



For Immediate Release

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Nine Paterson Public Schools Students Named Passaic County Unsung Heroes

Students celebrated for leadership and meaningful contributions to their communities

Paterson, NJ (April 13, 2026) – Nine exceptional Paterson Public Schools students were among those honored at the Fourth Annual Passaic County Unsung Heroes ceremony, held on Wednesday, March 25 at West Milford High School.

Co-sponsored by the Passaic County Education Association and the Passaic County School Boards Association, the ceremony recognized students who have made a lasting impact through their unique contributions to their schools and communities. Their efforts, often overlooked by traditional student recognition programs, play a vital role in helping our schools and communities thrive.

“I’d like to congratulate our nine outstanding students who were named Passaic County Unsung Heroes,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “The dedication and humility of these scholars have made the entire district very proud. Thank you for your leadership and for representing our school community with excellence.”

This year’s theme, “Flowing with Purpose: The Power of Persistent Character”, was inspired by the Paterson Great Falls and the enduring spirit of the Passaic River. Just as the river’s steady flow carves a path through any obstacle, the nine students that were honored lead with a quiet, unstoppable force of character that reflects the very best of Paterson Public Schools.

Additionally, the honorees were formally recognized by the Paterson Board of Education at its workshop meeting on April 1. The Board passed a resolution honoring the students, whose character and impact reflect the heart of Paterson Public Schools.

“Congratulations to these young men and women who have demonstrated such a profound commitment to excellence within their school communities across our city,” said Paterson Board of Education President Joel D. Ramirez.

The nine Passaic County Unsung Heroes from Paterson Public Schools are:

1. Ya’Mira Goodwin, Alonzo “Tambua” Moody Academy
2. Starlene Santana, Eastside High School

3. Katiana Escobar, International High School
4. Akram Ahmed, John F. Kennedy High School
5. Emmanuel De La Cruz Cruz, Newcomers High School
6. Derek Escobar, Paterson P-Tech
7. Lorainy Gonzalez, Rosa L. Parks School of Fine & Performing Arts
8. Mariana Gonzalez Curiel, Paterson STEAM High School
9. Jorge Perales, STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program

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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