



PAYMON ROUHANIFARD
SUPERINTENDENT

PRESS RELEASE

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Camden Celebrates Remarkable Members of the Class of 2016

Supt. Rouhanifard and Chancellor Haddon Lead Community in Celebration of Graduates

June 9, 2016 – Camden, NJ – Superintendent Rouhanifard today celebrated 21 remarkable students 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 Camden County College campus in downtown Camden, Rouhanifard and Rutgers-Camden Chancellor Phoebe Haddon joined dozens of parents and special guests to honor these inspiring students and their accomplishments.

“These remarkable graduates represent the promise and hope of Camden; they embody the incredible potential and determination that our students demonstrate each day,” 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 2016 all the best as they move forward and look to make the most of their vast talents.”

The award ceremony was hosted by New Jersey resident and host of La Mega’s Ahora Si radio show, Marilyn Rodriguez. Rutgers-Camden Chancellor Phoebe Haddon will be the keynote speaker. The School District started the Remarkable Graduates awards in 2014 to recognize the extraordinary obstacles some students persevere through in order to earn their high school diploma and develop postsecondary plans.

The 2016 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.

Interviews available in English and Spanish. Event photos available upon request. Interested media who were unable to attend the ceremony are invited to profile or interview our Remarkable Graduates anytime in June. Camden City School District graduation is June 23, 2016.

Amir Anderson

Camelot’s Woodrow Wilson Accelerated Program

Accepted to Coppin State University and Camden County College Readiness Program

Always a good student growing up, as a freshman **Amir Anderson** struggled to make good choices with the new found freedoms of high school life. Roaming the halls and cutting class quickly turned into skipping school and getting in trouble with the law. Amir’s parents sent him away to live with relatives in order to escape the streets. After stays with family members in Georgia, Delaware, and Winslow, New Jersey, Amir returned to

Camden to complete his education. However, being home was a gift and a curse. Tempted by old friends and negative influences, Amir had a few setbacks before finally putting his old life behind him and recommitting to his education. With the support and encouragement of his teachers at Camelot's Woodrow Wilson Excel Academy, Amir made up his lost credits and secured a full-time job. Today Amir works at Macy's and is deciding whether to attend Coppin State University or the Camden County College Readiness Program this fall.

Kiana Blake

Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy

Benedict College

Maintaining a high GPA, participating in extra-curricular activities, and serving as a student-leader are enough to keep any young person busy. But for motivated and mature senior **Kiana Blake**, school is just one of many responsibilities. Charged with caring for her three younger siblings, Kiana fits her honors course work around daily babysitting duties and making sure her younger siblings get to and from school safely. When she is forced to miss class to care for her family, Kiana always takes the initiative to request her makeup assignments, and has never missed an academic deadline. Facing demands at home and in the classroom is too much for many students, but not Kiana. She sees her high school years as practice for the multi-tasking and extreme focus it will take to achieve her goals at Benedict College this fall.

Julia Caulk

Brimm Medical Arts High School

Rowan University (Choice Program)

Julia Caulk was home schooled from the first grade until age 15. When Julia returned to public school as a teenager, she was placed in the 6th grade. When others would be discouraged or tempted to give up, being the oldest in her class made Julia even more determined to succeed. Despite sometimes being ridiculed or temporarily demotivated, Julia demonstrated a strong sense of self-will, perseverance, and determination to succeed. She is graduating from Brimm Medical Arts High School this month at the proud age of 21, with plans to continue her education at Rowan University this fall.

Tynisa Clark

Woodrow Wilson High School

Camden County College

After being diagnosed with sickle cell anemia as an infant, **Tynisa Clark** struggled with health issues that interrupted her education for days and sometime even months at a time. However, the common symptoms of nausea, fatigue, and weakness have never once dampened this bright star's spirit. The second oldest of five children, Tynisa adores her family and will stop at nothing to help her younger brothers and sisters succeed. Described as a "ray of sunshine" by nearly everyone she meets, Tynisa manages to excel in school and make a positive impact on her community despite dealing with the daily health issues brought on by her disease. Tynisa plans to take her positive spirit and can-do attitude to Camden County College this fall.

Adriana Concepcion

Camelot's Camden City Transitional Academy

Camden County College

From traveling through tough neighborhoods to school each day, to consistently caring for her nine siblings, it took **Adriana Concepcion** incredible determination and focus to achieve her high school diploma. Since joining Camelot's Camden City Transitional Academy, Adriana has consistently improved her attendance, academics, and overall attitude towards life. Rather than focusing on the obstacles ahead of her, Adriana chooses to remain positive to strive toward greatness. She greets her peers and teachers each morning with a smile, and aspires to be a professional hair stylist serving her community. Adriana will attend Camden County Community College this fall to further her education and continue working toward a brighter future!

Niara Corbett

Woodrow Wilson High School

Camden County College, Medical Assistance Program

Like many of her fellow Remarkable Grads, **Niara Corbett** had the responsibility of being a caretaker thrust upon her at a very early age. Her father is a diabetic who lost his vision to the disease when Niara was just a child. In and out of the hospital regularly, Niara's father relies on her to administer his needles and medication, clean his wounds, and provide strength to her mother and other family members. Despite the heavy responsibilities of caring for her family, Niara has perfect attendance and always finds time to focus on her school work. Known for her sensitive and caring nature, this year Niara was selected as one of 10 apprentices studying at Cooper Hospital for a medical assistant certification. Niara believes that the experience she's gained caring for her parents will help her treat patients with kindness and compassion when she achieves her dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Donnia Crisdon

MetEast High School

Lincoln University

Donnia Crisdon may not have lived in Camden all of her life, but she is definitely from Camden. At the age of 8, Donnia's mother lost her battle to cancer. That's when Donnia started moving around, first to East Camden, and then to six homes over as many years. Through all of the ups and downs, Donnia's managed to maintain a 3.22 GPA and found her niche as a student leader at MetEast High School. Donnia is a School Ambassador who gives tours to visiting VIPs and middle school students, when she isn't busy running the school's annual blood drive or representing her classmates as a Board of Education's Student Board Representative. Donnia recognized the need to give young women in Camden more opportunities to build self-esteem and social skills, so she started a cheerleading squad. Donnia plans to attend Lincoln University this fall, where she will study communications in the hopes of using her voice to have a positive impact on young people growing up in urban communities.

Krystal Ford

Camden High School

West Virginia State University

Krystal Ford was raised by a single parent and experienced a lot of instability at home. There were many times her family lived without electricity and running water, and experienced prolonged periods of homelessness. Without a stable home, Krystal bounced between schools and lived with countless family members who were also struggling to take care of their own children. During high school, Krystal's mother told her to quit school and get her GED. Krystal had other plans. She insisted on achieving her diploma through the traditional route. When she entered Camden High School, Krystal received no credit for her entire freshman year due to her family constantly moving. Despite this setback, she threw herself into her school work and will graduate high school in four years. Krystal believes that having observed people constantly making bad life decisions has inspired her to take the responsibility to always make right decisions for her life. A member of JROTC and Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program, Krystal is a student leader and looks forward to attending West Virginia State University this fall.

Jeffrey Espinal

Camden High School

University of Valley Forge

When **Jeffrey Espinal** was just eight years old, his mother was deported. For the last 10 years, not a day has gone by when Jeffrey, his father, and his sister have not missed her. Raised by his father, Jeffrey continued to work hard to be a success in school and make his mother proud. Throwing himself into sports, Jeffrey found that baseball helped ease the pain of not having his mother around. After 10 years apart, Jeffrey's mother will return to live with the family in the United States this summer. Jeffrey kept his focus and his hard work has paid off. He is the Salutatorian for Camden High School and will attend the University of Valley Forge in Pennsylvania so that he is not far from his family, especially his mother.

Josepfina Hurst

Brimm Medical Arts High School

Rowan University

Josepfina Hurst's journey to her high school diploma has been fraught with obstacles. Josepfina first experienced homelessness as an elementary school student, and has been in and out of foster care for much of her life. Because of instability at home, from a very early age Josepfina took responsibility for protecting her younger siblings and keeping her family together. Just before entering high school, Josepfina had to deal with the tragic passing of her beloved uncle, who had provided stability and adult support to her and her siblings. The pressures of earning an income and finding a place for her siblings and herself to rest their head has not stopped Josepfina from performing academically. She is currently working to move into a teen housing program while also preparing for high school graduation and making plans to attend Rowan University this fall. When others might've cracked under the pressure, Josepfina faced the unrelenting hardships of her life head on; getting up each day determined to be successful.

Shaymiesha Jones

Camden High

Lincoln Technical School

The transition to high school was not an easy one for **Shaymiesha Jones**. Struggling with family issues and trying to find her niche in school, Shaymiesha's grades fell below 60% and she got into a fight that put her in trouble with the law. After being placed in night school for the remainder of the year, Shaymiesha was determined to get serious about her education. She enrolled in Camden High and stayed after school to get extra help from her teachers. By building relationships with the Camden High staff, Shaymiesha found new ways to deal with her problems. She made connections with her teachers that inspired her to push herself even further. Graduating this month represents the culmination of Shaymiesha's efforts to turn her life around. She looks forward to continuing to push herself toward greatness and will study at Lincoln Technical School this fall.

Miguel Martinez

MetEast High School

Rowan University

Miguel Martinez came to this country as a teenager from the Dominican Republic. He did not speak any English; however, that did not stop him one bit. He worked hard to learn the language. But Miguel was not satisfied with just learning English, he wanted to master it. To do this Miguel spent many long days at school, reading in the library or working with his teachers. Miguel will graduate this month with a 3.0 GPA, and also recently passed the citizenship test to become a US citizen. Miguel's story embodies the best of the American dream. He looks forward to attending college where he can continue to pursue his dreams and build a life for himself in his new country.

Sharday Myers

Camden High School

Armed Forces

Sharday Myers's senior year of high school began with a rocky start. No longer able to live with her mother, Sharday was a homeless teenager struggling to get uniforms, buy school supplies, and arrange transportation to and from Camden High School each day. Worrying about homework and exams is not easy when you are thinking about your next meal or where you will lay your head. But Sharday went to work, reaching out to organizations like Grand Slam and Camden Dreams to secure shelter and assistance for herself. While navigating various charities and social services, Sharday still maintained good attendance and her honor roll standing. Accepted into more than 20 colleges, Sharday plans to join either the Navy or Air Force so she can continue her education with support from the Armed Forces.

Giancarlos C. Perez

Camelot's Camden High Accelerated Program

Pierce College

A Camden native, **Giancarlos C. Perez** set a goal early on to one day move away from Camden and see what else the world has to offer. Faced with both academic and social challenges, Giancarlos made a few decisions early in his high school career that put his goals in jeopardy. Rather than allowing a few poor decisions to define him as a person, Giancarlos decided to focus on the future and use school and sports to help him achieve his dreams. Giancarlos signed up to volunteer at a local food shelter, and channeled his energy onto the field as a tremendous Camden High School football player. Giancarlos inspires his peers to reach their full potential by setting a positive example and leveraging his natural leadership skills. Giancarlos has been awarded a scholarship to attend Pierce College in Los Angeles, where he will play football and further his education.

Saleema Ross

Woodrow Wilson High School

Camden County College

When she moved to Camden from Bridgeton last year, **Saleema Ross** did not let fears of coming to a new city dampen her drive to succeed. She came to Camden for a fresh start and to conquer serious personal issues that threatened to make her quit school and become bitter about life. Saleema told herself that she was going to make it, and often says that she is proud of herself for overcoming serious life challenges to thrive in school and life. During her pregnancy, Saleema would walk across Camden each day to make it to school on time. The mother of a newborn, Saleema managed to graduate with honors while taking responsibility for her baby. Already an independent business woman trained through Amway, Saleema looks forward to growing her business and continuing her education at Camden County College this fall.

Denzel Sanders

Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy

Trade School - Smith and Simmons, Philadelphia

Denzel Sanders has carried many caskets in his young life, most recently in May when a childhood friend was killed. Denzel could have easily followed his middle school friends down the path of temptation that ends in dropping out, going to jail, or even being murdered. However, Denzel's self-belief and desire to improve himself have allowed him to go far without strong parental guidance or support at home. The product of a single family, Denzel knows how easy it is for Camden boys to fall victim to the temptations for the streets. That's why he spends his free time mentoring younger students and serving as a positive role model. Denzel is a personable young man loved by teachers, staff, and peers alike. A student leader at the Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy, Denzel has succeeded because he listens to others and knows when to ask for help and accept assistance.

Malaysia Scott

Gateway to College

Camden County College (with plans to transfer to Rutgers)

Built by self-will and fueled by a unique drive, **Malaysia Scott** will earn her high school diploma this month after overcoming struggles that she'd previously felt insurmountable. Bouts with severe anxiety and depression made it difficult for Malaysia to feel comfortable in school, and eventually ended with her withdrawing from her studies in order to improve her emotional well-being. As Malaysia worked hard to regain emotional stability in her life, she fell behind academically. Not able to attend school during the 10th grade, Malaysia used the setback to refocus her efforts on the fight to attain her diploma. She joined the Gateway to College Program, and despite continuous medical challenges, she caught up in her academics within a few semesters. This fall Malaysia will enroll as a full-time student at Camden County College before transferring to Rutgers University to study communications. Malaysia is a source of inspiration as she continued to persevere even when the light at the end of the tunnel appeared dim.

Jennifer Sewell

**Gateway to College
Camden County College**

Stay motivated. Be dedicated. And never allow anyone to bring you down. This is how **Jennifer Sewell** succeeded in school during times when giving up felt like the easiest path. Education was always enjoyable for Jennifer, but circumstances changed during middle school. The victim of rumors, bullying and emotional abuse, Jennifer was removed from her school and placed into an alternative program for her own protection. A witness to her mother's struggle with addiction and the daughter of a strong and encouraging father, Jennifer has an inner strength that drives her to push ahead even when the odds are stacked against her. This spring Jennifer will graduate at the top of her class, having already completed her college prerequisite courses and with six college credits under her belt. She will register for additional courses this summer and enroll as a full-time student at Camden County College in the fall.

Barbara Veloz

**Woodrow Wilson High School
Attending community college**

Barbara Veloz's very foundation was shaken when she lost both of her parents in high school. Grief is handled in many ways, but she has never been bitter or broken. Barbara maintained her positive spirit, and is well known at Woodrow Wilson High School for being a sincere and hard-working student who is sensitive to others. With the support of her brother, a Wilson graduate and honors student, Barbara will graduate high school this spring. She and her brother worked tirelessly to complete their education and secure their future. A truly kind spirit, Barbara is always cheerful and frequently asks others how they feel with no agenda other than to be kind. She and her brother look forward to moving to Florida after she graduates so they can have a fresh start with the help of an additional family support system.

Marvin Williams

Camelot's Woodrow Wilson Accelerated Program

Accepted to Cheyney University, Rowan University and Camden County Community College

Marvin Williams is the epitome of a hard worker. However, he overcame much to get to this point. By the time he was in middle school, Marvin's parents had separated and hardships hit his home heavily. All of a sudden he lived in a single parent home and was forced to move from place to place. Living in four towns in two years wreaked havoc on Marvin's academics, and he was retained twice. When he moved back to Camden, Marvin joined the Camelot Woodrow Wilson Excel Academy to recover lost credits and get back on track. With the support of his mother, teachers, and coaches, today Marvin is a standout student. He is a popular football player and track star who's been accepted to Cheyney University, Rowan University, and the Camden County College Readiness Program. He plans to study business and accounting at college this fall.