



PAYMON ROUHANIFARD
SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent joins Rotary Club of Camden to Celebrate Students' Efforts to Turn Their Lives Around

Superintendent, Rutgers Camden Vice-Chancellor, high school deans, and Rotarians join to honor 30 young people set on getting back on track and earning their high school diplomas

Monday, February 12, 2017 Camden NJ – Today the Camden City School District joined the Rotary Club of Camden and Rutgers University-Camden to celebrate the hard work of 30 of the District's most improved high school students. ***The Second Annual Back on Track Student Luncheon*** highlighted students who had fallen behind in school, but through self-determination and support from caring adults, have now re-committed to achieving their high school diploma.

Dr. Nyeema Watson, Associate Chancellor, Rutgers University-Camden Office of Civic Engagement and keynote speaker Rashan Prailow, a Camden native and White House Associate for the Obama Administration, joined Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard, Camden City Rotary President Tom Venables, Reverend Chris Collins, and families to congratulate the thirty students. Previously identified as at-risk for dropping out, these young people from Camden High School, Woodrow Wilson High School, and Camden Big Picture Learning Academy were honored with gift cards, gift bags, and certificates during the luncheon. Following the luncheon, the honorees attended a special campus tour of Rutgers University-Camden.

Since his administration began, Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard has seen the District's graduation rate rise from 49 percent to 66 percent, while the drop-out rate has been cut in half – down from 21 per cent in 2013 to 11 per cent in 2017. In addition, new student supports and a new approach to discipline have led to an 89 percent drop in suspensions in the District's comprehensive high schools.

These gains, while significant, are not enough. That's why the District is using an early-warning system in all schools to identify and provide targeted support to students whose attendance, grades, or behavior put them at high risk of falling behind. The identified students receive extra coaching and support from their school leaders, drop-out prevention officers, and school Climate and Culture leaders, a new role that addresses behavior issues using restorative practices and gives teachers additional support to manage behavior issues in Camden schools.

"This time last year, we were piloting our new Code of Conduct, and weren't sure how much impact the restorative approaches and new staff training would have on our students and schools," said Superintendent Rouhanifard. "A year later, we see these investments paying off for Camden students. Suspensions have fallen by 53 percent District wide, and fewer students are dropping out of high school year-on-year. While we are not there yet, this luncheon is an opportunity to celebrate our students' progress and to highlight the dedicated adults working tirelessly to provide the myriad of supports many students need to finish high school and prepare for success in college or a meaningful career."

"The Back on Track event is an opportunity for the Rotary Club of Camden to fulfill its community service goal by encouraging the children and youth of the City of Camden to reach their fullest potential," said Tom Venables, President,

Rotary Club of Camden. "These young people should be applauded for the resilience and self-discipline they are demonstrating in their journey to obtain their high school degree. It is exciting that the Rotary Club of Camden together with the Camden City School District and the Rutgers Camden Office of Civic Engagement have embraced these young people and honored them for making very mature decisions despite their youth."

Keynote speaker and youth advocate Rashan Prailow, a Woodrow Wilson High School alum who went on to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania before working for the White House under President Obama, said, "The greatest comeback story is achieved by those who have faith, work hard, and remain humble."

See below for the names of the honored students. Students' biographies and interviews are available upon request.

Interviews will be available in English and Spanish, with officials, guests, honored students, and their families. RSVP to Maita Soukup at msoukup@camden.k12.nj.us or call 856-375-4737.

2018 Camden Back on Track Scholars:

Camden High School

Ajeenah Abdur-Rahmaan *c/o 2018*

Ayanna Mccants *c/o 2018*

Diego Brito *c/o 2018*

Jeremiah Bryant *c/o 2018*

Naquan Hodge *c/o 2018*

Brianna Miles *c/o 2019*

Ali Satchmei *c/o 2019*

Illicia Matos *c/o 2019*

Nicholas Butler *c/o 2019*

Elijah Adkins *c/o 2020*

Leroy Lee *c/o 2020*

Anthonique Murray-Irvin *c/o 2021*

Woodrow Wilson High School

Cin'que Moye *c/o 2018*

Diquesse Young *c/o 2018*

Jesus Velez-Ayala *c/o 2018*

Marcos Irizarry *c/o 2018*

Raul Velez-Ayala *c/o 2018*

Terronda Gibson *c/o 2018*

Ivy Mercado *c/o 2019*

Kenny Ruiz *c/o 2019*

Naysaan Benson *c/o 2019*

Ian Younge *c/o 2020*

Leyla Sepulveda *c/o 2020*

Yazmin Martinez *c/o 2021*

Camden Big Picture Learning Academy

Maisha Colon *c/o 2018*

Shemar Brown *c/o 2018*

Cioni Townsend *c/o 2021*

Dontae Howard *c/o 2021*

Jajuan Burgos *c/o 2021*

Zyone Arzeez *c/o 2021*