

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Wastewater Management Student Earns National Distinction *Nasson Toban becomes the first high school student to pass certification exam*

**Kansas City, December 13, 2019:** East High School senior Nasson Toban wants to make sure you can have a glass of clean drinking water.

Mr. Toban recently became the first high school student in the nation to pass the Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Certification exam, thanks to his participation in Kansas City Public Schools' new Wastewater Management program at Manual Career and Technical Education Center. As a result, he's now in line for a potential career opportunity with KC Water.

This unique accomplishment marks an important next step in a journey that has taken this young man from West Africa to Kansas City, Mo. Sitting in his classroom at Manual Career Tech, Toban smiled as he recalled the moment he opened the letter with his official results and realized he had passed the exam.

"I jumped up and down and started running around in joy," Toban said. "When I told my mom, she started crying and praying with me. Seeing her happy made me happy."

Toban was about 5 years old when he lost his father to political violence in Cameroon. His single mother and her children fled that violence as refugees in 2008, settling permanently in Kansas City.

In addition to his academic load as a senior, Toban manages to balance being the EHS Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Battalion Commander and playing both offense and defense for the football team. He works three jobs to help support his family, including parking cars in the Crossroads District on the weekends and sometimes working overnight shifts for Amazon.

With that level of responsibility in mind, Wastewater Management Systems instructor John Lopez was thrilled but not overly surprised that Toban was able to pass the exam.

"This is an amazing young man," Mr. Lopez said. "He's mentally tough. He put a game plan together and executed it."

The Wastewater Management program was launched this year in partnership with Kansas City-based Carollo Engineers and the City of Kansas City. Students are exposed to different aspects of the water management system, including Water Treatment Plant Operation, Wastewater Treatment Plant Operation and Water Distribution Systems. Students are also mentored by water and wastewater professionals.

"We're teaching our students to make sure that the water you drink is safe," Lopez said. "This is very important, very technical work. You can't just have anyone do it. It takes someone who is very highly trained."

It's no cakewalk to pass the certification exam. The class has three textbooks, each about two-inches thick and full of complex math, engineering, chemistry and design. Students who complete the course at Manual Tech and pass the exam are then given the chance to interview for well-paying jobs with KC Water starting in the spring.

“This program is a win-win for the students and for the city,” said Lopez, who joined KCPS after a long career with KC Water. “These are the kinds of opportunities that will really help break the cycles of poverty and benefit the entire community.”

Toban was skeptical at first about the program when Lopez pitched it during an EHS field trip to Manual Tech. But Lopez’s enthusiasm and the potential of a job waiting for him after graduation convinced Toban to give it a try. He ended up loving the class and recruited several of his classmates to sign up.

“Mr. Lopez is inspiring, and you can tell that he really cares about us,” Toban said. “He pushes us to do more than we thought was possible.”

Mr. Toban’s journey will continue after he graduates in May as a member of the Class of 2020. He plans to pursue a job with KC Water while simultaneously going to college. His ultimate goal is to become a nurse anesthetist.

“Passing this exam and getting a job with KC Water will be a huge help for me,” Toban said. “I want to help other people.”

Visit [www.kcpublicschools.org/mctc](http://www.kcpublicschools.org/mctc) to learn more about the Wastewater Management and other programs available at Manual Career and Technical Center.