



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 21, 2022

Contact: Paul Brubaker  
973-518-2298

## **DISTRICT RECOGNIZED FOR EQUITY-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP BY MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY**

*“The future of equity is in Paterson,” says university professor*

PATERSON – How do educational leaders build greater equity in their schools and make sure that every student and staff member is seen, heard, and respected? The answer may be to do what Paterson Public Schools has been doing.

“I truly believe that the future of equity is in Paterson,” said Dr. Patricia Virella, a Montclair State University associate professor at a meeting of the university’s Network for Educational Renewal (MSUNER) on Wednesday.

Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, Virella led district administrators in weekly sessions in which participants examined multiple domains in district schools and administration to identify priorities where equity needed to be instilled to a greater degree. In other words, these were difficult discussions in which people identified personal biases and realized the negative impact they have on the work of educating students. There were also realizations of the benefits of creating a more equitable environment.

Virella, who had presented the district with a special award to recognize its efforts to build greater equity, gave high praise to Superintendent of Schools Eileen Shafer for taking the initiative.

“It’s not often that leaders take this bold stance,” said Virella. “Although she wants to give her teachers and leaders space to share, she also wants them to know there are certain things that cannot happen. More importantly, she wants them to know that there are wonderful things that can happen.”

Shafer and other district administrators began addressing equity issues after the 2020 death of George Floyd as he was being held down by a police officer. Many of the district’s students were involved in the local activism that took place after Floyd’s death.

In the midst of the pandemic shutdown, Assistant Superintendent Cicely Warren led the effort to establish a **Social Justice Committee** of 60 individuals. Later that year, district and school administrators spent two days engaged in **Courageous Conversations**, a protocol for effectively engaging, sustaining, and deepening interracial dialogue based on the work of Glenn Singleton, author of *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in*

*Schools.* In those conversations, district leaders spoke freely about their experiences working with each other and in the district’s school communities.

Also last year, the district launched the **Youth Equity Stewardship** program in five schools, to elicit the perspectives and ideas of our students in building greater equity in our schools.

This year, the district will focus on giving the schools the resources and training they need to identify equity goals in their school communities.

With Shafer as she accepted MSUNER’s “Making A Difference” award were Warren, Assistant Superintendent Joanna Tsimpedes, and Deputy Director of Accelerated & Innovative Programs Rita Route.

“On behalf of everyone at Paterson Public Schools who has been working on these initiatives, I accept this recognition today with deep gratitude but also with a lot of humility,” said Shafer. “We know that our work is far from finished. But your recognition today indicates that we are on the right track and motivates us to keep working hard to make Paterson Public Schools a place where everyone is seen, heard, and has value.”

###