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PRESS RELEASE

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Celebrating Remarkable Members of Camden’s Class of 2015

Supt. Rouhanifard Leads Community Celebration of Graduates as They Head Off to Pursue Their Dreams

June 10, 2015 – Camden, NJ – Superintendent Rouhanifard today celebrated 20 remarkable scholars who are graduating this month and showing what can be accomplished with an unwavering commitment to a good education. At an award ceremony at the Salvation Army Kroc Center in East Camden, Rouhanifard joined dozens of parents and special guests to honor these inspiring students and their accomplishments.

“These remarkable graduates embody the best of Camden; they represent the incredible intelligence, potential, and determination that exists throughout our city,” Rouhanifard said. “We congratulate and thank these students, their families, and every single person in their school communities who has taught them, cared for them, and supported them. And we wish every member of the Camden Class of 2015 all the best as they move forward and look to make the most of their vast talents.”

The 2015 Remarkable Graduates were selected by their school communities. All five of the District’s high schools are represented as well as its alternative programs. The honorees are listed below in alphabetical order by last name.

The award ceremony was hosted by New Jersey native and host of the Power99 Rise and Grind Morning Show, Mina SayWhat. Woodrow Wilson High School alum and current football coach Preston Brown served as the keynote speaker.

The School District started the Remarkable Graduates awards in 2014 to recognize the obstacles some students persevere through in order to earn their high school diploma and develop postsecondary plans.

Monica Amador-Chacon bounced around for much of her youth—she had already lived in seven different states by the time she was 15. She and her family were homeless on multiple occasions, yet the economic and social hardships did not dim the high aspirations within her. After arriving at Woodrow Wilson High School for her sophomore year, Monica is now graduating in the Top 10 of her class. Next year, she will attend Camden County College, and she hopes to become a secondary education teacher focusing on history.

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Denisha Branch has epilepsy, and despite trying a variety of treatments, she frequently has low-level seizures and occasionally has grand mal seizures, which can involve a loss of consciousness and muscle contractions. That hasn't slowed her down. Denisha plays the drums in the Camden High School marching band and participates in activities like Girl Talk, a school-based group at Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy, where Denisha is a member of the Class of 2015. She plans to attend Camden County College, where she will study audio production.

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Self-doubt has nagged at **Daquan Daniels** at times, but it has never stopped him. After dropping out of MetEast High School several times, Daquan will graduate this month. In addition to his academic responsibilities, Daquan is a 20-year-old father who works after school to support his family. Daquan plans to attend Camden County College this fall.

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Zaire Daniels is under the guardianship of his uncle, and he is also a father. That's why Zaire works upwards of 35 hours a week to help take care of his daughter and his family. In addition, Zaire participates in the concert choir at Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy. Today, he is leaving the country for the first time in order to travel with the choir to Poland for an international competition. Zaire plans on attending Camden County College in the fall before transferring to Rowan University in the spring, where he will study criminal justice.

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After dealing with significant family challenges, **Emond Farrish** got off to a rough start in high school. She was adrift socially and academically, so much so that she and a friend got caught lighting a trashcan on fire on school grounds. By the time she transferred to MetEast High School after her freshman year, she had a 0.2 GPA.

But Emond repeated the 9th-grade, and with the fresh start, support from her grandmother and her school community, and a lot of her own hard work, Emond's GPA is now above 3.0. She will attend the Blackwood campus of Camden County College in the fall, where she plans to study forensic psychology.

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When **Alexis Horsey** entered Brimm Medical Arts High School for her freshman year, she was already nine months pregnant. She returned to school in November after giving birth to a daughter, and her mother assisted with child care. But Alexis's mom then became seriously ill and tragically passed away during Alexis's sophomore year. Alexis and her daughter rotated through family members' homes, but Alexis remained committed to her studies and her daughter. She plans to enlist in the United States Army after graduation.

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Moses Le grew up in the single-parent home of his father after his mother left when he was young. Money was always tight as Moses's father worked as a manual laborer. All of that tough work led to crippling arthritis and eventual disability. To help out with family expenses, Moses looked for jobs all over the city and eventually found one at McDonald's during his sophomore year. Moses has continued to work while pursuing his studies at Brimm Medical Arts High School, and he is now a crew trainer. Later this month, Moses will become the first person in his family to graduate from high school and go to college—he plans to enroll in Richard Stockton University, work at a nearby McDonald's, and study engineering.

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Pedro Martinez has been on his own and dealing with homelessness since late last year. Even so, he has continued to come to Camden High School and pass all of his classes. More recently, Pedro's girlfriend's mother offered him living space in a trailer. Pedro used his electrical skills to make the trailer suitable for his

needs. He plans to attend the Kaplan Career Institute after graduating, and he hopes to someday become a master electrician.

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Lashonda Midgett was raised by her aunt, but when her aunt passed away from cancer she was formally adopted at age 6 by her current foster mother. This tough start in life had an effect on Lashonda in school, and at private school her teachers hurt her self-esteem by questioning how much potential she had. But Lashonda forged ahead, developed a tremendous work ethic, and is set to graduate from MetEast High School and continue on to Montclair University. She hopes to one day become a screenwriter.

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By the time **Taylor Patterson** entered Camden High School, she had given birth to a child and been put out of two houses with her family. Despite the challenges she faced, Taylor found a way to excel. She has been on the honor roll for the last three years, and she has been the featured singer in two videos for the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program. She was also elected President of the JAG Career Association this school year. Taylor plans to attend Rowan College at Gloucester County and major in business administration. Once she earns her college degree, she wants to own a music production company.

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Rene Poveda has had to deal with extraordinary pain—while he was living with his aunt last year, she was murdered. The trauma shook Rene; not surprisingly, his grades and motivation suffered at first. But with support from his family and his community at Woodrow Wilson High School, Rene showed tremendous resilience and dedication to his studies. He is a student leader, a member of the Woodrow Wilson soccer team, and a Woodrow Wilson High School JROTC cadet. Rene has enlisted in the United States Army.

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Justin Ramirez struggled during his high school years. Instability at home led him to recede from the scene at school; he was not disrespectful, but he was discouraged. School was not his top priority.

Justin's senior year in the Camelot program at Camden High School has been dramatically different. His attendance skyrocketed, and he not only passed all of his classes but he became a member of the student government and the debate team. In addition, Justin began mentoring some of the underclassmen and sharing his story so they can find a way to persist through their own adversity. Justin was selected for paid internship at Lourdes Medical Center, and by December 2015 Justin will have a certification to work as a medical assistant.

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Nelson Rivera is a young man of outstanding character and a dedicated member of the Woodrow Wilson High School JROTC program. What makes him remarkable is that he is also a cancer survivor. Nelson battled leukemia and did not let it prevent him from striving for any goal. He will attend Camden County College in the fall, and he hopes to become a police officer.

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When there's a will, there's a way—that's been **Alaysia Robinson's** unofficial motto as she wound her way through high school. She experienced homelessness during her senior year, but Alaysia found a way to take care of herself and her academics, and now she'll be graduating in June. She plans to head to Camden County College in the fall and participate in the nursing program.

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Mahogany Robinson bounced around foster care placements as a child, and when she was a teenager she had a child of her own. But through it all, including a second pregnancy this year, Mahogany has remained steadfast about graduating from Camden High School and enrolling in college. Her commitment is paying off, as she plans to enroll at Atlantic Cape Community College this fall.

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Does **Luis Rodriguez** regret selling drugs on school property? Absolutely. But the mistake also changed his life, forcing him to reevaluate the direction he was heading and make a course correction. With the support of his parole officer and his Camden High School community, including the team at the Jobs for America's Graduates program, Luis is now driving toward public service as either a firefighter or a police officer. Luis plans to attend Camden County College this fall.

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Anthony Torres is a cross-country athlete, so he knows that the swift do not always win the race. Patience has served Anthony well as he has persevered through intense challenges such as living in someone's attic. But shortages of money and consistent housing will not deter this young man from graduating from Woodrow Wilson High School, enrolling at Montclair State University, and pursuing his dream of becoming a music therapist.

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For **Briana Tucker**, failure was never an option. She was sent to live with various family members and was homeless more than once as she was growing up. But she never gave up. Even though change was only constant at wherever she was calling home, Briana built a community. At church, Briana leads the youth choir. At the Gateway to College program, a partnership between the Camden City School District and Camden County College, Briana stays focused on succeeding academically. In the fall, Briana plans to attend XX and study music.

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When some students get louder throughout high school, it can actually be a positive development. That's been the case for **Roshad Williams**, who entered Woodrow Wilson High School as an extremely introverted freshman and is set to graduate as an excellent vocalist who has auditioned for the Apollo and a member of the National Honor Society. Roshad is a standout member of the WWHS Choir as well as a recording artist. He will attend Rowan at Gloucester County College and major in music.

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Jazzmine Wilson was doing fine, moving through Camden High School year after year until 2014. Then, her aunt, with whom Jazzmine and her sister were living with, left them alone in the apartment and did not come back. Jazzmine and her sister continued living there, and they got jobs in order to pay the rent. Although she had the pressure of providing for herself, Jazzmine continued to come to school and do well in her subjects. She will attend Camden County College in the fall and is interested in studying fashion.
