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John Blair

**Energy Specialist, Jackson Township School District
Ocean County, New Jersey**

John Blair, the Energy Specialist for [Jackson Township School District](#), has proven to be an indispensable force in advancing energy conservation and sustainability. With 25 years of experience in education, John's hands-on approach to energy management has not only optimized energy efficiency across the district but has also led to significant cost savings and environmental benefits. Thanks to John's leadership, every school in the Jackson Township School District is certified with Sustainable Jersey for Schools and the District estimates it has saved at least \$6 million.

John brings not only passion but also a great sense of humor to the job. He genuinely cares about making a difference, and one of his biggest motivators is helping taxpayers save money. "My motto is 'Going Green, Saves Green.' We pay so much in property taxes — if I can help make a dent by, for example, making sure we're not running the air conditioners in the schools on a Sunday, that's a win," he said. It's this practical, down-to-earth approach that makes John's work both impactful and deeply appreciated by the community.

Recognizing the importance of sustainable energy practices, Jackson Township School District took a proactive step by creating the Energy Specialist position, a role specifically designed to conserve both energy and money. John was appointed to this position to "mind the shop" when it comes to energy use and misuse. His responsibilities include conducting energy audits during unoccupied hours; monitoring and analyzing utility bills to detect and prevent overcharges, estimated billing errors, and unusual usage spikes; as well as tracking energy expenditures and reporting savings to the public. His efforts in fostering an energy conservation mindset among staff and students have played a pivotal role in the program's success. John also serves the role of Recycling Coordinator, helping to increase recycling and awareness in the schools.



John's work has contributed significantly to the district's recognition and achievements, including the 2024 [Sustainability Makes \\$ense Award](#) at the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Annual Awards event. The School District created an [overview video](#) that explains the District's accomplishments and features John and Shaina Brenner, a second grade teacher at Elms Elementary School and the outstanding leader of the District Green Team. The Elms Elementary School Green Team has a [comprehensive webpage](#) that spotlights their exemplary activities.

Since the creation of the Energy Specialist position, the Board has fulfilled its goal of reducing the district’s carbon footprint while eliminating \$3.6 million from the energy budget. Thanks to his foresight and commitment, the district has set an exemplary standard for energy conservation and responsible environmental stewardship.

After becoming certified with Sustainable Jersey for Schools, the district has applied and received numerous grants that have totaled over \$3 million. John said, “Achieving certification definitely helped our district receive grants and funding. Because of our completed and updated certification reports for each school, we can demonstrate what we have accomplished and show our dedication to sustainability which is what funders evaluate when deciding grantees.” For example, recently, the district was awarded a \$1.4 million grant to purchase two electric powered refuse trucks and cover the cost of installing two EV charging stations. The District has also received \$44,000 in grants funded by New Jersey Education Association and the PSEG Foundation from the [Sustainable Jersey Grants Program](#). These grants funded a variety of sustainability initiatives, such as an aquaponics system, an outdoor classroom, water bottle refilling stations and more.



District Sustainability Policy and Energy Management Plan

To prioritize sustainability and the effective management of their fiscal resources, the Jackson Township Board of Education have created a [District Sustainability Policy](#) and [District Energy Management Plan](#). John manages the implementation of the plan’s strategies including implementing effective and sustainable resources practices; exploring renewable and clean energy technologies; reducing energy and water consumption; minimizing utility costs; reducing the amount of waste and consumable materials; encouraging recycling and green procurement practices; and promoting conservation principles. John provides yearly updates for the Board of Education and each school. To watch John’s presentation, visit the Jackson Television YouTube Channel:

[Jackson Township Board of Education Meeting \(John’s presentation starts at minute 40:10\)](#). Each school in the Jackson Township School District received 20 Sustainable Jersey certification points for completion of the actions: [District Sustainability Policy](#) and [Green and Enhancement of District Strategic Plans](#).



Energy Savings Improvement Project (ESIP)

Making school buildings more energy efficient saves taxpayer money while reducing the pollution associated with building energy use. Under John’s leadership, the Jackson School District completed an Energy Savings Improvement Project (ESIP) that enabled the district to implement energy efficient capital improvements on all its buildings. John explained, “We undertook a \$28 million energy efficient construction project that, because of the savings that are generated by the newly installed equipment, creates a net zero cost to the taxpayers.” This initiative introduced state-of-the-art boilers, LED lighting, advanced plug load controls, high-efficiency transformers and two combined heat and power (CHP) units. Additionally, 5.2 megawatts of solar panels were installed, reducing annual energy consumption from 16 million kWh to 9 million kWh. The district has also embraced geothermal energy at four schools and launched water-saving plumbing projects, further emphasizing its commitment to sustainability.

John said, “The reduction of energy usage from these improvements has created enough savings to generate a positive cash flow to the district over the next 20 years. Some of the programs, like the ESIP, may seem too good to be true. But it is worth the time to explain the benefits of the ESIP to school leadership. I think all school districts should be doing an ESIP.” Each school in the Jackson Township School District received 10 Sustainable Jersey certification points for completion of the action [District Sustainability Policy](#) and 40 certification points for completion of the action [Energy Efficiency for School Facilities](#). Sustainable Jersey offers [free energy technical assistance](#) to help municipalities and school districts better understand energy use, establish energy tracking and management, and take advantage of utility incentives for energy efficiency audits and facility upgrades, such as an ESIP.

Sharing Expertise, Inspiring Action

Thanks to his success and practical insights, John is often invited to share the accomplishments of the Jackson Township School District with wider audiences. He has worked with Sustainable Jersey’s Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) Climate Corps Fellows, helping to prepare them for their roles supporting municipalities and school districts in evaluating, planning and implementing energy efficiency projects. John is also a regular speaker at events hosted by the [New Jersey Association of School Business Officials](#) and the [New Jersey School Boards Association](#), where he shares his expertise in energy performance strategies.

Recognizing both his knowledge and engaging speaking style, the Jackson Township School District expanded his role to include career guidance. At school career days, he speaks with students about opportunities in the growing fields of energy and sustainability. Continuing his commitment to community education, John is scheduled to speak at the [2025 New Jersey Sustainability Summit](#) on May 9, where he will present in the session *Energy Projects for Your Buildings and Fleets*.

More About John

John grew up in Rahway, New Jersey, the son of immigrants from Scotland and Ireland. His father, who founded the Rahway Youth Soccer Association (RYSA) and even has a field named in his honor, passed down a deep love of soccer to John — as a player, coach, referee and a passionate fan. Playing at a competitive level, John even picked up Spanish to better communicate with his Spanish-speaking teammates, a skill that later shaped his career. After starting out in the mortgage loan industry, John made a meaningful shift to education, becoming an Advanced Placement Spanish teacher before transitioning into an Assistant Principal at New Egypt High School and Energy Specialist at the Robbinsville School District. He then moved on to his current role as the Jackson Township School District Energy Specialist. He continues to share his passion for teaching as an adjunct English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at Brookdale Community College.

John and his wife Cheryl reside in New Egypt, New Jersey. They take great pride in their two grown children: their son John and his wife Faith, and their daughter Jessica and her husband Connor Pescatore. In his spare time, John enjoys playing the drums and jokes that one day he hopes to have a boiler room named after him — a nod to the significant energy savings he has helped the school district achieve. We think the savings alone could more than cover the cost of the boiler room plaque!

