Sebastian is so thankful for the after school program!

Meet Sebastian Fermin. Sebastian is a 10-year-old student in our after school program at School 15. He moved from The Dominican Republic to Paterson when he was 2 years old and has been attending School 15 since Pre-K.

Sebastian’s friends told him about the Full Service Community School (FSCS) afterschool program and his teacher encouraged him to join. When the Federal FSCS grant expired, PEF collaborated with several partner organizations to apply for 21st Century Community Learning Center grant to keep the afterschool program going.

Sebastian remembers his first day of school fondly and says he has always liked school, since that first day. He said, “Everyone was so welcoming, and it was so much fun!” His favorite subject is Art, especially painting. His mom, Martha, is immensely proud of him because he does well in all his subjects. His favorite hands-on project during the summer program was making paper look like ancient Egyptian papyrus paper.

Over the summer, Sebastian really enjoyed going on the field trips. They went to the mountains, Paterson Great Falls, and the zoo. He loved learning about the animals, especially the gorillas because they are his favorites.

He appreciates that all this is preparing him for a bright future! When he grows up, he wants to either be an Artist, an Engineer or play professional sports. He said he knows that those are only a few of his options and hasn’t really decided yet. That’s what we want for all our kids. Real options! Sebastian wants to be successful in whatever career he chooses so that he can give back to his community, especially giving food to the poor.

Mom shared her appreciation for the program by saying, “Sebastian has been doing really good in the program. Thanks to all the people involved because this really helped us as parents to get through this tough time. I give the program credit for him being more responsible and more independent. I don’t have to go behind him reminding him to do his work.”

Sebastian wanted to have the final word. He said, “Thank you to all of the teachers and everyone that made the program possible, because without them I could not be where I am right now!”
A Message from our Executive Director

Join me in celebrating the return to in-person learning for the majority of Paterson students!

Back-to-school has always been a mix of anticipation and anxiety, but this year the feelings were intensified! Students and adults were emerging from up to 18 months of shut-down for some and isolation for others. Many were traumatized by the loss of loved ones. We were still in the midst of a pandemic with so many unknowns and so many “what if” scenarios.

For the most part, it turned out to be a wonderful reunion! Children and adults were excited to see old friends and make new ones. Some were relieved just to be in the same space as their peers. For some, they’re relieved simply to get out of the house and return to some level of “normalcy.”

I appreciate the intense work that was done by Paterson Public Schools to ensure that we are prepared as can be under the circumstances. There have been and will be quarantines as we continue to learn how to coexist with the COVID-19 virus.

As we move through this school year, PEF is focused on supporting healing centered engagement and restorative practices in schools. These are strategies that don’t take a lot of resources, don’t cost a lot of money, yet have tremendous impact. We want to ensure that children and adults feel safe, respected, and supported. The strategies help to build trusting relationships and improve the climate and culture inside our school buildings. We’ve also trained community youth service workers, so that the positive cultures continue into afterschool spaces.

We’ve added a social and emotional learning component to our Talk Read Sing initiative by including books, tips, and tools that promote social and emotional wellness for parents, care givers, and the children.

PEF stands ready to help in any way that aligns with our mission. We’ve received a second year of 21CCLC funding for after school programming. Our office is overflowing with books that we are eager to get into children’s hands. We’re revamping our college track workshop to engage more students in planning for life after high school. We’re excited to support the expansion of Full Service Community Schools.

Let’s resolve to meet our children and families where they are and do our absolute best to move them toward a high quality education.

The Paterson Reads Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) was adopted by the Paterson City Council!

This means the city is an official partner in our work to make sure every child is reading on grade level by the end of the 3rd grade. Having the city sign-on as a key player will help us to impact greater numbers of Paterson’s families and children.

The CSAP was developed collaboratively by PEF, Paterson Public Schools, and 15 community based organizations who serve Paterson children and families.

The Paterson Reads Collaborative distributed a total of 15,000 books this year! 2,000 of those came from the customers of Bookends bookstore. Students received bundles of 5 or 6 brand new books, selected from the district’s grade level reading list.

We’re happy to report that 7 laundromats and a Paterson Housing Authority site now have reading centers so kids can have easy access to books.
Talk Read Sing!

PEF’s *Talking is Teaching: Talk Read Sing* program gives parents and caregivers the tools to talk, read and sing more with their young children, in any language, beginning at birth. This helps to increase meaningful interactions that are critical to healthy brain development and language acquisition.

84 *Trusted Messengers* are trained and engaged in one-on-one parent outreach! They have connected by phone or home-visitation, with 840 parents, who received our Talk Read Sing tote bags. The trusted messengers help parents make the best use of the contents of the tote-bags. Made specifically for families, caregivers and early educators, these resources help enrich a child's early language experiences by providing research-based tips for talking, reading, and singing with young children every day beginning from birth, in any language.

Several community leaders answered our call to help us reach more parents and caregivers. They recorded Talk Read Sing public service announcements. in English, Turkish, Arabic and Spanish. The PSAs ran repeatedly on Paterson Community Television, reaching an audience of 80,000 homes! You can find them on our Paterson Education Fund YouTube Channel.

Many adults and children submitted videos of themselves reading children’s books for our Paterson Reads a Book campaign.

You can join the campaign by using #PatersonReads to post pictures and videos of adults reading to kids or reading a children’s book into a camera!

*Talking is Teaching: Talk Read Sing*, a program of The Clinton Foundation’s Too Small to Fail initiative, is funded in Paterson by The Nicholson Foundation, The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation and The Turrell Fund.
Thanks to our Donors and Volunteers!

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Our Mission

To stimulate community action for change so that the Paterson Public Schools ensure that all Paterson children achieve high standards.

Our Goals:

- Build the community’s capacity to support, monitor and advocate for education improvement.
- Educate the community about changing education needs, enabling the community to respond.
- Serve as a vehicle for community participation in decision-making around public education.

Special Thanks to Alveria Spencer as she steps off our board, having completed a third term!
Welcome Dr. Melissa Baralt!
Celebrating Nelly Hidalgo Celi!

And we thought 2020 was tough! We were hit hardest this year with the loss of our friend and colleague Nelly Celi. Nelly was our Paterson Reads Program Manager and so much more. She was a go-getter, relationship builder and a perfect nudge. We used to joke that she personally knew half the people in Paterson. As it turns out - it was true! One day she was handing out books and greeting parents at the Great Falls, planning for the next event, and then the next day she was gone. We miss her so much.

Nelly’s passion for children and reading and her belief in PEF’s mission, brought us together 6 years ago. She was such a valued member of our team, always calling it as she saw it. Although her job didn’t require it, she was fully enmeshed in all aspects of our work, even to the point of becoming a Restorative Practices trainer. She was dedicated to making sure Paterson parents and children had access to books and other learning resources. She lived literacy. She had low (really low!) tolerance for people and bureaucracies that got in the way of progress and worked quickly to find solutions.

We’re so glad to have known Nelly and thankful that we took opportunities to celebrate her while she was with us. We will continue to celebrate her and her legacy! RIP Nelly.

Healing Centered Engagement!

We have broadened our Restorative Practices work to embrace the NJ Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) initiative. Two Paterson schools participated in a NJ HCE pilot led by The Foundation for Educational Administration. The pilot provided training and coaching, to help teachers, administrators, staff, families, and community groups develop a plan to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma. Members of the PEF staff served on the Development Team, Thought Leaders Team, and Coach to 3 schools. More than 300 Paterson administrators, teachers, support staff and community partners participated in 6 hours or more of training and planning, to help the school communities become more healing centered.

This work will help Paterson schools in their quest to move away from harsh exclusionary discipline to improving climate and culture, promoting social and emotional wellbeing, building positive relationships, and repairing harm through dialogue and accountability. We look forward to continuing this work and expanding it to more Paterson schools!

PEF trained 271 adults to implement restorative practices this year. There are now 15 Paterson Public Schools with trained adult and youth Circle Keepers!

Here are some recommended healing-centered strategies:
- Invest time in fostering transformational, not just transactional relationships from the start
- Build authentic partnerships with students and families
- Become a part of the community in which you work/serve
- Be relentless about noticing strengths
- Uphold relationships as the main vehicle for learning and healing
- Cultivate our ability to co-regulate – to lend your calm to others
The College Guide is Now Digital!

For 15 years, students at John F. Kenned High school produced an annual College Guide for Paterson Students. The students were forced to take a break in 2020, but they’re back at it! JFK Communications students have published their first fully digital College Guide! You can find the guide on our website at https://paterson-education.org/high-schools-2/.

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Graduating Every Paterson Child!