

The Agenda

Volume 26, Issue 2

Over Seventy Years of Excellence in Education

MOUNT VERNON FEDERATION OF TEACHERS



www.mvft.org

June 2025

Letter From the Editor

Laura Marino

A. Philip Randolph, a pioneering civil rights activist and labor organizer, famously said:

"Freedom is never given; it is won. Justice is never given; it is exacted, and the struggle must be continuous, for freedom is never a final fact, but a continuing evolving process to higher and higher levels of human, social, economic, political and religious relationship."

As we end this school year, and I end my term as Editor of *The Agenda*, reflect on the words of Mr. Randolph, who recognized the profound importance of organized labor. I would add also that respect is not given, it is demanded. We, the Mt. Vernon Federation of Teachers, demand respect through our everyday actions of educating, nurturing and loving the children of Mt. Vernon. We will continue to demand a fair and equitable contract that values our professionalism, hard work and humanity. Therefore, the higher humanity of our students and their families.

This edition of *The Agenda*, focuses on the people who have given the best part of themselves to the cause of public education.

Message from the President

Happy Summer MVFT

Greetings Members:

It is hard to believe that another school year has passed. This has undoubtedly been one of the most challenging years that we have endured. Our district will look noticeably different next year with a new Superintendent, three schools closing, and the downsizing of staff. The MVFT is also working with a mediator in contract negotiations. We will negotiate throughout the summer months with the expectation that upon return, we will have a negotiated collective bargaining agreement that the membership can ratify.

Our union continues to give generously, as we have given approximately \$25,000 to our members' children and Mt. Vernon students in the form of scholarships. Once again, we sponsored the Autism Awareness event that was held this spring.

On Monday, June 16th, we were able to honor 35 members who are retiring. We give them well wishes during their retirement. This issue of *The Agenda* highlights some of the fabulous things our members are doing around the district. I hope everyone has great summer !!!!!

Keith McCall, MVFT President



The Executive Board



MVFT President Keith McCall with NY State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento

MVFT Retirees Go Out in Style

Happy
Retirement

MVFT RETIREES 2025

MVHS:

Katherine Rutherford
Annette Parchment-Pennant
Seens Epps
Eddie Sauls
Christopher Burnside
Olga Weatherly

STEAM Academy:

Portia Barnes
Yu Jacobs
Peter A. Palij
Hiram Allen (deceased)

Denzel Washington School for Arts:

Teresa Cowans
Lisa Cooper-Merriman
Don Munroe
Angela Hall

Lincoln:

Patricia Mendola
Vincent Riccitelli
Anna Cammarata
Ronald Colandros
Louis Caldwell-Simmons

Williams:

Deirdre Davis

Benjamin Turner Academy:

Maria Jackson
Stephanie Smith
Sharell McKenzie

Grimes:

Pamela Bergins

Traphagen:

Sarah Gandarias
Charlotte Moore
Nilaja Williams

Cecil H. Parker:

Sherry Nelson

Graham:

Stephanie Milani

Hamilton:

Lisa A. Morris

Pennington:

Narjis Raza
Patricia LaBella

Mt. Vernon Honor Academy:

Jeannie Rinaldi
Arlene Jacobs

Rebecca Turner Academy:

Blair Washington



Parker Retiree Sherry Nelson



MVFT Pres. Keith McCall Addressing the MVFT Retiree Luncheon Attendees



Hamilton Retiree Lisa A. Morris



Graham Retiree Stephanie Milani

MVFT Retirees Go Out in Style



Hamilton Retiree Lisa A. Morris (middle)



DWSA Retiree Lisa Cooper-Merriman



MVHS Retirees (in no particular order) Katherine Rutherford, Annett Parchment-Pennant, Seens Epps, Eddie Sauls, Christopher Burnside & Olga Weatherly



Williams Retiree Deidre Davis



Pennington Retiree Narjis Raza



BTA Retiree Sharell McKennie in green

MVFT Retirees Go Out in Style



MVHA Retirees Arlene Jacobs and Jeannie Rinaldi with Nadine Shields-Alcalde



Grimes Retiree Pamels Bergins with Building Rep. Janeen Clayton



DWSA Retiree Angela Hall



Lincoln Retirees Ronald Colandros, Patricia Mendola and Anna Cammarata



STEAM Academy Retirees Peter Palij and Yue Jacobs





MVFT

SCHOLARSHIP

Congratulations

Recipients

- Molly Collins
- Yesenia Florez
- Tarren Wilkins
- Matthew Mazzella
- Jamely Ramsammy
- Angelica Cooper
- Kay Santos
- Kelis Santos
- Jackson Young
- Thomas Dunne
- Patrick DeNigris
- Justin Cohen
- Isabella Figueredo-Garcia
- Shalom Anderson -Grant
- Sharon Yang
- Olivia Riina
- Dayshawn Staggers
- Madison Davis
- Shayla Goss

Members

- Megan Collins (RTA)
- Marisol Florez (Honor)
- Satara Massaquoi (Williams)
- Marlene Mazzella (Pennington)
- Natasha Howell (BTA)
- Stephanie Cooper (Pennington)
- Evelyn Santos (STEAM)
- Evelyn Santos (STEAM)
- Pamela Schancupp (MVHS)
- Anne Dunne (NMHZ)
- Ann DeNigris (Lincoln)
- Carolyn Cohen (Williams)
- Isabel Garcia (Honor)
- Tracey Anderson-Grant (MVHS)
- Jaechul Yang (MVHS)
- Angela Riina (Lincoln)
- Tyshawn Staggers (MVHS)
- Carrie Lolita Davis (Grimes)
- Chevon Marsh (BTA)



FRANK PANDOLFO MEMORIAL MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP



Promoting Social Justice: The MVFT Social Justice Committee's Vision and Work

By Nadine Shields-Alcalde, Second Grade Teacher, MV Honor Academy (Holmes School)

On Friday, February 28th, NYSUT held its third annual Social Justice Academy, and the Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers (MVFT) was proud to be part of this influential cohort. The academy brought together unions from across the region to engage in conversations, build community, and reflect on how we can advocate for social and racial justice within our schools, locals, and beyond.

As a relatively new committee, the MVFT Social Justice Committee is committed to fostering awareness, dialogue, and action around issues of equity, equality, and justice. Our focus is not just on understanding these critical topics but also on ensuring that inclusivity is woven into the fabric of both our schools and our wider community.

The Heart of Our Mission

Mount Vernon serves approximately 6,500 students, representing a rich diversity of backgrounds. Our student population is 62% African American and 30% Hispanic or Latino, with many of our students benefiting from Title 1 funding. This diversity, while a source of strength, also means our district faces unique challenges as we navigate a changing and sometimes uncertain climate.

Social justice isn't just a buzzword for us—it's a guiding principle. At its core, social justice is about ensuring that every student, regardless of their background, is treated fairly and has the same opportunities to succeed. It's about ensuring no one is left out, marginalized, or discriminated against because of who they are, where they come from, or the challenges they face.

For the MVFT Social Justice Committee, this means standing up for those who have historically been treated unfairly and using our collective voices to advocate for the rights of all students and educators. Whether it's tackling systemic inequalities or providing support to those in need, we are committed to making Mount Vernon a place where every student feels seen, valued, and empowered.

Building Awareness and Community

One of the key goals of our committee is to build awareness among our members and the larger Mount Vernon community regarding the social justice issues that directly impact our students. Through community engagement, dialogue, and education, we aim to create spaces for open discussions on how we can collectively work toward equity and inclusivity.



Tashi Campbell-Tulloch, Andrea Gelling, Cordelia Anthony (President of the Farmingdale Teachers' Assoc.), Nadine Shields-Alcalde and Keith McCall at the NYSUT Social Justice Academy

This work extends beyond the classroom. It's about creating an environment where students and families feel safe, respected, and supported. It's about ensuring that all voices—especially those historically silenced—are heard and given the space they deserve.

Looking Ahead

As we continue our work as a committee, we are excited to collaborate with other unions, educators, and community leaders to ensure that social justice remains at the forefront of our mission. We are committed to providing the tools and resources necessary to make real, lasting change within our district and beyond.

Our journey has just begun, but we are determined to build a brighter future for all of our students. Together, we can make Mount Vernon an example of what it means to truly live out the principles of equity, justice, and inclusivity.



Social Justice Steering Committee Keith McCall, Nadine Shields-Alcalde, Tashi Campbell-Tulloch, and Andrea Gelling

The Credit Approval Process

by Ian Smith

Revised March 2025

by the Credit Approval Committee

The following is a brief overview of the credit approval process. The full contract language on reclassification and lane changes can be found on **pages 2 and 3**.

Note: TAs do not need to submit credit approval forms.

How to submit a credit approval form

1. Identify an accredited course.
2. Prior to taking the course print out a copy of the course syllabus. Highlight the following items on the syllabus so the credit approval committee can easily identify the information needed.
 - a. Name of the College/University issuing the credit.
 - b. Location of where the course is being held.
 - c. Dates of the course.
 - d. The part that specifies the course is a 3-credit graduate level course.
 - e. Number of credit hours.
3. Complete a credit approval form (usually located in the school's main office).
 - a. Make a photocopy of the credit approval form.
4. Attach the syllabus and all other supporting documents to the credit approval form.
5. Submit the credit approval form and supporting documents to Human Resources before the start of the course.
 - a. Be sure to get your credit approval form AND your personal copy of the credit approval form timestamped. This will prove that you completed and submitted your documents **prior to or before** the start of the course.

Rules regarding credits

- You may take up to 6 online credits per **calendar year**. (January - December)
- You may take up to 6 total credits in both the fall and spring semesters.
- You may take unlimited credits in the summer.
- In-service credit for reclassification

For every 15 credits at least 6 must be graduate credits.

IMPORTANT: Zoom classes are considered IN-PERSON / Face to Face.

Credit approval form denied or placed on hold

- If your credit approval form is denied:
 - ◇ The most common reason for denial is that the credit approval form was not submitted prior to the start of the course. Therefore, getting a timestamped personal copy is important.
 - ◇ You will need to appeal the decision through Human Resources.
- If your credit approval form is placed on hold:
 - ◇ You most likely did not provide complete information such as a syllabus with dates of the course, course description, or the number of credits, etc.

IMPORTANT: SYLLABUS MUST COME DIRECTLY FROM THE WEBSITE; NOT TYPED BY MEMBER

- Submit supplemental documentation to Human Resources to continue the credit approval process.

Rules regarding lane changes.

- You may apply for reclassification once every two years.
- Reclassification documents are due by October 1st or February 1st each school year. Lane changes will be reflected by October 16th or February 16th respectively.



Pack Light for Vacation!

By David Bonington, CFP®

One of the districts our firm works with recently asked for an article about Summer – and what's not to like about *that* topic? Downtime, fun, and vacation just ahead, with plenty of rest, relaxation, reconnection, and enjoyment – and maybe an extra hot dog or an ice cream sundae slipped in there once or twice. I can't wait!

But I better get to my topic before I spend 500 words talking about sun, sand, surf, picnics, and “secret ingredient” BBQ sauce.

Over now many years of work, the days leading up to a vacation always seemed to be some of the most hectic of the year. They still seem that way – and I know colleagues and family members who agree. I did some informal investigating, and a pattern emerged: just before vacations, some individuals have work habits and practices geared to putting in extra time and effort to address a large number of matters – not only work-related things, but all kinds of chores, tasks, and to-dos they don't want to have to “pack” with their vacation luggage or find waiting for them upon a return. They don't want to even think about these things on vacation, and they don't have to because before they leave the tasks are - a great four-letter word here - *DONE*. The goal of this intense and even frenzied activity is to head off on vacation leaving behind an empty Inbox and a To Do List with all major items checked off or crossed out.

If you like the sound of this – and who wouldn't? - before the school year ends why not get a head start on your pre-vacation preparation now? Attend to things like that dental appointment, that insurance company call, and any other “thats” likely to become vacation dead weight in your mental suitcase. This applies especially to any financial matters.

If something causing stress or anxiety is your portfolio allocation in these uncertain times, some financial goal which is proving elusive, or even a unique financial “knot” you keep trying to untie, a Stacey Braun counselor should be able to help. Fresh eyes and a second set of hands may be just what is needed. A planner's information, suggestions, and ideas - which are never accompanied by pressure to buy anything – can set the stage for a more relaxing vacation.

Why not make an appointment today? Odds are good that a session before the end of June will allow you to “pack light” when it comes to vacation because any “heavy” financial questions will have been raised, discussed, and possibly resolved. See if Stacey Braun can “add lightness” to what you bring with you on this year's vacation. The only thing we will insist you bring is sunscreen!

A free, confidential session with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925.

No financial products are sold and there is no sales pressure.

Stacey Braun
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Annual Autism Acceptance Day Celebration

By Katie Santoro

The Mount Vernon City School District proudly celebrated its Annual Autism Acceptance Day with a vibrant and heartwarming event that brought together students, families, staff, and the broader community for a day filled with joy, support, and inclusion.

Thanks to the incredible dedication of staff volunteers and the generous support from the Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers (MVFT), school staff, and local businesses, this year's event was a tremendous success. Families enjoyed an afternoon of fun with activities including bouncy houses, a live DJ, pizza, snacks, and refreshments—all provided free of charge.

SEPTA was especially honored to partner with the Daisy Dream Project and the district parent liaisons, which provided valuable resources and information to families of students with autism, helping them navigate services and support systems available both in and outside of school.



Donald Emerson, left, creator of Autism Awareness Day for MVCSD, and friend



MVFT Members and families sharing smiles and fun at the event.



Stepping to the Beat at the Autism Awareness Event



CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

By Andrea Gelling, MVFT Secretary

Births

Ashley Fortuna
(Edward Williams)
Birth of Son

Get Well

Ruth Bridges (Retiree, AB Davis)

Condolences

Lori Costello (Lincoln) loss of father

Janis Bisordi (Retiree, AB Davis)
loss of mother, Nina Bisordi

To the Family of Hiram Allen
(STEAM, Special Ed)

To the Family of Butch Costello
(Retiree, MVHS, Vocational)

To the Family of Irene Schindler
(Retiree, MVHS, Business)

To the Family of Philip Becherich
(Retiree, AB Davis, Science)



This event is about celebrating our scholars and creating an inclusive, welcoming space for every student and family. It would not have been possible without the time and heart our staff poured into it and the incredible generosity of our MVFT and local community.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make this special day possible—your support, time, and generosity made a meaningful difference in the lives of our scholars and their families.

SPOTLIGHT

Crowning Success in ATLAS Program

By Karen Wheeler

Gifted students in the sixth and seventh grades from the ATLAS Gifted and Talented Program at the Denzel Washington School of the Arts, under the instruction of Karen Wheeler, participated in a cultural arts project that challenged them to create a bust of an African woman wearing a traditional headdress and scarf. This interdisciplinary project combined elements of visual art, cultural studies, and historical research. Students explored the cultural significance, symbolism, and regional diversity of African headwraps, incorporating their findings into detailed sculptural designs. Using various modeling materials, they crafted expressive busts that reflected both technical skill and cultural authenticity. Through this experience, students enhanced their skills in observation, design, and cultural literacy. The project fostered critical thinking, cultural appreciation, and artistic expression, while also supporting differentiated learning and encouraging students to connect with heritage and identity through the visual arts. The completed sculptures are currently on display at the NYSUT headquarters in Albany, showcasing the students' creativity and cultural insight to a broader audience.



Karen Wheeler proudly displays her Gifted and Talented ATLAS students' work on display at the NYSUT Headquarters in Albany

MVFT Summer Office Hours



Monday–Thursday

10am–3pm

Closed on Fridays

Mount Vernon

Federation of Teachers

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Read Across America at Lincoln with Jessica Ruzcowski, Kaylan Robstad and Erica Glushakov



Membership Report

652

Retired

8

On Leave

1093

Active Members

1753

TOTAL

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BUILDING REPS

Karen Wheeler #1
Michelle Atterberry #1
Modesta Curzio-Spies #2
Laura Marino #2
Michele Battista #3
William DeMorris #3
Andrea Hyatt-Copeland #4
Daryl Lowe #4
Lorena Payne #5
Rebecca Challop #6
Ellen Hanney-Saligumba #6
Tashi Campbell-Tulloch #7
Monica DeOliveira #7
Janeen Clayton #8
Nikysha Copeland-Bey #8

Caiifa Clark #9
Rita Colucci #9
Ellen Benowitz #10
Mary Dempsey #12
Corinn Gorman-Bahr #12
Shawnette Odindo #13
Nicole White-Lee #14
Laurie Kellogg #14
Francina Jubilee #16
Greg McDonnell #16
Isabel Garcia #17
Nadine Shields-Alcalde #17
Sam Stern #18
Tyler White #18
Mike Malosky #18

The Agenda

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