



THE  
MOUNT  
VERNON  
SCHOOL

IDEA Action Report 2020-2021

# Inclusion Diversity Equity & Action





# IDEA Statement

Anchored in Christian values – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – relationships at Mount Vernon are foundational to learning. Preparing students to be college ready, globally competitive, and engaged citizen leaders call us to lean in to inclusion, diversity, equity, and action.

Creating and cultivating connections between all people, ideas, and sectors, the School welcomes all learners to wrestle with voices and perspectives that challenge our assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and privileges. Not allowing our differences to divide us requires each of us to engage in honest, vulnerable, and courageous conversations through empathy, reflection, examination, and action. Being real agents of change is a continuous journey.

Committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, our trust in each other strengthens our sense of identity, autonomy, and interdependence. As a school of inquiry, innovation, and impact, we are committed to creating and sustaining a school culture where all members feel valued and safe, sharing their authentic selves to design a better world...together.

-IDEA Statement: Inclusion Diversity Equity & Action (Adopted 2018-2019)



# Mount Vernon,

In August 2020, Mount Vernon reunited as a community after being separated for months due to the global pandemic. We reunited during a transformative, racial justice movement in our city and throughout the world. We reunited as local, state, and national election campaigns intensified. With hope, faith, and optimism, we accepted the invitation to face this challenge and opportunity in leading and representing the Mount Vernon community.

A critical component of the challenge and opportunity was to recognize and empathize this past summer with the stories shared from past and current members of our Black community by acknowledging failures, missed opportunities, and gaps while building upon the previous steps taken ([IDEA Expressions of Learning, 2018-2020](#)). We have been humbled by the vulnerability and strength it has taken for those who felt safe to come forward to share these experiences. These powerful stories have changed the trajectory of the School forever.

While we cannot solve the complexities in other school communities, we will continue to focus on Mount Vernon, leaning in together with collective conviction to set a course of bold ideas and approaches to address race and racism within our own community. And when we do, we will empower all people to realize their full potential, engage meaningfully in life, and leave at the end of each day with their humanity fully intact.

Seizing the moment to effect change, the School embarked on a journey during the 2020-2021 school year focused on building **strategy**, developing **programs**, and most importantly, cultivating **relationships**.

## Focused on Strategy

How will we build the institutional infrastructure to cultivate a community of endurance to sustain the long journey of anti-racism? How might we fully live out our mission of inquiry, innovation, and impact in order to design a more inclusive future? How might we set forth tangible action steps to hold the School accountable to our aspirations, goals, and objectives for IDEA?

## Focused on Programs

How will we develop programmatic initiatives, strengthening our capacity to think more broadly and process information more deeply? How might we create and cultivate connections between diverse people, backgrounds, identities, ideas, and sectors? How will we equip ourselves with the ability to dialogue across differences, welcoming the chance to wrestle with voices and perspectives that challenge our assumptions?

## Focused on Relationships

How might we gain new insights for a more complete, inclusive picture by listening and learning from People of Color within our community? How will we foster belonging of the most underrepresented groups at the School? How might we build trust to unearth and eradicate words and actions of racism and prejudice? How might we respect, affirm, and celebrate the dignity and worth of each member of our community despite identity and background.

Originally communicated in July 2020, the IDEA Action Report 2020-2021 addresses four key areas of action steps – organizational & school climate, learning & well-being, recruitment & retention, and advancement & continuous improvement. Reflecting a deliberate, incremental focus in building a more inclusive future, the School has taken a comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to advancing IDEA through school-wide assessments, external partnerships, professional learning, counseling services, parent education and volunteerism, marketing, recruitment efforts, funding, and communication. The IDEA Action Report demonstrates the investment and commitment of our community, the progress towards fulfilling prioritized interventions and short-term objectives, and the transparency of future-focused goals to be achieved.



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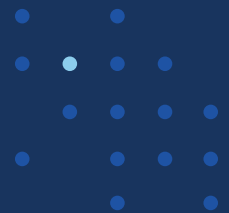
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# 01

# 01

## Organizational & School Climate

- Commitment to look back to look forward through conducting intentional conversations with past and present members of the Black community
- Commitment to analyze and revise the School's current processes, policies, handbooks, and communication in order to build a more inclusive future where words of racism and actions of prejudice will not be tolerated
- Commitment to retain external resources to measure IDEA gaps, missed opportunities, community needs, and next steps

During the 2020-2021 school year, the School prioritized a set of action steps to gain insight, assessing the organizational and school climate through partnerships, interviews, conversations, surveys, and review of policy and documents as well as to take action to combat and eradicate words of racism and acts of prejudice.

## Action Step 1

Begin inclusion, diversity, and equity assessment through an external partner, engaging with Black alumni and parents as well as current Students, Parents, and Staff of Color and amplifying their voices within Mount Vernon

The School developed a partnership with ReadySet, a consulting firm building human-centered solutions for innovative organizations with diversity, equity and inclusion in mind. After leading a year-long organizational and school climate assessment and concluding it in May, the methodology, bright spots as identified in the assessment by ReadySet, and opportunities for growth and progress in the future are summarized below.

### Methodology

During the fall, research consultants conducted an internal review of documents including IDEA action steps, employee and student handbooks, admissions procedures, marketing materials, recruiting faculty/staff process and application, policies, strategic plan, course catalogs, professional learning programs, partnerships, and memberships.

In November, the School formed a diverse committee of faculty/staff to engage with Black alumni representing Mount Vernon's graduating classes from 2008-2020. The committee curated the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences pertaining to connectivity, inclusivity, and day-to-day sense of belonging of Black students. From November through February, the committee attempted to reconnect with all Black alumni. The interviews, designed and framed by the external partner, ReadySet, focused on two primary questions: 1) How did your identity as a Black member of the community affect your experience at Mount Vernon? and 2) If the experience could have been different, what would that have looked like? The results of the confidential interviews were provided to ReadySet for analysis.

In December, ReadySet administered an anonymous, confidential survey to Mount Vernon parents (Preschool through Upper School), faculty/staff, and Upper School students, focused on overall engagement, fairness, decision-making, voice and communication, belonging and inclusion, culture and mission, leadership, and diversity.

During the spring of 2021, the consulting team interviewed a diverse representation of current Mount Vernon parents and faculty/staff members.

### Bright Spots

Data and stories collected from the organizational and climate assessment revealed three major bright spots in what our community loves about Mount Vernon:

1. Exceptional Educational Community – In the study, strong connections with the faculty/staff drive a positive community experience and deep level of engagement at Mount Vernon. Specifically, students believe that teachers are dedicated to their growth in their talents and abilities. Faculty/staff members contend there is open and honest communication between colleagues. And, families feel that they have a sense of belonging at Mount Vernon.
2. Innovation & Impact – Reported by respondents, the study reflected the belief that education needs to change and we are leading the work at Mount Vernon. In addition, parents trust Mount Vernon is providing an education that is preparing students for life with the right mix of foundational skills and innovation. Based on this experience, families continue to highly recommend Mount Vernon to their friends. Ultimately, faculty/staff members believe the work the School is doing is positively impacting the lives of people.
3. Optimism & IDEA – Parents and faculty/staff members believe the School values and is committed to diversity, and the School has taken action to make the environment more inclusive. Parents recognize how the School has started to make significant investments in IDEA, and the recent steps taken by the School make it feel real in a way it has not in the past.



## Opportunities

Data and stories collected from the organizational and climate assessment revealed three major opportunities where Mount Vernon has the potential to build capacity and grow moving forward:

1. **School-wide Communication & Decision-Making** – While there were positive reflections on the School's level of communication and response to COVID, families and faculty/staff members are unclear at times about the "why" behind certain strategic decisions, leading to a feeling of exclusion. Requesting more clarity, respondents reported a deeper desire to understand the overall plan of the School and how decisions are aligned with the plan.
2. **Inclusive School Community** – With optimism for IDEA, Alumni, Parents, and Students of Color point to past experiences of racial difference as something to endure rather than celebrate. Community members recommend providing more resources on issues of race and culture, increasing diverse representation at all school-levels in student and staff populations, amplifying voices with divergent perspectives, and allowing for more equitable advancement.
3. **Educator Capacity & Cohesion** – Based on the findings, there is a sense that the high volume of initiatives, pace, and demands on schedule, tend to overwhelm, contributing to faculty/staff turnover. Specifically, Black educators, at times, expressed struggling with seeing a long-term future for themselves at Mount Vernon, while sharing a sentiment that the School's commitment to diversity is improving. Overall, the report revealed an opportunity for greater cohesion between all four academic divisions.

As the IDEA Action Report was released to the School by ReadySet at the end of the school year, we will continue to analyze their findings and recommendations and incorporate them into action plans, building on the foundation established during the 2020-2021 school year. Also, see the IDEA Journey Ahead at the end of the IDEA Action Report, responding to the major opportunities identified in the study.

## Action Step 2

Expand Student Code of Conduct to combat and eradicate words of racism and acts of prejudice by developing Expressions, Language & Acts of Racism policy

In August, the School released the [Expressions, Language & Acts of Racism](#) policy, expanding the Student Code of Conduct to combat and eradicate words of racism and acts of prejudice. During the fall, the respective Deans of Student Life within each division and the Director of IDEA created an engaging, interactive workshop reviewing the policy with students in grades 4-12. Preschool through grade 3 students participated in the Upstander workshop developed by the Lower School IDEA Coordinator. Also, the policy has been reviewed with faculty/staff members within each division. Officially, the Expressions, Language & Acts of Racism policy has been inserted into the Student & Family Handbook and Employee Handbook. The policy will be reviewed with students and faculty/staff members on an annual basis.

## Action Step 3

Incorporate IDEA Statement into The Mount Vernon School Bylaws

On Monday, July 27, the Mount Vernon Board of Trustees unanimously approved to incorporate the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action Statement into the School's governance documents and bylaws.



# 02

# 02

## Learning & Well-Being

- Commitment to review the School's curricular and instructional framework for PS-12 programming through a culturally responsive IDEA lens and infuse and amplify multiple perspectives, voices, experiences, and historical contexts of Black and underrepresented communities
- Commitment to expand anti-bias and anti-racist training opportunities for all students, faculty/staff members, parents, and trustees and deepen competencies for social and emotional learning -- self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, healthy relationships, and ethical decision-making skills
- Commitment to support the social and emotional well-being of Students and Staff of Color through dedicated staff members, programs, and opportunities



During the 2020-2021 school year, the School prioritized a set of action steps to advance IDEA, focused on learning and well-being through professional development for the faculty/staff, affinity frameworks, counseling services, parent education, and volunteer programs.

#### Action Step 4

Establish an anti-bias and anti-racism framework for students, faculty/staff, and administrators through the School's professional learning program

Through Mount Vernon's Research, Design & Iteration (RDI) professional learning program for faculty/staff, the School created a partnership with iChange Collaborative -- an external firm helping "organizations build inclusive cultures, communities of belonging where people feel valued and inspired to do their best work." From November to April, iChange Collaborative facilitated multiple RDI workshops with the faculty/staff, focused on the diversity imperative, how race identity impacts teaching and learning, disrupting bias, cultivating allies, and leading transformational change.

Additionally, Mount Vernon faculty/staff participated in a number of external workshops during the 2020-2021 school year including:

- Interpersonal and Systems Bias (ReadySet)
- Cultural Competency Institute (Multicultural Resource Center)
- Strategic Anti-Racism in Advancement Activities (Multicultural Resource Center)
- Investing in a Culture of Well-Being for Students of Color Today and Tomorrow (National Association of Independent Schools)
- People of Color Conference (National Association of Independent Schools)
- Implicit Bias Training (Storbeck & Associates, Carney Sandoe & Associates)
- Promoting Civil and Open Discourse in Independent Schools (EAB)
- Restorative Approach to Discipline (Center for Spiritual and Ethical Education)
- The Power of an SEL/DEI Partnership in the Classroom (Center for Spiritual and Ethical Education)
- Positioning Your School for Making Progress in Diversity (Southern Association for Independent Schools)

#### Action Step 5

Review the School's curricular and instructional framework for PS-12 programming through a culturally responsive IDEA lens and infuse and amplify multiple perspectives, voices, experiences, and historical contexts of Black and underrepresented communities

The Mount Vernon faculty/staff embarked on a year-long study of anti-bias work and culturally responsive teaching steeped in neuroscience. A year-long deep study of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* was launched by teacher leaders and IDEA coordinators on the Upper Campus, where faculty investigated anti-racist thinking, unpacking self-identity building an anti-racist community, microaggressions, cultural archetypes, and what is culturally responsive teaching. Highlights of learning included understanding how the chemical components of the brain and its alert systems are directly impacted by environmental conditions in classroom spaces that directly hinder or make possible deeper forms of learning, and learning that culturally responsive teaching is less about learning every detail about each students' identity and more creating safe environments where, despite cultural differences, teachers can foster trust across differences in order to empower every student to achieve and exercise higher order cognitive thinking skills.

In addition, all four divisions (PS-US), with the passion and dedication of our entire staff, infused and amplified multiple perspectives, voices, and historical contexts of Black and underrepresented communities. Matter of fact, school-wide there were 73 identified learning opportunities through project-based learning units, class activities, and workshops throughout the year. While not an exhaustive list, a sample of the 73 examples include:

- **Preschool and PK5 Innovation Project:** How might we explore the impact of Black innovators and inventors? Students generated questions about innovation and inventions connected with a topic that directly impacts their lives, including interview questions for Lonnie Johnson (creator of the Super Soaker) of Johnson Research and Development Company as a part of their discovery work.
- **Lower School and Grade 4 Who's at the Table Project:** Who was at the table when major historical decisions

and events took place? Students analyzed power structures through the lens of the American Revolution. Using the novel, *Forge*, students engaged in the author's *Unsung Heroes Project* and were able to share their work and questions directly with the author.

- **Middle School and Grade 7 Humanities Project:** How might we explore a more complex history about Native American identity behind all of the stereotypes? What's the story behind the story? Students explored stereotypes of Indigenous people in cartoons and other modern representations. Summatively, students designed a textbook page that contained stereotypes based on their research.
- **Upper School and Grades 11-12 Data & Rhetoric Project:** Students watched *13th*, a documentary, analyzing the documentary's argument on criminal justice, gathering evidence of the director's use of ethos, pathos, and logos, and assessing the data/statistics incorporated in the documentary. Ultimately, students constructed researched arguments about race, equity, and the modern-day prison system.
- **Arts & Jazz Project:** Upper School students in the "Theatre for Youth" course wrote, filmed, and recorded a puppet play about the life of Ella Fitzgerald and shared it with Lower Campus performing arts classes. The play followed the format of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* but instead of incorporating orchestra instruments, students introduced younger learners to jazz instruments.

## Action Step 6

Form a committee of diverse representation to design and develop an affinity group framework

At the end of October, the School formed both a diverse student-facing committee and parent-facing committee of teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents to design and develop a framework for an affinity group program. November through April, the respective committees conducted research of longitudinal studies, expert viewpoints throughout the country, and successful practices in educational organizations and corporate environments. Aligning with the Mount Vernon mission, vision, and values, the respective committees clarified the purpose of an affinity program by identifying the conditions and resources needed.

### Student-Facing Affinity Framework

- Create space within the Mount Vernon community for Students of Color, cultivating relationships with others who share a common identity and similar experience
- Partner with iChange Collaborative during the 2021-2022 school year to support launching of affinity program and assessing ongoing needs
- Train affinity group leaders to effectively lead and facilitate affinity group gatherings

- Provide group guidelines, scalable for a variety of affinity groups in the 2021-2022 school year and in the future

### Parent-Facing Affinity Framework

- Create space within the Mount Vernon community for a Parents of Color Affinity Group, cultivating relationships with others who share a common identity and a similar experience
- Restructure Mount Vernon Parents Network (MVPN) to include two IDEA Chairs, collaborating with the Chief of IDEA and Director of Community Impact
- Provide group guidelines, scalable to a variety of affinity groups in the future
- Build a network within MVPN to provide support for new Parents of Color

## Action Step 7

Realign counseling services to provide additional support for social and emotional health of Students and Staff of Color

The School realigned counseling services to provide additional support for social and emotional health of Students and Staff of Color. In August, we welcomed Keri Walton to Mount Vernon, joining us from Kennestone Hospital, where she served as the Emergency Room Care Coordinator - Senior Social Worker. Keri's knowledge and experience complements our counseling department, especially serving Students and Staff of Color during an important time within our community.

## Action Step 8

Refocus Parent University to provide specific parent programs for inclusion, diversity, and equity

In addition to the rich experiences within each division, school-wide opportunities are provided for parents to learn and grow, engaging with national experts and members of the Mount Vernon staff. This year was no exception as we refocused Parent University around the theme of Cultivating Community Resilience & Belonging to provide specific parent programs for inclusion, diversity, equity, and action.

October 2020 - February 2021

- Panel discussion of the documentary, *The Upstanders*
- Talking to Kids about Race & Racism, Julie Lythcott-Haims
- Panel discussion of the documentary, *Angst*
- Parenting through Anxiety in Children, Dr. Lisa Damour



# 03

# 03

## Retention & Recruitment

- Commitment to strategic shifts in outreach in admissions to increase awareness, engagement, and enrollment of diverse communities within the Atlanta area
- Commitment to build upon recruiting and retention of Faculty/Staff of Color through partnerships, mentorship, and leadership
- Commitment to expand IDEA Department, conducting national search to recruit Chief of Inclusion Diversity Equity and Action reporting directly to the Head of School as a member of the senior leadership team and identifying IDEA directors for the Lower Campus and Upper Campus as well as IDEA divisional coordinators

During the 2020-2021 school year, the School prioritized action steps focused on retention and recruitment, conducting a marketing audit, increasing diverse representation, and identifying a senior leadership position.

## Action Step 9

Relaunch 2019-2020 marketing audit through the IDEA lens and develop strategy to attract Families of Color to meet and exceed diversity goals

In the 2020-2021 school year, 17% of the students enrolled at Mount Vernon are Students of Color. The School remains committed to strategic shifts in outreach in admissions to increase awareness, engagement, and enrollment of diverse communities within the Atlanta area. At the end of September, the School relaunched the 2019-2020 marketing audit through the inclusion, diversity, equity, and action lens. The leadership of Trustees and the School's Brand Development Department conducted a thorough review of last year's marketing audit and created a partnership with Hector Muñoz, a global chief marketing officer, to oversee the marketing audit, provide robust analysis, and inform the School of next steps through a series of recommendations.

The course of the audit was completed in three phases.

### Phase 1 - Marketing Strategy Review

This phase assessed all recruiting activity, enrollment, metrics, sentiment, and perceptions with People of Color within the Mount Vernon community. The analysis showed a recruitment strategy that largely used print, organic social, and limited partnerships to attract People of Color to the School. The final report revealed that sentiments and perceptions can be improved through greater transparency, authentic relationships, and providing pathways for People of Color to have more voice.

### Phase 2 - Creative Messaging Review

Admissions and Brand creative messaging from the 2019-2020 admissions season were reviewed for their messaging effectiveness in attracting People of Color. The School uses market personas, developed in collaboration with a previous Board subcommittee in 2019, to target messaging, creative, and advertising efforts. It was recommended that the profile be revised to be more differentiated to include the needs and values of various races and ethnicities. It was recommended to create testimonials to be used in marketing that showcase the values of academic rigor, college acceptance, nurturing staff, and scholarship success.

### Phase 3 - Qualitative Research

The final phase included an admissions team session and qualitative interviews with People of Color within the Mount Vernon community. These interviews yielded new opportunities to grow partnerships with external community organizations representing People of Color. Once again, it was recommended to develop testimonials and empower the voice of the current parent community.

### Recommendations

In preparation for the next admissions cycle, a set of recommendations based on the market strategy review, creative messaging review, and qualitative research conducted emerged from the study:

- Revise marketing personas
- Prioritize IDEA messaging and storytelling on all mediums
- Revise 'full-funnel' digital strategy
- Develop current family testimonials
- Design recruitment strategy

## Action Step 10

Identify four inclusion and diversity coordinators, representing each of the four divisions, to increase diverse representation for curricular and instructional advancement within the School as well as to provide greater support for Parents of Color

In September, the IDEA Department launched an open process for current MV faculty/staff members to express interest in applying for one of the four coordinator positions. Increasing diverse representation, the IDEA divisional coordinators will assist in advancing the curricular and instructional framework of their respective division as well as to provide greater support for Parents of Color within each division. Receiving applications across four divisions, the selection committees in each division worked through an interview process and appointed staff members prior to the end of September. The School announced the appointment of the following staff members:

Preschool IDEA Coordinator: Molly Collier  
Lower School IDEA Coordinator: Taryn Rumph  
Middle School IDEA Coordinator: Chaundra Suddith  
Upper School IDEA Coordinator: Pamela Villafañe

## Action Step 11

Launch national search for Chief of Inclusion Diversity Equity & Action, reporting directly to the Head of School as a member the senior leadership team

Partnering with a national search firm, Storbeck & Associates, the School engaged with a diverse representation of leaders throughout the United States in public and independent schools, higher education, corporations, and non-profit organizations.



After an extensive and engaging process with Storbeck and the candidates, **Stacey Lee** was named Mount Vernon's first Chief of IDEA, beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. With more than 15 years of experience as a student affairs professional at St. Mark's and St. Paul's, Stacey is a high-performing, high-touch strategic leader

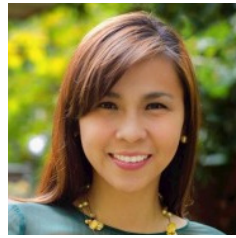
who believes deeply in the essential value of human development alongside vigorous academic preparation. Her academic background, professional career, and demonstrated impact aligns well with Mount Vernon's IDEA commitment to create and sustain a school culture where all members feel valued and safe, sharing their authentic selves to design a better world...together.

Beyond her title and responsibilities, Stacey believes "trust is essential to any effort to enact lasting change. While the resources of time, space, and finances are vital to schools, it is the human investment that matters most."

## Action Step 12

Increase recruitment and representation of diverse talent at the School's executive-level and teaching staff

In addition to the appointment of Stacey Lee, Chief of IDEA reporting directly to the Head of School, the School recruited three additional executive-level leaders, transitioning into the 2021-2022 school year.



The School announced the appointment of **Caroline Diaz** as our next Director of Preschool and Head of Extended Play Programs. Engaging Caroline through the interview process, community members commented on her energy, passion, and growth mindset as well as her commitment to relationship building and her warm, approachable personality. Caroline has been an early childhood educator for over 20 years. Recently, she served as The Director of the Preschool and Early Learning Center at The Westminster Schools as well as the Supervisor for their After School Kids Program.



**Leah Nestor** was named the next Head of Middle School. Attributed to her interaction within the MV community, Leah is a "team-builder, parent partner, creative strategist, diverse networker, and solution seeker." Most importantly, she has a deep commitment to and love for Middle School students

during a critical developmental and dynamic period. For the past decade, Leah has served Savannah Country Day School (SCDS), Preschool through Upper School, in various capacities -- senior executive, curriculum designer, program developer, academic coach, and music educator in the classroom.



While the Upper School is younger compared to other divisions at Mount Vernon, **Kristy Lundström** has been appointed the first female Upper School division leader at Mount Vernon. With more than 25 years of international experience, Kristy is an innovative educator with a depth of unmatched

applied leadership coupled with a high level of emotional intelligence. Most recently, Kristy has been serving as the Head of Middle School at McDonogh School in Maryland, Preschool through Upper School with 1,400 students.

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Beyond executive leadership, the School has prioritized increasing diversity among the faculty/staff in all divisions and departments. Attending the Teacher of Color Recruitment Fair and participating in 2020-2021 workshops such as "Overcoming Obstacles to Recruiting Faculty of Color" produced by NEMNET and "Attracting, Hiring, and Supporting Faculty of Color" hosted by the Southern Association of Independent Schools have given the School greater insight to recruiting and retaining People of Color at Mount Vernon. A decade ago, less than 1% of the faculty/staff reflected People of Color at the School compared to 26% in 2021-2022.



# 04

# 04

## Advancement & Continuous Improvement

- Commitment to communicating clear, tangible action steps reflecting short-term and long-term targets
- Commitment to amplifying the progress of inclusion, diversity, equity, and action within The Mount Vernon School, bringing awareness and understanding to the broader School community
- Commitment to conducting ongoing analysis and review in real time to pivot and adjust as necessary for the School to lean in and live out IDEA daily

During the 2020-2021 school year, the School prioritized action steps focused on advancement and continuous improvement through funding, amplifying action steps and progress, and communicating frequently with the Mount Vernon community.

### **Action Step 13**

Commit 20% of The Mount Vernon Fund to support inclusion diversity, and equity initiatives

In August, the School reported committing 20% of the Mount Vernon Fund to IDEA initiatives. During the 2020-2021 school year, the investment in the Mount Vernon Fund supported professional learning programs for faculty/staff, IDEA community assessment with an external partner, marketing audit, workshops for Parent University, search consultants for Chief of IDEA, and compensating IDEA coordinators representing each of the four divisions.

### **Action Step 14**

Design a new IDEA site on the School's website to amplify action steps, resources, and progress

For the 2020-2021 school year, Mount Vernon designed and dedicated an IDEA section on the School's website, specifically amplifying action steps, resources, and progress as well as creating the ability for community members to share experiences and offer recommendations for future ideas. Through this site, the School shared 15 school-wide communication messages providing IDEA updates on an ongoing basis. In preparation for the upcoming year, Mount Vernon will launch a new school-wide website and will include the new IDEA site, incorporating storytelling and progress.

### **Action Step 15**

Release annual report to community, analyzing findings, reporting progress, and identifying future opportunities

Released on May 16, the IDEA Action Report 2020-2021 reported on four key areas of action steps -- organizational & school climate, learning & well-being, recruitment & retention, and advancement & continuous improvement. Reflecting an important step, the School took a comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to advancing IDEA through school-wide assessments, external partnerships, professional learning, counseling services, parent education and volunteerism, marketing, recruitment efforts, funding, and communication. Through the findings and recommendations in each of the four areas of focus, the School developed a set of IDEA priorities moving forward in the 2021-2022 school year.

# 05

## IDEA Journey Ahead

The IDEA journey ahead builds on the foundational steps taken this past year, specifically the recommendations provided by ReadySet from the organizational & school climate assessment. Being story-informed, experience-informed, data-informed, and research-informed, the School will continue to focus on cultivating relationships, developing programs, and designing strategy to scale our efforts to advance inclusion, diversity, and equity within our community.

Analyzing short-term objectives and long-term goals moving forward, Mount Vernon announces **The 4th(i) Project** – a school of inquiry, innovation, and impact + **inclusion**. Through the 4th(i) Project, the School is prioritizing five major inclusion initiatives with tangible action steps for the 2021-2022 school year. Twenty percent of the Mount Vernon Fund will provide the funding and resources necessary to support these initiatives.

### **1. Deepen skills and strengthen attributes to dialogue across difference, welcoming every voice**

Focused on relationships, Mount Vernon has established a partnership with Essential Partners for the 2021-2022 school year. Through training, facilitation, coaching, and consultation, Essential Partners and its practitioners will invest in Mount Vernon students, faculty/staff, and parents, utilizing their dialogic model. Demonstrated in the education, corporate, and nonprofit sectors, their model builds trust, strengthens mutual understanding, supports well-being, and discovers areas of connection across differences of identities.

### **2. Initiate an inclusion network**

Focused on relationships, the School is committed to supporting the social and emotional well-being of Students, Parents, and Staff of Color through dedicated programs and opportunities. Based on the affinity group framework created this year, the School during the 2021-2022 school year will begin an affinity group program for Students of Color and Parents of Color under the leadership of the Chief of IDEA. As underrepresented members of the community, the affinity model will assist in cultivating relationships with others who share a common identity and similar experience. Providing guidelines, the inclusion network will be scalable for a variety of affinity groups in the 2021-2022 school year and in the future.

### **3. Develop a cultural competency framework for students, faculty/staff, and administrators**

Focused on programming, the School will develop a cultural competency framework for Preschool through Upper School. As a competency-based learning institution, we will review the School's curricular and instructional programming through a culturally responsive IDEA lens and design a roadmap of standards, domains, and outcomes to support a safe and inclusive environment for all learners.

### **4. Launch the next strategic planning cycle, building a more inclusive future**

Focused on strategy, the School will launch a new school-wide strategic planning process in the 2021-2022 school year, charting the next iteration for Mount Vernon. The strategic planning cycle is focused on three major areas: strengthening identity, deepening innovation, and scaling impact. Analyzing the progress of the School's current plan, **MVX**, and reflecting on future opportunities, students, faculty/staff, parents, and alumni will have the opportunity to participate in frequent workshops. Welcoming every voice, the community will assess the mission, IDEA Statement, values, culture and norms, teaching and learning philosophy, external drivers, and arts and athletics programs to build a more inclusive future.

### **5. Implement a revised marketing strategy to increase awareness, engagement, and enrollment of diverse communities within the Atlanta area**

Focused on strategy, in preparation for the next admissions cycle, the School will revise marketing personas, creating more precise descriptions of prospective family's needs that have prompted their search for an independent school. In addition, the School will remain committed to prioritizing IDEA storytelling on all mediums -- revising the digital strategy and developing current family testimonials. Externally, the School will forge partnerships with community organizations in increasing awareness and engagement with the mission, vision, and values at Mount Vernon.





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Grounded in Christian values, we prepare all students to be  
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