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Nine Paterson Public Schools High School Seniors to Graduate with Associate Degrees

Early College Program Celebrates First Graduating Cohort

Paterson, NJ (May 20, 2025) – Nine seniors from Paterson Public Schools are reaching a remarkable milestone this week: earning their associate degrees from Passaic County Community College (PCCC) – a full month before receiving their high school diplomas. The students will walk across the stage at PCCC’s main campus in Paterson this Wednesday, May 21st.

These students are part of the district’s Early College Program, an initiative designed to open doors, raise expectations, and redefine what is possible for public school students in Paterson.

“By the time they graduate from high school, these nine students will have already earned a college degree—an extraordinary accomplishment that sets them apart,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “The Early College Program reflects our firm commitment to expanding access to meaningful, high-impact learning opportunities. When students are given the resources and encouragement they need, they don’t just meet expectations, they exceed them.”

Launched in the 2023–2024 school year, the pilot program was created through a partnership between Paterson Public Schools and PCCC. It allowed a cohort of eleven high school students to complete their junior and senior years entirely on the college’s campus while simultaneously working toward an associate degree.

“This is not just about acceleration; it’s about accessibility,” said Joanna Tsimpedes, Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services and Special Programs. “It’s about leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students - regardless of ZIP Code or background - have access to challenging, high-quality educational opportunities.”

The first year of the program was funded by the PCCC College Bound Grant in partnership with the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, and Paterson Public Schools funded the second year of the program. All tuition, fees, textbooks, and materials were fully covered for participating students. Students also received lunch tickets for the PCCC Café and, when eligible, bus passes to support their commute.

All nine students will receive an associate degree in humanities, which provides a broad foundation in subjects like literature, history, philosophy, communication, and the arts—skills that are central to critical thinking and effective communication. An associate degree in humanities is a steppingstone to transfer into a four-year college or university. It can save time and money while earning general education credits that apply toward a bachelor’s degree.

The success of the program is a result of thoughtful planning and a strong partnership between the district and PCCC, led by Rita Routé, Deputy Director of Accelerated & Innovative Programs. Teams across PCCC - including Pre-College Programs, Enrollment Services (Early College & Dual Enrollment), the Center for Student Success, and the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society - played a crucial role in providing tutoring, mentoring, and academic advising.

Research shows that Early College students are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, and persist through their postsecondary education. Just as important, they gain confidence, independence, and a strong sense of purpose. For many families, this also represents thousands of dollars in savings, making college more accessible and achievable.

The Paterson Board of Education will recognize the nine students for their extraordinary achievement at its June meeting.

For more information about Paterson Public Schools visit our [website](#).

About Paterson Public Schools

Paterson Public Schools serves over 26,000 students from pre-K to 12th grade in New Jersey's third-largest city. About 70.6% of the student population is Hispanic, 16.3% are Black, 6.5% are Asian, and 5.0% are Caucasian. Recognizing its proud traditions, diverse community, and strong partnerships, the mission of Paterson Public Schools is to provide an academically rigorous, safe, and nurturing educational environment that meets the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students. The district is committed to preparing students for post-secondary education and careers. Despite the Paterson community being classified as low-income, many of its students achieve high academic success. A growing number of elementary school students are reading at or above grade level, and more high school students are earning college credits through Advanced Placement exams and enrolling in college-level courses before graduation. Paterson Public Schools is distinguished as one of only 17 school districts in New Jersey to offer the competitive International Baccalaureate program and is among just four districts with a P-TECH high school. In collaboration with IBM and Passaic County Community College, the P-TECH program allows students to graduate with an associate degree in applied science and valuable tech sector experience. For more information, visit www.paterson.k12.nj.us

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