

# Annual Evaluation Report

Mount Vernon S.T.R.O.N.G. Program

Mount Vernon Youth Bureau

Project Director: Hamp Miller

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21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center

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**Submitted by**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Mount Vernon **STRONG** (**S**tudents **T**aking **R**esponsibility and **O**wnership **N**ow and **G**raduating) program is a collaborative effort among the City of Mount Vernon Youth Bureau, the Mount Vernon City School District, the Amani Public Charter School, Westchester Community College and Westhab PEAK Center. Mount Vernon STRONG (MV STRONG) program encompasses six sites: Mount Vernon High School, AMANI Public Charter School, Benjamin Turner Middle School, Columbus Elementary School, Graham School; and the PEAK Center. The goal was to serve 700 students on a consistent basis, attending 30 or more days. In this first year of the new the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program grant cycle, 1038 youth were enrolled at six sites with 635 considered consistent attendees (reaching 91% of the goal). Each site offered afterschool programs, some weekend programs, and programs during school vacation periods. Two sites, Mount Vernon High School and the PEAK Center, also provided summer programming for high school youth and served 137 youth. The PEAK Center ended their program year in mid-February 2018 as they had to vacate their location and were not able to secure an alternate site in Mount Vernon.

There have been many successes beginning with the collaboration of the MV STRONG program with the schools in the promotion of the *DADS take Your Child to School Day* on September 19, 2017. The MV STRONG Program was present at the *Back to School Nights* held in the fall/spring at Mount Vernon HS, Benjamin Turner MS, Columbus School, and Graham School. Throughout the school year, MV STRONG parent conferences and meetings were scheduled when evening school events were being held. Parents had the opportunity to serve as chaperones for a variety of field trips. The MV STRONG Benjamin Turner MS program site along with the CAPP program collaborated on a dramatic World Aids Day Awareness

presentation at the MV Dole Community Center on December 1, 2017 and several parents and other community members attended showing support for the project participants. On March 24<sup>th</sup> the MV STRONG program staff and students along with several parents attended the Never Again March in Washington D.C. On June 8<sup>th</sup> the end of the program year, fifteen parents showed their support and appreciation for the students of the MV STRONG Program and their hard work and dedication throughout the program year. Parents of students participating in the youth Bureau's seasonal job placement program were required to participate in the in the interviewing, selection and orientation process. In addition, the parents of students participating in the Summer Entrepreneurial Academy were mandated to attend an orientation as well as the presentation of student business plans. The AMANI MV STRONG program collaborated with the school on a dramatic presentation of Annie Jr. This site also continued the use of parent events to increase parental involvement. These events allowed parents to see their students as well as the collaborative effort between the schools and MV STRONG.

Recommendations include providing continued professional development, maximizing the use of [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net) for accountability and accurate data collection, increasing opportunities for youth to participate in ongoing community service projects, continuing the incorporation of hands on STEAM (Science, Technology Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) programs for youth of all ages, increasing communication to parents about student attendance and accomplishments in the program, and exploring opportunities for students to participate in regional events planned for youth. The recommendation in terms of the provision of services for parents is to plan joint activities for the parents of all five program sites focusing on the themes identified as most interested in from the results of the annual parent surveys.

## **Program Description**

The Mount Vernon STRONG (**Sudents Taking Responsibility and Ownership Now and Graduating) program's overarching goal is to provide expanded learning and social, emotional development opportunities to **700** students and their families during afterschool, weekend and summer hours. **MV STRONG's mission** is to change the trajectory of the students at risk of dropping out of school or not meeting the NYS Learning standards by supporting them in their current educational placement. While the goal of providing opportunities to 700 Mount Vernon's students and their families on a consistent basis was not quite met in Year 1 of this grant, the enrollment of 1038 students with 635 students considered consistent attendees is indicative of the potential the MV STRONG Program has to achieve its mission of changing the trajectory of students' academic success.**

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, Mount Vernon City School District was re-identified as a Focus District. Two of the schools (Mount Vernon High School and Graham School) were identified as Focus Schools and Benjamin Turner Middle School was identified as a Priority School. The Mount Vernon Youth Bureau 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program (Mount Vernon STRONG or MV STRONG) includes six sites: Mount Vernon High School, AMANI Public Charter School, Benjamin Turner Middle School, Columbus Elementary School, Graham School; and the PEAK Center. The MV STRONG program was set up to provide high-quality academic enrichment opportunities that align with the students' academic needs including implementing targeted activities for students who need extra help.

The MV STRONG program serves students at the Mount Vernon High School site, which is the larger of two comprehensive high schools in Mount Vernon. The AMANI site serves students in grades five through eight attending the Charter School. The Columbus site

serves elementary students in grades three through six. The Graham site serves students in grades three through eight. The PEAK Center site is owned by Westhab Inc., the largest nonprofit provider of affordable housing and supportive services in Westchester County. The PEAK Center serves Mount Vernon High School students and students considered non-completers and eligible to take the GED. The new GED format, which has proven more difficult for students, has resulted in a recruiting challenge for the PEAK Center. The PEAK Center shares space with additional youth service programs for younger students as well as Westhab's employment services and offices that make services referrals for Mount Vernon's south side community. The AMANI Charter School, Benjamin Turner Middle School and Graham Schools as well as the PEAK Center are located in densely populated areas of Mount Vernon with high rates of crime and high rates of substance use as well as low rates of educational attainment.

The Theory of Change was used in setting program goals and designing program elements that result in positive student outcomes. A Logic Model was developed that represents the theory of change showing how activities lead to outcomes. In September 2017, a Partners Meeting was held to review the Logic Model, including the objectives, clarify accountabilities and establishing a common understanding of the strategies to be used to achieve the objectives. Throughout the school year, it was determined through a review of the key elements of the program design and the stated objectives that the Mount Vernon STRONG program has been implemented with fidelity. Progress towards meeting all program objectives was achieved; however, the program objective related to provision of services to parents and other adult community members continues to be challenging in this community with parents working hard to support their families and having little available time to attend additional school related

events. The efforts to coordinate 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC parent services with other school events such as the Back to School nights and PTA meetings has been met with some success.

### **Evaluation Framework and Plan**

Evaluation efforts included multiple methods to measure program implementation and fidelity. The evaluators from Interactive Health, LLC work closely with the Project Director, staff, and partners in administration of materials, both online and in print; data collection; and dissemination of results. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected from students, parents, and staff on programs and activities, which help to improve program selection and implementation.

The project evaluators from Interactive Health, LLC have continued to work with the Project Director and site coordinators to make sure the program requirements are understood and that student and program data are collected as required. The use of the *YouthServices.net* web based software by both the Youth Bureau and AMANI has facilitated the reporting of youth participation in activities and daily attendance.

The quality of the programs was evaluated in multiple ways: through direct observation; the review of the organization of each of the programs; communications with the Project Director, site coordinators, and school employees; the analysis of student and parent satisfaction surveys administered, analysis of student responses in two focus groups, the NYS Academic Assessment data, the QSA administered in January, and the year-end Student Outcome Surveys administered at each of the five sites. Formal observations of the program were initiated in November and continued throughout the school year. The evaluator attended Partnership Meetings as well as the Rest of the State Winter 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Conference held in Albany in

January. Additional supportive services provided by Interactive Health, LLC evaluators included: the translation of the registration forms into Spanish, the translation of the Parent Survey, and the development of a two-sided fact sheet outlining the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC goals as well as the local MV STRONG program goals for use in professional development. The evaluator also participated in a site-coordinators meeting to discuss evaluation requirements and results of the data collected as well as how data are used to monitor progress, and provide technical assistance on the use of youthservices.net to collect and house program data.

The evaluation firm, Interactive Health, LLC, has 20 years of experience working in research and evaluation with organizations and schools in New York State. The Evaluation Team from Interactive Health included Ellen Garcia who has an undergraduate degree in elementary education and social studies from Syracuse University, and a master degree in Special Education from Lesley University. She obtained a Certificate of Advanced Study in School Administration from Fairfield University. Ms. Garcia conducted site visits, communicated with the MV STRONG team, collected data, and reported out results. Dr. Katherine Roberts holds doctorate degree in education from Columbia University as well as master degrees in both public health and science from Columbia University. Dr. Roberts' responsibilities included conducting site visits, questionnaire development, data collection and management, and reporting. Additional evaluation team members included Ms. Alyssa Quezada, who collected and entered data, created reports, and conducted translation services and Ashlyn Llerandi who provided translation services for written materials.

## **Engagement & Communication**

Communication between the Evaluation Team, the Project Director, and site coordinators was done in person, via phone, and via email. The Project Director indicated that site visits could occur at any time without prior notice to the site coordinators. The initial visits were always informal and used to get to know the site coordinator and learn about the program structure and offerings. During the formal site visits held to observe program activities, the evaluator would sit in the back of the classrooms and not interfere in the activity or with the learning process.

The Evaluation Team worked with the Project Director to determine when and how to administer the student, parent, and staff surveys so to not interfere with program activities. The staff completion of the QSA survey online has worked well. The results of the January administration of the QSA were returned to the Project Director for review. Reports of the QSA by individual program site as well as a report of the combined QSA results were provided. The evaluator asked the site coordinators to select enrichment activities to be assessed by the students through paper and pencil surveys twice a year, toward the end of the winter session and then again toward the end of the spring session. These surveys were organized, delivered, and collected by the Evaluation Team and data were entered and analyzed, with a report created of the results. The site coordinators determined the specific time for the administration of these student satisfaction surveys.

The Student Outcome Survey was completed online by students participating at Benjamin Turner Middle School and Mount Vernon High School. However, the response rate was poor (see Table 2 on page 13) so the recommendation has been made to administer a paper and pencil survey in the 2018-2019 program year. The Student Outcome surveys for the other sites were paper and pencil surveys that were organized and delivered to the site coordinators for

administration to students. The paper and pencil administration of this survey worked well for these sites.

Parent surveys were administered at two sites. The AMANI site provided a link to parents via email. This worked well as the AMANI parents are used to responding to email requests. The response rate for the paper and pencil Parent Survey at Columbus School was fair. This survey was provided in English and Spanish as the Columbus School has a high proportion of Spanish speaking parents.

**Evaluation Findings**

In this first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Program new grant cycle, 1038 youth were enrolled at six sites with 635 considered consistent attendees, attending 30 or more days. This enrollment and attendance rate is similar to the rate in previous 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant cycle program. The initiation of the two new program sites, Benjamin Turner MS and Columbus School, required additional time for enrollment and staff recruitment. While 1038 students enrolled and attended programs, the goal serving 700 students considered consistent attendees was not met.

**Table 1: Number of Students by Site during Year 1**

<b>Program Site</b>	<b>Consistent Attendees</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>
AMANI Charter School	159	308
Benjamin Turner Middle School	63	97
Columbus Elementary School	73	82
Graham School	88	121
Mount Vernon High School	233	397
The PEAK Center	19	33
Total	635	1038

The demographics of the youth served across the Mount Vernon STRONG Program include: 50% male and 50% female, with gender balance relatively equal at most sites with the

exception of AMANI serving more males and MVHS serving more females; 88% African American, 10% Hispanic, and 2% American Indian, Asian, White, or two or more races. African American youth were the predominant ethnic group at each site except Columbus School which served more Hispanic/Latino students than African American youth, which reflects the composition of the schools. The number of Mount Vernon STRONG youth eligible for free/reduced meals was 72%, slightly lower than the overall District wide rate of 78% reported in the 2016-17 BEDS Report. The proportion of Mount Vernon STRONG designated as English Language Learners was 5%, less than the District wide rate of 9%. The proportion of students with disabilities served was 13%, slightly less than the District wide proportion of 18% reported in the BEDS Report.

The Out of School Time Observation Instrument created by the *Policy Studies Associates, Inc.* was used as a guide in conducting the direct observations at each site. The results of the observations were discussed with the Project Director and the respective site coordinators as well as some service providers. Observations of program activities for high school youth at Mount Vernon High School site and the PEAK Center site included: academic assistance Music Production, Credit Recovery, and Organic Cooking. Observations of program activities for middle school youth at AMANI Charter School included: Claymation, an art program, Yoga, and academic assistance. Middle School activities observed at Benjamin Turner included: DJ Academy, a Girls Group, and academic assistance. Observations of program activities for elementary students at Graham School and Columbus School included: Computer Coding, an Art group, a Girls STEM group, practice for a holiday performance, and academic assistance.

Each 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC site provided the students with a variety of activities across the program year. Academic assistance and enrichment were emphasized at each site. Students were not always given the opportunity to select all activities, but a wide variety of activities was provided. Student choice was reflected as frequently as possible. Field trips connected to academic enrichment activities were very popular with students, as these provided opportunities that the students would not otherwise have. The Youth Bureau included two programs from other funding sources in the MV STRONG program. Both the Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, CAPP, program and the Girls Embracing Maturity, GEMS, program added supportive health related services. The evaluator worked with each site coordinator to select the activities to target for the administration of the student satisfaction surveys. These surveys were administered at midyear and at the end of the year. A total of 508 student satisfaction surveys were collected from 22 different enrichment activities. Survey results were similar to results in previous years. The analysis of these student satisfaction surveys indicated that the students overall enjoyed the variety of activities, valued the opportunity to try new activities and learn new skills, showed a preference for activities that included hands on experiences and physical activity, valued the academic support, and appreciated the opportunities the fieldtrips outside of their community provided. A written summary of each student satisfaction survey was provided to the site coordinator.

The NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool was administered online to staff in January 2018 and again in May 2018. Four of the ten elements were included in the survey to reduce testing fatigue: Elements 1 (Environment/Climate), 3 (Relationships), 5 (Programming/Activities), and 7 (Youth Participation/Engagement). In addition to the 45 quantitative questions, two open-ended questions were included where staff members could

provide written feedback on the program and ways to improve it and/or comment on their experience being part of the Mount Vernon STRONG Program. Forty staff, representing all six sites, completed the January online administration of the QSA and thirty-eight staff representing five sites completed the May online administration. A comparison of the two surveys showed a larger number of NA/unsure responses to questions in the January administration compared to the May administration. This is to be expected with the addition of two new sites and many new staff during Year 1 of this grant cycle. However, it also speaks to the need to provide continuous professional development as well as written communication about the program's goals and procedures which can be used by site coordinators repeatedly throughout the year. Staff comments also reinforce the need for additional training and communication.

In response to the question, "What is the best thing about the MV STRONG Program?", examples of staff responses include:

- ❖ Knowing that students have a safe and secure place they can go to receive academic help and structured activities.
- ❖ The family environment and incredible programs.
- ❖ The STRONG program provides a safe structured environment for the children of working parents.
- ❖ The program offers free care after school which many families need!
- ❖ I think the way the way the students are exposed to a variety of activities which will hopefully expand their horizons.
- ❖ The best thing about this program is how it's evolved over the years with its extended number of offerings.
- ❖ At AMANI, the community spirit and emphasis demonstrating self-respect and respect for all others is inspiring. This culture is maintained in the MV STRONG portion of their day.

In response to the question, "What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving the MV STRONG Program?", examples of staff responses include:

- ❖ More activities.
- ❖ Provide healthier snacks.
- ❖ I think adding more trips would be beneficial.
- ❖ Expand the program to include 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders also.

- ❖ More employee trainings.
- ❖ I think there needs to be better communication among staff and coordination in showcasing students work. I also believe they can stand to work on their organization overall. It's important the Director shares information with staff so everyone is on the same page.
- ❖ A better understanding of how this extra program benefits the grades for each student.
- ❖ More group talking and team building.
- ❖ Have staff well equipped on protocols and procedures.

The Short-term Student Outcome Survey (SSOS), which was adapted from the *Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative's Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development*, was administered to students at five of the six sites at the end of the year in June 2018. There was a total of 259 students (50% boys and 50% girls) who completed surveys. Most (81 %) students indicated that being involved with the program has helped to increase skills to further their education (e.g., life skills, academic success, and positive life choices domains), which was measured by 13 items.

**Table 2: Number of Student Outcome Surveys Completed and Results**

	Number of Surveys	Increase Skills (13 items)
Amani	79	79%
Benjamin Turner MS	28	71%
Columbus	61	85%
Graham	56	81%
Mount Vernon HS	35	85%
Total	259	81%

Students took time to answer questions about what they liked best about the Mount Vernon STRONG program and what could be done to make it better. Elementary and middle school students noted that they liked the program staff and being able to get help with their

school work. Through the written comments, high school youth noted the supportive family like environment that the programs provided as well as the leadership activities students were encouraged to participate in. High School students were asked to respond to five additional items. Three items were included to assess whether or not the program helped them to make healthier choices about drugs and alcohol and to be able to say “no” to things that are wrong. The majority of students responded that the program had helped them in making healthier choices. Two additional items were included to assess whether or not the program helped students to think about jobs or future careers and to think about college or other training after high school. Of the students surveyed, 97% indicated that the program helped them think about jobs and careers and 94% indicated that the program helped them think about either college or additional training after high school. Students at all program sites commented that they liked the opportunity to do or learn new things, to make new friends and/or spend time with friends, and to be creative. They liked the trips to colleges and different places and learning about new things.

In response to the question, “What, if anything, can we do to make this program better?”, students responded similarly to the previous years and indicated a preference for more time for the outdoor activities, more time for enrichment activities, more field trips, more diverse activities, more participants, and better/healthier snacks. High school students noted that more equipment was needed for the music production program and an additional session of organic cooking should be added. Of special note is the Mount Vernon High School site students’ work and opportunities that developed through participation in the Music Production activity. Students wrote and produced a music video, *Never Again*, in response to the Parkland, Florida school shooting. The song was performed at the Doles Center in Mount Vernon and a video of the production was posted on You Tube. On March 24, 2018, forty-seven students traveled to

Washington DC to stand in solidarity with Parkland victims. MV STRONG students also met survivors of the Sandy Hook school shooting and learned about their experiences and current plans. On May 23, 2018, seventeen students traveled to the United Nations to attend a forum supporting The Voices of Youth Against Gun Violence.

A Parent Satisfaction Survey was designed to evaluate parent satisfaction with the programs, inform program development, and plan for sustainability. This year the survey was administered to parents at the AMANI and Columbus school program sites. A website link to the survey was emailed to the parents of students at the AMANI Charter School site and a paper survey in both English and Spanish was hand delivered through student backpacks to parents at the Columbus School site. A total of 112 parent surveys were completed with 90 completed online and 22 completed on paper. Parent responses to the survey across the two sites indicated that their children enjoyed the program activities with 84% of AMANI parents indicating that their students enjoyed the activities very much and 13% of the students somewhat enjoyed the activities and 64% of the Columbus parents indicating their students enjoyed the activities very much and 23% somewhat. The majority of parents at both program sites responded that the program helped their children improve their grades in school, complete their homework, and stay out of trouble. Parents of youth from both sites indicated that they would recommend the program to other parents. Parents also noted that they valued the fact that the program provided a safe place for youth to be involved in positive activities and programs after school and on some weekends. Responses to the question, “What did you like best about the MV STRONG after school program?” were similar to the youth responses on surveys throughout the year. Common responses were homework help/academic assistance, dedicated staff who understood the students’ needs, time to interact with their peers and educational fieldtrips. It is clear that the

families appreciate the assistance and opportunities for their children to participate in a variety of activities that they may not be able to provide for their children. Parents also noted that the program encouraged “children to be well rounded individuals, not only academically.” Responses to the question, “What could make the MV STRONG program better?” were also similar to responses youth had provided. Parents, however, stressed more time allocated to homework, additional subject specific tutors, educational trips, and better planning of trips. These responses indicate the parents both value the program and its potential to impact their student’s school success. In response to the question, “As a parent, what type of educational program would you be interested in attending?” The AMANI parents expressed the greatest interest in these two topics: Guiding Your Teen through Adolescence and Financial Aid and the College Application Process. The Columbus parents expressed the greatest interest in these two topics: Computer Education and Common Core Learning Standards & Academic Assessment. The Columbus parents added two additional topics of interest: managing children’s behavior and information on drugs.

### **Evaluation Utilization**

The Evaluation Team provided updates on a consistent basis to the Project Director and the Executive Director of the Youth Bureau regarding what and when evaluation activities were taking place, the purpose of those evaluation activities, and what has been learned as a result of those evaluation activities. Reports of the results of evaluation activities (e.g., surveys, observations) were shared with the Project Director and Site Coordinators and discussions were held on what was gleaned from the data including suggestions for program improvements.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the Mount Vernon STRONG Program had come close to meeting their goal of providing expanded learning and social, emotional development opportunities to **700** students and their families during afterschool, weekend and summer hours. Although there were 1038 students who were enrolled and attended at six sites, only 635 were considered consistent attendees. There were some barriers to reaching the 700 consistent attendees (e.g., the two new sites started later than expected and the PEAK Center was forced to close early) that are not anticipated to impact this goal in the upcoming year.

Six recommendations to be considered during the upcoming year are: 1) provide ongoing professional development for program staff, 2) maximize the use of youthservices.net for accountability and accurate data collection, 3) provide opportunities for youth to participate in ongoing community service projects, 4) incorporate hands-on STEAM activities for all ages, 5) consider the use of a variety of communication strategies with parents and the community, and 6) collaborate across program sites in the provision of services to parents.

To increase awareness of the program and its activities, it would be helpful to develop of a formal communications plan so that all partners and sites have the opportunity to contribute ideas and information about their site-specific work. Each site could work with their students to determine best how to share their experiences. Such a proposal could provide students with opportunity to reflect on what they have learned, hone their presentation skills, and motivate other students to participate in Mount Vernon STRONG programs. The use of regular communication with parents through email should also be explored further. Once parents become more familiar with communication from MV STRONG via email, parent participation in online surveys would be expected to increase.