

WHAT'S GOING ON

around Mount Vernon City Schools

A PUBLICATION OF THE MOUNT VERNON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

SUMMER 2014: SPECIAL ISSUE



Press conference at the Education Center on July 16th with members of the Board of Education introducing the new Superintendent Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton to the Mount Vernon City School District. Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson, Mayor Ernie Davis, Board Trustee President Elias Gootzeit made comments in support of Judith Johnson's work.

A FOND FAREWELL, HELLO NEW DAY

Time to Reflect and Empower New Leadership for Improved Mount Vernon Schools

LOOKING BACK: It was clear when I started in 2012 that this was a school system poised to accept meaningful change. Even though I agreed to simply act as a steward while the search for a permanent superintendent ensued, I knew I couldn't simply keep the ship afloat - we needed to repair and improve. With the support of the city community, transformation is underway. Together we've started to right the ship operationally and strategically, weathering the storm with greater strength and changing course toward a brighter horizon.

LESSON LEARNED: Despite our progress, I remain troubled by the inclination of some residents' efforts to destroy and defame reputations by circulating false rumors and lies. This behavior is unjustified and counterproductive. City residents must meet this negativity without fearful avoidance. Drawing inspiration from Dr. Martin Luther King's quote: "One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized, cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered."

WHAT'S AHEAD: The work we have accomplished has made my time one of the most enriching chapters in my career. As I prepare for retirement, I hope to travel more, further my passion for playing the piano, and complete my doctorate degree. I hope to continue my education, expand my global knowledge, and continue to be an advocate for children and citizens of Mount Vernon. There still are difficult decisions to be made and the commitment of transformation is not only expected of the educators but also of the community. The new administration will continue to innovate and optimize resources. Mount Vernon has a fine team of talented educators and the new administration brings energy that is both infectious and inspiring. I wish you all the very best in education, work, and life. Bon voyage and full steam ahead.

Judith Johnson
Interim Superintendent of Schools, Retired 7/31/14



NEW LEADERSHIP: Following an extensive search put forth by the Board, I am thrilled at the opportunity to change the landscape of public education in Mount Vernon. Upon the start of my three-year contract in August, my priorities include restoring the community's faith in public education, taking steps to improve high school graduation rates, and ensuring young students get the literacy remediation they need.

BACKGROUND: I have most recently served as superintendent of schools in suburban Monroe Township, N.J. Having previously served in different capacities at three other New Jersey districts, including Newark, I feel prepared to take on the challenges and enhance the potential within Mount Vernon schools.

MISSION: I expect to prove my worth and restore public faith in schools through my actions by demonstrating transparency, engaging concerns directly, and being consistent in decision-making. I also agree that addressing the literacy needs of the city's youngest students is an important way to deal with short- and long-term achievement issues. You can't start at the high school level and expect to impact the graduation rate. It has to spiral up from elementary school.

Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton
Superintendent of Schools, Effective 8/1/14

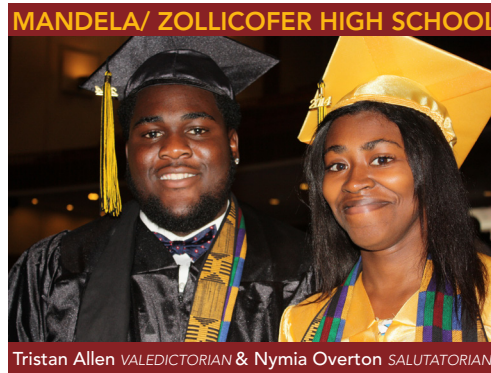
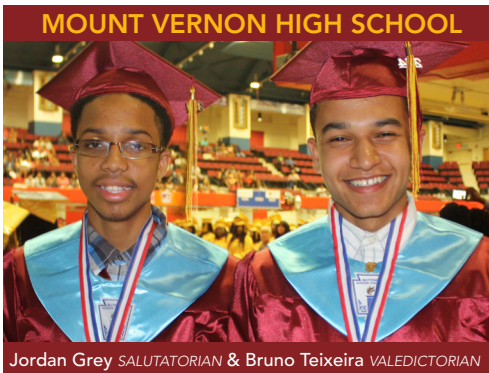
MV BOARD OF EDUCATION NEWS



Congratulations to Board Trustee Elias Gootzeit, Esq. as the new Board President and Dr. Serigne Gningue as Vice President. We also wish to officially welcome newly appointed Trustees Darcy Miller, Charmaine Fearon, and Omar McDowell.

Pictured from left to right: Elias Gootzeit, Dr. Serigne Gningue, Darcy Miller, Charmaine Fearon, and Omar McDowell

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATING CLASS OF 2014



Stay focused. Don't let anything get in the way of your dreams. Hard work pays off in the end.

With a total of 432 graduates in 2014, Mount Vernon continues to be focused on improving graduation rates. However, despite our graduation rate challenges, it is important to showcase the commitment of our highest achieving students as inspiration for future graduates (valedictorian and salutatorians from each high school shown above). When speaking with each of them, it was impressive to learn of their educational journey and the inspiration behind their success

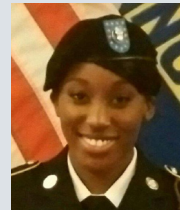
as students. They all shared experiences of struggle and triumph. Whether coming to this country with little knowledge of the English language or American culture, they were able to find the support in school and at home to support their academic growth. Some also learned harsh lessons and found emotional strength to avoid negative influences. We wish them the very best this summer as they work to prepare for college studies and explore their dreams of careers in engineering, criminal law, politics, and medicine.



Calling All Alumni of Mount Vernon!

Keep in touch with us and share your success stories. Why? Because you inspire future generations of Mount Vernon graduates and that is of great importance to all of us. Email us at community@mtvernoncsd.org.

ALUMNI NEWS



Sergeant BREANDA CRUMP

Join us in congratulating a 2009 Mount Vernon High School graduate, Sergeant Breanda L. Crump. She graduated from the Warrior Leader Course (WLC) in the US Army Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). She exceeded course standards by achieving a grade point average of 99.25%; earning the top position on the Commandant's List as the Distinguished Honor Grad.



Novelist LINDA FAIRSTEIN

Class of 1965 Mount Vernon High School graduate, Linda Fairstein is an American author and former prosecutor focusing on crimes of violence against women and children. She served as head of the sex crimes unit of the Manhattan District Attorney's office from 1976 until 2002 and is the author of a series of novels featuring Manhattan prosecutor Alexandra Cooper. For more on her books and background, visit www.lindafairstein.com.

COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE LIST OF OUR 2014 GRADUATES

Adelphi University • Adelphi University • Alabama State University • Albany State University • CUNY • Benedict College • Bennett College • Berkeley College of White Plains • Binghamton University • Borough of Manhattan Community College of the CUNY • Boston College • Boston College of SUNY • University of California at Los Angeles • Campbell University • Canisius College • Central State University • Chestnut Hill College • Cheyney University of Pennsylvania • City College - Bronxville • University of Connecticut • Coppin State University • The Culinary Institute of America • CUNY - New York City Technical College • Curry College • Daemen College • DePaul University • Fairfield University • Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison • Fashion Institute of Technology • Finger Lakes Community College • Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College • Genesee Community College • The George Washington University • Georgia Southern University • Globe Institute of Technology • Guttman Community College • Hofstra University • Hostos Community College of the CUNY • Howard University • Hudson Valley Community College • Hunter College of the CUNY • Iona College • Jacksonville University • Jacksonville University • Wales University (Providence) • Johnson C. Smith University • Keuka College • LaSalle College • Le Moyne College • Lehman College of the CUNY • Lincoln Culinary Institute • Lincoln Technical College • University of Maryland, Eastern Shore • University of Maryland, College Park • Marymount Manhattan College • University of Massachusetts, Amherst • Medgar Evers College • Morehouse College • Morgan State University • Mount Saint Mary College • College of Mount Saint Vincent • Mount St. Mary's College (Chalon) • Nassau Community College • Niagara Community College • Niagara University • Norfolk State University • Northwestern University • Northwood University, Florida • Nyack College • Oakwood University • Onondaga Community College • Purchase College State University of New York • Queens College of the CUNY • Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute • University of Richmond • Roberts Wesleyan University • Saint Rose • Sarah Lawrence College • School of Visual Arts • Seton Hall University • Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education of the CUNY • The University of South Florida, Tampa • University of New York at Albany • State University of New York at New Paltz • College of Staten Island • Stevens Institute of Technology • Stony Brook University • Sullivan County Community College • Westbury • SUNY College at Oneonta • SUNY College of Technology at Canton • SUNY Delhi • SUNY at Farmingdale • SUNY Fredonia • SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome • SUNY State University of New York • Utica School of Commerce • Valencia College • Virginia Union University • Virginia Wesleyan College • Wagner College • Washington Adventist University •

THANK YOU thank you THANK YOU thank you THANK YOU



Timothy Costello
Asst. Superintendent
for Business (Retiring)

"Transformation. That is the word that best describes the current state of Mount Vernon City School District. Over the last two years, under the leadership of Judith Johnson, Timothy Costello and Dr. Hasna Muhammad we have begun to see significant, positive changes in our schools resulting in the success of our students. From a rigorous curriculum, to sound budgets, to the attraction and retention of exceptional educators, these individuals deserve our gratitude and thanks."

Trustee Elias Gootzeit, Board President



Dr. Hasna Muhammad
Asst. Superintendent
for HR (Retired)

CELEBRATING FORMER BOARD TRUSTEES



The Board of Education honored retired board members at the Education Center in May. Pictured from left to right: Former Board Trustees Marc Stucky, Gerry Whiteside, Delia Farquharson, and Leonard Sarver. Not pictured: Michelle Walker



Jeff Yonkers
MVFT President

Jeff Yonkers and Judith Johnson Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers Union Contract with Board of Education

With the support of the Board of Education, Judith Johnson reached an agreement on a three-year contract with the MVFT that balances taxpayer concerns with the need to ensure adequate resources are in place to provide a quality education for all students. This new teacher contract:

- Partially minimize the rate of salary increases after three years;
- Provide stipulations increasing health insurance contributions;
- Increases the time span to the top ladder of the salary scale.



Judith Johnson

Most important was the emergence of a shared understanding that going forward, unions and management must work as team members focused on educating children for success while remaining sensitive to the fiscal challenges facing taxpayers.



D.C Schools Chancellor KAYA HENDERSON

Westchester Magazine's 2014 high school edition featured "Rocket Ship" student Kaya Henderson, D.C. Public School Chancellor and Class of 1988 graduate of Mount Vernon High School. In her interview, she shared fond memories of her math teacher Louis Cuglietto (pictured left), current principal of Port Chester's John F. Kennedy Magnet School. She also credits the Mount Vernon public school system for her career in Washington, DC and shared how she got her launch at Mount Vernon High School. Thank you to Chancellor Henderson for being the guest key note speaker at 2014 Mount Vernon High School's graduation at the Westchester County Center on June 27th. To follow Chancellor Henderson's career, visit www.dcps.dc.gov.

CLASS OF 1957 In September of 2013, the Class of 1957 reunited for their 50th celebration as graduates of Mount Vernon High School (then located at A.B. Davis Middle School). While visiting their former grammar school Pennington Elementary, they learned of an old oak tree having been destroyed as a result of Superstorm Sandy. Having shared such fond memories playing as children on the rock and area near the tree on Pennington's grounds, they organized the purchase of a new oak tree and planted it on Arbor Day in April 2014. The school's faculty and PTA organized a dedication ceremony and concert as a thank you with the theme "Mighty Oaks From Little Acorns Grow". Thank you for your continued support of Mount Vernon schools.



University • Arcadia University • The Art Institute of New York City • Atlanta Metropolitan College • Babson College • Barber-Scotia College • Barry University • Baruch College of the City University of New York • Bronx Community College of the CUNY • Brooklyn College of the CUNY • Broome Community College • Broward College • Buffalo State College of the CUNY • City University of New York • Claflin University • Clark Atlanta University • Columbia University • Columbia-Greene Community College • Concordia College • Delaware State University • Dominican College of Blauvelt • Drew University • Drexel University • Dutchess Community College • Edward Waters College • Erie Community College, City University of New York • Fisk University • Florida Institute of Technology • Florida State University • University of Florida • Fordham University • Franklin Pierce University • Fulton-Montgomery College • Hamilton College - NY • Hampton University • University of Hartford • Hartwick College • Harvard College • Herkimer County Community College • Hillsborough Community College • Jamestown Community College • John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the CUNY • John M. Patterson State Technical College • Johnson & Wales University (Charlotte) • Johnson & Wales University • Lincoln University • LIU Brooklyn • LIU Post • Long Island University Post Campus • Loyola University Maryland • Manhattan College • Manhattanville College • Marist College • Mercy College • Miami Dade College • Miami University, Middletown • University of Miami • Mohawk Valley Community College • Monroe College • Monroe Community College • Nazareth College • New England College • University of New Haven • College of New Rochelle • New York Institute of Technology - Manhattan • New York University • Niagara County Community College • Pace University, New York City • Pace University, Westchester Campus • Pacific Union College • Palm Beach State College - Palm Beach Gardens • Pennsylvania State University • Wesleyan College • Rochester Institute of Technology • Rockland Community College • Russell Sage College • Saint John's River Community College - Orange Park Campus • The College of Saint John's River Community College • St. John's River Community College • St. John's University - Queens Campus • St. Thomas Aquinas College • State University of New York - Plattsburgh • State University of New York • SUNY Alfred State College • SUNY College at Brockport • SUNY College at Cobleskill • SUNY College at Cortland • SUNY Morrisville State College • SUNY College at Old Westbury • SUNY Oswego • Syracuse University • The University of Tampa • Tidewater Community College • Tompkins Cortland Community College • Tuskegee University • University at Buffalo • The University at Albany • Wentworth Institute of Technology • Westchester Community College • The College of Westchester • Wilmington University • Wood Tobe-Coburn School • York College of Pennsylvania



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THANK YOU (continued)

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D)

Senator Jeff Klein (D)

Congressman J. Gary Pretlow (D)

The Mount Vernon Board of Education is grateful for the continued support of our local legislators including Congressman Eliot L. Engel with over \$300,000 in state funds assigned to Mount Vernon in the past year.

IN MEMORIAM Ruby Dee

It was with tremendous sadness, and great reflection on the impact and beauty of her life, that we mourned the passing of Ruby Dee, activist and actress, and mother of Dr. Hasna Muhammad, recently retired Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources. Ruby Dee passed away in June at the age of 92. For more on the inspiring life of Rubie Dee, her late husband and fellow activist/actor Ossie Davis, and their foundation, visit www.ossieandruby.com.



INTRODUCTIONS



Ken Silver
 Asst. Superintendent
 for Business

As the new Assistant Superintendent for Business, Ken brings a well-rounded understanding of stakeholder dynamics and business. With more than 20 years of experience in various Westchester school districts, he expects to be able to move forward with managing measureable improvement for Mount Vernon. "I am deeply motivated by the respected history of Mount Vernon as well as its diversity and perseverance. I share the community's hope to make a difference in the schools by contributing to help preserve and build upon the district's strengths while also helping to make the necessary decisions that will directly improve the quality of education for its children."

RESTRUCTURING IN 2014

In an effort to continually engage the community in the restructuring effort, we will be reconvening a committee of parents, educators and citizens to evaluate our restructuring progress and identify next steps as we work with new leadership to fulfill the long-term commitment. If you are interested, email community@mtvernoncsd.org.

CALENDAR EVENTS

8.30.14 BACK-TO-SCHOOL EVENT

Backpack Giveaway: 12pm in Hartley Park

To volunteer, email community@mtvernoncsd.org

9.3.14..... SCHOOLS REOPEN

TV PRODUCTION AT MVHS

The Warner Brother's produced television series for HBO called "The Leftovers" is based on the Tom Perrotta novel of the same name. Two days of filming were on location at Mount Vernon High School over the spring of 2014. It seemed like fate because the property across the street off of California Road was once the twenty-two acre estate of the American studio executive Harry Warner in the 1930s. The fifth episode and the second to last episode of the series were filmed in various areas of the school. Warner Brother's leased the space for a total of \$30,000 and renovated the 9th Grade Academy entrance with fresh paint, landscaping, and vent repairs. Some of our 9th grade students also had an opportunity to be cast as "extras" in a science fair scene. What an exciting opportunity for them!

