



# FAIR LAWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

## **STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

**Fair Lawn, N.J. (May 18, 2021)** - On May 13, 14 Fair Lawn High School (FLHS) seniors graduated virtually with an associate's degree from Bergen Community College (BCC), six weeks before they will receive their high school diploma with their Class of 2021 peers at Sasso Field on June 22.

Fair Lawn High School held an in-person pre-graduation ceremony in the school's auditorium to recognize the graduates and their families before BCC's virtual commencement ceremony for more than 2,000 graduates. FLHS Principal Paul Gorski, Vice Principal Nicole Mattina, Superintendent Nick Norcia, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Dr. Natalie Lacatena, and BOE Trustee Julie Mahan congratulated each graduate as they walked across the stage to receive their certificate of completion from FLHS; each graduate's photo was displayed on the auditorium screen and a few words were spoken about where they will be attending college (full list below) and what they plan to study.

"Congratulations to the first 14 students ever from Fair Lawn High School to graduate with an associate's degree before high school," said Superintendent Nick Norcia. "You made our dream of starting this program in our district become a reality."

FLHS's first graduating cohorts completed a dual-enrollment program from BCC's Early College Program, which they began in September 2019 (many students just 16 years old). Pre-pandemic, the students attended classes at BCC in the morning and were bused back to FLHS to finish their high school classes in the afternoon. On top of this, students participated in sports, clubs, worked part-time jobs, or juggled studying for their ACT/SAT tests.

Despite switching to remote classes this past year due to the pandemic, experiencing an intense two-year schedule and the trepidation of attending college with adults, the graduates say they'd do it again.

"I would 100 percent recommend the program because it is totally worth it," said Michael Natenzon, one of the BCC graduates. "It was a lifetime opportunity and it may be hard and intimidating, but it was worth it."

"The best part for me was to experience what college is all about, to learn about the freedom, that was huge," said Finn Kliever.

FLHS Guidance Counselor Stacy Maio was the lead contact for the students for the past two years, helping to guide them through the BCC program and making sure they were on track to graduate from FLHS.

“It has been a pleasure to get to work with you and witness the growth, maturity and transformation each of you has undergone since walking into the conference room that day (at the start of the program). You walked in as high school kids, nervous and excited to embark on this challenge, and you are walking out as young adult college graduates with confidence, independence and an associate’s degree! Congratulations!” said Mrs. Maio.

“These outstanding graduates are a testament to the Fair Lawn High School spirit. They persevered through something unimaginable and rolled with every punch and never skipped a beat,” said Principal Paul Gorski. “You showed us what is achievable and there are many who want to follow in your footsteps,” said FLHS Principal Paul Gorski.

Ten FLHS cohorts have already enrolled in BCC’s 2021-2023 program.

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**Photo Caption:** The BCC graduates attended a pre-celebration in the FLHS auditorium with their families.

(L to R): Principal Paul Gorski, Faith Kwasnik (University of Scranton), Jasper Tumboken (Stevens Institute of Technology), Samantha Thai (Rutgers University), Michael Natenzon (Rutgers University), Kaelynn Amodia (Rochester Institute of Technology), Fiona Lau (Rochester Institute of Technology), Frank Guadagnino (California State University, Fullerton), Finn Kliewer (New Jersey Institute of Technology), Stav Kanza (Rutgers University), Dilara Kiper (Rutgers Newark), Jung Hae Joon (University of Florida), Adriana Kopf (Rutgers Newark), Mark Sinay (Drew University), Superintendent Nick Norcia. Not present: Jason Wu (Penn State).

**Photo Credit:** Fair Lawn Public Schools