

TESTIMONY

of

The Mount Vernon City School District

for

New NY Education Reform Commission

September 10, 2012

Presented by:

Judith Johnson, Interim Superintendent of Schools

On behalf of the children and families of the City of Mount Vernon, I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Judith Johnson and since July of 2012 I have served as the Interim Superintendent for the Mount Vernon City School District (MVCSD). I spent ten years as the Superintendent for the Peekskill City School District and just under four years at the USDOE as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education and later as Acting Secretary for elementary and secondary education. I wish to thank the governor and the commission members for their commitment to the urgent task of determining the level and degree of fiscal and human resources that will dramatically increase the quality of education we provide for New York's public school students.

DEFINING THE CORE PROBLEM

In a 2008 NCEE report entitled, "Tough Choices, Tough Times" it was found that "The core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era." We can get to where we must go only by changing the system itself." We understand that the goal is to retain the focus on student achievement, in difficult fiscal environment. The reality is that Mt. Vernon has been devastated by the GEA (GAP Elimination Adjustment). We have lost 13 million dollars in aid that was to come as a result of 2007 court ordered reforms. I suggest that your study must include attention to the needs of poor kids who live in our cities and our farms. For them, state funding has been going in the wrong direction.

POVERTY AND PERFORMANCE

Communities' Ability to Pay As Measured by 2009 NYS Adjusted Gross Income (Table 1)

Why is this important? Based on this data from the NYSED, Mount Vernon School District is the lowest ranked when compared with other school districts in Westchester County in the area of ability to pay as measured by adjusted gross income. The following table shows that Scarsdale is the highest ranked in this category while Mt. Vernon is the lowest.

Table 1

Communities' Ability to Pay As Measured				
<i>By 2009 Adjusted Gross Income</i>				
District	Adjust Gross Income	Rank	Lowest Rank	Highest Ranking
Mt Vernon	\$127,673	46	46	
Scarsdale	\$705,138	1		1
High	\$705,138			
3rd Quartile	\$356,070			
Median	\$268,364			
1st Quartile	\$195,984			
Low	\$127,673			
Source: State Education Department - 2009 Adjusted Gross Income/2010-2011 TWPU; 2009 Median Income				

History of Per Pupil Cost (Table 2)

When compared with other Westchester school Districts, Mount Vernon City School District's per pupil spending is among the lowest. The following table shows the wide gap between Mount Vernon's Per Pupil spending and that of other districts.

Per Pupil Expenditure			
<i>Based on 2011-12 Projected</i>			
District	Per Pupil Spending	Lowest	Highest
Mt. Vernon	\$22,576	\$22,576	
Pocantico Hills	\$43,656		\$43,656
High	\$43,656		
3rd Quartile	\$27,587		
Median	\$25,652		
1st Quartile	\$23,609		
Low	\$18,321		
Source: State Education Department - Pupil Cost... Fall BEDS.			

General Fund Revenue; Tax Levy, STAR, State Aid and Other 2010-2011 Actual Per Pupil Unit (Table 3)

The following Table is a comparison of the State’s median income from various revenue sources and that of Mount Vernon School District’s. MVCSD’s revenue from property taxes and STAR is over 10% below the NYS median.

	Property Taxes	STAR	State Aid	Other
NYS Median%	63.6%	8.6%	7.8%	5.3%
MVCSD%	51.5%	10.2%	33.7%	4.7%
Total Revenue from Prop Tax & STAR	MVCSD 2010-2011 Actual Revenue			
State Median is 72.2%; MVCSD's is 61.7%	\$200,439,929			

Free and Reduced Lunch Participation and Student Achievement Data (Table 4)

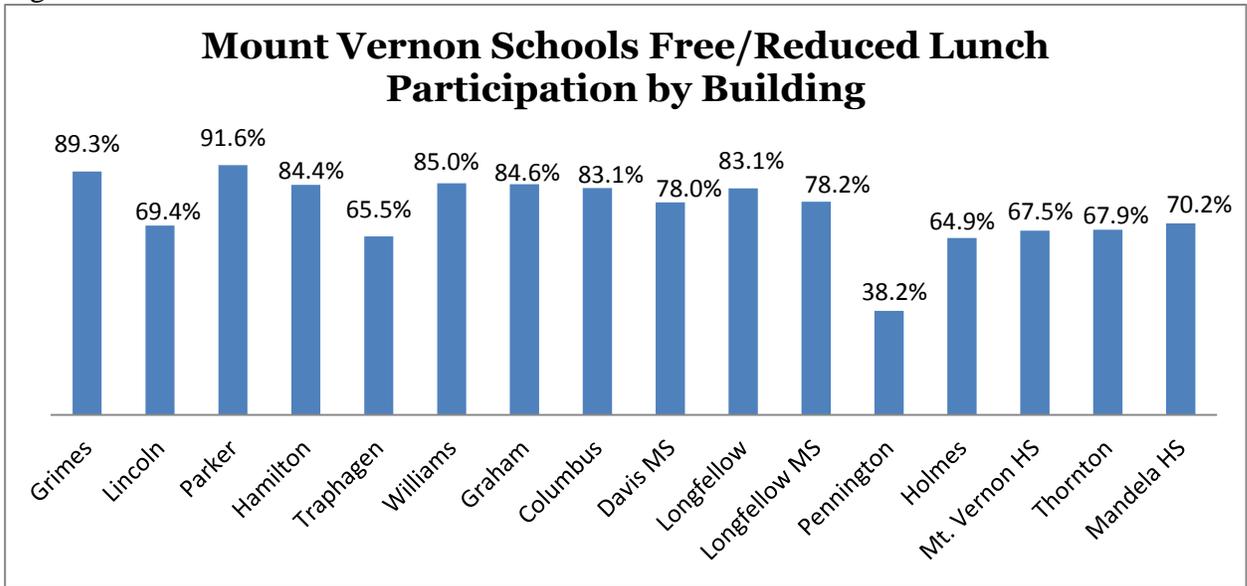
Mount Vernon’s overall free and reduced lunch participation rate is 75%, the highest in Westchester. Table 4 is a detailed school by school analysis while Figure 1 is a graphical depiction of each school’s participation rate. MVCSD’s highest free and reduced lunch participation rate is 91.2% while the lowest is 38.2%.

Table 4. District’s Free and Reduced Lunch Participation by School

School Name	Pre-K	K-12	Total # Students	Free#	Reduced#	F/R Total	F/R %
Grimes		457	457	379	29	408	89.3%
Lincoln		761	761	461	67	528	69.4%
Parker		322	322	276	19	295	91.6%
Hamilton		390	390	300	29	329	84.4%
Traphagen	25	305	330	182	34	216	65.5%
Williams	28	511	539	416	42	458	85.0%
Graham	122	435	557	427	44	471	84.6%
Columbus	36	527	563	423	45	468	83.1%
Davis MS		794	794	541	78	619	78.0%
Longfellow	40	356	396	277	52	329	83.1%
Longfellow MS		536	536	359	60	419	78.2%
Pennington	35	290	325	98	26	124	38.2%
Holmes	27	360	387	205	46	251	64.9%
Mt. Vernon HS		1336	1336	780	122	902	67.5%
Thornton		639	639	386	48	434	67.9%
Mandela HS		205	205	127	17	144	70.2%
Total:	313	8224	8537	5637	758	6395	
District Free and Reduced Lunch Average:							75.0%

Based on Student Enrollment as of 6/22/2012

Figure 1

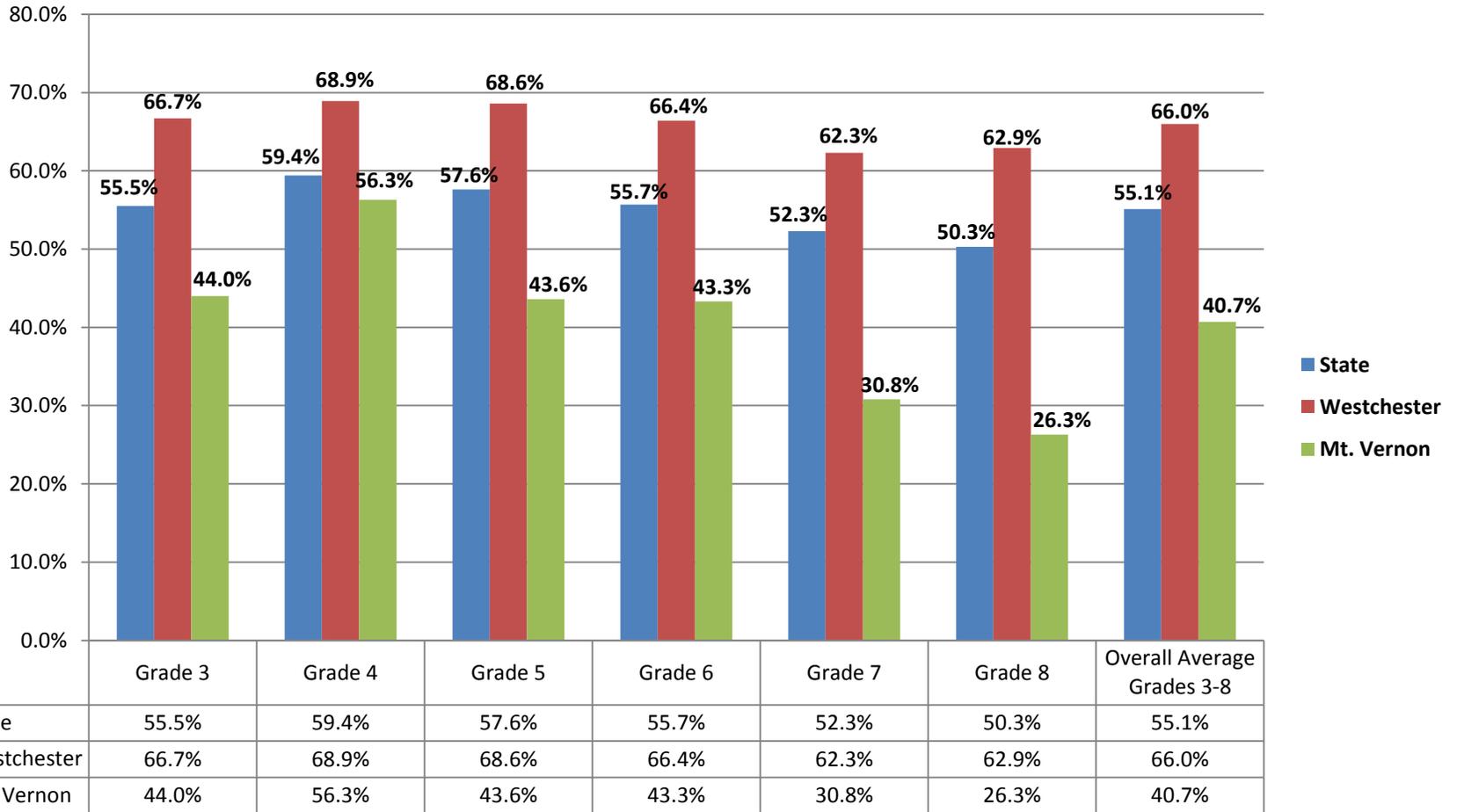


Our overall social economic status also impacts our students' performance when compared to the Westchester County average as depicted in Figure 2. The gap between Mt. Vernon and Westchester County average is much wider than Mount Vernon and the New York State average. It appears that the growing disparity in family incomes appear to be contributing to growing disparities in student achievement.

This presentation is a summary of our student performance in Grades 3-8 English language arts and mathematics assessments for the 2011-2012 school year and high school graduation rates for the past two accountability years. Also presented are fiscal data including our free and reduced lunch counts and their relationship with the performance of our students on the New York State assessments. There is much research to support the positive correlation between social economic status and student achievement. Much of our data show that those elementary schools with high free and reduced lunch participation, except for one elementary school, performed lower on the assessments. Table 4 and Figure 1 show Mount Vernon Schools' free and reduced lunch participation, disaggregated by school. The District has an overall average participation rate 75% and is the highest in Westchester County.

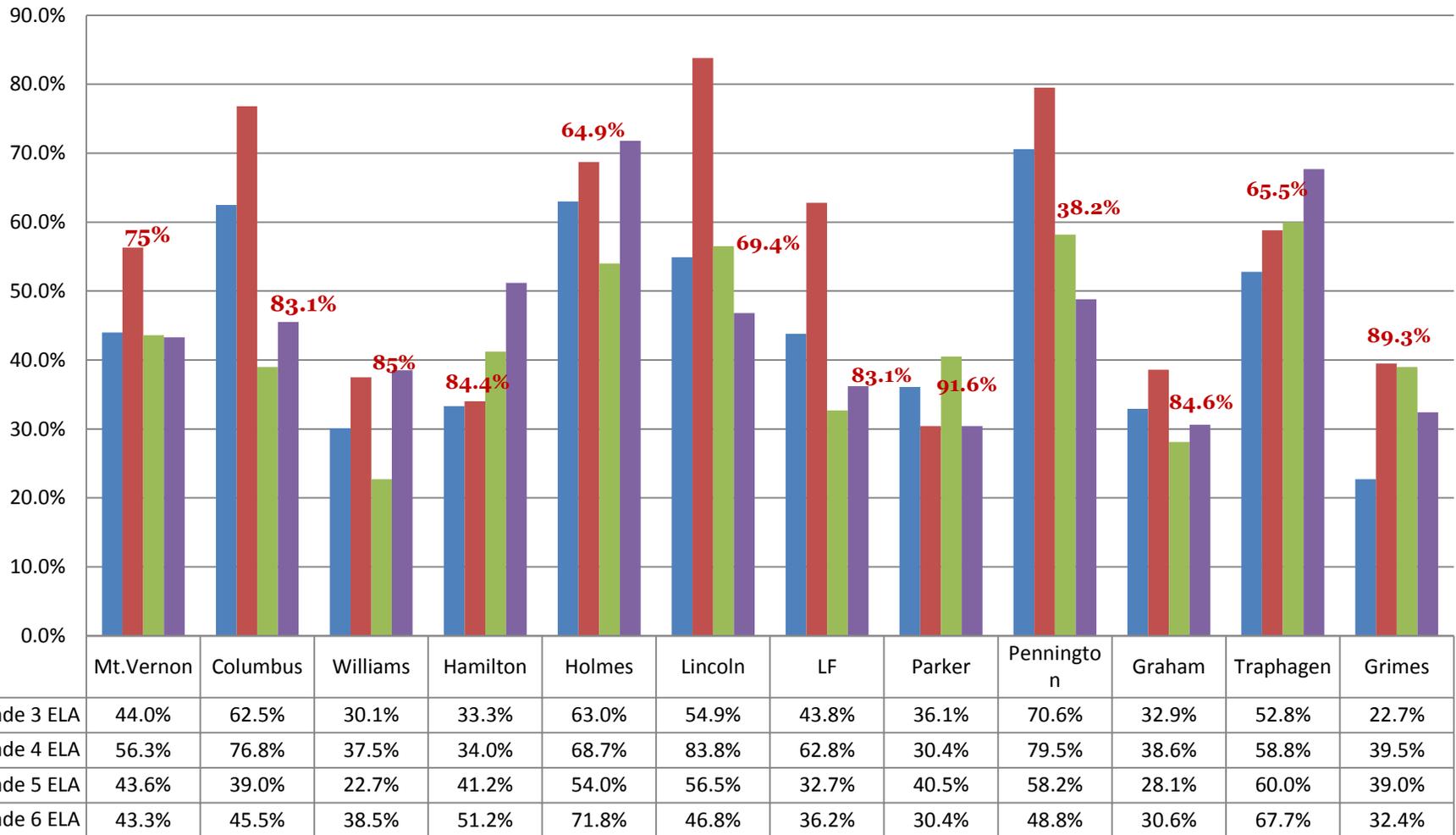
Figure 2 shows a comparison of our students' performance on Grades 3-8 ELA with that of the State and other Westchester school districts. It is evident that our performance levels are below that of other Westchester districts.

Figure 2. Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Proficiency in Grades 3-8 ELA in New York State, Westchester and Mt. Vernon



Overall Average Note: 55.1% of grades 3-8 students across the State met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard. In Westchester 66%, and in Mt. Vernon 40.7% met or exceeded the mathematics proficiency standard.

Figure 3. Percent of Students (By District Average and School) Meeting or Exceeding ELA 3-6 Performance Standards in 2012 (Compared with F/R Lunch Participation)



** Mount Vernon City School District has 75% free/reduced lunch participation rate, 38.2% minimum and 91/6% maximum at Parker Elementary School, one of the lower performing schools. Columbus Elementary is the outlier and is under study for best practices.*

Figure 4 depicts the performance levels in English Language Arts of our two middle schools, Davis and Longfellow:

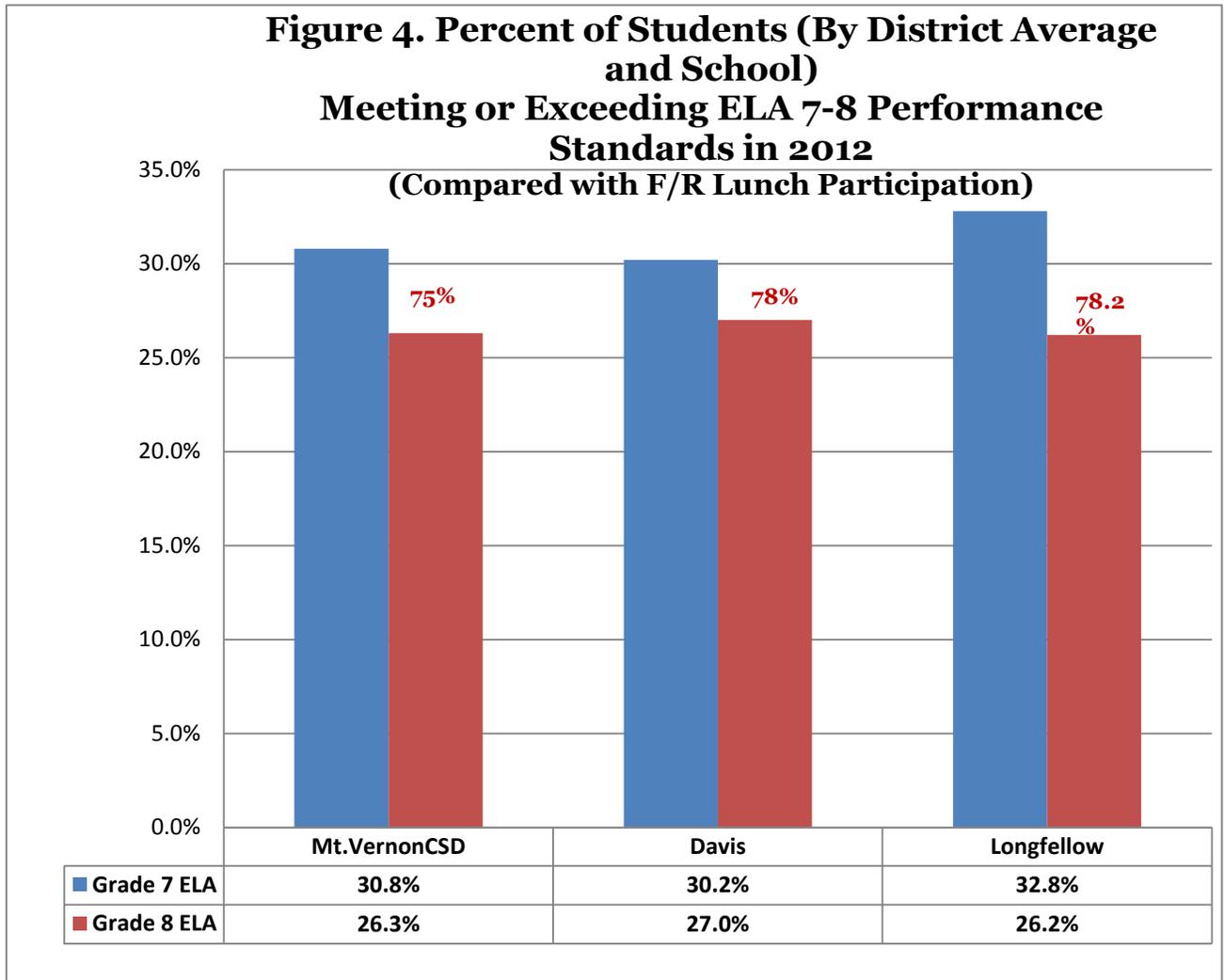


Table 5 illustrates our high school graduation rate and the challenges of getting all students to meet the graduation standards. Currently, our graduation is 61%. In a recent issue of the Harvard Business Review, Stacey Childress authors an article entitled “Rethinking Schools.” In it she reports on a study that illustrates the economic imperative we face. In 2008 the Stanford economist Eric Hanushek developed a new way to examine the link between a country’s GDP and the academic test scores of its children. He found that if one country’s scores were only half a standard deviation higher than another’s in 1960, **its GDP grew a full percentage point faster in every subsequent year through 2000.** Using Hanushek’s methods, McKinsey & Company has estimated that if the U.S. had closed the education achievement gap with better-performing nations, GDP in 2010 could have been 8% to 14%—\$1.2 trillion to \$2.1 trillion—higher. **The report’s authors called this gap “the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession.”**

Charles Blow observed that instead of dramatically upping our investment in our children’s education so that they’ll be able to compete in a future that has more educated foreign job seekers, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction.

Table 5. High School Graduation Rates in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 School Years

High School Graduation Rates

2011 – 2012 <i>Based on 2010-2011 Data</i>	2010 – 2011 <i>Based on 2009-2010 Data</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 61% Graduation Rate • State Standard Objective is 80% • District Accountability Status - Improvement Year 1 • Did not make AYP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 63% Graduation Rate • State Standard Objective was 80% • District Accountability Status – Good Standing • Did not make AYP

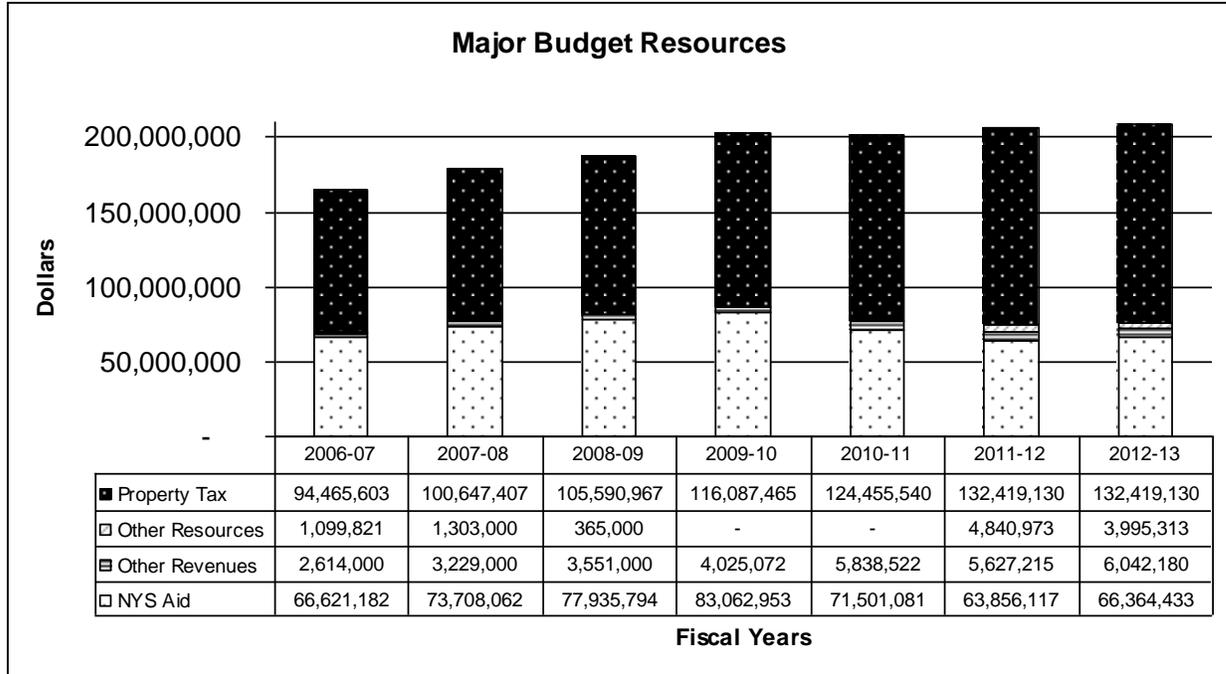
Online Technology

Technology has the potential to increase student achievement. The online learning programs allow students to progress at an individual pace without the stigma of being labeled **low achieving**. Stacey Childress and others in a recent issue of the Harvard Business Review describe the technology based world our children live in today. The nature of their environment is characterized by multimedia, addictive games and mobile access and asynchronous activities and anywhere, anytime capabilities. That is not the look of our classrooms. We need a robust and accelerated movement from the ten pound textbook loading down backpacks to the use of high quality digital, materials. Tammy Erickson in the same issue eulogizes the outmoded classroom that was useful in an era that needed an efficient industrial workforce and suggests the gap between the output of our educational system and today's job demands is enormous. She offers the following, - operate school as a base camp, or design hub for learning; group students by what they know not by age, and provide credit for project based learning demonstrations. Ensure Broadband access for all students and educators either through categorical grants. **Competency and strategic planning** initiatives provide a wide range of new learning opportunities including expanding the range of courses available to students, particularly students in small rural and inner city schools.

FISCAL CHALLENGES

The National Working Group on Funding Student Learning in a 2008 report notes: Today's finance systems were never designed to support such uniformly high levels of student learning, particularly when the task calls for closing achievement gaps and making the greatest gains with students who have been poorly served. Instead, these

systems were constructed piecemeal over decades to fund enrollment, build schools, support programs, hire staff, and provide extra dollars to needy students. (Page 1)



Recommendations

I conclude the paper by offering the following recommendations:

The first step is to resist the urge to impose another unfunded or underfunded mandate on our schools. A mandate requires the reallocation of existing dollars and staff resources.

1. Fiscal Equity

Today's finance systems were never designed to support such uniformly high levels of student learning, particularly when the task calls for closing the achievement gap and making the greatest gains with students who have been underserved.

- a. Strengthen the targeting of education aid to high need and lower wealth districts as enacted in 2007 and resume full funding of the phase-in provisions of Foundation Aid at least for districts not reaching the definition of a successful school district.

Paying the highest per capita tax rate (and the second highest true tax rate in the Lower Hudson region) when we have the lowest per capita income (based on the number of personal tax returns, individual or joint, filed in Mount Vernon) means that the Mount Vernon community has the least ability (income) to pay for education from the only source that remains to that community (property taxes). Income dollars are compelled to pay for education while living in one of the most expensive regions in the state and in the country. The demand for educational property tax dollars compete with other daily essentials like shelter, travel, energy. Further even with that economic strain, Mount Vernon lags badly when compared to regional school districts. Mount Vernon is consistently in the bottom quartile.

The state needs to commitment to a more rapid implementation of the CFE decision; reverse the GAP Elimination Adjustment (\$11,956,764 – this alone would make possible a substitution of 9% of the property tax base); and carefully consider the basis of regional and small city cost differentials.

b. Freeze charter school tuition until the legislation is passed to set aside a separate funding stream for Charters. One imagines that this notion of the money following the child is meant to punish the sending school district for a student's departure. The real recipient of the punishment is the child who remains in the public school with fewer dollars to support his or her education. A child may leave; the infrastructure and human resources remain intact. There are significant fiscal pressures on districts from the growth in charter school . And, allow public schools the same flexibility offered to Charters. Level the playing field.

2. Student Achievement

In a recent issue of the Harvard Business Review, Stacey Childress authors an article entitled “Rethinking Schools.” In it she reports on a study that illustrates the economic imperative we face. In 2008 the Stanford economist Eric Hanushek developed a new way to examine the link between a country’s GDP and the academic test scores of its children. He found that if one country’s scores were only half a standard deviation higher than another’s in 1960, its GDP grew a full percentage point faster in every subsequent year through 2000. Using Hanushek’s methods, McKinsey & Company has estimated that if the U.S. had closed the education achievement gap with better-performing nations, GDP in 2010 could have been 8% to 14%—\$1.2 trillion to \$2.1 trillion—higher. The report’s authors called this gap “the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession.”

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Technology: Technology has the [potential to increase student achievement. The on line learning programs allow students to progress at an individual pace without the stigma of being labeled as low achieving.

We are not investing enough in Science, Technology and Math. Stacey Childress and others in a recent issue of the Harvard Business Review describe the technology based world our children live in today. The nature of their environment is characterized by multimedia, addictive games and mobile access and asynchronous activities and anywhere, anytime capabilities. That is not the look of our classrooms. They were built on the average of 66 years, before television and internet. We need a robust and

accelerated movement from the ten pound textbook loading down backpacks to the use of high quality digital, materials . . . Tammy Erickson in the same issue eulogizes the outmoded classroom that was useful in an era that needed an efficient industrial workforce and suggests the gap between the output of our educational system and today's job demands is enormous. She offers the following, -operate school as a base camp, or design hub for learning; group students by what they know not by age, and provide credit for project based learning demonstrations. Ensure Broadband access for all students and educators either through categorical grants.

a. We don't spend as much as the other Westchester districts on enrichment, specialized assistance and more. Our students come to schools with limited literacy skills knowing 10,000 words while others in the more affluent areas know 100,000 words." By grade four these students may have a two million word divide. This is fixable. But it takes funds to build researched based enrichment programs that can close the gap. Fund and mandate full day pre-kindergarten for all four year old children, especially those in high poverty schools.

b. Introduce career paths into the secondary education programs and allow students, after two years of high school (to age 16), to enter career /vocational programs that provide both a high school diploma and a post secondary degree. The programs should focus on work readiness for the current workforce and introduce the concept of continuous learning for "tomorrow's" jobs.

Local Governance: examine the governance of schools to learn what good practices produce and what practices are not in the best interests of children. Determine if there is a need to be more explicit about the standards for governance.

Conclusion

The values judgments, choices this commission makes will have a lasting effect on the lives of hundreds of thousands of poor children, who count on us the adults, to care for them. Their well being and their access to sound education, their chances to escape poverty, is a moral imperative for our entire state...Thank you for the opportunity to address the commission.

2012 Application Approved in May 2012 as Projected in Amani's New Application

School Year	# Students	Per Pupil Allocation	Projected Charter School Cost	District Budget Accord	Projected Impact
2011/12	80	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 1,343,520.00	\$ 206,743,435.00	0.65%
2012/13	160	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 2,687,040.00	\$ 212,945,738.00	1.26%
2013/14	240	\$ 17,298.00	\$ 4,151,520.00	\$ 219,334,110.00	1.89%
2014/15	320	\$ 17,817.00	\$ 5,701,440.00	\$ 225,914,133.00	2.52%
2015/16	320	\$ 18,351.00	\$ 5,872,320.00	\$ 232,691,558.00	2.52%

Impact of Amani's 2012 Projected Charter School Cost based on a 2% Increase in the District's Budget

School Year	# Students	Per Pupil Allocation	Projected Charter School Cost	District Budget	Difference with Amani's Projection of District Revenue
2011/12	80	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 1,343,520.00	\$ 206,743,435.00	\$ -
2012/13	160	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 2,687,040.00	\$ 208,821,056.00	\$ (4,124,682.00)
2% Increase				\$ 4,176,421.12	
2013/14	240	\$ 17,298.00	\$ 4,151,520.00	\$ 212,997,477.12	\$ (6,336,632.88)
2% Increase				\$ 4,259,949.54	
2014/15	320	\$ 17,817.00	\$ 5,701,440.00	\$ 217,257,426.66	\$ (8,656,706.34)
2% Increase				\$ 4,345,148.53	
2015/16	320	\$ 18,351.00	\$ 5,872,320.00	\$ 221,602,575.20	\$ (11,088,982.80)

Impact of a static Student Cost over the Term of Amani Charter School Application based on a 2% Increase in the District's Budget

School Year	# Students	Per Pupil Allocation	Projected Charter School Cost	District Budget	Difference with Amani's Projection of District Revenue
2011/12	80	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 1,343,520.00	\$ 206,743,435.00	
2012/13	160	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 2,687,040.00	\$ 208,821,056.00	\$ (4,124,682.00)
2% Increase				\$ 4,176,421.12	
2013/14	240	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 4,030,560.00	\$ 212,997,477.12	\$ (6,336,632.88)
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2014/15	320	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 5,374,080.00	\$ 217,257,426.66	\$ (8,656,706.34)
2% Increase				\$ 4,345,148.53	
2015/16	320	\$ 16,794.00	\$ 5,374,080.00	\$ 221,602,575.20	\$ (11,088,982.80)

Detailed Bibliography to follow