 1922.

“What, then, is best and right to be done with our slaves? Plainly and unequivocally, common sense says keep the slave where he is now—in servitude. The interest of the slave himself imperatively demands it. The interest of the master, of the United States, of the world, nay, of humanity itself, says, keep the slave in his bondage...”

For some, Vance legacy as slaveowner clouds monument

Beth Walton bwalton@citizen-times.com
Published 4:44 p.m. ET March 13, 2016 | Updated 9:29 a.m. ET March 13, 2016

ASHEVILLE — For more than a century, the Vance Monument has marked the center of town. Buildings in Pack Square Park have come and gone. Roadways have changed. The square itself has become bigger.

When it was built in 1896, before high-rise businesses dominated the cityscape, the 50-foot obelisk was a towering structure, meant to be seen from the distance, something to reflect the far-reaching influence of Zebulon Vance, a former governor and U.S. congressman.
Removal of Vance Monument

After standing tall for more than 120 years, the Vance monument was taken down, stone by stone in May 2021. Asheville City Council voted to remove the Vance obelisk in March 2021, following the recommendation of the Vance Monument task force, which was created in June 2020, days before Dr. Freeman's formal announcement to rename Vance Elementary School.

Buncombe County leaders pass resolution to remove Confederate monuments

by Rosie Woods, WLOS Staff | Tuesday, June 16th 2023

ASHEVILLE - Vance Elementary School is getting a new name.

Superintendent Gene Freeman told the Asheville City School board during a special meeting June 23rd that he will be moving forward with the change.

"How do you explain to any kid, but especially an African American kid, that their elementary school is named after an individual who owned slaves and whose ideology was that slavery was good and that's the way it should be?" Freeman asked. "We can't explain it. And I'm not saying we need to wipe away history, either, but some history belongs in museums, not where we congregate our kids to teach and to learn."

The move did not require a vote from the Board of Education, but the five members did not verbally dissent from the superintendent’s call and Board Chair Shemekia Russell told Freeman that the board appreciated his actions.

Historical Research of Finalists
Initial Announcement Shared on Social Media & Feedback from our Staff, Families & Community

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April Bell DeLae
Both my girls went to Vance, they loved Vance, I loved Vance, and I fully support renaming Vance. It will not detract from those memories, for the memories are about the community, the love and support the school gave to our family. Just voicing my support to move on in our community w a gesture like this (in case the Board or Dr Gene reads this 😊)

Like Reply 1y

Cyndie Allen
Thank you ACS. We’re a former Vance family as well, with nothing but positive memories from our time there, we still deeply value the community & friendships built through the connections made at the school. We are grateful to y’all for acknowledging the painful history our community has lived through & perpetuates by glorifying & defending racism & our problematic past. Thank you for exemplifying that we can all do better as we learn and grow, and for being willing to face these challenges head on with transparency.

Like Reply 1y

Laura Boffa
I’ve loved being a part of this school’s community, and I support this renaming! Education is all about growing.

Like Reply 1y

Drew Reisinger
My kindergartner who attends Vance Elementary asked me earlier this week “who is Vance?” I didn’t want to tell him.

Like Reply 1y

Emily Danae Whitmire
This is one step that MUST be taken.

Show Attachment

Gpe Ready Red
Yall said we march for nothing huh? Can’t be surprised when its all part of the plan.

Show Attachment

Autumn Pittman
Perhaps consider renaming it after this woman?

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Implementaton
Public Engagement Forums
Because mass gathering limitations made it impossible to host an in-person forum, differentiated times for virtual public input forums were key to ensure a wide array of perspectives. Additionally, the first public engagement forum was reserved for just Vance staff and families.

Task force created to assist in renaming of Vance Elementary; meeting schedule here
by Kristy Kepley-Steward | Wednesday, September 16th 2020

A task force for renaming Vance Elementary School has been created + four virtual town halls have been set for Sept. 24, Oct. 1, and two on Oct. 6. Made up of current students, teachers, staff members, families, alumni + community members, it’s met twice and created a timeline for a final decision in Feb. 2021. Wanna weigh in? Check the meeting details here and note the Sept. 24 meeting is geared toward Vance staff + families. (WLOS)

Who am I?

Why We Are Here
- School names are a way of honoring and communicating our values
- Current school name does not align with the values we want to elevate
- It is time for a name that is more reflective of our current beliefs
- Racial Equity/Justice will be at the forefront of our decision making process: it’s the reason we’re coming together

Specific Name Ideas That Have Been Shared
- John Lewis Elementary School
- George Washington Carver Elementary School
- Billy Gayles Elementary School
- Stephens-Lue Elementary School
- Burlington Street Elementary School
- Enloe Elementary School
- West Asheville Elementary School
- Satchel Springs Elementary School
- Peaceful Garden Elementary School
- St. Paul Home Elementary School
- Charles Henry Turner Elementary School

Why was it important for you to be here tonight?
- I support the renaming of our wonderful school and I want all students and families to feel welcome at our school.
- This is an important issue in our community and I want all of our kids to attend a school whose name reflects a spirit of inclusion and acceptance for all.
- To gain insight into the changes made to Vance.
- I want to show my support for our school and the efforts the community is making for all of our students.
- As a parent and community member who cares about doing the right thing and making a positive change.
- I am concerned that this naming process may have left out the voices of all.
- I am so proud of our community for making this change.
- I am a student at Vance, and I want to support our community.
Guiding Principles of Renaming Process
When the Board of Education initially approved our Superintendent's recommendation to rename Vance Elementary School, we instantly began receiving suggestions from our target audiences. Therefore, an important first step of the Taskforce was determining its guiding principles. These principles served as the initial litmus test to immediately eliminate names that did not have long-term potential. The last thing we wanted to do was be forced to rename the school five or ten years down the line. However, in order to ensure the process was as inclusive as possible, we asked stakeholders to rank the importance of each principle during our four public forums.

Guiding Principles When Selecting a New Name
- Locally Relevant
- If we choose to name it after a person, it should be a Person of Color
- Reflects the values of our current community
- If we choose a theme, it should be something that's already unique and relevant to the school, like ecology
- Has long term potential
- Something that makes people want to go there
- Inclusivity

Which of these guiding principles resonates the most with you?

Qualities and Characteristics in a New Name

IDEAS:
- Connection to Asheville → history from here
- Memorialize former schools of ACS
  - Stephens Lee Elementary School
    - Educators that taught at Stephens Lee → you still don't know a lot of the history; booklet in Pack Square that's about Stephens Lee educators
  - Burton Street Elementary School
- Shiloh Elementary School
- First Black Vice Mayor or Mayor of Asheville
- Female educator that was in one of our former schools
- If it's a person, it needs to be a person of color; however, naming it after a person, is not our only option
- Parks Elementary School for Rosa Parks
- Theme that represents the school's mission would also be a great idea
  - Ecology or Community
- Racial Equity/Justice at the forefront; it's the reason we're coming together
Media Engagement

Although internal communications were key, we also relied on local media partners to share our story because our community was also considering the removal of the Vance Monument. In total, our campaign was covered 26 times, with the most stories (12) coming from WLOS-ABC13 News.
Branding
Below you will find graphics created as part of the Renaming Process as well as the new logo designed by Asheville Primary Schools’ Art Teacher Shawn Winebreeder.
Lucy S. Herring Day
This August marked the first time all Lucy S. Herring students and staff were back in the classroom since the school’s renaming. To ensure they each had a shared lens, the inaugural Lucy S. Herring Day was held on October 26th, 2021 to coincide with what would have been Mrs. Herring’s 121st Birthday. Due to COVID constraints, a whole school assembly was not able to occur. However, students reviewed several digital media pieces, including firsthand records of Mrs. Herring and interviews with local historians, then participated in classroom based, age appropriate activities.
Lucy S. Herring Unanimously Approved

During their February 1, 2021 meeting, the Asheville City Board Education unanimously approved a new name for Vance Elementary School --- Lucy S. Herring Elementary School. Overwhelmingly, the community's response was a positive one.
Engaging with our Target Audiences

32 People Attended our Virtual Community Forums, with the most being Vance Parents

66 Community Members Responded to our Survey

30 People Shared Their Renaming Suggestions Via Email

20 People Served on the Renaming Task Force, Including 10 Vance Alumni and 3 Current Vance Students

60 Vance 5th Graders Selected one of the Five Finalists and Completed a Projects to Learn More

53 Vance Staff Members Made Their Feelings Known

@AVLCitySchools Social Media Posts About the Renaming Process Received

1,352 Likes
616 Comments
156 Shares/Retweets
Good Afternoon Students, Staff and Families. This is Ashley-Michelle Tumbles with an update about your school community.

The Vance Elementary School Renaming Task Force presented its final name recommendation to the Vance City Council Education Committee during their December 30th meeting.

After conducting their own research, meeting with local historians and hearing the thoughts and feelings of our students, staff, families and greater school community, they suggested Vance Elementary School be renamed Lucy S. Herring Elementary School.

Herring dedicated 46 years of her life to teaching, 35 in Asheville City and Buncombe County Schools. A black female educator, she began her career at just 18 in an after-school Swannanoa schoolhouse before moving to Hill Street School in 1970 and later Stephens-Lee High School. In 1941, Herring became the principal at Mountain Street— a school that was later named after her — and was one of the district’s first Black administrators, eventually overseeing segregated elementary schools for both districts.

In 1966, Mountain Street School was rebuilt and named Lucy S. Herring School. For the next 15 years, the school served local students of color before closing in 1987 following court-ordered integration.

Herring died in 1987 at the age of 87.

Although all five were incredible Black female educators who faithfully served the students and families of Asheville City Schools, they ultimately decided on Lucy S. Herring, honoring the work of Christine A. Avery, Gladys Pusher Primary, Evelyn M. Diaster and Florence Green was capable because of Herring’s lasting legacy.

You can learn more about Herring through this video presentation by Vance Elementary School 6th Grader Mackenzie Baker.

Whereas the task force recommends naming the school after Lucy S. Herring, they also believe it’s important to honor all five educators and suggest a plaque could hang in a prominent place within the school explaining not only the purpose behind its renaming but also serve as a marker celebrating the contributions all five women made.

The Asheville Board of Education is scheduled to vote on the recommendation at its February 10th meeting.

Additionally, teachers, staff, parents, families, and future families were charged with selecting input. You can read more about this following today’s recommendation, the task force’s new school name remains until February 10th.

For more than 30 years, Asheville City Schools has prided itself on our constant desire to adapt to our changing world as we strive to best meet the needs of our students, staff, families and community.

Therefore, please know that the name of Vance Elementary School will be brought before the Asheville City Board of Education during their February 10th meeting. Should our Superintendent, Dr. Gore Freeman, receive approval to bring the renaming process to a close, this district will start an extensive advertising campaign to receive feedback from as many stakeholders as possible, especially those who currently make up the Vance Elementary School community.

In Asheville City Schools, we know that history cannot be ignored; however, we also know that some history should be in museums, as opposed to on the marquee of a school building whose main focus is creating a supportive, learning environment where all students can learn.

In our district, excellence with equity is more than a motto. It is the driving force of every decision we make. Therefore, we would be remiss to the social and emotional well being of children, especially our students of color, if we were to continue to attend a school named after a slave owner, as his stance on racial equity did not match the current beliefs and feelings of our Vance students, staff, families and community.
As Asheville City Schools continues to evaluate the ever-changing climate of our community and country and how it impacts our response to equity, we are utilizing lessons learned through the renaming process to serve as a jumping off point for our communications plan for 2022 - 2025 Strategic Plan, especially since it too will be rooted in creating equitable learning environments for all our students.

Asheville City Schools was one of 37 school districts statewide to receive Blue Ribbon Awards during the North Carolina School Public Relations Associations’ 2022 ceremony. Blue Ribbon Awards are the highest honor a school district can receive from NCSPRA, which is the state’s leading organization for school communications and public relations professionals. In fact, our Communications Department received North Carolina’s Best of the Best Award in marketing for its “Renaming of Vance Elementary School Communications Plan.”

By sharing lessons learned through our renaming process, we hope school districts who are facing similar situations can not only “admire and acquire” our successes but grow from our missteps —namely, that mass gathering restrictions hampered our ability to engage with our target audiences in tried and true fashions.