Forging a Bright Future
New Leadership Takes Helm of School District

Transformative leadership. That was the term used by Board of Education President Elias S. Gootzeit to describe the appointment of Mount Vernon's new Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton. “We needed a leader who was willing to come to our district and face our challenges head-on, establish a level of trust not seen before in our community and most important, with a commitment to improve the quality of education for all students of the Mount Vernon School District,” said Mr. Gootzeit.

Since Dr. Hamilton's tenure as Superintendent began in August, he has worked diligently to provide the groundwork to transform Mount Vernon into a high quality school district focused on achievement and academic excellence. Dr. Hamilton has enlisted the help of an entirely new central office staff to work toward the goals outlined by the Board of Trustees. Dr. Jeff Gorman, newly appointed Deputy Superintendent, has put his efforts towards the area of curriculum and instruction. The office of curriculum and instruction will play a critical role in the academic success of Mount Vernon in the coming years. "Providing focused leadership and direction in instruction will be pivotal to our success," stated Dr. Gorman. "By establishing relationships with industry leaders of instructional technology like Pearson Education, and creating systems and supports that not only enhance learning but help to ensure student success, the Office of Curriculum and Instruction is making great strides to support student achievement. The transformative changes taking place in Mount Vernon are nothing short of exciting. Through engaging our community, staff, students and stakeholders, there is nothing we cannot achieve. Great things are on the horizon for Mount Vernon," said Dr. Gorman.

Also joining the Mount Vernon City School District is Ken Silver as Assistant Superintendent for Business. Mr. Silver brings a wealth of experience to this position and is eager to make this year's budget development and review process more transparent and open than ever before. "In these times of increased fiscal scrutiny it is imperative that the public have a complete and accurate view of our finances," said Mr. Silver. To this end, Mr. Silver and his staff have been working since early fall to make the budget easier to understand. This has been done through combining budget codes and eliminating redundancies. In addition, all building names are now visible so residents can see more easily what school is being referred to in each budget line.

"I am extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work with this talented group of individuals. They bring unique expertise and a valued perspective to our school system. We are committed to raise the bar of academic excellence for Mount Vernon children, we promise to be more responsive and proactive and most important, we have set course to place our school system on track as an academic powerhouse in Westchester County," concluded Superintendent Hamilton.
I am filled with hope and promise that we can restore the Mount Vernon City School District. We have made some great strides in the short time that the new administration has been in place. Much of the work will take several years to accomplish but we are picking the low hanging fruit and putting protocols in place to help remediate some of the challenges we face. These protocols have been supported by the Board and will help improve business efficiency and student outcomes.

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<tr>
<th>CHALLENGE</th>
<th>STRATEGIC PROTOCOL</th>
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<td>Ineffective teacher/ principal evaluations</td>
<td>New state requirements have linked evaluations to student achievement. However, this process must align teacher proficiency with learning standards in order for the process to serve its intended purpose.</td>
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<td>Diminished arts programs</td>
<td>We are proud be developing a Performing Arts Magnet School. We have a host of students who are extremely gifted in the fine and performing arts, and their needs have been overlooked and, in some instances, ignored. Artistic expression could be the difference between completing school and dropping out for some students.</td>
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<td>A dismantled Career and Technical Education Program resulted in students losing pathways to workplace readiness skills and employability upon graduation</td>
<td>We are planning to restore these programs and forging business partnerships to help lessen the impact on the school budget. In many instances the elimination of these Career and Technical Education programs put our students at a huge disadvantage upon graduation.</td>
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<td>Outdated administrative office processes, equipment, and records keeping</td>
<td>Through a grant acquired by the District, we were able to reorganize and restructure the Business Office and archive records that created mounds of paper that cluttered the office. Additionally, we were able to ensure greater compliance with applicable rights to privacy laws for staff and records management.</td>
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<td>Teacher proficiency of the New Common Core Standards</td>
<td>With an aggressive curriculum revision plan, teachers are being trained and retrained on new standards and interventions to help identify learning gaps as early as possible in order to connect students with services that will get them back on track for academic success.</td>
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<td>Aged school buildings and facilities in disrepair</td>
<td>We are actively addressing needed facility updates and building repairs. The conditions in some of our buildings have sent staff and students the wrong message about the importance and value of education in Mount Vernon.</td>
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Edward Williams School Honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

After weeks of focused preparation, the students of Edward Williams Elementary School hosted formal assemblies to honor the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Thursday, January 23, 2015. Katrina Allson (6W) kicked off the morning’s activities with a rendition of “America” on her trumpet (Mrs. Lisa DeFrenza, band instructor). Kyia Dacres and Jayden Powell (5C) recited excerpts from Dr. King’s iconic “I Have a Dream” speech. Kyia later reflected upon “the undeniable impact Dr. King has had upon American history. The fruits of his labor can be seen, as we have witnessed African Americans fill seats in Congress, hold coveted positions in major sport leagues, win Academy Awards and now hold the highest office in our country.”

Thomas Dyer (6N) and Jahmir Fields (5H) recited poems inspired by the spirit of the civil rights movement and Brianna Simon (6W) presented a piece of original poetry which reflected on the struggles of Dr. King’s fight for peace. The Edward Williams’ String Ensemble (directed by Mrs. Mary Lando) performed “We Shall Overcome” and “Song of Brotherhood.” Eileen Cordero (6W) then provided the audience with a rendition of African American Spirituals, which are sacred songs created by the Africans who were sold into slavery. These powerful songs reflected the slaves’ need to express their faith and desire for freedom. The 3rd Grade Members of Edward Williams’ Chorus (directed by Miss Antonella Delli Carpini), along with 6th Grade soloists, then performed the classic and exuberant spiritual, “Shut De Do.” These younger members of the chorus were especially excited to also sing “This Is My Wish,” as it was accompanied by their classmates on hand bells.

The students of Edward Williams have conveyed a great deal of enthusiasm while studying the life of this influential man and have been eager to artistically express their appreciation for how he changed the landscape of equal rights history.
**Fitness Education Grant Awarded to Traphagen**

Traphagen Elementary School was awarded a competitive grant for physical education programs with indoor and outdoor equipment through “Project Fit America” (PFA), a national non-profit charity. Valued at $17,800, this two-year program is intended to create new and sustainable opportunities for students to be active, fit and healthy as part of the everyday school experience. Traphagen will serve as a pilot program for the Mount Vernon community.

As part of the PFA program, Traphagen has agreed to integrate a “Fitness Forward” program into the existing school structure. Once implemented, the school will take part in a two-year tracking of the children’s improvements through pre- and post- fitness tests administered each fall and spring.

“We are thrilled to be chosen as the first school in Westchester County to pilot this program and are the proud recipients of this valued physical education grant,” said school Principal, Ilene A. Bichler. “The integration of Project Fit America supports Traphagen’s mission to educate youngsters on the importance of embracing a healthy balance of exercise, proper nutrition and classroom success.”

As part of the grant, PFA will provide and implement state-of-the-art outdoor, above ground fitness equipment, indoor fitness equipment, 1,000 fitness cups to be used for explosive cardio, building teamwork and cooperation among students. Also included is a squad set of five sports hoops which are three pounds in weight and used for creating upper body strength, cardio, abdominal training and development.

Additionally, PFA will provide a mentor teacher who will work hands-on with physical education teachers to help them customize the program to fit Traphagen’s facilities, scheduling, and student population. A comprehensive core curriculum for the physical education teacher as well as a Fitness and Health Outreach Curriculum for cross curricular lessons, parent outreach, extra credit, and health and nutrition instruction is also provided.

NewYork-Presbyterian/Lawrence Hospital in Bronxville is the exclusive local sponsor of this program and is working in collaboration with PFA and the Mount Vernon City School District to create exemplary fitness in education.

**Hamilton School Launches Reading Initiative**

Students at Hamilton Elementary School launched the 2nd Annual Literacy Initiative during an all-day, school-wide event on Friday, November 21, 2014. The initiative, designed to inspire students to read outside the school day, sets a goal for students to read a combined total of 200,000 pages by June 2015.

“Reading outside the school day is a critical component of student achievement,” commented Principal Dr. Jackie Manning-Campbell. “As educators we can only do so much during the normal school day. Reading outside the school day promotes vocabulary growth, which increases the rate of learning and that’s an important step toward raising student achievement.”

Beginning with a kick-off assembly that served more as a pep rally, the all-day event promoted reading and writing throughout the school. The assembly featured 6th grade cheerleaders and students from the Hip Hop Dancers rallying students to read. Students and staff alike were on their feet as lyrics such as “We’ve got the characters, the setting, and of course the plot. It’s the elements of fiction that I’m talking about,” celebrated the elements of a story through a rap song.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton implemented a renewed focus on literacy in the district, particularly at the elementary level. “Literacy and reading comprehension are critical for the long-term success of our students. Without strong literacy skills, students will not have the basic buildings blocks to be successful in the later years of their education. We must instill in them now the importance of reading and the major role it will play in their future,” said Dr. Hamilton.

The school building decor was also transformed for this very special event. Art teacher Janet Rush transformed the lobby with her exquisite decorations of various book covers such as *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. “I am extremely proud of all our staff and students for coming together to make this event a success. I cannot wait to not only meet our 200,000 page reading goal but to surpass it,” concluded Principal Dr. Jackie Manning-Campbell.

The Reading Initiative was made possible through the support of the Mount Vernon Public Library, Scholastic Books, Lakeshore Learning Store and TGI Fridays Restaurant.
The Mount Vernon Community is encouraged to participate in the planning of the 2015-2016 budget. Please attend these important meetings. Your voice will be heard!

Wed, April 8th: 7:00pm
Mount Vernon City School District Education Center Board Room
165 N. Columbus Avenue
(914) 665-5000

Mon, April 13th: 10:30am
Mount Vernon Doles Center
250 S. 6th Avenue/ (914) 665-2447

Tues, April 14th: 10:30am
Mount Vernon Armory Center
144 N. 5th Avenue/ (914) 665-2434

Sat, April 18th: 8:30am
United Black Clergy
Friendship Free Will Baptist Church
261 E. Lincoln Avenue/ (914) 668-1210

Sat, April 18th: 10:00am
Traphagen School/ Auditorium
72 Lexington Avenue/ (914) 665-5060

Wed, May 6th: 6:00pm
DISTRICT-WIDE BUDGET HEARING
Mount Vernon City School District Education Center Board Room
165 N. Columbus Avenue
(914) 665-5000

Sat, May 16th: 9:00am
Longfellow Elementary School Auditorium
625 S. 4th Avenue/ (914) 665-5100