

# SCENARIO: VULCAN

## THE AREA

Vulcan is a Midwestern city of 210,000 with a grand industrial past and a scuffling present. It prospered in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of the American auto industry, thanks to its status as home base for two famed auto parts makers.

In the last 20 years, it has lived through the familiar Rust Belt story of abandoned smokestacks, white flight and creeping blight. Its population is down from 257,000 in 1980.

Despite that, it retains a number of strong, middle-class neighborhoods with well-kept older homes and active civic associations. Some of those neighborhoods are integrated; some are mostly white; a few are minority dominated. Its downtown, which has few residences and little life on weeknights or weekdays, borders on some of the most poverty- and crime-ridden blocks of the city.

An unusually high percentage of Vulcan's residents were born there and have lived there most of their lives, often in the same neighborhoods, even homes. Conversely, the city has a low immigration rate.

Two Interstate highways, one on its north/south axis, the other on its east-west axis, neatly divide the city into four quadrants – and form strong boundaries between neighborhoods. A third interstate runs along the city's southern border. The two auto parts makers retain headquarters in Vulcan, but employ a fifth of what they did in the city's heyday. The companies' onetime dominance of Vulcan's economy and civic life is shown by how their founder's names are sprinkled onto Vulcan's schools, roads, cultural institutions and neighborhoods.

Vulcan has one major college, Loyola-Vulcan, a 7,000-student Jesuit institution with a lovely campus on the edge of downtown. The county community college is in the suburb of Lakemore, just outside the southeast boundary of the city. Vulcan has a once-grand, now somewhat shabby, theater district in its downtown – with several old-style theaters that reflected the cultural tastes of the auto parts magnates. It has a small art museum. Its most notable museum is the vast National Inventors Hall of Fame, which is in the zoo-park district just west of the downtown, and just inside the Buchtel school cluster.

Vulcan has a strong mayor/council form of government – and in its case the adjective “strong” is an understatement. Its mayor, a swashbuckling populist named Vince Wischnowski, is serving his fifth term and won re-election the last time with 73 percent of the vote.

## **THE SCHOOLS**

The school district serves only the city proper; the suburbs have their own districts.

Vulcan’s schools, serving 27,000 students, are in trouble. The district is on the state’s academic watch list, and 72 percent of its schools failed the Average Yearly Progress standard under No Child Left Behind. Enrollment has dropped by 3,500 students over the last decade. Attendance rates are dipping, particularly in high schools.

The district, with 39 elementaries, 10 middle schools and eight high schools, is organized into eight clusters, based on the high school catchments. Of its 57 schools, 70 percent are more than 70 years old. Only three have been built since 1980.

Three years ago, citizens of the state were surprised and ashamed when an NBC Dateline news special cited its school buildings as the worst overall in the nation. The TV program spurred a flurry of activity, as the Legislature passed an \$8 billion bond for school capital projects and set up a powerful State Facilities Agency to administer it.

The state program offers 59 percent funding for what it calls essential educational facilities, with a 41 percent local match. Under this setup, the state money will not pay for any auditoriums, music, sports or community facilities. Money for any such facilities must be raised locally, on top of the mandated match. The State Facilities Agency also issued very detailed rules for school buildings paid for by the bond, with standards for minimum school size, grade configurations, square footage per student etc

Vulcan is one of eight urban districts eligible for priority funding under the program, if it can complete a master plan that passes state review and raise the local match by March 2006. The state calculates Vulcan’s basic match at \$409 million – though the school board contests that estimate as too low.

A state evaluation rated 18 of Vulcan’s 57 schools (12 elementary, four middle and two high) as “priority needs” under the capital program, meaning they needed to be rebuilt or replaced. (See attached list, with details) Thirty schools were rated “acceptable, but needing major upgrades.” Eight were rated “adequate” and one, Garfield, the newest (18 years old) high school in a southern, relatively affluent part of the city was rated “superior.” (Garfield’s construction had

reflected a long-time habit of Vulcan school politics: responsiveness to the wishes of middle-class taxpayers with the means to leave the city. The Garfield cluster has no priority need schools.)

The State Facilities Agency's evaluation of the Vulcan schools also projected an enrollment decline of 3,800 students over the next decade. Given that decline, and the state's school size guidelines of 400 for elementary schools, 700 for middle schools and 1,000 for high schools, the state has recommended closing two high schools, two middle schools and five elementaries.

The state has a charter school law, enthusiastically backed by the new governor, which gives charters broad leeway. The state Education Department is urging Vulcan to approve charters to reduce its own building needs. The law gives school boards the right to review charter applications, but rejected applicants have a right of appeal to the state.

The state did not specify which schools should be targeted for closing, but news reports analyzed this recommendation side by side with its "priority needs" list and suggested which schools were most endangered. This caused great uproar in the neighborhoods, revealing a tremendous sentimental attachment to Vulcan's older schools, which co-exists with a general public sense of dissatisfaction with the educational status quo.

Vulcan also has a vocal and politically savvy historical preservation community. The news reports galvanized this group to threaten lawsuits if the district sought to demolish any of what it called Vulcan's "handsome, historic and precious" older schools. The group said it would help raise money to preserve rather than replace older schools.

## **THE CHALLENGES**

While problem buildings are scattered around Vulcan, the trickiest decisions center around two clusters: Buchtel and North.

Buchtel High, in west-central Vulcan, is the district's worst-performing school and one of the worst in the state. Once a proud, Prairie-style civic treasure, the 86-year-old school is now the district's oldest, with dreary, dark corridors, a mold problem, leaky roof, ancient labs, substandard computer wiring and a grand old auditorium whose plaster is crumbling and whose rumbling ventilation system is so loud that anyone on stage has to shout to be heard over it.

Buchtel has a long, proud sports tradition, with eight state basketball championship trophies in its front hall, and a fiercely proud and active alumni base. Also, the largely minority communities that send to Buchtel have a deep sense of resentment about other political decisions regarding public investment

that they feel wronged them, such as destruction of many homes to make way for the east-west freeway two decades ago.

Also, Rankin elementary, an Afrocentric-themed school in the cluster, operates out of the lowest-rated school facility in the whole city, but has test scores well above the cluster norm. It has wide, dark corridors, and small classrooms where old fluorescent fixtures hiss and flicker. Its thin walls leak noise and energy. Its lavatories were declared a “disgrace” in a recent local TV news expose.

The North cluster, serving the ethnically diverse, working class neighborhoods of North Vulcan, has several high-performing elementaries – Harris and Forest Hill - that are smaller than state guidelines, and rated “acceptable but need upgrades” on the facilities evaluation. Under state rules, Vulcan may build or maintain schools smaller than the guidelines, but must pick up the extra costs on a pro-rated formula based on the state’s square footage per student guidelines.

Mayor Wischnowski has no control over the school district, but has long been vocal about education issues. School boards tend to view him as a meddler, albeit one who is fairly enlightened about the value of good public schools to his city.

Upon passage of the state capital bond program, the mayor took the lead in proposing a 1 percent bump in the county sales tax, with revenues being used to pay the local school construction match in all the county’s municipalities. But suburban voters voted down the proposal last spring.

Now the mayor has gone to the school board with a new proposal: He would throw his prestige and clout behind a .25 percent increase in the city income tax to raise the local match and another \$300 million beyond that. But, he said, he and citizens who don’t send children to the public schools would have to get something tangible out of the deal. He mentioned the city’s shortage of recreation centers and playing fields. He talked about seeking uses for vacant institutional and office buildings in the downtown. He alluded to several brownfield sites in the industrial southeast quadrant, for which state cleanup subsidies have been offered, but with no takers so far. *What*, he has asked the school board, *can you do for me if I do this for you?*

## **YOUR TASK**

Imagine that you are an advisory panel, chosen by the Vulcan school board for your varied expertise and civic spirit to help the district navigate through this period of crisis.

The board has listed a number of challenges on which it seeks your counsel. (You can others to these if you want.):

- What steps, generally, can Vulcan take to improve design and materials in its older schools to improve the learning environment? How should it respond to the demands of preservationists to keep old schools at all costs?
- How should it work through the particular problems of the Buchtel and North clusters in terms of which schools to renovate or close, and whether to build new or seek alternative spaces?
- Citywide, what opportunities and challenges are presented by the idea of using the charter law or non-traditional sites to meet educational needs and limit school size?
- What can the district do to help the mayor meet his goals in return for his important help in raising resources?
- Can the district meet its facilities challenges working within the boundaries of the state program? If so, how should it raise the local match and how can it earn public support for that plan? If the state deal is unworkable, what alternatives does Vulcan have?

For each of these challenges, you can suggest several possible strategies or solutions. Do not get hung up seeking the one perfect solution. With each suggested solution, be honest and clear about the tradeoffs it entails. And wherever possible, offer examples of real places where your ideas have been tried successfully.

Good luck. Have fun. Be creative. In talking through this scenario, please do not change any of its basic facts, but feel free to go beyond the stated situation to introduce ideas or players who could help bring about a good result – as long as the additions are realistic.

## **VULCAN SCHOOLS' PRIORITY BUILDING NEEDS, BY CLUSTER**

### **Bartram Cluster**

High School: Rated adequate

Priority elementaries: King and Case

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### **Buchtel Cluster**

High school: Priority need

Priority elementaries: Crouse, Stewart, Rankin (Rankin is the Afrocentric)

Priority middle school: Perkins

**North Cluster**

High School: Acceptable, needs upgrade

Priority elementaries: Findley

Priority middle: Jennings

**Central Cluster**

High School: Priority need

Priority elementaries: Mason

**Kenmore Cluster**

High school: Adequate

Priority elementaries: Margaret Park

**Garfield Cluster**

High school: Superior

No priority need schools

**East Cluster**

High school: Acceptable, needs upgrade

Priority elementaries: Robinson, Hotchkiss, Barber.

Priority middle: Glanton

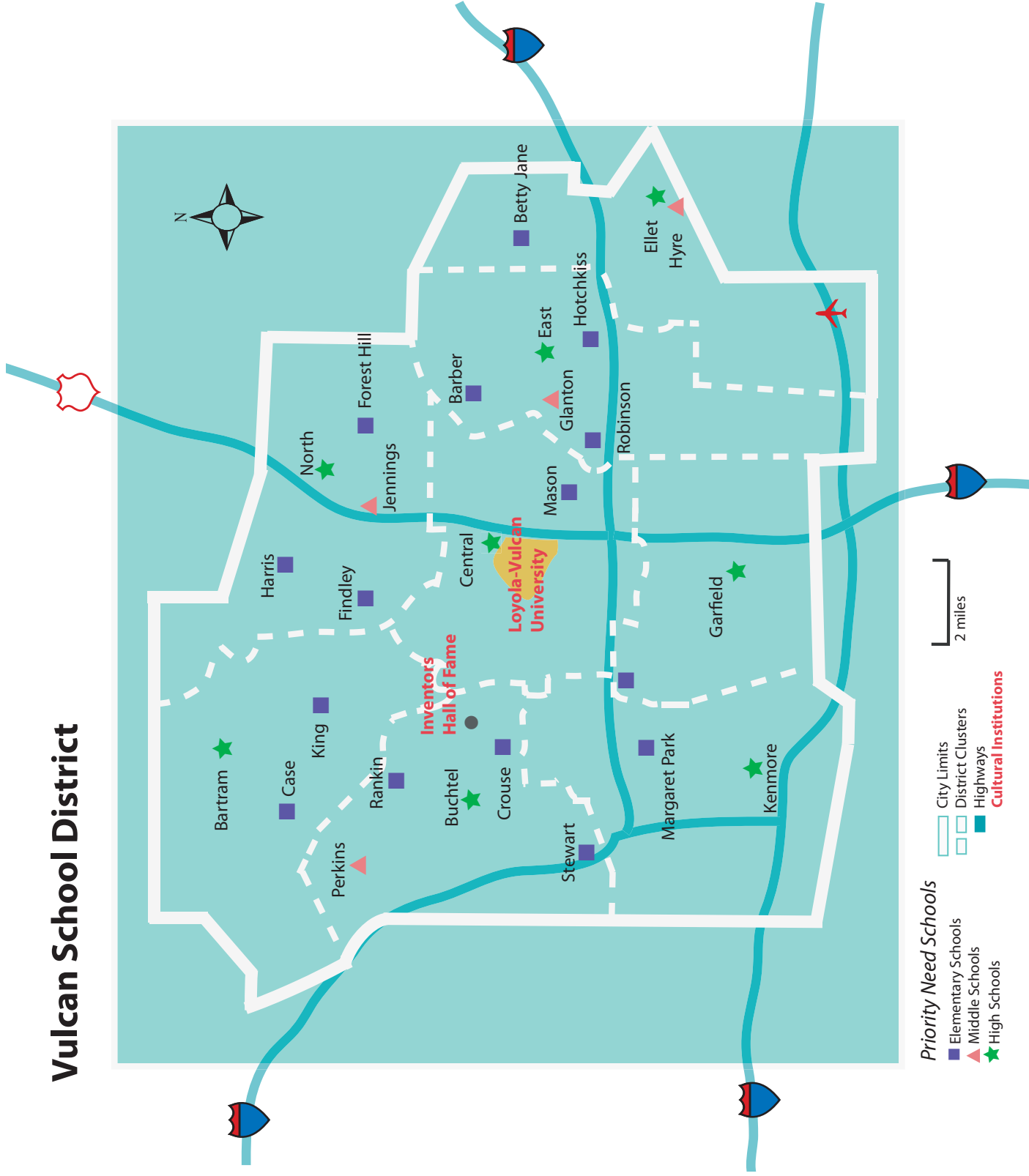
**Ellet Cluster**

High school: Acceptable, needs upgrade

Priority elementaries: Betty Jane

Priority middle: Hyre

# Vulcan School District



**Priority Need Schools**

- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools

**Cultural Institutions**

- City Limits
- District Clusters
- Highways

2 miles



## Vulcan School District Facts

	District
<b>Adult Education Levels</b>	
Adults with a High School Diploma (%)	79.1
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree (%)	16.4
<b>Household Characteristics</b>	
Number of Households	88,093
Single-Parent Households with Children (%)	15.2
<b>Income and Wealth (\$)</b>	
Median Household Income	33,663
Income Per Person	18,531
Median Home Value	75,343
<b>Household Income Distribution (%)</b>	
Less than \$15,000	21.5
\$15,000-\$29,999	23.0
\$30,000-\$49,999	23.9
\$50,000-\$74,999	18.4
\$75,000-\$99,999	7.5
\$100,000-\$149,999	4.0
\$150,000 or More	1.7
<b>Population</b>	
Population	206,203
Population Density	3,786
Median Age	35
<b>Population Distribution by Age (%)</b>	
4 Years or Younger	7.0
5-19 Years	21.0
20-44 Years	35.9
45-64 Years	22.4
65 Years or Older	13.7
<b>Ethnicity Facts</b>	
White persons, percent	67.2%
Black or African American persons, percent	28.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent	0.3%
Asian persons, percent	1.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent	Z
Persons reporting some other race, percent	0.4%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent	2.1%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent	1.2%
Foreign born persons, percent	3.2%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+	5.8%
<b>Education Facts</b>	
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+	80.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+	18.0%

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com)

## Vulcan School District Facts

	District
<b>Enrollment of Racial/Ethnic Groups</b>	2004
White (%)	45.9
Black (%)	48.3
Hispanic (%)	1.0
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	1.8
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	0.1
Multi-Racial (%)	3.0
<b>Enrollment of Students with Special Needs</b>	
Economically Disadvantaged (% receiving free lunch)	59.5
English Language Learners (%)	1.4
Students with Disabilities (%)	16.7
<b>Enrollment Distribution by Gender</b>	
Female (%)	49.0
Male (%)	51.0

	District
<b>How Students Performed on State Reading Tests</b>	2004
Grade 3 Reading Proficiency (%)	69.0
Grade 4 Reading Proficiency (%)	60.1
Grade 6 Reading Proficiency (%)	44.9
High School Reading Proficiency (%)	66.8
<b>How Students Performed on State Math Tests</b>	
Grade 4 Math Proficiency (%)	50.6
Grade 6 Math Proficiency (%)	47.2
High School Math Proficiency (%)	54.6
<b>Graduation Rate (%)</b>	
All Students	74.8

School Statistics	
Number of Schools	61
Number of Students	29,532