



Passaic Public Schools

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Passaic Public Schools and More Than Bootstraps Announce Partnership to Increase First Generation Passaic Student Entry and Success Rates in Higher Education

PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY – June 23, 2020 - The Passaic Public Schools and the New Jersey non-profit, [More Than Bootstraps](http://MoreThanBootstraps.org), announced today their partnership aimed at increasing the number of first-generation students entering and succeeding in higher education.

More Than Bootstraps is a non-profit organization created by a group of educators seeking to level the playing field and remove some of the substantial barriers that first-generation college students encounter in accessing and succeeding in higher education. More Than Bootstraps accomplishes this by employing a near-peer mentoring model. This model uses college student peer leaders from within the community to guide high school students through the application and college assimilation process. The peer leaders, by working as a mentoring cohort, will strengthen their own college-going identities in order to improve their success in higher education. Through this framework More Than Bootstraps aims to:

- Increase the number of high school students applying for and being accepted into institutions of higher education;
- Increase the number of high school students applying for and receiving scholarships and financial aid;
- Educate high school students and their families on the benefits and expectations of higher education and engage them in the college application process;
- Provide support to Passaic Public Schools teachers and counselors;
- Provide support for Passaic high school graduates through the challenging early years of higher education.

More Than Bootstraps selects students based on their desire to attend college and their commitment to the program rather than focusing only on their grade point average. High school students in the program receive a monthly stipend, a computer and additional funds for technology. Peer leaders

receive funds, and additional resources are also available to help them with some of their college-related expenses.

Passaic Public Schools is classified as a District Factor Group (DFG) “A,” the lowest socioeconomic level given by the New Jersey Department of Education. Its diverse student body is comprised of a large percentage of student groups that are underrepresented in higher education, primarily Hispanic/Latino (93.35% as of October 15, 2018). The vast majority of these students will be first-generation college students who lack college assimilation skills and family support.

Nationally, the college matriculation rate for first-generation, low-income students, is far lower than for students whose parents had some postsecondary education. Many first-generation high school students find the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) a significant hurdle. Research indicates that many first-generation college-bound students are not successfully completing the financial aid applications, leaving much-needed aid on the table. When first-generation students are able to access the aid that they need, they often matriculate at local public Pell-serving institutions, where resources are limited. Pell-serving institutions have an average six-year graduation rate of 39%. This means that more than half of these students will find themselves in debt and without a degree at the end of six years.

Research indicates that academic challenges are not the primary obstacle to the success of first-generation students in higher education. In addition to financial obstacles, stereotype threat and imposter syndrome are among the many psychological challenges that influence first-generation, low socio-economic students’ success.

In coordination with the Passaic Public Schools, More Than Bootstraps is using the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year to assess the needs of the district, students, and families, build awareness of the program, and liaise with students, counselors, administrators, and families.

Additional information about More Than Bootstraps can be found at www.morethanbootstraps.org.

ABOUT MORE THAN BOOTSTRAPS

More Than Bootstraps builds on the strengths and resources of first-generation college students, the majority of whom are students of color from low-income communities. Students in More Than Bootstraps will succeed not just through their individual efforts and grit but through their membership in and contribution to a peer community, engaged in a shared enterprise focused on success in getting to and succeeding in college. More Than Bootstraps is a 501(c)3 organization, Tax ID 83-2245008.

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