



FAIR LAWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CENTRAL OFFICE • 37-01 FAIR LAWN AVENUE • FAIR LAWN, NJ 07410

Contact: Liz Wellinghorst, Community Relations Liaison, 201-794-5500 ext. 7006

mwellinghorst@fairlawnschools.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A STATEMENT FROM MR. NICHOLAS J. NORCIA, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

ON THEIR WAY TO EARNING AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL

FAIR LAWN, N.J. (Oct. 8, 2019) - Fourteen Fair Lawn High School juniors arrive at school every day at 7:15 a.m., then quickly get on a bus for Bergen Community College, where they are enrolled in various courses, everything from math, to writing and history. They return to FLHS before lunch and spend the afternoon fulfilling their high school requirements; some head off to afterschool activities like sports, band and part-time jobs.

No doubt this is a long day, but the goal for these students is to earn an associate's degree their senior year, a month before they graduate from high school. The students are participating in BCC's Early College Program, which started in 2017 and currently partners with 11 high schools. BCC graduated its first high school cohorts in May 2019.

The dual-enrollment program, a competitive application process for students, requires 15 credits per semester while completing required courses for high school.

"We are so proud of our members of the Class of 2021 who are the first FLHS students to participate in the Bergen Community Early College Program," said FLHS Principal Paul Gorski. "They started school this September before their classmates did, and they are balancing their college and high school responsibilities beautifully. These students are on track to earn their Associate's Degree from BCC in May 2021, a month before their FLHS Graduation! Special thanks to Guidance Facilitator Stacy Morales for her instrumental role in getting this program off the ground."

The students have varying goals and motivations for attending early college.

"I wanted the college credits to be honest," said Fiona Lau, 16, who is also a member of the high school marching band, fall color guard, and violinist in honor's orchestra. "I don't know what I want to do when I grow up, so I wanted to see if I could find an interest too."

Early-college programs represent a national trend and so many advantages, not to mention financial savings.

“It’s something we feel is a great opportunity for our students,” said Fair Lawn Superintendent Nick Norcia, during the January 2019 board meeting when trustees approved the district’s participation in the program. “We think it’s something we can give back to our families who are feeling the crunch and financial burden.”

Fair Lawn Schools pays the full cost of the students’ tuition.

“Seeing this new initiative come to fruition makes me extremely proud as superintendent! To me, these 14 students won the lottery by not having to incur student loans or tuition for two years, but I am not sure they’ll realize that until they are a little older,” said Norcia jokingly.

Junior Samantha Thai said she wanted to “challenge herself” while also furthering her education, but added, “From a financial perspective, it would be less strainful on my family when I got to another college after high school.” Thai works two part-time jobs, is a member of the Honor Society, Student Council, winter fencing team, and spends her free time studying for the SAT.

Students who earn these credits in high school will ideally take fewer credits while in college, especially if they transfer to one of the state’s public universities.

“Transferring from any of New Jersey’s community colleges to the state’s public four-year institutions allows the student to transfer seamlessly and automatically enter his or her junior year of college at a fraction of the cost of a four-year institution,” said Jennifer Migliorino-Reyes, Dean for Student Support Services at BCC. “Students who earn an A.A. degree or A.S. degrees - transfer programs - will find that the state's public institutions will grant them full credit for general education requirements. All of this at the age of 18!”

That’s exactly the goal for one early college cohort.

“It gives me an advantage in the future,” said Mark Sinay, who juggles early college with lacrosse, judo, Jewish Club and volunteering at Valley Hospital. “When I graduate from FLHS, I graduate with an associate’s degree too.”

###

Photo: Early College.JPG

Caption:

1st Row (L to R): Faith Kwasnik, Kaelynn Amodia, Jung Hae Joon, Samantha Thai, Stav Kanza, Adriana Kopf, Dilara Kiper, Superintendent Nick Norcia

2nd Row (L to R): Principal Paul Gorski, Michael Natenzon, Mark Sinay, Fiona Lau, Frank Guadagnino, Finn Kliewer, Jasper Tumboken, Jason Lu