



For Immediate Release

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Paterson Public Schools Students Debut Unified Flag Football Team

The new program brings inclusive competition for Paterson students

Paterson, NJ (March 25, 2026) – Students from Paterson STEAM High School and the STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program made their debut on March 18 at the New York Jets’ New Jersey Unified Flag Football League launch event at the Atlantic Health Jets Training Center in Florham Park.

Thanks to the generous support of the New York Jets and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, Paterson STEAM High School and the STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program has launched its first unified flag football team - marking a major step forward in expanding inclusive sports opportunities for students.

“This is a proud moment for our district,” said Superintendent Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “This program reflects the work being done to ensure all students have meaningful opportunities to participate, compete, and grow. By bringing students together on the same team, we are building a culture of inclusion that extends beyond the field.”

The program was developed through the leadership of Principal Dr. Nellista Bess and Vice Principal Christopher Awad, in partnership with the New York Jets and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. Through this collaboration, students have access to the equipment, resources, and support needed to participate in unified athletics.

“Becoming a Unified Champion School has been a great opportunity for us,” said Dr. Bess. “Seeing our scholars come together, support one another, and grow closer across STEAM, STARS, and T.I.E.S. has been really powerful. Our staff have been just as excited to coach and support our students, and we are especially grateful for the support of the New York Jets organization, which has strengthened this experience for our students.”

The team will compete in the UFF East Conference against Bloomfield, Lakeland, Pequannock, Union City, and West Orange High Schools. Their upcoming games include March 26 against West Orange (away), March 30 against Union City at Hinchliffe Stadium, and April 14 against Bloomfield (away), with additional games to be announced.

For more information about Paterson Public Schools, visit: www.paterson.k12.nj.us

About Paterson Public Schools

Paterson Public Schools serves over 22,000 students from pre-K to 12th grade in New Jersey's third-largest city. About 71% of the student population is Hispanic, 16% are Black, 6% 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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