

PATERSON PRESS

# Paterson educator claims he was discriminated against — because he's white

*3-minute read*

**Joe Malinconico** Paterson Press

Published 4:11 a.m. ET April 26, 2023

PATERSON — A city educator has filed a racial discrimination lawsuit against the school district, claiming he has been denied more than 45 promotions since 2016 and in only one instance was interviewed for a job he sought.

Thomas Franco of Ridgewood said in his lawsuit that he is white, while 95% of the people who have administrative positions in the Paterson district are African American or Hispanic. He claimed in the suit that the people hired for the positions he pursued had less experience than he has and inferior academic credentials.

In his suit, Franco alleged the district “does not provide the same opportunities for advancement to White applicants as it does to minority candidates.” The lawsuit said the district “is denying opportunities to Mr. Franco and refusing to promote him based on the color of his skin and not his qualifications.”

**More from the city's schools:** This is what Paterson's new superintendent of schools will be paid

Franco’s lawyer, Evan Goldman, said many of the promotions he sought were for principal and vice principal, positions for which he has the requisite state certificates.

“Clearly, he was qualified to at least get interviewed for those positions,” Goldman said.

The Paterson school district’s general practice is not to comment on pending lawsuits.

Franco currently is working as a guidance counselor at Paterson’s International High School, where his salary is \$82,555, according to district payroll records. He started working in

Paterson in 2016 and had been at a middle school for five years. He said in his lawsuit that his district evaluations rated his job performance as “highly effective” and “effective.”

Before coming to Paterson, Franco worked seven years at Hudson County School of Technology in North Bergen, seven years at Manchester Regional High School, and two years in Asbury Park Public Schools, according to his lawsuit.

**Paterson Press:** As development surges in Paterson, why is the tax base falling?

Franco said he took a job in Paterson because it was closer to his home in Passaic County, “with more opportunities and a student population who would benefit from his experience in similar, low-income communities.”

In addition to the district, Franco’s lawsuit named as co-defendants four assistant superintendents, including one Hispanic man, Luis Rojas, and three African Americans: Cheryl Coy, David Cozart and Cicely Warren. Franco said in his suit that they were responsible for his not being interviewed for the promotions.

Many lawsuits against the district also include the superintendent as one of the defendants. But Franco did not name soon-to-retire Superintendent Eileen Shafer, who is white, in his complaint.

*Joe Malinconico is editor of Paterson Press.*

*Email: [editor@patersonpress.com](mailto:editor@patersonpress.com)*