

## Community Think Tank & Consensus Forward: In Text & Images

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*Artists Designing Evolution,, LLC*

### Preface: Altar



Closing the Opportunity Gap: Black Children Thriving in Schools : A community gathering exploring best practices and solutions that support positive academic outcomes for Black youth

September 14, 2019

@ Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation of Asheville



## Introduction

At the inaugural Closing the Opportunity Gap Symposium on September 14, 2019 a little over 200 community members gathered at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Asheville for a half day-long gathering of scholars, community members, leaders, organizations, and a community facilitator. Through a foundation and lens set in creative facilitation, local organizer and Founder/Creative Director of Artists Designing Evolution (adé PROJECT) led the final segment of the day. Creative facilitation is a practice taught by Partners for Youth Empowerment (PYE) Global that is rooted in the belief that we all have the ability to imagine the future. We do it all the time, and yet too often our envisioning takes the form of unconscious fear or dread. In our “just in time” world, and given the multitude of challenges facing us, it’s hard to think forward in a generative manner. As creative facilitators we believe it’s important to regularly exercise our visionary capacities and to share visioning practices so we can fully engage our creative imaginations in working toward a world we want.

Based on the facilitation practices engaged by Cortina, we zoomed in on what we heard:

- Knowing the research just means that we are informed.
- Grounding and moving from strengths + taking inventory of assets is the way forward, both for Black youth in the schools, and also for the community at-large.

We took pause for the facts that had been presented:

- Community is the key to ACTION.
- Culture is the foundation of IDENTITY.
- Giving what is needed is EQUITY + INCLUSION, therefore it is JUSTICE.

The youth took the mic and wove narrative through poetry, calling to us:

- Can you see us?

- Why don't you know us?

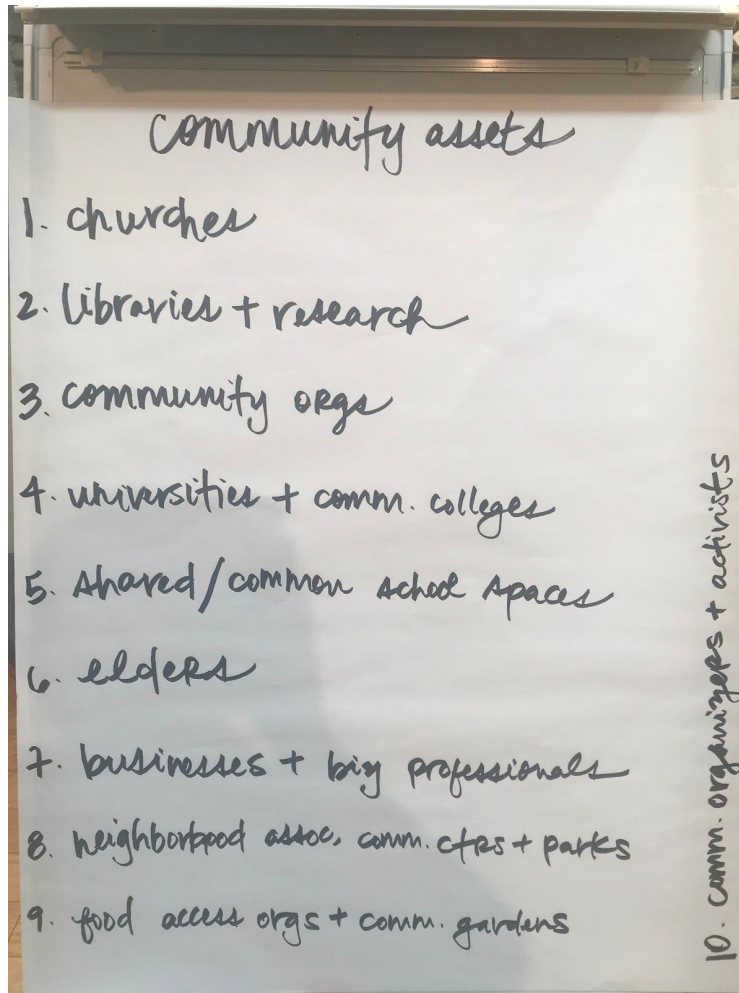
Then, using Creative Facilitation methods, Cortina named the important philosophies that we were standing upon and how these beliefs catalyze change organizationally:

- The wisdom is in the room. In other words, we have what we need, and we have the people we need to move things forward. If we think not, we only need to check the room.
- Reflect back what you heard and engage only in two-way conversations.
- Nothing about us, without us, is for us. Check: who is leading? Who is acting? Who showed up... and what role do they have as things move forward?

And in the final piece of this segment, Cortina facilitated an exercise combining practices known as Open Space, Milling, and Creative Visioning. In order to move the attendees from listening to engaged action, Cortina created ten community assets that were named and/or touched upon by the scholars providing presentations on the disparities for Black youth in education; what is needed to shift the culture of schools, education, and learning for Black youth; as well as the necessity of cultural inclusion for Black youth in school and the community in order for authentic, experiential learning to take place. These ten assets were derived from research on community asset mapping, developmental assets, equity + inclusion in order to shift from disparity to parity for Black students in the present educational system. We MUST bring the community back into the school in order for opportunity to shift for Black students, families, and ultimately the whole of the community.

- Businesses + Business Professionals
- Churches
- Community Organizations
- Community Organizers + Activists
- Elders
- Food Access + Community Gardens
- Libraries + Research
- Neighborhood Associations, Community Centers + Parks
- Shared + Common School Spaces
- Universities + Colleges

## Community Assets.



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## Community Member Response Summary: Dr. Joseph Fox

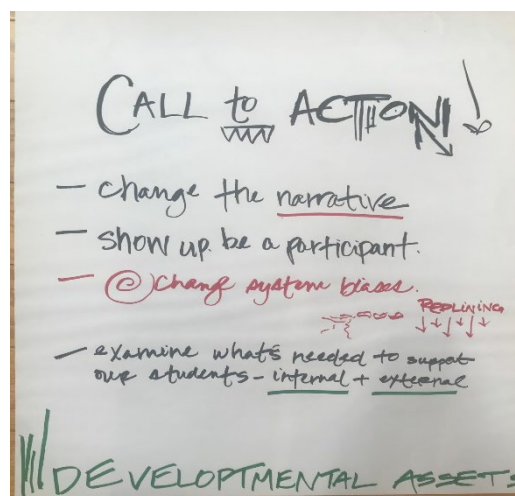
After presentations by the panel of scholars, four regional and local Black education scholars, Dr. Joseph Fox provided commentary as the respondent. This is Cortina's summary of his response.

### Call to Action

- Change the narrative.
- Show up and be an engaged participant.
- Challenge and change system biases... how is redlining STILL showing up?
- Examine what is needed to support our students internally and externally.
- Engage in research and application of the [DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS](#).

### Developmental Assets

- Search Institute has identified 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed. Half of the assets focus on the relationships and opportunities they need in their families, schools, and communities (external assets). The remaining assets focus on the social-emotional strengths, values, and commitments that are nurtured within young people (internal assets).
- The Developmental Assets® are 40 research-based, positive experiences and qualities that influence young people's development, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults.
- Over time, studies of more than 5 million young people consistently show that the more assets that young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive.
- To download Developmental Assets and dig more deeply into the framework, visit - [http://page.search-institute.org/dev-assets-download\\_1212-17](http://page.search-institute.org/dev-assets-download_1212-17)



## **Creative facilitation using open space, milling & creative visioning**

The community think tank occurred after the panel of presentations by Black education scholars and the response by the community respondent, Dr. Joseph Fox. The community think tank involved all symposium participants and was facilitated by Cortina using creative facilitation methods. Below, you'll find text and an image associated with each community asset, ten in all, from the community think tank.

### **Strategy + Community Assets: Businesses + Biz Professionals (#1)**

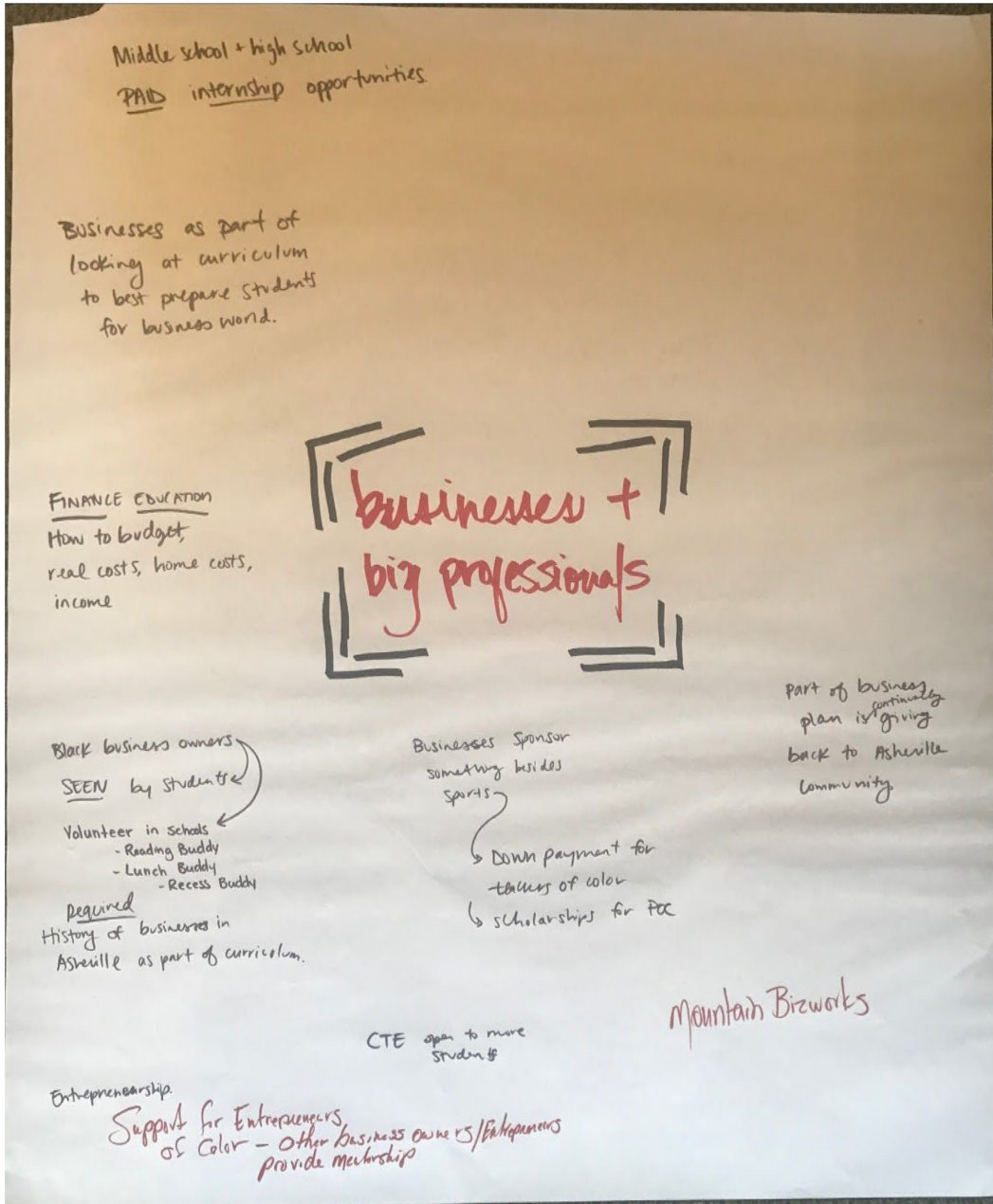
#### *Strategy + Action*

- Middle + high school - paid internship opportunities.
- Businesses as part of looking at curriculum to prepare students for the biz world.
- Finance education - how to budget, home costs, business costs, income generation.
- Black business owners - seen by students; volunteer in schools as a reading buddy, lunch buddy, recess buddy; required learning of the history of Black businesses in Asheville as part of the curriculum.
- CTE - open to more students.
- Businesses sponsor something besides spirits/wines/alcohol - down payment for teachers of color and scholarships for people of color (POCs).
- All businesses consider adopting a plan for continuously giving back to Asheville as part of their explicit business plan.

#### *People + Places*

- Mountain Bizworks
- Western Women's Business Center
- AB Tech Small Business Center

- Western Carolina University
- Lenoir Rhyne University



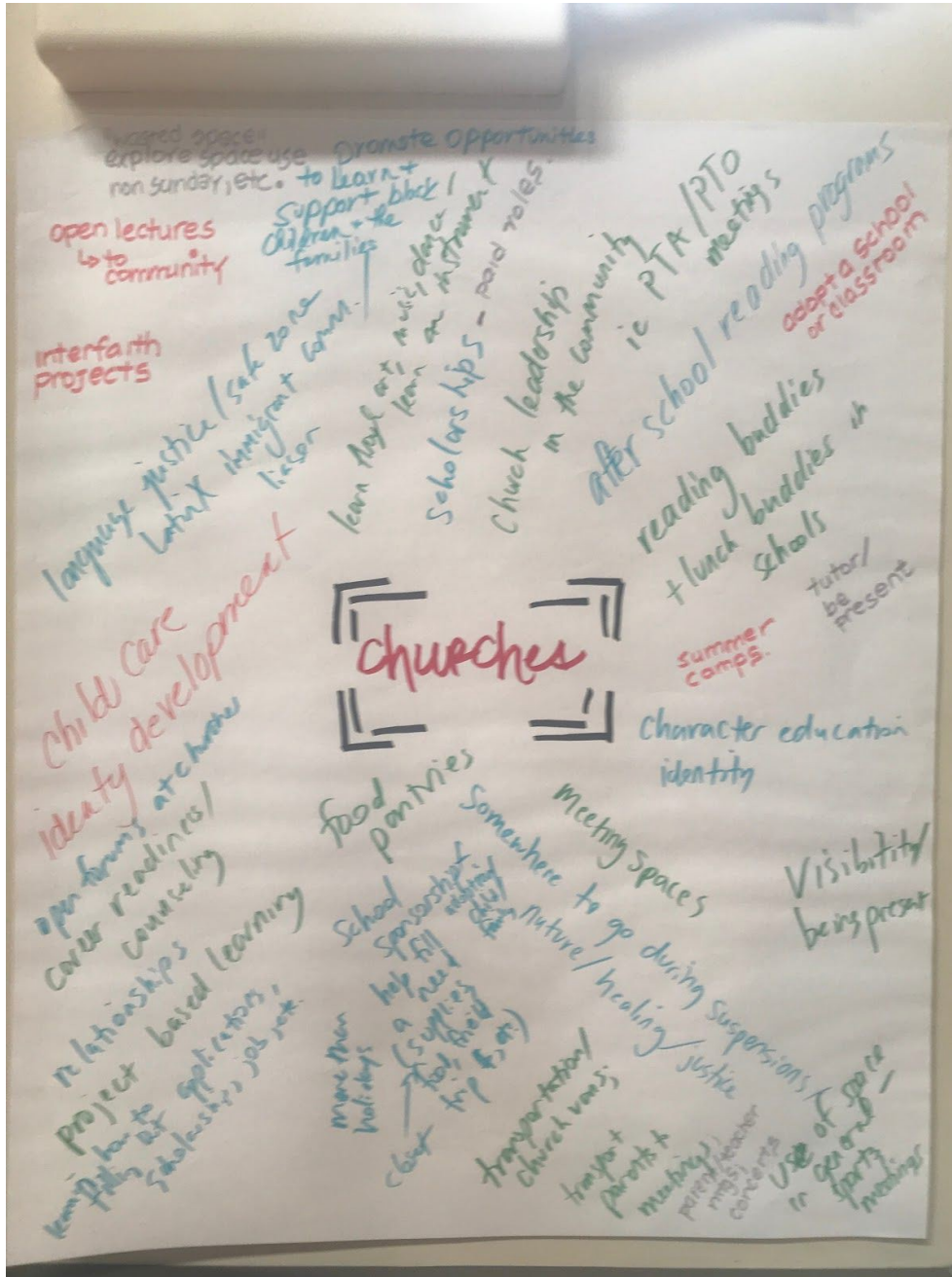
## Strategy + Community Assets: Churches (#2)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Open lectures to community.
- Interfaith projects.
- Language justice/safe zone by way of Latinx immigrant community liaison.
- Offering childcare at services and beyond in the community.
- Ideation development - open forums at churches, job/business readiness + counseling, relationships, project-based learning, workshops on filling out applications to secure needed resources (i.e. jobs, internships, scholarships, etc.)
- Food pantries that are open to the community + schools.
- Promote opportunities to learn and support black children + families.
- Host spaces where youth can learn through art, music, dance, and learn an instrument.
- Scholarships and paid roles for youth and young professionals.
- Church leadership has more presence in the community (i.e. PTA/PTO mtgs).
- Provide meeting space.
- Serve as a place to go during suspensions to nurture and provide healing justice.
- Support community org/afterschool transport needs with church vans.
- Support parent/family transport needs to get to meetings, shows, parent/teacher confs.
- Engage with the community on more than just holidays.
- Serve to help fill the gaps for student need (i.e. toiletries, food, field trip \$, clothes, etc.).
- Engage existing or creating a new space for summer camps.
- Character education and identity support.
- Visibility! Show up and be present when parents and families aren't able to.



- Provide tutoring, reading buddies, lunch buddies in schools, afterschool reading, etc..
- Churches can adopt a school or a classroom to provide support year-round.



## Strategy + Community Assets: Community Organizations (#3)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Informing leadership (of people of color) and getting “buy-in”.
- Tapping into community organizations leadership - knowledge + expertise.
- Black children seeing black leaders, leading.
- Professional development for this work into structures being mandatory.
- Alternative learning opportunities (i.e. wilderness leadership trip - Outward Bound, etc.).
- Connection of siloed community orgs through symposiums and discuss and share around early warning response system (EWRS).
- Asheville (the City) having a strategic Black child development plan to unify + divest community orgs to close opportunity gap (connect vs. compete).
- Community orgs being a liaison between parents, parent leadership + schools.
- Redirection of funds + sponsorship of local, informed Black community organizations, and move away from outer-state, white-led organizations.
- Building behavior management skill set for our teachers through community org education and trainings.

• Informing leadership - getting "buy-in" of people of color

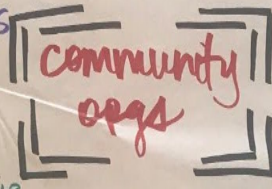
• Tapping into community organizations leadership - knowlege & expertise

• Black kids seeing black leaders leading

• Professional development for this work into structures (mandantory)

• Alternative learning opps.

I.e. wilderness leadership trip. (Outward Bound)



• Connection of silo'ed community orgs → symposiums

(EWRS)  
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• Redirection of funds ↓ sponsorship of local; informed Black community organizations. (Away from out-of-state, white lead orgs)

• Asheville (the city) having a specific, strategic Black child development plan to unify + direct community orgs to close opp. gap (connect vs compete)

• Building behavior management skill set of our teachers through community org education + trainings

• Comm orgs being a liezon between parents, parent leadership, + schools

## Strategy + Community Assets: Community Organizers + Activists (#4)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Uniform, shared vision of equity.
- Step into abundance mentality.
- Combine efforts, move out of silos.
- Know + understanding our local history + current impact.
- Promote opportunities for people to learn or support Black children.
- Common space or website with bio & contact info of local experts, organizers + activists.
- Support activists from within the system.
- Get rid of school leaders & teachers who are not engaged in activism efforts.
- Teachers being able to advocate for themselves.
- Listen to community experts.
- Mandatory training + in-class involvement for leadership and administration of schools.
- ACS having more transparent and open communication.
- Bring in local equity consultants to work with administrators of schools.
- Providing wellness + yoga trainer for Black students.
- Realize that it's time to rebuild the house!
- Create specific accountability criteria + implementation with community oversight.
- All admin and teachers taking Building Bridges + REI.
- Have the conversation about “excellence with equity”. What does this mean exactly?

### *People + Places*

- NCAE
- ACAE

Common space/  
website + bio and  
contact info of local  
experts, organizers,  
activists

# Uniform shared vision of equity

Have the conversation about "excellence with equity"  
What does this mean?

Specific  
Accountability  
Criteria +  
Implementation w/  
Community  
oversight

## Know - Understanding our local history + current impact

All admin's  
teachers taking  
building surveys,  
LEA

## Step into abundance mentality

It's Time to  
rebuild the house!

Promote opportunities  
for people to learn  
support black  
children.

# community organizers + activists

Get rid of  
school leaders/teachers  
who are not???

Support  
professors from  
within the  
system

TEACHING  
WELLNESS + HIGH TEACHERS  
FOR BLACK STUDENTS

## Combine efforts - move out of silos

Mandatory  
training + in-class  
involvement for  
leadership/  
administration

## ACS / schools transparent / open communication

Teachers  
advocate  
for members  
MCRPE  
ACRE

## Listen to Community experts

Bring in local consultants  
(ie Tepayar, Ambrose, Work w/  
Adaway) to Admins  
of Schools

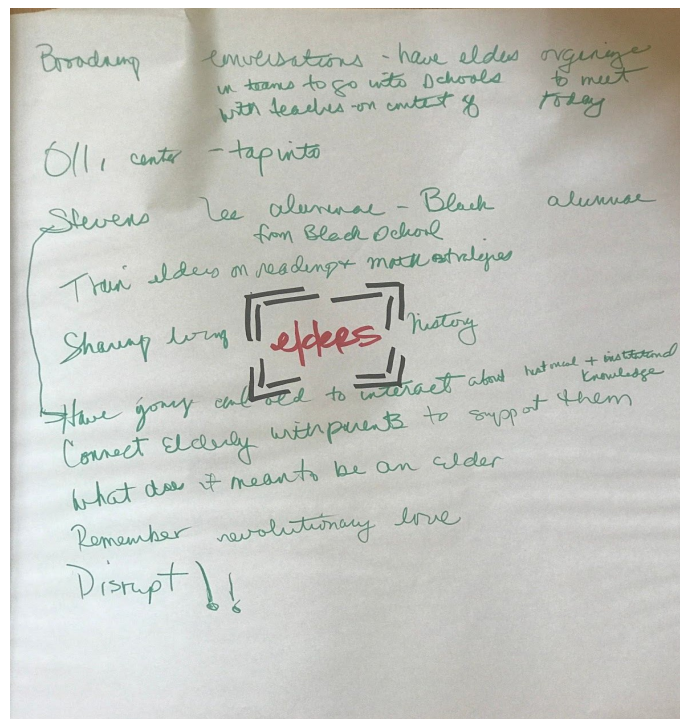
## Strategy + Community Assets: Elders (#5)

### Strategy + Action

- Remember revolutionary love!
- Disrupt the exclusion of elders in community and organizing spaces.
- What does it mean to be an elder?
- Connect elders with parents in need of support and see about mutual aid/benefit.
- Have youth and elders engage and interact about natural and institutional knowledge.
- Sharing and learning history of the community.
- Train elders on reading and math strategies to be able to activate homework support.
- Establish potential teams of elders to organize, cluster in teams to go into schools to meet with teachers in context of what's needed for the present day.

### People + Places

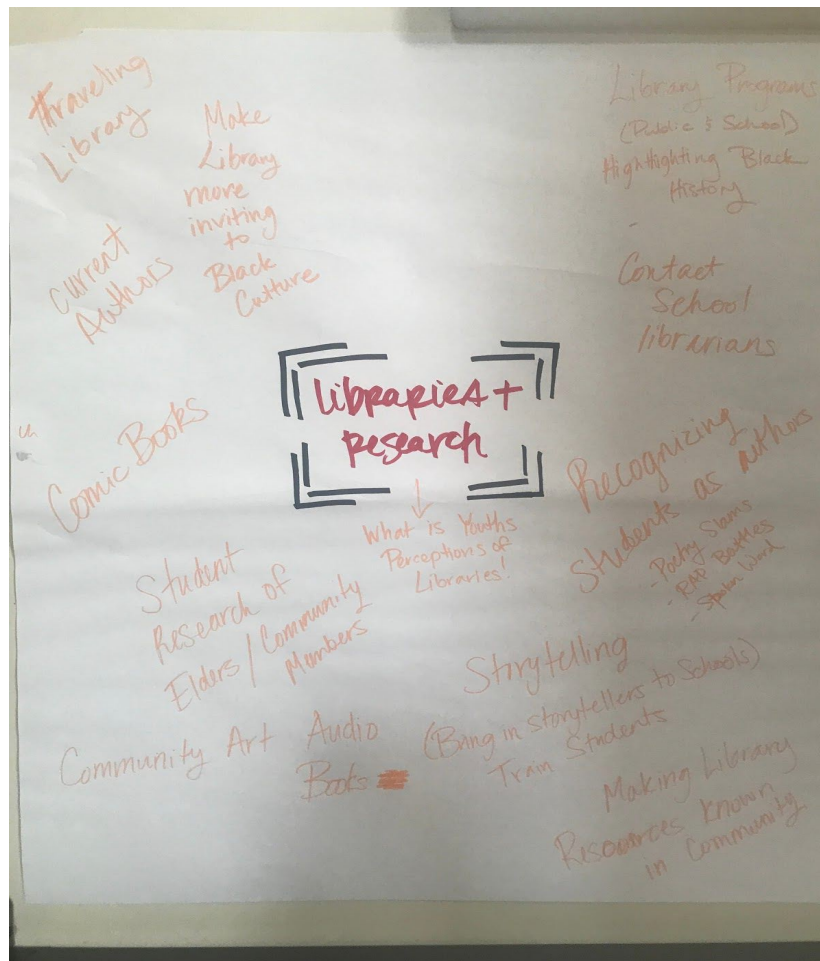
- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
- Stephens-Lee alumni



## Strategy + Community Assets: Libraries + Research (#6)

### Strategy + Action

- Traveling library that can go around to different community sites + locations.
- Current, local authors that engage with schools and students.
- Support interest in comic books, and perhaps the creation of one.
- Student research projects on elders, community members, and artifacts.
- Audio books!
- What is the youth perception of libraries?
- Storytelling - bring in storytellers to schools and train students.
- Making library resources more known in the community.
- Recognizing students as authors through poetry slams, rap battles, and spoken word.
- Contact school librarians to get a sense of youth engagement, usage + resources.
- Make library more inviting to Black culture.
- Library programs (public + school) that highlight and center Black history.



## Strategy + Community Assets: Shared + Common School Spaces (#7)

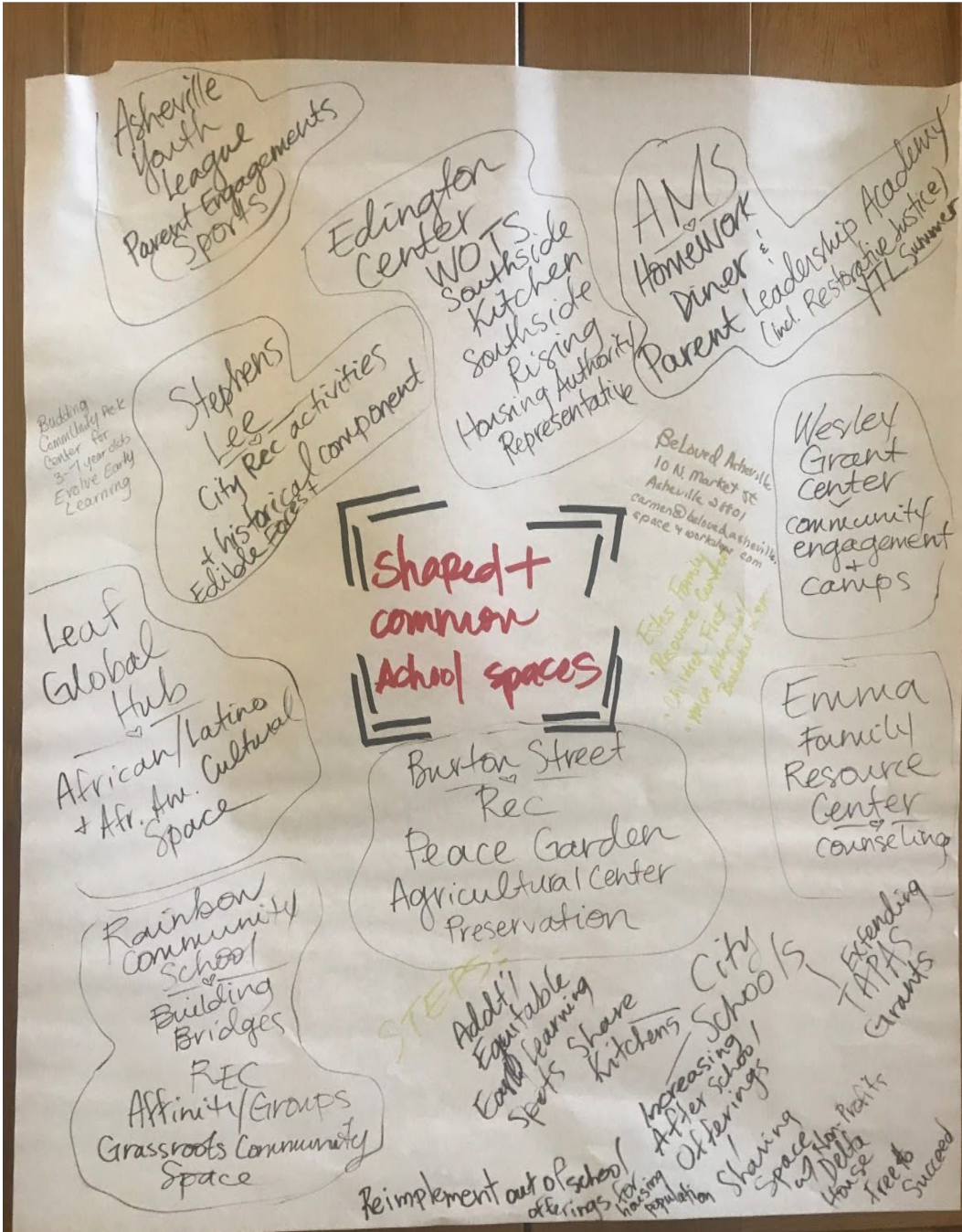
### *Strategy + Action*

- Blossoming of a community pre-K center for 3 to 7-year-olds - Evolve Early Learning.
- Forming of additional equitable learning spots, shared kitchens, and meeting spaces.
- ACS extending of TAPAs grants to cover use of school spaces.
- Increasing of afterschool offerings, and reimplement out-of-school offerings for the housing population.
- Sharing space with nonprofits that already have space (i.e. Delta House, STEAM, etc.).

### *People + Places*

- Asheville Middle School (AMS) Homework Diner
- Asheville Middle School (AMS) Parent Leadership Academy (incl. Restorative Justice + YTL summer programming)
- Edington Center
- Word on the Street/La Voz de los Jóvenes
- Southside Kitchen
- Southside Rising
- Asheville Housing Authority Representative
- Wesley Grant Center - community engagement + camps
- Emma Family Resources Center - counseling
- Burton Street Recreation Center
- Burton Street Peace Gardens - agricultural center preservation
- Rainbow Community School - grassroots comm space, trainings, learning
- Stephens-Lee - city recreation activities, historical component
- Asheville Youth League - parent engagement through sports
- Beloved Asheville - space and workshops for the community
- Estes Family Resource Center
- Children First/Communities in Schools program locations
- YMCA Afterschool/Youth Sports Activities





## Strategy + Community Assets: Food Access Orgs + Community Gardens (#8)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Food pantries and/or farmers markets in school parking lots... and this may be happening in Fairview and at Isaac Dickson.
- Growing minds thru A.S.A.P. (Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Program), \$\$ grants.
- Universal breakfast + lunch for all students and not just for the “underprivileged”.
- Many services are K-12, but more is needed for 0-5 (pre-school).
- Manna backpacks are something that happens, and includes recipes, but is this enough?
- Manna backpacks may also be furthering/contributing to stereotypes between kids.
- Access to cooking courses or cooking space - IRL + ASAP may be an opportunity.
- Transportation to resources, food access, community gardens, etc..
- Community gardens need harvest and uptake - can AmeriCorps help with this?
- Food commodity reserve program at TJ & others - how can we get schools to rescue these or reduce waste?
- Little payback from NCA - National Communication Association, but potential here.
- Verner Learning Center, “Rainbow in my Tummy”.

### *People + Places*

- Bountiful Cities
- Homework Diners
- Manna
- A.S.A.P. (Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Program)

- Bountiful Cities ed program \* See Schools Below

- Homework Diners

- food pantry @  
School parking lots

- [Fairview, Dickson)  
Growing Minds through ASAP grants

- Manna backpacks (includes recipes)  
might contrib to stereotypes, unweildy for <sup>the kids</sup> but is this enough?

- universal breakfast + lunch

- many services are K-12; need more  $\phi$  to 5

food access  
orgs + community  
gardens

- transportation to resources

- Cooking: ASAP & IRL might teach

- Verner "Rainbow in My Tummy"

is  $\$$  ... little pay back from NCACFP

- Food Commodity rescue program @ TJ & others; how

can we get schools to rescue these or reduce waste Eske Elementary School Garden  
Hill Fletcher Garden  
Vorce Garden

- FOOD waste in schools (toss expired food) fast)

- Community gardens need harvest + uptake. AmeriCorp help w/ this?

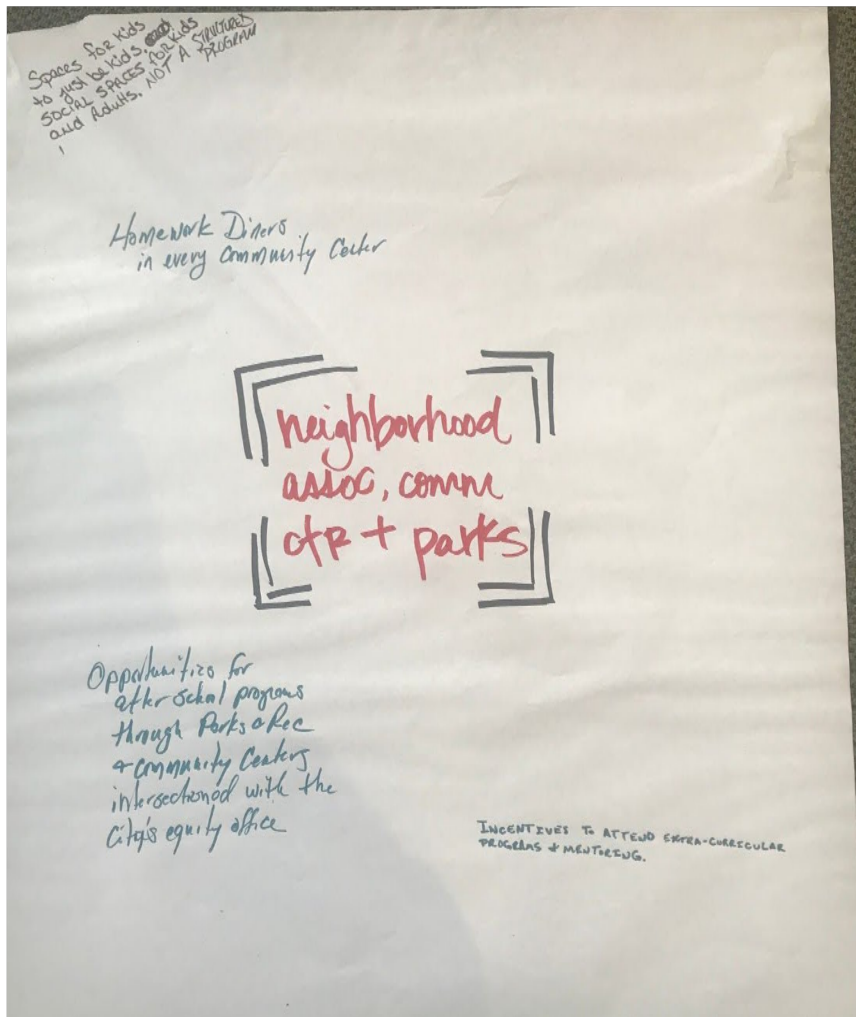
## Strategy + Community Assets: Neighborhood Assoc., Comm Centers + Parks (#9)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Homework Diners taking place in every community center.
- Spaces for kids to be kids... social spaces for kids and adults and no structured agenda.
- Incentives to attend extra-curricular activities and community programs.
- Opportunities for after-school programs through Parks & Rec and community centers intersecting with the City's Equity & Inclusion office.

### *People + Places*

- Local community centers.



## Strategy + Community Assets: Universities + Colleges (#10)

### *Strategy + Action*

- Specialized certification programs focused on equity - will help recruitment. Certification programs could happen in summer in Asheville, and create a draw to Asheville.
- Pay for and require all teachers go to Building Bridges + REI over the summer months.
- Make more visible hiring or opportunity-driven initiatives that will drive faculty of color in predominantly white schools.
- Learn the history of predominantly white schools and historically Black schools.
- Open the doors!
- Share the space, and resources.
- Recruitment of and outreach for local children of color.
- Mentorship!
- Invite local students to campuses with local community days, “Open House” style.
- Strategically place more Black teachers in classrooms.
- Create a community that supports families and students of color.
- Focus recruitment of education majors on education as the best place to work for school justice and educational equity.
- White teachers assuming responsibility for self-education about best practices for equitable + just classrooms.
- Reimagine learning through a think-tank or additional symposium!
- Need teachers’ lounge, community teachers, community teachers’ lounge, that is focused on building community through identity.

### *People + Places*

- UNC Asheville
- AB-Tech University
- Lenoir-Rhyne University
- Western Carolina University
- AVID
- Asheville City Schools
- Buncombe County Schools
- Charter Schools
- Private Schools
- Primary + Preschools

UNCA  
AB tech  
LRU  
AVID-izing  
throughout ACS

ACS  
BLS  
Charter Schools  
Private Schools  
Primary/Preschools

Focus recruitment of  
education majors on  
education as the best  
place to work for social  
justice + equity -

Specialized cert.  
focused on  
- will help  
recruitment. Certificate  
programs could happen  
in summer in Asheville.  
people want to come to  
AVL.

While techs assuming  
responsibility for  
self-education about  
best practices for  
equitable / just  
classrooms

Pro for +  
required  
teachers to  
go to Building  
Bridges / do it  
in summer  
city /  
(County, etc.)  
PREI

**Universities  
+ comm colleges  
+ learning spaces**

Reimagine  
learning w/CA  
that work and more

Need  
Community Teachers =  
Change =  
Teacher of  
classroom

open the  
doors

mentorship  
invite students  
on campus

share  
the space  
& resources

recruitment &  
outreach of  
local children  
of color -

Black  
teachers  
in classroom  
create a community  
that support families  
of color

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opportunity  
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Faculty of  
color  
Predominantly  
white schools  
learn their  
history

## Conclusion

What did we just hear?

- Knowing the research just means that we are informed.
- Grounding and moving from strengths + taking inventory of assets is the way forward, both for Black youth in the schools, and also for the community at-large.

The facts from today

- Community is the key to ACTION.
- Culture is the foundation of IDENTITY.
- Giving what is needed is EQUITY + INCLUSION, therefore it is JUSTICE.

The youth spoke...

- Can you see us?
- Why don't you know us?

Reflect back in words + Actions

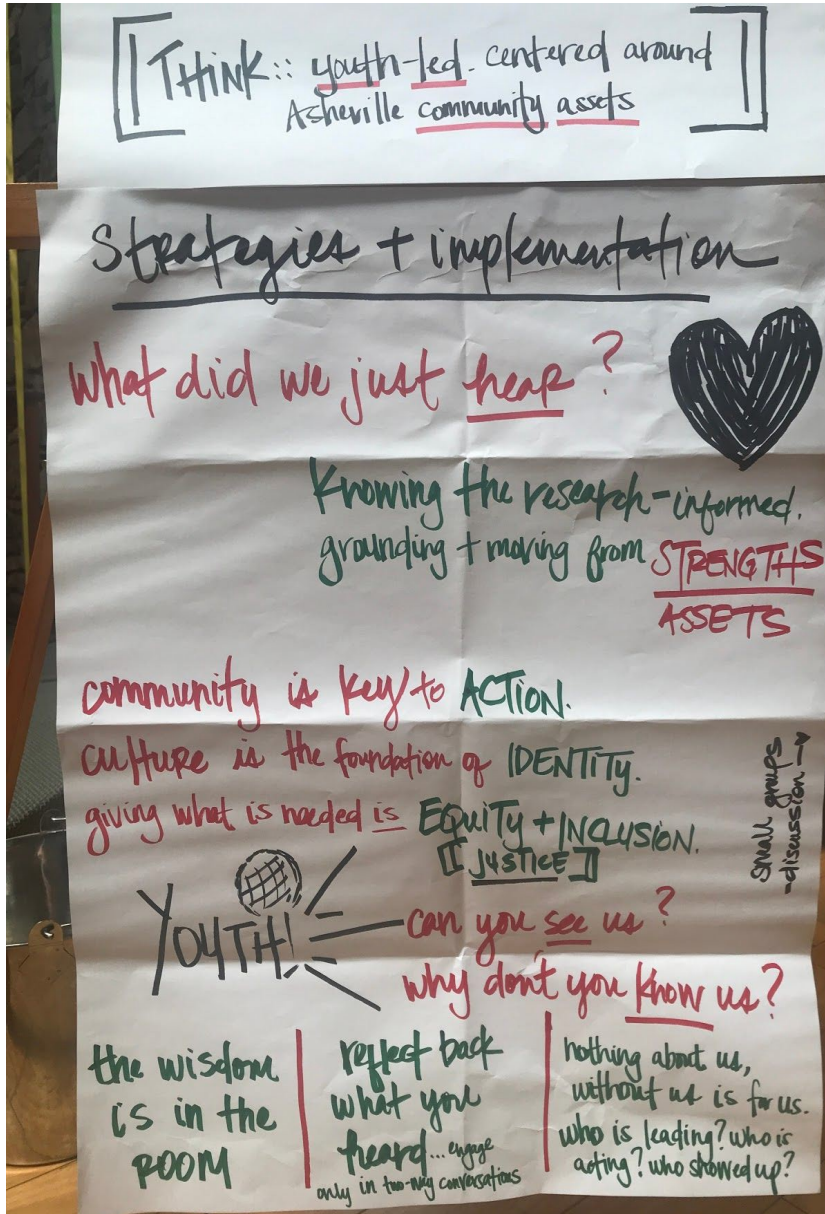
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- Nothing about us, without us, is for us. Check: who is leading? Who is acting? Who showed up... and what role do they have as things move forward?

## Strategies + implementation

What practical steps  
can be implemented immediately  
that would change academic  
outcomes for Black  
children in our area?

[ Think :: youth-led. centered around  
Asheville community assets ]





Author Note: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Cortina Jenelle Caldwell, Artists Designing Evolution, LLC , email: [connect@theadeproject.org](mailto:connect@theadeproject.org) .