



For Immediate Release

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Paterson STEAM High School Wins Unified Flag Football State Title

Paterson Public Schools' unified team caps off unforgettable season with a championship

Paterson, NJ (May 22, 2026) – The Paterson STEAM High School unified flag football team was crowned champion at the New Jersey Unified High School Flag Football League Championship on Friday, May 15 at the Atlantic Health Jets Training Center in Florham Park, NJ. After defeating Bloomfield in the semifinals, the students topped Parsippany Hills, 30-26, in the championship game. The team's victories on Friday capped off a historic inaugural season and created memories the students will carry with them for years to come.

Made up of students from Paterson STEAM High School and the STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program, the unified team was one of four squads in the 18-team league to advance to the playoffs.

“This championship is a historic milestone that showcases the true spirit of Paterson STEAM, STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program, and Paterson Public Schools,” said Superintendent Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “It proves that when we intentionally build space for every student to compete and thrive, extraordinary achievements follow. I am incredibly proud of this team for bringing home the championship and setting a gold standard for athletic excellence and inclusion.”

Launched by the New York Jets, the New Jersey Unified High School Flag Football League is an inclusive high school sports initiative created in partnership with Special Olympics New Jersey and Special Olympics New York.

“Watching our student-athletes push through the regular season and rise to the occasion in the championship game was unforgettable,” said Paterson STEAM and STARS Academy/T.I.E.S. Program Principal Dr. Nellista Bess. “This championship belongs to the entire Paterson STEAM, STARS/T.I.E.S. family – our dedicated players, coaches, staff, and families who believed in this vision from day one.”

Dr. Bess and Vice Principal Mr. Christopher Awad spearheaded the planning and preparation for the students' participation in the league. The team, led on the field by Mr. Melvin Robinson, Ms. Cristina Concepcion, and Mr. Vonward Alford, will be recognized during a New York Jets home game at MetLife Stadium next season.

Funded through grants from the Jets and Special Olympics New Jersey, the establishment of Paterson STEAM as a Unified Champion School allowed STEAM and STARS/T.I.E.S. to participate in the Unified Flag Football League.

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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