

# CLIFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Clifton High School Students branch into STEM studies at Passaic County Community College**

Four Clifton High School students earned the distinct privilege of attending a prestigious STEM program at Passaic County Community College.

Three of the students attended the 2019 STEM Math and Science Academy at Passaic County Community College (PCCC) this past summer after attending an informational assembly in early June 2019. Carlomagno Ontaneda, PCCC Representative, spoke with the students about STEM-related summer courses offered at low or no cost to high school students. Ontaneda went on to mention that several CHS graduates who are now PCCC students are currently participating in the prestigious NASA Scholar's program.

"At first, I didn't really know if I was interested, but when I heard the words, NASA, I was very excited to learn more about the program," said Salah Shreekh, a senior at Clifton High School.

Salah was one of three ESL students who attended PCCC's 18-day STEM Program in July. Clifton High School ESL teacher, Thea Landesberg, encouraged Salah and two other students, Busra Celik and Teodora Pavloska, to look into the opportunity at PCCC.

"We didn't have many of our ESL students take advantage of the program. Salah, Busra, and Teodora were exceptional students. I knew they would love the program," said Landesberg.

"They split an Uber, went to Paterson on their own, applied, and were accepted. They sent me a selfie of themselves in the Uber on their way back with the caption, 'We will go to college,'" continued Mrs. Landesberg.

"I was nervous at first when Busra asked me to go," said Teodora Pavloska of her experience. "But I realized that this is a great opportunity for students who are interested in science, technology, or medicine. It's a good way for everyone to learn and to meet new people from different schools."

Busra Celik, a CHS junior, said, "I couldn't believe we were speaking to students who were working at NASA, students who were just like me! I went home and told my sister about the program because she loves to build things. She's in middle school, but now she can't wait to get to Clifton High School so that she can be a part of the PCCC STEM Academy, too!"

The fourth CHS student, Joseph Huaylla, was uncertain about what he wanted to study in college during his junior year. His guidance counselor, Mrs. Fabrykant, pointed him in the direction of the 30-credit program at PCCC. The two-semester immersive program, allows students to take classes full-time on campus at PCCC during their senior year, fulfilling high school graduation requirements while earning 30 college credits.

"I started researching STEM and became interested in engineering, but what really caught my attention was the NASA program," said Joseph.

"Joseph attended classes at PCCC over the summer where he obtained a 3.75 GPA in Math and College Success courses. He scored a 710 on the Math portion of the SAT and is now taking Calculus," said Mr. Ontaneda.

"I have so many options here at PCCC," continued Joseph. "I met Brenda Noriega, a CHS graduate and ESL student, who is now interning at NASA. I know that with hard work, I can do the same. This experience at PCCC has really improved my confidence. High school students underestimate the value of community colleges. Personally, I think more kids should look into the huge opportunities that exist at PCCC."

In addition to taking classes at PCCC, Joseph is involved with PCCC's Robotics team. Joseph is also a math tutor for middle school students at the Clifton Public Library and a Student Instructional Leader at PCCC.

"I've found, through this experience, that I enjoy teaching," said Huaylla. "I work in a classroom with the professors and answer questions that students may have during the class session."

Joseph was leaning toward studying art before he heard about the STEM program. He is now majoring in Mechanical Engineering and looks forward to all of the programs that PCCC has to offer.

"After this summer, I know that I will be a doctor one day," said Salah Shreekh regarding his summer experience. "If you're a kid learning a new language or trying something that seems too difficult, you just have to keep learning and learning. As long as you keep learning, nothing can stop you."

"All of the professors were so nice and patient," said Ms. Çelik. "The program is a great experience for all types of students. I feel so accomplished, and now I can do anything."

“I was so happy when I completed the program and received my certificate,” said Ms. Pavloska. “My parents were there when I got my certificate. I think they were proud because they came to this country for me and now, I have started college.”

Clifton Superintendent, Danny A. Robertozzi, Ed. D., met with the students in September to congratulate them on their achievements. “The amount of hard work that these young women and men have put into the STEM programs at PCCC is an example for all students. I am so proud of their accomplishments. Clifton High School’s partnership with Passaic County Community College is preparing our students for an outstanding future with countless opportunities.”

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