



THE  
MOUNT  
VERNON  
SCHOOL

IDEA Action Report 2021-2022

# 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)

Committed to continuous improvement, the IDEA journey at Mount Vernon during the 2021-2022 school year builds on the deliberate, foundational steps taken over the past several years, including the 15 action steps reported in the [IDEA Action Report, 2020-2021](#). Welcoming Stacey Lee, Chief of IDEA, to Mount Vernon in August provided a critical leadership role in collaboration with all four divisions, Community Development, Brand, Admissions, and Head of School to prioritize the previously identified five IDEA initiatives coming into 2021-2022 school year. Accompanying the initiatives has been a commitment to building common language for our community that supports understanding and connection for students, parents, and faculty/staff. Being story-informed, experience-informed, data-informed, and research-informed, the School continues to focus on cultivating **relationships**, developing **programs**, and designing **strategies** to scale our efforts to advance inclusion, diversity, and equity within our community.

### Action Step 1:

Deepen skills and strengthen attributes to dialogue across difference, welcoming every voice

Focused on relationships, Mount Vernon established a partnership with Essential Partners for the 2021-2022 school year. During pre-planning in August, all faculty and staff members were trained by Essential Partners in their Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) model which builds trust, strengthens mutual understanding, supports well-being, and discovers areas of connection across differences of identities. According to Essential Partners, “dialogue is about understanding other people and having people understand us. It is a way of learning about one another and talking about our ideas about the world.”

Throughout the year, the Upper Campus faculty and staff increased their capacity in the dialogic model utilizing two essential questions: (1) How do we create “brave spaces” where we feel comfortable being ourselves and taking risks and (2) How do we create “engaged spaces” where we feel invited to share our unique perspectives and ask other about theirs? The extensive training empowered the faculty and staff to facilitate dialogic experiences with students in Middle School Community and Upper School Advisory where each experience was grounded in self-awareness and empathy in order to cultivate the environment where every voice is encouraged and welcomed.

Student leadership and peer modeling was also a priority in collaborating with Essential Partners. We are proud to share that a cohort of Upper School students connected with Essential Partners in the fall and winter, experiencing the same facilitator training as the faculty and staff. This group of students brought forward the authentic wonders and possibilities of the dialogic model informed by their first-hand experiences and stories of their peers. Essential Partners connected with our family community through two

Parent University workshops this year. In the first session Essential Partners walked through the art and science of the dialogic model. In the second session Essential Partners provided context and handed the experience over to our highly capable student facilitators. In this session, student facilitators created a healthy container for holding dialogue with Mount Vernon families as they reflected upon times in their own school experience where they wished they had been more understood or wished they had better understood a peer. Families in attendance spoke to the power of the experience and shared positive reflections regarding the potential for like student experiences.

In the coming academic year we look forward to integration of the dialogic model into our learning spaces (curricular and co-curricular), the developmentally appropriate engagement of our Lower School students with the tool, and the expansion of community engagement through structured dialogue as our partnership with Essential Partners continues.

### Action Step 2:

Initiate an inclusion network

Focused on relationships, the School remains committed to supporting the social and emotional well-being of students, parents, and staff members of color through dedicated programs and opportunities. As a result, the School, during the 2020-2021 school year, developed and designed an affinity and alliance model, empowering members of underrepresented members within our community to cultivate deep relationships with others who share a common identity and similar experience. Understanding the value of such a program informed through research and gaining insight through the stories shared from School families, Mount Vernon was able to launch the inaugural Inclusion Network Affinity Program this past fall which centered on building community and making connections, specifically for the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community at Mount Vernon.

Supported through the Mount Vernon Parents Network, Mount Vernon’s BIPOC students, families, faculty/staff gathered together in the fulfilling, yet challenging work of affinity exploration. These experiences reaffirmed research that proves positive identity development is the foundation that supports cognitive development. For example, one young Mustang arrived at a BIPOC Affinity gathering and exclaimed, “Is this for me?!” Seeing himself reflected in peers and families in attendance at a special, dedicated time and space gave him a feeling of affirmation and belonging that was palpable. Building off the framework established and the impact celebrated from the initial year, we will continue to support and scale the positive identity development of Mustangs through participation in affinity and alliance groups for traditionally underrepresented communities within our larger Mount Vernon community.

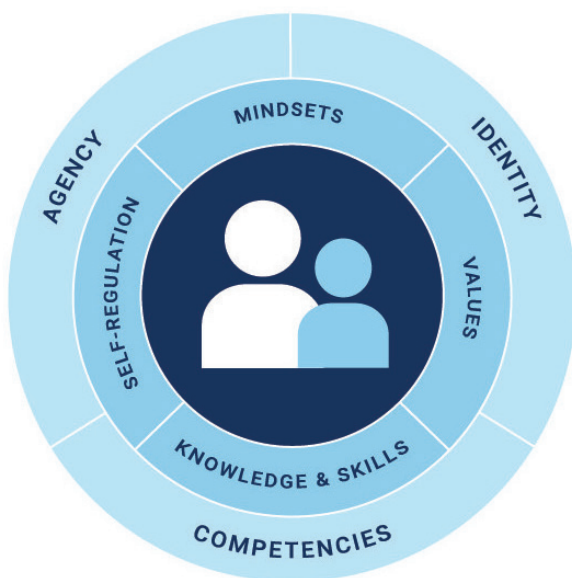
### Action Step 3:

#### Develop a cultural proficiency framework for students, faculty/staff, and administrators

Focused on programming, the Office of IDEA partnered with faculty/staff, administrators, and students during the 2021-2022 school year and studied the work of external research institutions to create the first prototype of the Mount Vernon Cultural Proficiency Framework. At the heart of this framework, adapted from the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research, is the recognition that positive identity development is essential to unlocking cognitive growth and academic performance. The capacities in this initial framework are developmentally appropriate by age/division and scaffolded within the context of MV mission, values and developmental experiences. Moreover, this framework brings to life the interdependent nature of Mount Vernon's competency-based teaching and learning model, the School's IDEA Statement, and overall commitment to human development.

Experiences coupled with reflection help students build cultural proficiency and support positive identity development which can be maximized in the context of social interactions with others, specifically in the MV learning environment. The hallmark Upstander

Program in our Lower School illustrates the ways in which developmental experiences can shape school culture. Through layered and consistent reflection upon moments to act as upstanders, our Lower School students understand the power of being an ally. Lower School students will find friends sitting alone and offer company, and they will listen to concerns at a morning meeting and collectively seek solutions on behalf of a classmate. From our most critical early childhood moments to the realization of independence and capability of middle adolescence, we seize opportunities to support self-awareness and remind students that their unique contributions to our school community are vital and valued. When our learners know this to be true they are willing to forge ahead starting with questions and failing up toward becoming their best selves. Moving forward, the School will iterate the framework as the School defines the standards, domains, and outcomes that support cultural proficiency in all of our developmental curricular and co-curricular experiences.



#### EARLY CHILDHOOD (3 TO 5)

Self-regulation; interpersonal (social-emotional) knowledge and skills

#### MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6 TO 10)

Self-regulation (self-awareness and self-control); learning-related skills and knowledge; interpersonal skills

#### EARLY ADOLESCENCE (11 TO 14)

Group-based identity; emerging mindsets

#### MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE (15 TO 18)

Sense of values; individual identity

## Action Step 4:

Launch the next strategic planning cycle, building a more inclusive future

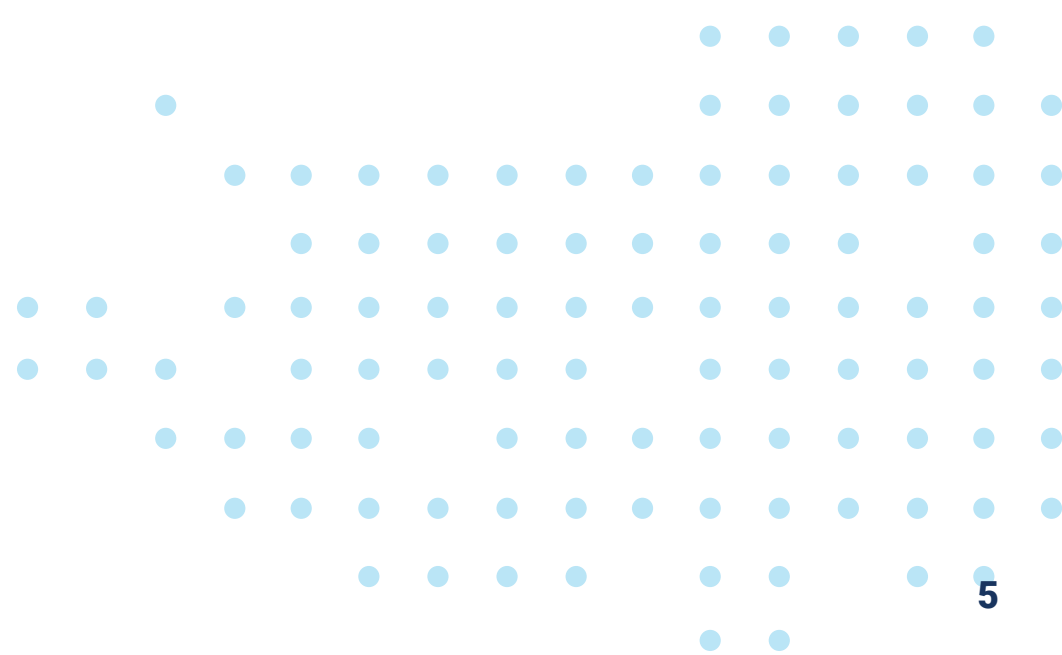
Focused on strategy, the School launched a new strategic planning process in the 2021-2022 school year, charting the next iteration for Mount Vernon. The strategic planning cycle focused on three major areas: strengthening identity, deepening innovation, and scaling impact. Analyzing the progress of the School's current plan, MVX, and reflecting on future opportunities, students, faculty/staff, parents, and alumni had the opportunity to participate through various workshops, surveys, and/or focus groups. Welcoming every voice, the community assessed 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. Seven strands emerged from synthesizing hundreds of narrative responses from our community: Christian values, IDEA, precision of language, brand identity, whole child, voice & choice, and accountability and retention. Consequently, these seven strands informed three major themes of the School's analysis : (1) agency & permission; (2) clarity of terms; and (3) measuring impact. Building a more inclusive future, the School will be designing the next strategic roadmap and sharing it with our community during the 2022-2023 school year. At the intersection of your voice and a transformative future in front of us, a new purpose-driven journey begins for our school of inquiry, innovation, and impact.

## Action Step 5:

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

Focused on strategy, as a continuation of the previously conducted marketing audit focused on Families of Color, the School seeks to increase awareness, engagement, and enrollment of diverse communities, currently representing 20% of the Mount Vernon community (+2% over the last two years). Therefore, the School prioritized developing a 360 degree customer journey map to gain a deeper understanding at all stages of a family's experience from awareness to advocacy in order to increase diversity and cultivate inclusion and belonging. Based on in-depth interviews with BIPOC families this year, the School (a) was able to document perceptions and actions of BIPOC families at each stage of their journey and (b) identify opportunities at each stage to improve the experience, minimize attrition, and increase overall connection and satisfaction with the Mount Vernon experience. Additionally, historical data (admissions information, new parent surveys, ReadySet assessment, withdrawal information, personal interviews, and additional internal data), was analyzed across both campuses to identify progress, opportunities, and gaps.

Being mindful of the desires and expectations from our current BIPOC families while gaining a deeper understanding of the families seeking an independent school, the Office of IDEA, Admissions, and Brand Development will make it easier to view percentages of representation of BIPOC families at the School, create video content featuring BIPOC families during recruitment and onboarding, demonstrate experiences such as the dialogic model utilized during times of challenge, and forge external partnerships with community organizations in increasing awareness and engagement with the mission, vision, and values at Mount Vernon.





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