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## Ann Coyle Degnan

**Assistant Business Administrator for Facilities****Long Branch School District**

Monmouth County, New Jersey

With over 25 years of service to the [Long Branch School District](#), six of those as Assistant Business Administrator for Facilities, Ann Coyle Degnan has been a driving force behind the district's sustainability progress. Her leadership and skill in securing grant funding—bringing in more than \$186,000 through Sustainable Jersey-related grants—have empowered green teams and supported a range of sustainability initiatives, including energy efficiency upgrades, food waste reduction programs, tree plantings, and large-scale composting efforts.

All nine schools in the Long Branch Public School District have achieved [Sustainable Jersey for Schools](#) silver-level certification, and seven have earned the [Digital Schools Star Recognition](#). Ann's passion, persistence, and strategic mindset have helped position the district as a state and national leader in school sustainability efforts.

Ann is quick to deflect praise. "I'm happy to be the main supporter and enabler," she said. "This work is not about me; it's about our community. I cannot take credit for all the actions and work, but I hope I do my job to support it." She sees her role as tactical support for the green teams at each school, empowering dedicated teachers like Kelly Stone and Jessica Sickler to lead sustainability efforts at the classroom level. Ann also emphasizes the importance of consistent engagement, noting that all nine schools submit Sustainable Jersey for Schools applications annually, ensuring sustainability actions remain current and ongoing.



## District-Wide Champions

The impact of the partnership between the district and the schools is evident in the district's consistent recognition. George L. Catrambone Elementary School (GLC) has received the [Sustainable Jersey Champion Award](#) in the elementary school category six times. Long Branch Middle School earned the same distinction in the middle school category four times, while Long Branch High School has been honored three times in the high school category.



Ann is a frequent presenter on Sustainable Jersey for Schools panels, sharing insights from the district's successful programs. She said she tries to lead with empathy and a good sense of humor, "I encourage everyone to

just do something that contributes to the health of the planet, it doesn't have to be perfect or large, but do a little something every day and we will all make a difference and impact." Most recently she presented at the [New Jersey Association of School Business Officials](#) annual conference in June.

## A Voice for Sustainable Planning

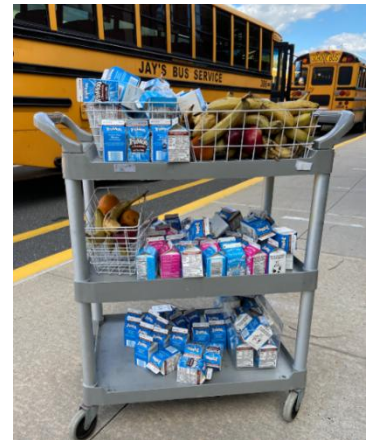
Ann's sustainability advocacy extends beyond the school district. She is a member of the [Long Branch City Zoning Board](#), where among other things, she champions the inclusion of native plants and sustainability features in new development. "They know it will be a no vote from me if it does not include New Jersey native plants and sustainability features," she said. "Now they correct the applications before it even comes up." Her advocacy is firm yet collaborative, rooted in a belief that consistent, thoughtful action can create lasting change.

## Food Waste Reduction Warriors

One of Ann's most visible successes is leading the district's comprehensive food waste reduction program. GLC Elementary School was awarded a \$25,000 grant through Sustainable Jersey's [School Food Waste Pilot Program](#), which supported the purchase of an on-site composting machine and provided implementation support from Rutgers Cooperative Extension. The program has fostered a strong culture of sustainability at the school, with students actively engaged through Food Waste Warrior lessons developed by the World Wildlife Fund. Share tables, composting, and student-led waste monitoring have dramatically reduced cafeteria waste from over 50 bags per day to as few as eight. A recent school-wide campaign invited over 200 students to design a Food Waste Warrior superhero and slogan, with many taking their lessons home and inspiring families to begin composting themselves.



The district's partnership with Sodexo has also led to innovative programs that promote healthy eating and reduce food waste. Students participate in garden sampling, nutrition education, and the popular Top Chef Challenge, where they create nutritious meals and compete for recognition from local culinary professionals. These efforts support a holistic view of sustainability that includes health, nutrition, and community engagement. "I tell school administrators that sustainability actions create new educational choices for the students," Ann said.



"Incorporating sustainability into hands-on learning helps kids understand the benefits of protecting and being nurtured by our natural surroundings."

Share tables are a United States Department of Agriculture-approved method for collecting unopened, uneaten food that would otherwise be thrown away. GLC Elementary School has an impressive share table program in place. Donation stations are set up in the cafeteria, where students can drop off any unopened, unexpired, and unwanted food items from their lunch trays—including packaged snacks, fruit, milk, and more. Volunteer students and teachers help distribute donated foods daily. Throughout the day, items are stored in a dedicated food share refrigerator and then transferred to a cart that's rolled out at dismissal. A video titled "[The Food is Right | Long Branch Public Schools Food Share Program Best Practices](#)" showcases this effort. Ann said, "By rescuing unopened and edible food from ending up in the trash, we contribute to reducing food waste and its environmental impact. Share tables are easy to do and cost almost nothing for a school to set up. We fill up the food cart and roll it out when the buses leave. All the kids take the food with them to eat at home later."

GLC Elementary School K-5 STEM Teacher, and past [Sustainable Jersey Sustainability Hero Kelly Stone](#) commented, "I believe these lessons have made an impact. The students are not taking food they do not want in

the lunch line and they are eating more off their trays. Students are more cognizant of the waste they are producing and recycling has increased both with students and staff. Many students frequent the food share table, and they often remind their peers to share before tossing out. Students are very much aware of the effects of food waste and ask many questions about composting.”

GLC Elementary School received over 45 certification points for the work they have done in the areas of food waste reduction. Check out the Sustainable Jersey for Schools actions including: [Food Recovery – Share Tables & Donation](#); [Waste Audit](#); [Campaign to Reduce School Food Waste](#); [Food Waste Recycling or Composting](#); and [Document Recycling Rates](#). GLC Elementary School is also spotlighted in the Sustainable Jersey Toolkit for PreK-12 Schools: [Reduce, Recover & Recycle Food Waste](#).

## **Trees for Schools: 91 Native Trees Planted**

Among the many grants Ann has secured, the [Trees for Schools](#) grant stands out. Long Branch was one of only 23 public school districts statewide to receive this funding in the inaugural round of the program, which provided \$109,700 to support the planting, maintenance, and care of 91 native trees across Long Branch school properties.



Superintendent Francisco E. Rodriguez highlighted the significance of this effort, stating, “Trees are not just silent witnesses to the passage of time; they are active agents of sustainability, nurturing our Long Branch public schools and community with their shade, beauty, and the promise of a brighter, greener future.” The trees, watered and cared for by the Long Branch Department of Public Works, are a living testament to the district’s vision for the future and work to help mitigate climate change. The Trees for Schools program is a joint effort of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Sustainable Jersey, and The College of New Jersey.

## **Optimizing Energy Efficiency**

Energy efficiency has also been a hallmark of Ann’s work. For over nine years, Long Branch Public Schools has used EnergyCAP software to monitor utility data across all buildings, enabling the district to track usage and optimize performance. Ann supports the Energy Manager, who also supervises the Buildings and Grounds Department, ensuring peak efficiency and reliable infrastructure. In 2017, Long Branch Public Schools completed local government energy audits (LGEAs) for nine buildings, leading to the development of a \$10 million Energy Savings Plan through the Energy Savings Improvement Program (ESIP). The project, completed in June of 2019, reduced energy consumption by 16.6% year-over-year.

## **Rooted in Values**

Ann credits her passion for sustainability to her mother, who raised nine children with a love of nature. “She taught me it is the right thing to do,” Ann said. Raised as the eighth of nine children, Ann grew up in a household where gardens were part of daily life and stewardship of the environment was second nature. Her parents modeled a strong work ethic that continues to guide her today. Ann earned her BS from Bloomsburg University and her MBA from Lehigh University.

## **Looking Ahead**

This summer, Ann is managing a series of major Long Branch school facilities projects, including five HVAC upgrades, three emergency generator installations, and the construction of a new parking lot. To stay grounded through it all, she recently joined a yoga studio—her way of keeping balance amid the many moving pieces. She lives in Long Branch with her husband and looks forward to traveling in the future.