



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Mount Vernon City
School District
February 27, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in February, 2025 for the new superintendent of the Mount Vernon City School District. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews, a community forum or focus group settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, community forum and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below: *Not all focus groups were a group that was disaggregated for the online survey.*

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	9	
Administration	39	27
Faculty	3	217
Community	50	93
Support Staff	9	107
Parents	21	315
Students	21	26
Total	152	785

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report.

It should be emphasized that the data are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Board's attention.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Mount Vernon City School District (MVCSD) is viewed by its constituencies as a city with the feel of a small town. The city's proximity and accessibility to New York City was cited by almost each group as a strength. It is described as a close knit, safe and walkable community, and although there is ethnic, cultural and financial diversity, it is a community of familiarity, mutual support and is welcoming to newcomers. There is a strong sense of community throughout the school district. Many of the staff members live in Mount Vernon and graduated from Mount Vernon schools, adding to a family atmosphere that values relationships. Residents appreciate the beauty of Mount Vernon and its surroundings, as well as the housing stock with relatively low taxes for Westchester County.

There is a great deal of pride in the students of MVCSD. Described as "great kids who want to learn," they are afforded opportunities in a variety of curricular programs, athletics and extracurricular activities. In the past, Mount Vernon schools were recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools. There is a rich history of alumni who are accomplished in their fields (athletes, actors, businessmen, authors, etc.), and are accessible to the MVCSD community. The students noted that they feel their voices are heard.

Another strength of the Mount Vernon City School District is its staff. Many come from the community and care about the community. They are described as collegial and dedicated, wanting to make a difference in students' lives. Historically there has not been a lot of staff turnover, and often their leaders come from within the ranks. Many live in Mount Vernon and send their children to Mount Vernon schools. They are seen as talented, passionate and caring, and get to know students and their families.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Declining enrollment was cited as one of the reasons for the current financial distress in the District. A district reorganization and subsequent closing of one or more schools is currently underway, but respondents voiced concern of continued financial distress and how it will be communicated. The community cites a lack of trust, continued administrative changes, and a perceived inability to receive timely communication regarding changes. Changing demographics has resulted in a greater need for the limited resources. Additionally, there is a feeling that resource allocation is not equitable, and there is an urgency for creativity in securing additional resources.

Each focus group shared that presently morale is low, exacerbated by three years without a contract for the teachers, and other collective bargaining agreements are expiring at the end of the current school year. There is a concern of talented staff leaving the District during these uncertain times.

People who work for the district, parents, and community members expressed concern about some members of the organization, especially Board members, overstepping their roles. While these actions might be intended to be helpful, they create confusion, inefficiency, and a feeling among employees that they can't effectively address the conflicting priorities.

There is a desire throughout the school community to have systems in place to ensure accountability and include strategic planning with measurable goals while addressing student achievement and the curriculum, resources, and professional development necessary to realize improvements. They want to "return to focusing on academics."

Constituent groups call for inclusion in data driven decision making and to be given reasons for deviating from previous decisions. They want to be included, respected partners in the MVCSD learning community.

Overall the focus groups shared a collective optimism for overcoming their challenges. They often referred to the foundational strength of the District rooted in valued relationships. One group summed it up saying, "Nothing is an overnight fix. We need someone who is looking for the long haul."

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

Recent frequent changes in district leadership have led to a stated need throughout the school community for consistent, experienced, collaborative and accountable leadership. They desire a superintendent who has had experience with turnaround efforts in a community similar to Mount Vernon, and can inspire and motivate the Mount Vernon learning community through innovative strategic improvement planning. They are looking for a visionary leader who will hold themselves and others accountable and assume all the responsibilities of the position with integrity, building trusting and respectful relationships.

Mount Vernon wants a superintendent who understands their community and will be a visible presence in it. An honest, effective communicator adept at maintaining productive Board relations, skillfully delegating responsibility, ensuring equity in resource allocation, and making decisions with the input of others is sought to lead the charge of a dedicated leadership team, staff and community.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the district. The search team will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Mount Vernon City School District Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and communities.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and the Mount Vernon City School District staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Rita James, District Clerk, who organized the search team's time in the district.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do stakeholders value regarding the schools? What strengths do they desire to retain and build upon?
- What are the issues this District currently faces, and will face in the next three to five years?
- What personal and professional characteristics are expected in a new Superintendent?

Mount Vernon Board of Education February 3-7 9 Participants

Strengths:

- Diversity
- Proximity to the City
- A good blend between suburban and urban
- Transportation system availability
- Beautiful Houses in Mount Vernon
- A close knit community
- Family oriented
- Excellent mix of cultures
- Churches are the backbone of community

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Financial stress as well as emerging structural challenges
- Balancing revenues and expenses
- Housing and the impacts of IDA
- Right-sizing the district to student needs and enrollment
- Infrastructure- aging buildings
- Improve trust
- Share information in a more transparent manner
- Address adult literacy
- Improve early intervention programs, involvement of parents
- Increase the emphasis on the basics of Math and Reading
- High Taxes
- Reorganization of the district
- Curriculum upgrade
- Unify the school and community
- Overcome a sense of entitlement in the district
- Build relationship with community stakeholders
- Improve/expand parent engagement

- Teachers' contract
- Improve transparency, honesty and accountability with all stakeholders
- Social and economic equity
- Deal with growing migrant population
- Deal with growing chronic absenteeism
- Eliminate silos, improve transparency

Desired Characteristics:

- Good systems thinker to drive institutional change
- Mobile and visible in the district
- Good verbal skills, communicator
- Experience in turnaround district
- Balance between energy and experience
- Avoid any perception of nepotism or favoritism
- Focus on students
- Able to share a vision
- Finance and Budget experience
- Curriculum background
- A track record of a problem solver
- Strong minded, strong willed but not a micromanager
- Student-centered
- Develop and implement a strategic plan
- Strong yet engaging personality
- Proven track record of ensuring accountability
- Visibility and connection to students
- Support STEAM
- Focus on student safety
- Committed to Mount Vernon
- Experience as a district leader
- Able to work with the Board
- Ironclad integrity/clean background
- Able to address staffing issues
- Urban and suburban experience helpful
- Experience at calming the stormy seas
- Willing to work with all stakeholders

Mount Vernon K-8 Principals	February 7	4 Participants
Mount Vernon High School Principals	February 7	4 Participants
Mount Vernon Assistant Principals	February 7	13 Participants
Mount Vernon Administrators Group (MVAG)	February 5	4 Participants
Senior Cabinet	February 4	4 Participants
Junior Cabinet	February 4	6 Participants
Special Education Supervisors	February 11	4 Participants

Strengths:

Community

- Generations of families and people know each other; Deeply rooted sense of *family* that is valued in this community
- Vibrant, changing community
- Diverse cultures in the community, contributing to the tapestry of who we are
- Emphasis on community engagement
- Mount Vernon is placed between upper and lower Westchester and close to NYC
- Quick ride to get to the arts - Harlem, Broadway, NYC
- Location - between three major train stations and two different train lines
- Historic past to city and district
- Vocal advocates in the community
- Access to successful graduates
- Tight knit, resilient community
- A lot of pride in the community
- Sense of community - amongst the families and the staff
- Parent involvement has strong roots, but is falling off
- Strong community focus and community connection - many staff are from Mount Vernon, their children or grandchildren attend
- Deep sense of connection; Communal feeling apparent from day 1

Staff

- Collegial staff
- Staff want students to have agency
- Staff want to make a difference for their students academically, socially, emotionally
- You foster real relationships - not only with colleagues, but the families we serve
- Dedicated staff - historically not a high turnover district - we have 30-year and 40-year staff recognized
- We promote from within here - not always looking outside
- Confidence in the cabinet to carry out the vision and mission
- Leaders know that "slow and steady" is the best way to progress
- Split to COO and CFO model - good for staffing and procurement/communication and efficiency
- We have an amazing team -tight knit - no cut throat
- Sense of community amongst the staff; Students come back to teach and work in MVCSD - know the challenges students face
- Amazing school leaders and faculty here

Programs

- Curriculum & Instruction- putting systems in place and starting to fill the gaps - cohesive team; improvement in graduation rates and scores
- Feeling that children are getting what they need to make it
- Great programs - they are overshadowed right now
- We have children going to Broadway, entering contests, attending CTE with nursing degrees, and students with profound disabilities being employed
- Opportunities for students - youth employment, safe place for girls, medical program, career exploration/internships
- Pride the staff has for what they provide students

Culture

- Embrace and celebrate successes
- We are steadfast on our goals
- Value of the arts - heritage throughout the community and what the arts has done for the community - must maintain and elevate it; Arts Magnet School became Denzel Washington School of the Arts - celebrate and re-elevate it
- This is a receiving place - a lot of love right out of the gate
- Handle tough things with compassion
- Staff and administrators attend activities and see the students outside of school
- "No Place for Hate" initiative
- Mount Vernon has a strong history of students achieving greatness

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

Community

- There isn't any trust with the community right now - money, decisions, consolidation is amplifying that
- Apathy in the community
- The immigrant families are afraid to send their children to school
- Rising homeless population in Mount Vernon (McKinney-Vento Act) We need clear guidance, policies, and assistance throughout the system
- Parent engagement is decreasing
- Diversity of the community is not as apparent in the schools
- Closing schools and layoffs - subsequent unrest in the community
- Reorganization - emotional attachment to elementary schools; heartwrenching to close them; not an easy decision
- There are challenges about what *family* looks like
- We have forgotten about the community - diversity is not just cultural, but financial - remember the school district serves a larger purpose

Staff

- Four contracts up in 2025; Lack of a contract for teachers and administrators is adding to the stresses
- People are not being "nourished"
- Titles with many jobs - Do leaders realize how hard-working and valuable each is?; Wearing many hats means we are doing too much and cannot address things as effectively

- Must be a difference between personal and professional relationships
- Insecurity -have lost many - there is a tremendous amount of turnover
- Administrators who leave are not always replaced so we have a lot of titles
- How to make teachers solvent and how to move them educationally and unify the district level administrators
- Lacking community amongst leadership
- We have a lot of untapped capital- to interconnect to the betterment of the district
- Leaders are not professionally developed; they're always running professional development
- Make professional learning a priority - to get the best out of us we need the knowledge to be the best
- Need to invest in every level of employment - valued and invested
- We work under fear of not being here - no parameters in place to protect our jobs
- The schools have shifted to doing the work of central office - need to protect the sacred space of the school building providing for children
- Nepotism has not always put the best person in positions and makes accountability challenging

Programs

- Amazing initiatives are not getting noticed or the attention
- Financial concerns are very real and are everywhere - three years without a contract
- Getting a reading program and funding it
- Mental health challenges exist - meet the needs of our children where they are
- Consistently address reading and literacy issues throughout PK-12
- Social media
- Lessons must be changing with the times and prepare for the world we're moving into
- New curriculum all the time - just finish professional development and it is gone
- Students do not have technological experience
- ELL's and all subgroups may not be getting all the help they need
- 1 in 4 of our students has an IEP - getting kids to read on grade level
- Continue to have low achievement in the district
- Superintendent has moved away from being the academic leader of the district
- Trauma learning should be addressed
- We don't talk about education enough here

Culture

- The political climate is driving everything right now
- Closing schools is fracturing the sense of place - causing heartbreak
- We need to get back to a place of continuity
- Issues of equity across schools - trickles into school comparison
- Nobody is looking at the good things going on, but they are looking at social media
- At other places there is a sense that this is a troubled place
- Trust
- Some don't understand rank and chain of command
- The pressures can be great here
- Morale is low throughout the district - lack of contracts adds to this
- Morale is shredded as teachers do not feel valued nor do they have the resources they need in order to give the children what they need

- Only have as much power as the support from above you
- Great ideas die on the vine
- Strategic planning
- People who act outside their roles (Board) cause confusion and chaos
- Lack of consistency - 3 superintendents in three years and changes in the cabinet; leaders need to be in place 3-5 years to make a difference
- Change is not always welcomed
- Kids need to be at the forefront of everything we do; the #1 objective
- People can use their connections
- Boards will cater to one part of town over another
- Board meetings can be volatile
- Board is fractured - reorganization was 5-4 vote when it was a clear decision
- Board will give directives to the administration - we're sometimes bounced in different directions
- Handling complaints- they (Board) are mean in public
- Board doesn't let superintendent be the CEO - they go directly to the administrators
- Board needs to be one with the superintendent, keeping the child the focus
- Board airs dirty laundry in the public
- Disgruntled folks go to the Board rather than the proper channels, such as the unions - turns into personal agenda. It's been worse over the last two years
- Appears the community and Board want to create chaos; public display of disagreement makes us not look serious
- Need to be better collaborators as adults to set a standard of excellence
- Clarify before we are out in public - set a better example
- Must remind everyone to stay in their lane
- Leaders outside of here think it is structural problem in Mount Vernon
- Leaders outside our district watch board meetings and don't want to be here
- Politically charged environment
- Administrators can become cannon fodder
- Communication gap exists top to bottom
- Unrealistic goals are given to the schools
- Due process and protocols are not followed top to bottom (squeaky wheel shapes leaders' perspectives)
- Everyone knows everyone - a strength and a challenge
- Political connections - fear-driven decisions from the cabinet put building administrators in tough positions
- Transparency - building administration is sometimes last to know what is happening

Financial

- On the verge of fiscal collapse
- The old bond issues are in the way from establishing a needed bond now - including Board members not believing - (it's self-sabotaging)
- Outside agencies spoke, but were not believed/trusted
- People may believe dire situation - some Board members may intervene or do not trust
- There is a multi-year plan, but everyone must acknowledge it
- Capital project
- Significant number of taxpayers are sending their children to private schools
- Finding resources and quality staff in the wake of financial distress

- We are behind in technology
- The finances affect everything
- Resource management; Allocation of resources might not be equitable
- Need to focus on equity- Provide for the success for all the schools - looking through the equity lens
- Budgetary concern - history of not raising taxes, not enough aid from the state
- Building educational equity - socio-economic differences affects access to resources

Desired Characteristics:

Leadership

- Experienced superintendent - 5-8 years
- Experience in a district like Mount Vernon/similar populations to implement strategies for improvement
- Experience with turnaround efforts
- Experience at all levels of education - teacher, building administration
- Substantial time as a teacher; knowledge of curriculum
- Recognize past practices are not best practices; Not pressured to do what we have always done
- Person of character and integrity
- Ethical leadership; Lead with an ethical and moral compass - with ability to say "no"
- Stand up for what you believe in
- Gets out of the office - goes out to staff (not just for special events)
- High level of visibility; Physically present in the schools
- Really cares about children and spends time developing relationships with the children; do not send a candidate who "loves children"
- Transparent
- Has a clear vision and can articulate it ; Bring unity under the vision
- Can create and articulate 10 year vision; Vision for the 22nd century
- Organized and structure-oriented
- Systems thinker to sort through inefficiencies; improve existing systems
- Systems manager to end leadership triage
- High emotional intelligence
- Resilient
- Mentally and emotionally strong and prepared for the challenges in the district
- Conflict resolution, art of compromise
- Be a self-aware leader; able to observe yourself
- Time management skills - for self and understanding subordinates' challenges
- **Exceptionally strong leader** - who does not bend - knows and maintains the vision and mission, as pressure will constantly be there; who can navigate agenda and political environment, minimize distractions and stay focused on the plan
- Get to it and be strong in it; Steadfast in what you are charged to do
- Collaborative leader; Brings others with him/her
- Effective Communicator - everyone needs to hear this is what Mount Vernon is doing
- Courageous communicator; Communicate the good and the bad
- Sound, swift decision making; Confident making unpopular decisions
- Decisive; Fight fires quickly
- Active listener; Willing to listen and listen with discernment
- Can agree to disagree

- Bring the stakeholders to the decisionmaking table
- Set clear and ambitious objectives
- Organizational and management skills - strategic planning, financial management skills, time management
- Support and manage all the components of responsibility
- Empathetic
- Passionate leader
- Presence
- Commands respect
- Courageous conversations
- Mind set and the skill set to get the job done (both)
- Keep student academic success and achievement at the forefront
- Confidence and self-efficacy
- Builds and navigates relationships
- Strategic planner
- Able to identify and solve problems; sees problems as opportunities
- Knows and understands our issues; Able to heal us
- Have thick skin as well as an awareness of board protocols, procedures and keep them on the rules, regs and facts rather than 'what you have heard'
- Excellent with Board relations - Board needs to come together and make decisions - act accordingly in public
- Can garner the support of the Board/unify while making recommendations to them
- Command the respect of the board
- Proactive - we have been reactive, yet not everything has to be reactionary

Community

- Rebuild faith and trust in our schools- trust with all stakeholder groups
- Aware of our diverse needs and capabilities - looking for the ability to support them while valuing the sense of community
- See what the community is capable of - be able to lift them up
- Talks to people - comfortable to be with parents
- Experience in a district with a high homeless population
- Must have an interest and binding commitment to a culturally diverse - from every walk of life - community with a wealth of issues; can unite the community
- Have a heart and a passion for working in an underserved community
- Sensitive to immigrant population
- Passionate about wanting to make a difference for students academically, socially, emotionally
- Willing to become a part of Mount Vernon -sees the position as more than a job and extends beyond the day
- Community-building
- Retain good traditions, but can be forward thinking
- Able to see beyond our borders - borrow what's working elsewhere
- Visible in the community - attend events
- Build relationships with people in the schools
- Partnership with parents
- How to motivate parents to become more involved, while understanding their circumstances; Define parent involvement

- Connection with higher education

Staff

- Support the staff who are helping the struggling students
- Good energy - it is contagious and this group and others need to feel like valuable parts of the team - we have expertise and know that it matters
- Invest in district leaders - write an evaluation that goes beyond the student data
- A mentor
- Draw upon our strengths, know us on a personal level, and identify weaknesses
- Capacity and the desire to make **US** better - principals, cabinet, district level - our leadership is important to us as well
- Provides support to administrative team along with the protection needed to get the massive undertaking done
- Leads dynamic and role of central office - to support the schools
- Able to motivate others about a growth mindset
- Address low morale- know how to heal the land and work swiftly to bring a sense of comfort, purpose and an answer in sight
- Strong management skills, delegating effectively

Culture

- Build relationships to bridge the division with all the stakeholders in the city - parents, staff, Board, politicians
- Don't go to take pictures, but be there because you can address teachers, students and the custodial staff by name
- End commenting on social media
- Address those who speak negatively about things happening in the district
- **Someone who can change culture** - can stay the course; been part of leading cultural changes successfully
- Understand the culture of Mount Vernon
- Know about trauma
- Data oriented - able to create data-driven culture
- Skill set to understand root causes and train teachers and administrators to increase student performance
- Do what's best for students regardless of who says otherwise
- Inspire and mobilize teachers, students, the community to reach education goals
- Puts an emphasis on the social-emotional health of the entire school community and repairing any harm
- Instructional leader - has a clear idea with every issue
- Knows how to regulate the issues and how to grow us

Financial

- Experience with contract negotiations
- Financial acumen
- Financially savvy
- Resourceful - contacts outside to help with funding
- Experience with resource allocation and differences within a district
- Be aware of Mount Vernon's financial history

- Creative securing additional resources - grant writing, fundraising, etc.
- Find resources so students can be competitive
- Be able to weather the storm - the boat is choppy now but the calm is coming - someone who *wants* to be able to weather the storm

Italian Community

Chester Park Hill Neighborhood Association

Fleetwood Neighborhood Association

Black Clergy

February 4 2 Participants

February 5 2 Participants

February 7 3 Participants

February 7 10 Participants

Strengths:

- Beautiful city to grow up in
- Location - easy commute to the city
- 3 Metro North stations; 30 minutes to NYC; Close to four highways
- Gradient of Bronx to Westchester
- Mix of suburban and urban in Mount Vernon and close to rural areas, too
- Working to keep reputation of city of trees
- Diversity is our strength; brings comfort to residents
- Its neighborhoods - we love our street and neighbors
- Walkable area
- Friendly neighbors
- City of homes; Housing stock - homes, apartments
- Family community
- School taxes are favorable in comparison to neighbors in the county
- Mount Vernon CSD offered varied programs including trades
- Teachers are passionate
- Teachers care and go out of their way for the students
- Our kids are great - love learning and being in a creative environment

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- School district and city politics - citizens do not want to lose the schools
- Mount Vernon has more gangs than any other city in Westchester
- Cannot send students to the high school
- Many lawsuits in Mount Vernon
- Shrinking of school age population
- Too many district buildings
- Financial issue - building more low income housing
- Economic challenges - in the city and the school district
- Economic distress was not communicated before
- Financial challenges and effect on taxpayer burden
- Balance tax burden with impact of closing schools
- Building more low income housing, bringing in more children with needs
- Need to bring the children together, especially with school closings
- Schools cannot accept the funds for afterschool programs due to other issues -lack of staffing, students
- May be losing good teachers

- Diversity is not only race and ethnic backgrounds but economic
- Diversity means differences in what students have access to outside of school
- Sensitivity to diversity
- Never covered the underground train, which divides the neighborhoods
- Haven't had the proper leadership to meet our needs
- Some negative statements have been made publicly by the leaders
- Question whether the students are at the forefront of decisions
- Communication concerns; Have to get to the parents
- Parents ask questions at Board meetings and do not get answers
- Need to plan for the child as a whole - supports to thrive, extracurricular
- Have the changes made addressed the root cause of the problem?
- Community members want to be informed; It's hard for those who are paying attention to know what is happening, and even harder for others who are not
- Building principals are not fed the information to help inform parents
- High level of poverty in the city provides challenges to families
- Academics in the schools has weakened
- Mount Vernon recognized for Blue Ribbon schools in the past
- Many administrative changes, even at the principal level - has an effect on the teachers in the school; There has been a lack of consistent leadership to ensure following through on things
- Constant change
- Right decision becomes a change in decision without understanding why; Went K-8 recently (3-4 years ago) and now going K-6 in some and K-8 elsewhere
- No "outside the box" thinking to solve the issues; Need to think innovatively
- Do not appear interested in solving problems of children
- Schools seem to be run by volunteers (Board)
- Highest cost around for educating children
- Capacity for 17,000 but have 6,000 kids
- Make noise without solving problems
- Facebook is the source of news for much of community

Desired Characteristics:

- Experienced superintendent in a diverse community (financially and ethnically) or in a setting with challenges
- Open to differences, has experiences with different cultures
- Can bring people together
- Dynamic leader
- Independent; No outside agenda
- Listens
- Maintain focus on academic achievement
- Leader
- Transparent
- Able to be the medium between the administration and the community
- Vision - great communicator
- Communicate what is needed/what is best and identify the research behind it
- Be about the children
- Understand communication strategies and can put them in place

- Bring more athletic opportunities for younger students - keep them in their community
- Knowledgeable as an educational leader
- 1-, 3-, 5-, 7-, 10-year plan with metrics and communicate and follow through with it
- Recognize what makes a school a "good school"
- Development and subsequent accountability for teachers to learn
- Ensure principal effectiveness
- Focus on our challenges and meet them with our resources
- Experience settling contracts
- Trusts others to follow through
- Strong leadership - not easily swayed
- Tough with thick skin
- Willing to make cuts where needed; Eliminate union no-show jobs
- See the challenges as opportunities
- Fiscally responsible
- Outside of the system; No ties to the community
- Awareness of community issues and able to reach out to teach according to their needs
- Respects parents and the community and shows it
- Ingrained in the community
- Heart for the community
- Lead the orchestra of ideas in the community

Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers (MVFT) February 5 3 Participants

Strengths:

- There is a sense of knowing staff are making a difference
- Many staff are from the community and care about MVCSD
- Most of us WANT to be here
- We have GOOD kids - they want to learn
- Many of our kids get scholarships
- We have good athletics, offering a wide variety of sports
- Good CTE programs; many programs are coming back
- Students do volunteer work in the community
- We have many clubs and after school programs
- Have IB, arts, AP programs, and aviation at the secondary level
- Many interest groups for younger kids, such as gardening and fishing

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Working under an expired contract - it will be three years at the end of the school year
- Process is causing damage - people are leaving to work elsewhere, even mid- year
- Morale is horrible
- War on teachers - brain drain, retention of staff
- Spending - on programs that do not endure, such as curriculum that comes and goes according to deals with publishers
- One-time sale of assets doesn't address ongoing budget concerns
- No generation of taxes with apartment buildings

- Maintenance on district buildings
- They say they are here for children, but it is hard to believe by their actions
- Budget issues; Revenue shortfall - spending is disparate with the needs
- Community does not trust the administration - battle to get the budget passed
- Board appears to be running the district
- Board doesn't like to be questioned - ostracize others and only care about 'the five'
- Inordinate amount of legal expenses
- Communication lacking - Is there anything we can do to prevent or improve as a result of the lawsuits? Are we looking at how we can decrease legal costs?
- Must connect with ALL stakeholders - community, staff (all employees), students
- Need efficiencies - technology and business practices, top heavy administration
- Need innovation and innovative thinking
- Mistrust and disconnect between the all staff and administration
- People do not feel valued
- Teachers have to make do with part of a curriculum - not provided all the resources or some grades do and not others
- Feeling that personal issues are creeping into personnel
- Every week we go to a meeting and it seems there is another plan we have to work
- Too few of us and we are being asked to do more
- Sense of job insecurity; Fear that we are going to lose a lot of good people because they can't make it on what they make at their jobs

Desired Characteristics:

- Integrity - not just a paycheck
- Be "all in" - think about Mount Vernon at the end of the day
- Embrace "What I can do for Mount Vernon?" rather than "What can Mount Vernon do for me?"
- Proven track record - had been a teacher for a while, a career educator
- Solid financial background with budgeting experience
- Willing to listen
- Run the district and not be run by the district
- Fight complacency
- Critical thinker with courage of convictions
- Be present, vocal and involved at board meetings
- Outgoing and can get along with people
- Can determine and willing to find efficiencies

Community Forum

February 5

33 Participants

Strengths:

- Mount Vernon is a tight knit community
- We are familiar with the families and the needs of the neighborhoods
- We have schools in every neighborhood - don't have to walk far
- Kids can make friends easily
- The schools are safe
- Close proximity to NYC - small town feel with the city nearby
- Get to know the leaders here - your voice is heard

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Customer (the parents) service must be improved
- Communication - must provide different formats and different languages (especially in Spanish)
- Communication formats (pdf is not easy when using a phone) sometimes Word document or link; should be considerate of the receiver
- Lack of transparency across the board- how decisions are made- how information is sent
- Honesty and transparency to the residents
- Transparency at the Board level
- In the midst of possible closures - major reorganization
- Board must hold the superintendent accountable
- Teaching, security and TA's contract is not settled now and may not be for the new superintendent
- Enticing families to want to bring their children to Mount Vernon City School District and keep students here who are attending
- Curriculum and extra-curricular activities have been cancelled due to lack of funding
- NYSED will be sending in a fiscal monitor
- Teachers have not had a raise in four years - incentivize them to stay
- Board has lost the trust of the parents/community
- The community does not feel heard
- There have been forums and surveys without adequate notice and have been held before breaks/ inconvenient times
- We have been asked to complete surveys without sufficient information up front
- There needs to be clarity around the issues in the district

Desired Characteristics:

- Justified, transparent and honest, fair
- Open and welcoming to the community - holds open forums
- Manage limited resources
- Keep up with the changing face of landscape in education
- Experience working with different cultures and backgrounds
- Help parents who are struggling and kids who have different needs
- Ideas to keep students interested
- Multi-task and be fast-paced
- Technically savvy, but meet everyone where they are
- Get to the grass roots of the families in the neighborhoods - don't rely only on online (the notes in the backpack work)
- Meet everyone (ENL) and grandparents who are raising children
- Show empathy
- Clear in decisions - and stand your ground - be strong, patient and right
- Responsive to the community - keep your "finger on the pulse"
- Keep close to the district
- Welcoming to parent feedback and listens to the community
- Help elevate the district -including curriculum and programs
- Visible and present among the different schools
- Approachable and accessible

- Staff needs a superintendent who is supportive without concern of retaliation
- Experienced with the job - also strong curriculum and fiscal sense
- Dynamic and is able to excite everyone about MVCSD
- A leader you want to follow
- Urban experience
- Active in organizations (educational, social)
- Experienced superintendent (not on the way out) who listens
- Willing to get around to all the groups in Mount Vernon

Parent Liaisons

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

February 11

February 7

13 Participants

8 Participants

Strengths:

- Diversity - we are small but have a little bit of everything
- We have talented and brilliant children; Rich history of producing talent in all areas
- Kids can flourish here; We produce athletes, actors, and kids do well
- Location - easy commute to to NYC - quick drive, public transportation options
- Great things going on right now in the schools
- Caring and talented teachers
- Parents who care and are dedicated to schools and community
- Parents who work in the district - take ownership by being involved
- Awesome and amazing PTA
- Sense of belonging where people are acknowledged
- The people - attract interesting people with diverse backgrounds and skill sets - we are a melting pot
- We come together when something is wrong
- Affordability
- Strong sense of community - many churches and houses of worship (well-attended)
- Community comes from love
- Familiarity with everyone
- We have great schools and parents feel good about them once you are in there

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Negative gets highlighted - needs to recognize the good things happening
- Need to rebuild trust
- Lack of adequate resources - extracurricular activities have been cut
- State monitor (financial issues)
- Declining enrollment
- Morale is low - students, parents, teachers, and staff
- Need to make the district enticing to keep families here - and to keep staff and administration here
- Service focus change - accountability- administration must measure success and remember the community is who they serve
- Get feedback to make decisions
- Tone and the culture of the district must change
- Address the physical appearances (broken toilets) in the school to show students we value the schools; Infrastructure - keeping up

- Parents and students are not told about what is happening in the schools - summer changes without notice
- Who is the Board catering to?
- Ask us if we are willing to pay more to make the changes we need
- Culture needs to change - on the defense by just walking into the Board of Education building
- Student achievement concerns
- Curriculum - having a space where teachers and administrators feel comfortable voicing their thoughts and knowledge without retaliation
- Curriculum improvements are needed
- Little time for implementation - decide over the summer and has to be put in place in the fall
- Teacher retention - we lose quality staff
- Career and college readiness - ensuring our students are prepared
- Being attentive to the social and emotional needs
- Ensuring HS readiness
- Evidenced-based learning
- We are not data driven
- There are models for special education we could be implementing
- Unique learners need the behavior support; not enough resources to help them
- Nepotism must go - hiring without qualifications because I know you
- Some leaders are "out of touch" about what is out there and what works
- Adjust events to accommodate working parents
- Engage younger parents before their children are school aged
- Need to create the experience they are seeing in the private schools
- Improve partnerships - schools and parents
- Shouldn't be vast differences between the schools - causes inequities
- Minimize reactiveness
- Don't shut down people who question - end retaliation
- Surveys must have a stated purpose and explanation (written in english and spanish)
- Teachers need support and development
- District reorganization
- Community trust - fractured, end the finger pointing
- District finances - manage limited finances and be transparent in managing them
- Communication - people feel they are not being heard - get answers to questions - to ensure people are being taken seriously
- Communication - things left hanging
- Policy-making -create guidelines,communicate them to the public and follow them
- Language barrier exists in our communications - include other languages
- Political landscape - effect on us as a Title I district
- Increasing enrollment in public charter schools -siphoning students, dollars, families
- Labor relations - contracts that are not renewed and others coming up for renewal
- Security is different now - question regarding how we are faring
- Technology - many grandparents having trouble
- Our district needs positivity and to improve our image
- Need to refresh what is on the website

Desired Characteristics:

- Must have a vision
- Able to change the culture and the tone of the district
- Can educate the Board to put the needs of the students first
- Effective communicator
- Be transparent
- Won't shy away from community discussions
- Open to a healthy dialog - might not all be positive
- Open listener - hear us and not pacify us
- Use metrics to measure effectiveness
- Engage parents and community - before a decision is made
- Welcome the engagement of parents; all voices; doesn't source the same parents
- Listen to the community - encourage feedback (some people just want to be heard and do not require an immediate answer)
- Keep parent confidences
- Utilize parent liaisons and the PTA
- Proven track record of being in a district and turning it around
- Is an advocate for the community and the schools, even if it runs contrary to what Board members say
- Innovative - bring new ideas
- Energetic
- Professionalism
- Relatable - can meet with everyone
- Visibility - attend the activities and get to know everyone
- Knows teaching and learning
- Knows models, curriculum, and can ensure leaders are aware - cutting edge
- If the answer is "no" just tell us why
- Can measure outcomes and be data driven
- Empathetic - know we are here because we want to be
- Open to changing policies upon review
- Resilient
- Remain calm and don't take business personally
- Cultural confidence
- Cultural competence - know the community
- Experiences with school budgets and finance
- Fiscally responsible - knowledge of what is being planned financially
- Creative
- Problem solver
- Manage change and changes already in progress
- Labor relations experiences
- Flexibility - openminded to address our diversity
- Able to work with technology as well as "old school" to meet the needs of everyone
- Strengthen the committees - embrace the skills of our community members
- Innovative - thinks "outside the box" and moves forward
- Follow through with what is heard
- Strong leader, galvanizing force who can bring people to the table for solutions
- Can have the uncomfortable conversations and bring them to resolution
- Committed to stay and make a difference

Support Staff Leadership

February 4

9 Participants

Strengths:

- A diverse community
- Artists in the community
- A sense of Family and Home
- Community really cares

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Equity of programs (k-12 not equal or consistent) at Buildings
- Lack of fidelity
- Separate Board governance from management
- Job descriptions need updating
- Improve accountability across the District
- Improve the image of all schools
- Manage buildings independent of the Central Office

Desired Characteristics:

- Transparency- truth in reporting
- Experience in working with a transient population
- Familiar with Mount Vernon demographics
- Hands-on and visible in the school and community
- Familiarity with ENL
- Fair, even handed
- Fiscally responsible
- Goal-oriented
- Able to define roles and responsibilities
- Student -centric
- Experience with Special education

Rebecca Turner Academy Students

February 11

7 Participants

Mount Vernon High School Students

February 11

8 Participants

Denzel Washington School of the Arts Students Feb. 11

6 Participants

Strengths:

- We have teachers who care and have a passion for their students
- Students excel in academics and interests - athletics, etc.
- Small feel - everyone knows people - connected - making friends is easy
- Small community and we all feel we get a chance and equal opportunity
- There's always someone there to help - one hand washes another
- Go somewhere in the community and you will know someone
- Parks, shops - everything is here in a walkable community

- Excel in many areas - Olympians, the arts, business - everyone has talent that needs to be fostered - here it is recognized and we can pursue our individual talents - here they nurture excellence
- City events also bring us together
- Close knit and dedicated community
- People support our schools and the people in it
- Diversity in the district - immersed in different ethnicities, welcoming to different sexualities, respectful of differences
- MVHS provides opportunities - CPR, pre-medical, cosmetology, many opportunities for students
- You can make connections while in school, such as internships or learning trades
- Sense of community - many of us know each other
- Tight knit community
- Sense of family - teachers, security, principals all know us and are immersed in what we do
- Openness - students can express through dress, hair, etc. to be who you are as long as you are respectful to others
- District really cares about community
- Genuine, authentic people
- We are involved with community officials - police and fire attend things at our schools
- We are seen and heard as students

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Don't get the recognition we should in the greater community
- Budget concerns
- Funding - supplies in classrooms (paper and pencils, textbooks), lacking resources
- Financial concerns - cuts to school programs; uncertainty
- People for more interactive learning and involvement in learning
- Update science labs - equipment, videos, current research
- Supplies for athletics are needed to enhance our abilities
- Communication - schools are the last to hear things
- Fundraising and funding
- Have not been on any trips since COVID - limitations put on our classroom experiences and transportation
- Not getting education in the manner we should
- Misplaced funding - school board rooms updated when poor conditions in schools
- We have students who are coming to HS with lack of basic education due to COVID
- Student mental health concerns - many are not getting help they need
- Need to learn how to socialize
- Kids who are not reading on grade level
- We should have freedom to take standardized tests
- Crowded classrooms - not enough staff to address the varied needs of everyone in the classrooms
- Scheduling concerns - many courses and electives are only offered once, shutting students out of opportunities
- Making people want to stay in Mount Vernon schools - sense that there are more opportunities in other high schools
- Equity across the high schools - programming and materials

- Lack of tutoring - many teachers need to work a second job and can't be here after school
- Unfair grading practices - exam should not be 50% of the grade
- Grade communication - being able to make up
- Infrastructure concerns - ceiling panels falling
- Technology is obsolete - cannot use old devices in exams, crashing, storage issues, 2008 laptops, have to use your own device, but cannot use your own for testing
- Students are not taken seriously
- Other administrators are only here when something good happens - Who are you? Be here more and get to know us
- Nurse shortage - not always a nurse on duty
- Teachers covering - substituting for other teachers
- Safety and security concerns - in the community
- Teachers that do not want to work with us
- Kids are not being listened to and it seems nobody cares
- Not able to reach the best teachers to do the job
- Counselors are not available
- Teachers talking to others and not helping students; Some care and some do not
- Organization - a disconnect between events
- Prioritizing in the best interest of students
- Messaging is negative for our high school; STEAM are left out; only positive elsewhere
- We have 4 different schools with students and not a lot of cross school connections
- Mental and emotional health
- Rumors drive stereotypes
- Student-teacher relationships need to be improved; feeling heard and respected, increase compassion and mutual respect
- Upper administration has been dismissive

Desired Characteristics:

- Able to stand up to social pressure
- Eliminate bias due to personal relationships
- Be encouraging - instill confidence
- Caring leader; Passionate leader
- Perseverant, open minded
- Here for the children, not for the money
- Get out of the office - get involved and be out there
- Love Mount Vernon - get out there and see us
- Love your job and community
- Selfless enough to put the schools first
- In touch with the students - get to know us and our schools
- Take pride in us
- Understand our culture and tight knit community
- Articulate and communicate
- Value non-traditional career path (don't tolerate an arts school, but understand the school without bias)
- Resilient and determined to address the challenges- We are worth the while!
- Don't fall victim to peer pressure - if you see something say something, especially if something is wrong

- Evaluate problems and have steps to fix it
- Come to shows **and** classes - Go see it for yourself; do not make statements without knowing us
- Take care of us in the community
- Knowledge for all aspects of schooling - home instruction
- Communication - even when something is wrong
- Understands black culture - understand the community you will lead
- Value teachers as well as the students
- Hire good teachers who care about their students
- Experience hiring - knowing the background of staff to be a good fit
- Set goals and let everyone know what your goals are
- Stick to the set goals and communicate progress
- Ensure engaging classes where we are taught
- Stand on our foundation
- Follow through with what you say you are going to do
- Come to the schools -
- Prioritize financial problems; Adapt and manage the budgets
- Nourishing students to learn - be able to have an eye on school meals
- Has a plan to unite students
- Good mental health - emotional intelligence, be able to handle stress
- On task with what needs to be done
- Set proper priorities - curriculum, resources, finances
- Identify and address ongoing issues
- Listen to concerns and ideas - take them into account
- Be very involved
- Good time management
- Work well with cabinet
- Build a sense of trust with parents and community
- Be reliable
- If from outside get to know us first
- Maturity - be responsible for your actions and a positive role model, be assertive as opposed to threatening
- Be happy to be here