

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

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Michael Salvatore, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Schools, Long Branch Public Schools

Dr. Michael Salvatore has served as the Long Branch Superintendent of Schools for more than seven years. Under his leadership, all nine of the Long Branch Public Schools have achieved Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification and have become state and national models. “Our schools live and breathe green,” said Dr. Salvatore. “We achieve this by incorporating sustainable principles into our teaching, learning, thoughts and actions.”

By creating a culture of sustainability, Dr. Salvatore hopes to influence early learners and promote actions that impact the students far beyond their formal schooling. Dr. Salvatore brings humor, passion and inspiration to his work in the district and is known as a thought leader in education. Recently, Dr. Salvatore was named Superintendent of the Year for Monmouth County. He was also recognized by the United States Department of Education for collaboratively leading sustainability initiatives in his district that resulted in two schools being recognized as U.S. Green Ribbon schools in the same year, which is unprecedented.

Progressive and innovative, Dr. Salvatore’s team works hard to improve the future of the district’s schools and the planet. Three Long Branch Public Schools, (George L. Catrambone Elementary, Long Branch Middle School and Morris Avenue Elementary School), have achieved Sustainable Jersey’s higher-level silver certification and six schools have achieved the bronze-level certification. In addition, Catrambone School, the middle school and the high school each received the Sustainability Champion Award for earning Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification with the highest point level in their respective category.

Leading a Strong Sustainability Team

When asked if he has advice for other school administrators, Dr. Salvatore said, “You must find the students, teachers and leaders in the community who are passionate about sustainability, whether it be organic farming, energy efficiency, solar or something new. If you discover the fervid people and empower them, then amazing things unfold.” Recognizing the need to add



administrative support, Dr. Salvatore created a position for a sustainability officer to oversee implementation and communication of the sustainability initiatives; the school board allocated the funds to fill the position. In just one year, Diego DeAssis, the Long Branch Public Schools social and environmental sustainability officer, has worked collaboratively with many gifted participants including the facilities director, Ann Degnan, and the principal at George L. Catrambone Elementary School, Christopher Volpe, to establish protocols for advancing the vision of sustainability.

Elementary Students Launch #StrawFREEinLB Campaign

Students from the George L. Catrambone School have started an impressive campaign to “Just Say No to Straws.” Their inspiration came after the students participated in a community service project to clean up the beaches of Long Branch. Students were surprised by the considerable number of drinking straws they found in the sand. Third grade students studied the negative effect straws have on New Jersey’s beaches and, as a team, they came up with a plan to stop using plastic straws in the cafeteria both at breakfast and lunch. It took perseverance, but nearly the entire school has stopped



using straws. Dr. Salvatore said, “Today students in the school walk right past the straw bin in the cafeteria without any temptation to use a straw. They know the plastic straws cause more harm than good and last forever with little to no way to recycle them.” You can follow the hashtag #StrawFREEinLB to see student videos and progress updates; here are links for two videos: [GLC Just Say No To Straws](#) and [Save the Sea Turtles](#). The students are now working to make the City of Long Branch straw free. They visit local businesses and ask them to sign a pledge. A handful of businesses have already signed on. Dr. Salvatore said, “These students are very persuasive. I encourage them to present their efforts at the school board meetings because it is hard to say no to them. Recently, I went to a chamber of commerce meeting and every person at the table had a straw in their water. I mentioned that the students would be upset if they saw the straws. By the next meeting, the straws were gone.”

Comprehensive Health Center for School District Staff

The Long Branch Public Schools have taken an innovative approach to promoting staff wellness. Dr. Salvatore explained, “Faced with unpredictable health insurance premiums, the school district and union leadership came together to develop a plan to take control of our financial destiny and health. Four years ago, the school district approved the capital expense to build a wellness center at the Long Branch High School to provide medical support for all staff and their dependents.” The Partnership Health Center Long Branch (PHCLB) provides basic wellness and medical needs to its members; members do not pay a co-pay or deductibles. The center is open seven days and all PHCLB services are accessed on a voluntary basis. The wellness center is located centrally in the school district on school property, making it a convenient location to all work sites. An experienced medical team provides comprehensive services, from wellness care to urgent care, and the center provides monthly newsletters, diagnostic services, as well as nutrition, chiropractic care, physical therapy and programs targeting staff wellness and activities. Regular meetings with the health center and the Long Branch School District business administrator provide a forum to review the status of operations and an opportunity to discuss improved and expanded services. Dr. Salvatore said that the popular yoga program and the new acupuncture services (soon to be rolled out) are a result of staff input.

Energy Efficiencies Result in Cost Savings

Dr. Salvatore explained, “Originally, my interest in sustainability grew out of the need to preserve quality while facing uncertain revenue projections. The school district faced a fiscal cliff that threatened to reduce our resources and degrade our high quality educational system. So, we observed the efficiency of our energy and developed a plan to bridge the difference.” In 2011, the Long Branch Board of Education hired Cenergistic to help identify potential energy



savings. As part of this contract, a full-time energy manager actively tracks and monitors utility usage at every

school building. The program uses EnergyCAP which reports a clear picture of each meter's cost and consumption history for months or years. For example, the George L. Catrambone School was built with LEEDs for Schools Design guidelines. The building is new and has high efficiency equipment, glazed windows and more. After analyzing the bills, the school district was able to identify areas for improvement. The Catrambone School has cut its energy consumption by 40 percent, resulting in about \$20,000 in annual utility cost savings. The Long Branch Middle School demonstrated a 14 percent energy use reduction and achieved over \$95,000 annual reduction in energy costs. The Long Branch High School demonstrated a 14 percent energy use reduction and achieved over \$146,000 annual reduction in energy costs. Key changes included efforts to update and properly use the school's energy management system and promote simple behavioral changes such as turning lights off when not in use and unplugging appliances. The schedules for heat and air conditioning were updated, the temperature in the hot water loop was reduced and solar panels are installed on eight schools.



The students help by leading the behavior changes in the schools. A group of second and fourth graders participate in the PowerSave Schools program, which is a collaboration between New Jersey Natural Gas, the Alliance to Save Energy and Sustainable Jersey for Schools. The program incorporates energy-efficiency as part of the curricula and educates students through hands-on projects designed to help schools save energy and money through changes in behavior, operations and maintenance procedures. The students participate in the annual Ocean Fun Day at Sandy Hook to present all of their work with saving energy. Their exhibit is interactive and spreads an energy saving message of Last Out, Lights Out!



Farmers Market School-to-Work Program

Long Branch Public Schools provide a School-to-Work program for students to sell produce at the West End Farmers Market and other outlets. It is a transitional program that focuses on job readiness. Long Branch Public Schools use the school gardens to incorporate job skills training into the special education curriculum by teaching students how to create and sell products. Some of these students have unique challenges in the classroom, so being able to use the garden as an outside classroom has yielded great results and the student response has been very positive. In addition to the School-to-Work students, the gardens provide benefits to all of the students in the district. Each school has a student green team that designs, outlines, plants, waters and collects the harvest. Dr. Salvatore said, "We're working to create a culture of sustainability. Our students play a key role in our efforts to teach and promote sustainable practices into our Long Branch Public Schools culture, as they participate in the process of selling a crop of organically-grown lettuce, produced by our very own elementary students." In 2016, the Joseph M. Ferraina Early Childhood Learning Center, a pre-school in the district, received a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey for Schools grant funded by the New Jersey Education Association for a 1,000-plant aeroponic greenhouse that was installed with district matching funds. Students from across the district work in the greenhouse as part of the curriculum and contribute produce to the farm stand.



Want to learn more? Read about the district's sustainability achievements in the green team's annual report: [Long Branch Green Team 2018 Annual Report](#).