

BOARD OF EDUCATION UNANIMOUSLY APPROVES BOND REALLOCATION VOTE FOR MARCH 7

City residents will be asked to approve reallocation of bond money to accommodate growth

The Board of Education will ask voters to approve a plan to repurpose existing bond funds to accommodate anticipated student population growth. The board voted unanimously at its Jan. 3 meeting to put the bond reallocation to a public vote on March 7, 2017.

The plan calls for the repurposing of a portion of the \$108 million bond approved by residents in March. Additions to several elementary school buildings, land acquisition and building changes require approval from the public. A need for more elementary level classroom space is anticipated due to new planned housing developments that will increase the school age population in the city.

“We are not asking for any more money,” said Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton, Superintendent of Schools. “We find there is a need for us to provide more instructional and play space for an influx of children into the district, and we’re asking the public to allow us to repurpose some funds to get ahead of this now while we have the opportunity.”

The new plan also calls for keeping neighborhood schools intact. Parker Elementary School had originally been slated to become a pre-K center for the south side of the city. In response to community input, the new plan will reconfigure Parker as a pre-K through 8 building.

“We heard the parents and reconsidered,” said Lesly Zamor, Board of Education President. “Parker is a school that has traditionally done very well. We plan to make it a pre-K–8 building with an enhanced Pre-K center and build upon that success.”

Full details on the bond referendum going before voters on March 7, 2017 can be found on the district website at www.mtvernoncsd.org/marchvote.

GRAHAM SCHOOL OPENS NEWLY RENOVATED AUDITORIUM

Project is among the first completed for 20/20 Vision Bond

In October, the school district held a ribbon cutting ceremony for one of the first completed projects of the 20/20 Vision and 2016 Bond. The 406-seat Graham School auditorium has been restored and renovated to accommodate the district’s increased focus on the arts.

“The auditorium is the centerpiece of any facility, but especially in an elementary school. It is essential that teachers and students have an appropriate gathering space to celebrate accomplishments and achievements, recognize milestones and showcase their talents. This new auditorium is a shining example of what can be expected throughout our schools as the 20/20 vision comes into focus,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton.

The \$520,000 investment brought about a complete renovation of the interior space of the auditorium including new carpeting, seats, lighting, ceiling, stage and curtains. A key goal of the project was to provide an update to the auditorium without sacrificing the classic architecture and character of the space.



Graham Auditorium Ribbon Cutting



SUPERINTENDENT, BOARD PRESIDENT LETTERS



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Mount Vernon City School District, I would like to thank everyone for coming to the 2nd Annual Community Holiday Concert. Traditions go a long way in providing the groundwork to develop strong and enduring relationships. This holiday tradition that

we have started represents the efforts we have made to unify our community and strengthen the bond between home, school and families and community. If you missed it, please come next year and enjoy! Special thanks to Jasmine Guy for being our celebrity guest reader.

The Holiday Concert was an opportunity to come together as one community, united in the desire to transform and to celebrate our success. It was a chance to renew our commitments and take time to reflect on where we have been and most importantly, to unify our community around helping the less fortunate. It was also a time to count our blessings and offer thanks.

Our district has made a promise to transform our schools, reinvigorate this community and instill a deep sense of pride and commitment to excellence in our schools. We have worked closely with the City of Mount Vernon, community groups and stakeholders to ensure that we are meeting the social and educational needs of our students.

The last 12 months has seen the greatest level of transformation to date. From the passage of the \$108 million bond and the 20/20 Vision to the continuing beautification of our schools, each step we take is aimed at improving education, changing the culture, and most importantly, ensuring that our educational programs and facilities are robust and of the highest caliber. We could not have done any of this without your continued support.

I truly believe that I was meant to find Mount Vernon at this time, and I hope that I have inspired you as much as you have inspired me. It is my sincerest wish that you have a happy and healthy 2017.

For the Sake of All Children,

Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton
Superintendent of Schools



Dear Parents, Students and Citizens,

This has been an exciting season in the Mount Vernon City School District. We at the Board of Education feel and hear the enthusiasm amongst the administration, faculty, staff and stakeholders throughout the community. The positive direction of our district is resonating everywhere

in this city and beyond.

We are undergoing many capital projects throughout the district and looking forward to the completion of many, many more. It is my dream to see our district equipped with all of the resources necessary, both physical and human, to take our children to higher levels of achievement. From uniforms, first-rate facilities, academic rigor and a more positive attitude, we are on a progressive path that will result in a transformation of this district and community like never before seen in our time!

Our 16 schools touch every community in the city. As we steer ahead towards our new future, we remain committed to the educational enrichment of our children ... while improving the neighborhoods that we serve.

Please keep the faith, and we will achieve great things together. This district has not seen this level of care for its students and facilities in decades, and it will take us a few more years to bring it back to a level that we can all agree is serving our most precious resources, our children.

Thank you,

Lesly Zamor, President
Mount Vernon City School District

Board of Education

Lesly Zamor, President
Adriane G. Saunders, Vice President
Charmaine Fearon
Serigne M.Gningue
Rosemarie Jarosz
Omar McDowell
Micah J.B. McOwen
Darcy Miller
Wanda White



LAWSUIT AGAINST CITY IS RESPONSE TO PILOT AGREEMENTS

Tax incentive deals for housing developments shift burden to smaller taxpayers



The Mount Vernon City School District Board of Education has filed a lawsuit against the City of Mount Vernon, its officers, employees and agents and other necessary persons or entities to protect the interests of the Mount Vernon City School District and the

educational services available to district students.

The resolution was passed at the board's Oct. 18 meeting in response to PILOT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes) agreements that city officials are negotiating with housing developers which would negatively impact the school district.

A PILOT agreement is made to compensate a local government for some or all of the tax revenue that it loses because of the nature of the ownership or use of a particular piece of real property. Usually, it relates to the foregone property tax revenue.

The City of Mount Vernon recently approved plans for the construction of residential housing, and the city and the Mount Vernon Industrial Development Agency (IDA) are contemplating offering significant tax incentives for these projects by entering into a PILOT. These PILOT agreements would reduce the tax liability on these large property owners while shifting the tax burden to smaller taxpayers.

"As trustees, we have a fiduciary obligation to act in good faith to protect the integrity of the educational standards of the district and to act as responsible stewards of the tax dollars on behalf of the citizens of Mount Vernon," said Mount Vernon Board

of Education President Lesly Zamor. "This board has acted in an effort to protect the community against potential double digit tax increases from the development that will ensue if tax breaks, abatements and PILOTs are planned for residential developers."

In addition, the projects, which include multifamily residential units, are expected to increase enrollment in the district's schools. Since the district is subject to a tax levy cap, which doesn't take into account additional costs due to an increase in enrollment, the district's tax cap would be reduced in the first year of the PILOT agreement.

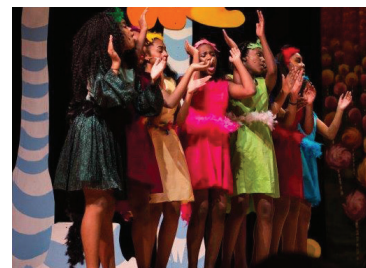
This drain on the tax base would compromise the educational benefits and opportunities available to all students in the district. In addition, the existing physical capacity limitations in the district due to the restructuring of the schools could not presently accommodate the anticipated influx of students.

"These types of PILOTs benefit developers at the expense of our students," said Mount Vernon City School District Superintendent Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton. "If we do not get the tax dollars and state aid needed to support the anticipated increase in student population from these developments, we will be forced to pierce the tax cap or slash programs that we have worked to restore like guidance counselors, nurses, art, music, etc. This is unacceptable."





STUDENTS SHINE IN “DR. SEUSS’ SEUSSICAL THE MUSICAL”



‘AMAZING READERS’ PROGRAM BENEFITS WILLIAMS ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Studies show that children must recognize that letters represent sounds and can blend to form words in order to learn how to read. Teaching this foundation for literacy, called the sound or phonetic code, is the goal of the “Amazing Readers” tutoring project. The project started by volunteers in 2012 is reaching struggling readers in grades one and two at Edward Williams Elementary School.

“We work on building phonetic skills at an early age with fun and engaging games,” said Amazing Readers Founder Jennet Walker. “Most of our students progress rapidly in the classroom once they master the sound code and can blend, segment, and manipulate sounds aloud and in writing.”

Amazing Readers volunteers are trained to teach phonics systemically so that children can progress quickly. Students are given reading and spelling exercises and decodable books with only sounds they know so they can experience success. The program uses donated books and a training room at the Mount Vernon Public Library. Children are tutored one-on-one for 35 minutes twice a week during the school day. Since 2014, volunteers have tutored 57 struggling readers from Edward Williams Elementary School.

LINCOLN ELEMENTARY PLAYGROUND OFFICIALLY OPENS



Lincoln Elementary Ribbon Cutting

After three years of successful, communitywide fundraising yielding more than \$70,000, Lincoln Elementary School administrators, students and parents were happy to cut the ribbon, opening a new park for students on Sept. 30.

The idea and fundraising efforts for the park were spearheaded by Pamela Monroe and Lucinda Ribeiro, both PTA co-presidents. Often, students stayed after school to help prepare for bake sales and candy-grams.

“It feels amazing,” said sixth-grade student Jayna Monroe. “It was an idea that became real.”

The park was modeled after a drawing done by one of the school’s fifth-grade students.

PARENT UNIVERSITY HELPS PARENTS SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN

The district’s Parent University provides learning opportunities that help families become full partners in their children’s education. The classes/workshops are designed to enhance skills, provide opportunities for growth and development and contribute to children’s academic, social and emotional success. The goal is to support families to become more involved by offering trainings and providing information and assistance needed in becoming active participants in their children’s education.

Next in the series: COLLEGE BOUND

SATURDAY, JAN. 7, 2017

This session will inform parents about the college admissions process, financial aid opportunities and various ways to save and pay for college.

Sessions to be held at Benjamin Turner Middle School, 624 S. 3rd Ave. from 9 a.m. to noon. A light breakfast will be served. Call 914-665-5227 to learn more.