



For Immediate Release

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YES Program Concludes 2025-2026 School Year with Inspiring Showcase

Students reflect on a year of leadership, service, and student voice during culminating YES program event

Paterson, NJ (June 11, 2026) – Paterson Public Schools’ Youth Empowered Stewardship (YES) Program hosted a reflective and impactful culminating event on Monday, June 1 at School 16 to celebrate the conclusion of the 2025-2026 academic year. The showcase featured end-of-year activities and presentations highlighting the accomplishments, growth, and community impact achieved by students throughout the school year.

“The YES Program showcases the extraordinary capacity of our student leaders to drive meaningful culture shifts within our schools,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Laurie W. Newell. “These students are proving that their voices are vital tools for building a more equitable district. Their work serves as a powerful reminder that when we listen to our youth, we build stronger communities.”

During the showcase, student leaders and their advisors presented their projects, which included a pilot of the upcoming cell phone ban, a farm-to-table project to address food deserts and sustainability, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, an award-winning anti-vaping public service announcement, school culture, and chronic absenteeism. The presentations were interactive and included multimedia tools, creating a dynamic celebration of student growth, leadership, and community engagement.

“It has been a privilege to witness the YES journey for these 180 students and their advisors,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Cicely Warren. “Through their projects, they have addressed food insecurity in Paterson, advocated for their community on an international stage at the New York Auto Show, and taught their peers the importance of showing up for school, their community, and themselves. These young people are actively modeling the empathy, leadership, and stewardship we hope to see throughout the world.”

A highlight of the event was the presentation of official certificates to YES students, recognizing their leadership and dedication. Additionally, students in grades 8 and 12 received commemorative pins in recognition of their academic milestones. The event also featured a compelling presentation about the impact of the YES program, reflecting the importance of engaging students as problem solvers and community builders, in collaboration with their teachers. The presentation concluded with a spoken word performance titled "We Are More", which utilized a powerful blend of rhythm,

movement, and voice to express the importance of young people feeling heard, valued, and supported throughout their educational journeys.

“Our amazing YES student ambassadors demonstrate the significant impact of student voice,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Cozart. “Their passion and dedication highlight the power of young people coming together to make a difference. The projects they undertake at school will enhance the school environment, creating safe spaces where children can thrive.”

This event marked the culmination of a year-long journey for the YES students, which began with their first group activity in September. Throughout November and December, the students held group discussions about the challenges facing them and their peers. These dialogues revealed a central theme connecting their shared experiences: “What We Wish Teachers Knew About Us.” Based on this theme, they created and distributed a schoolwide survey. In March, they hosted a roundtable discussion to review the data. Finally, in May, students presented their survey findings and recommendations to staff during a professional learning community session, sparking meaningful dialogue.

Under the leadership of Dr. Warren and Dr. Cozart, the YES Program engages students in art-based experiences and discussions designed to build skills and promote community impact through empowerment stewardship, personal journeys, and community action. The program’s success is further strengthened through the dedication and collaboration of Jenna Goodreau, Director of Full-Service Community Schools, and Laurel Olson, Supervisor of Student Support Services, whose support helped guide and sustain student engagement throughout the year.

This year’s YES cohort included students from nine schools across the district and they met six times throughout the academic year: Dr. Frank Napier, Jr. School of Science & Technology, School 10, School 12, School 16, Maria Magda O’Keefe School, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Educational Complex, Joseph A. Taub School, Eastside High School, and International High School.

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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