



Constitution High School graduate Tatiana Williams-Taylor plans to attend Duke University on a full scholarship.

— PHOTO BY ABDUL SULAYMAN/TRIBUNE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

Simply the best: Meet four Philly School District graduates from Class of 2022

Chanel Hill
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

The Class of 2022 excelled in the classroom, served their community, won awards and made memories that will last a lifetime.

After years of hard work, late nights and a lot of determination in the face of a global pandemic, these four seniors have shown exceptional leadership, courage, dedication and endurance during their time in the School District of Philadelphia.

These graduates come from all walks of life — different high schools, programs and extracurriculars — but together they're poised to become the next generation of leaders who will make a difference in their communities.

Tatiana Williams-Taylor

Tatiana Williams-Taylor is passionate about giving back to the community and assisting others. She is the president of the National Honor Society at Constitution High School and has been a part of New Options More Opportunities, a youth development nonprofit, for the last several years.

She was involved in various projects and programs concerning the study of the brain and nervous system at Ivy League colleges like Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania during her high school years.

Williams-Taylor is one of 150 students nationwide to be awarded the \$20,000 National Coca-Cola Scholarship and the only student in the School District of Philadelphia to receive the award in a decade.

"It's truly an honor to be named a Coca-Cola scholar," Williams-Taylor said. "It's a very competitive scholarship where only 150 students are selected nationwide out of over 65,000 applicants. I'm looking forward to connecting with their alumni in the future."

She plans to attend Duke University on a full scholarship and study neuroscience.

Souleymane Diarra

A student-athlete, Souleymane Diarra has maintained above a 3.5 GPA while being a part of his school's wrestling program at Overbrook High School.

"I never wrestled before until I got to high school," Diarra said. "One

GRADUATES • 4A

Philly officials want you to reimagine the Benjamin Franklin parkway

Maria Pulcinella
WHYY

Philadelphia is embarking on a new phase of its long-term plan to redesign the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

The goal is to transform the area from Logan Circle to the Philadelphia Museum of Art into a more welcoming space for pedestrians and cyclists.

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation on Tuesday announced the Reimagine the Benjamin Franklin Parkway planning effort, a collaboration between Parks & Rec, the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, & Sustainability, and international design firm Design Workshop.

Philly officials say they want to work with the community to create a "world-class public realm plan" for permanent changes that will improve the iconic parkway in terms of appeal, functionality, and traffic safety. The city characterized the changes it seeks as "people-centric."

Officials outlined a four-phase plan in which the city will collect public feedback, both in person and digitally, that will eventually inform preferred plans for the parkway. To kick off Phase 1, the city wants to hear from residents about their vision for the parkway's future.

Matt Radar, president of the Parkway Council, said in a statement that the project represents the next stage in a "decade-long journey to right the balance between 'park' and 'parkway.'"

The parkway has evolved since its inception in the 1870s. Inspired by the Champs-Élysées in Paris, it aimed to improve connections between Center City and a growing Fairmount Park.

In a 2013 study by the University of Pennsylvania's PennPraxis, researchers noted the parkway became "less



Looking east toward City Hall from Eakins Oval. — WHYY PHOTO/EMMA LEE

an elegant pleasure drive to the park and more an automotive conduit to the city."

The 1960s redesign of Eakins Oval as a traffic circle, the authors wrote, "tipped the balance in favor of the car over the pedestrian experience."

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell, in announcing the initiative, said the city wants to hear from both residents and visitors as it makes the parkway a greener space that is more accessible and inclusive.

Those interested in getting involved can take the city's first parkway survey, which will be open through Aug. 15 and is available in 10 languages.

On Saturday, June 18, the public is invited to participate in an interactive design and planning event at The Oval XP, a pop-up festival situated at the base of the art museum steps. Visitors will be able to weigh in on their preferences for the parkway's future, touch-

ing on transportation, amenities, programming, and attractions.

The design team will also collect public feedback at the Wawa Welcome America concert slated to take place on Monday, July 4. Local ambassadors will similarly gather resident feedback through door-to-door canvassing and community conversations.

The engagement initiative comes in the wake of a drawn-out and often heated process of soliciting public input and weighing plans to narrow Washington Avenue in South Philadelphia, considered one of the city's most dangerous streets.

A wrench was thrown in that process last week when City Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson refused to introduce legislation to make the changes in his district. Safety advocates have since urged the city to press ahead with narrowing the corridor.

This article first appeared on WHYY.org.

Violence prevention groups struggle as city grants delayed

Philly poised to give more money, but earlier grantees still haven't been paid

Sammy Caiola
WHYY

Geanna Williams-Davis beams at the entrance of a basement room in the Shepard Recreation in West Philly, greeting a line of still-waking adolescents headed in for breakfast. They take plates of baked goods, fruit and cereal before sitting down at an arrangement of folding tables that will serve as their classroom for the day.

The first Saturday in June marked the start of the summer session for Positive Choices, Williams-Davis' program designed to teach children emotional management and life skills that could prevent them from getting involved in gun violence. Week one was a multimedia production workshop.

"Our kids, all they see is murder, drugs, violence," she said. "We're trying to show them something else."

Positive Choices is one of 41 nonprofit-led efforts selected in September 2021 to receive support from the City of Philadelphia's

Targeted Community Investment Grant (TCIG) program, then in its fourth round. The city will soon announce the fifth round of the program, which will set aside more money for a new cohort of recipients.

City leaders have touted this grant program as a core feature of their gun violence prevention strategy. But nonprofit leaders who were selected for the last round of TCIG awards say the program has been plagued with difficulties and delays. Multiple groups said they had to cover program expenses out-of-pocket for longer than anticipated, fell behind on contractor payments and youth stipends, or had to eat the cost of certain events or supplies because their requests for payment were denied. Groups had the option of spending upfront and getting reimbursed or having the city's fiscal sponsor pay for program expenses directly.

"It's a bit much, if you're awarded a grant in September and it's almost

PREVENTION • 4A



Cameron Larke, 11, is a participant in the Positive Choices program, which aims to teach kids conflict resolution and life skills, such as stock trading, and introduce them to careers like auto mechanics and video production.

— KIMBERLY PAYNTER/WHYY

Council orders schools to replace water fountains

Stephen Williams
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

City Council's unanimous vote this past week to require the School District of Philadelphia to replace all of its water fountains with lead-filtering hydration stations by 2025 is a good first step, but it's a temporary fix, said 4th District Councilmember Curtis Jones Jr.

"Some of these school buildings are just too old. At the end of the day, we need to take a look and evaluate all of our facilities," Jones said. "If you look at the state of physical plants in our schools, we are looking at a \$5 billion problem. We have to address all of that."

Lead contamination in drinking water is a problem across the School District of Philadelphia, according to a February 2022 report by public interest research group PennPIRG. The group reviewed testing information available on about 2,000 fountains and found that 98% of schools tested had at least one tap where lead was detected in

the water and over 60% of all tested outlets had lead contamination.

Some schools' fountains showed extremely high levels of lead contamination, such as one at the Duckrey School in North Philadelphia.

"It's not too much to ask that schoolchildren have drinking water that is entirely lead free — in fact, it should be essential," said At-Large Councilmember Helen Gym. "I am honored to have worked alongside PennPIRG and PennEnvironment on this legislation and campaign since 2016. The campaign for clean, safe, and lead free water has not only resulted in a swift victory, but also kick-started a billion dollar school modernization efforts for the first time in decades. We will continue to organize with school communities across this city, fighting for healthy learning environments for every student."

In June 2021, PennEnvironment, PennPIRG, the Black Church Center for

LEAD • 4A