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November 27, 2019  
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PATerson Public Schools Administrators, School Board Commissioners Show Their Pride in International Baccalaureate Students

Officials thank students, parents, teachers and administrators at pre-Thanksgiving board meeting

***Photos attached: See end of release for captions. ***

PATerson – Days after disparaging remarks were made about the district’s International Baccalaureate (IB) program, Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer and Board of Education commissioners made sure all IB students, parents, teachers and administrators know that their hard work in the rigorous, world-renowned academic program is appreciated.

“I couldn’t be more proud of our IB students,” said Shafer at the board’s regular meeting on Tuesday night. “I know what you’re going through. You need to continue what you’re doing. We are always here to encourage you and support you, as we are for all of our students.”

Numerous IB students, parents and teachers were in attendance at the meeting on Tuesday following disparaging remarks made about the IB program, some which were circulated on the Internet. The remarks followed the district’s announcement that 2019 International High School Valedictorian Aamya Perez became first IB graduate to be awarded the IB diploma.

“Those remarks made us seem like we are failures,” said Isabela Gonzalez, a tenth-grader in the IB program. “Nothing could be further from the truth.”

“I signed up for the IB program to reach a higher education so that I could succeed and show that Paterson students can defy the odds and not become delinquents or trouble-makers,” said Amina Cuascat, another tenth-grader in the IB program.
Board of Education President Oshin Castillo was concerned about the label of delinquent being associated with Paterson students.

“That’s not the perception we want of our students in the City of Paterson. They are amazing. They are talented,” said Castillo. “It’s our job to help change the narrative. What can we do moving forward? We can’t allow our students to have that perception of delinquent about themselves.”

Castillo empathized with the students, saying that it wasn’t long ago when she was a high school student herself, and she made a point to acknowledge the efforts of the IB program’s teachers.

“Thank you for motivating our students,” Castillo said.

A total of 44 IB students were in the district’s first graduating class. All of them graduated high school and were accepted to such colleges as the University of Pennsylvania, The Citadel, Howard University and Case Western Reserve University. Twenty-three of those students were candidates for the IB diploma, and had completed the rigorous academic track that Superintendent Shafer detailed in an op-ed published last week. Five of the 23 IB diploma candidates came within just a few points of qualifying for the IB diploma and will be resubmitting their work for reconsideration.

Commissioner Manuel Martinez, Jr. told the IB students to pay no attention to people who criticize others online.

“Most of these people do so from the comfort of their couches rather than engaging in life. Shame on them,” Martinez said. “Do what you are continuing to do every day. Greatness is alive and well in the City of Paterson and it is in this auditorium tonight.”

“I would match up students from Paterson against students anywhere,” said Charles Ferrer, first vice president of the Paterson Education Association, who graduated from Eastside High School in 1978. “Our students can compete with anybody, without a doubt.”

Commissioner Johnathan Hodges advised the students to remember who they are, and to try to turn the negative episode into a point of motivation.

“By going through the IB program, you are already winners,” said Hodges. “I would put it up as a challenge to be more successful than you already are.”
Board of Education Vice President Nakima Redmon took pride in the fact that IB students came to the meeting to voice their concerns.

“Tonight, I saw Paterson students stand up for what they believe in,” Redmon said. “You are special. People do care about you.”

Photo 1: IB students Amina Cuascat and Isabela Gonzalez address the Board of Education on Tuesday evening.

Photo 2: IB students, parents and teachers in the audience applaud the IB students’ remarks made at the podium.

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