



For Immediate Release

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Two Paterson Public Schools Seniors Achieve College Milestone Ahead of Graduation

Paterson high school seniors earn college degrees through Early College Program

Paterson, NJ (May 21, 2026) – Two Paterson Public Schools seniors have reached a remarkable milestone, earning associate degrees from Passaic County Community College (PCCC) through Paterson Public Schools’ Early College Program. The students, Alan Benitez and Xavier Gonzalez, are from Paterson STEAM High School.

The rigorous Early College Program is designed for motivated students prepared to meet the demands of college-level coursework, demonstrate academic excellence, and thrive in a higher education environment.

“We congratulate these outstanding scholars for reaching such an important academic milestone,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “Their success reflects what is possible when ambition meets opportunity. Through programs like Early College, our scholars are not only preparing for higher education – they are already succeeding in it.”

Alan Benitez will attend Rutgers University-Newark, where he was accepted into the Business Management program. He will graduate high school with an associate degree in Psychology. Xavier Gonzalez will attend New Jersey Institute of Technology to pursue architecture. He will graduate from high school with an associate degree in Communications.

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

Benitez and Gonzalez were recognized alongside fellow graduates during PCCC’s commencement ceremony held Wednesday, May 20, on the college campus. Last year, nine Paterson Public Schools students earned their associate degrees from PCCC.

The success of the program is the result of thoughtful planning and a strong partnership between Paterson Public Schools and PCCC, led by Rita Routé, Deputy Director of Accelerated & Innovative Programs. Teams across PCCC - including Pre-College Programs, the Office of Early

College & Dual Enrollment, and the Center for Student Success - played a crucial role in providing tutoring, mentoring, academic advising, and personalized student support services.

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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