

Medford Township School District

Medford Township, Burlington County

Medford Township school district leaders participated in the NJSSP with the intent of addressing two district-wide goals: energy benchmarking and connecting facilities projects to student learning. Over the past 17 years, the district completed several large-scale projects to reduce reliance on fossil fuels by increasing renewable energy production and converting its fleet of school buses to biodiesel. Although Medford has greatly diminished its energy costs, improving the performance of its school facilities became the district's next target. The district recently contracted with a vendor to carry out related energy shared services that included procuring energy, conducting in-depth facility assessments and implementing comprehensive energy efficiency upgrades. This process will allow the district to further lower energy costs and redirect the funds to meet other district needs, such as technology upgrades, professional development and capital improvement projects.

Medford's operations and curriculum directors built an unlikely collaboration to identify infrastructure needs and create a development plan. Both directors had goals specific to their teams and together successfully launched new testing standards and found ways to keep facilities projects on schedule.

One of Medford's greatest strengths is its diverse and invested stakeholder group. From administrators to students, teachers and parents, sustainability has become a commonly used term and the culture has shifted to one that embraces more progressive ideas and practices. It is important to note that Medford has nearly two decades of experience in this area. The district is driven by clear, measurable goals and has a successful track record of completing large-scale projects that were environmentally, educationally and fiscally responsible. The administration and the board of education are strong proponents of new projects that align with the district's sustainable mission. Longevity in leadership has been a clear benefit to this district's success. The superintendent and operations director have a combined 51 years of service between them. So much of what makes their work successful involves relationships and trust. Years of successful projects earned the trust of district leaders, which now allows projects, thought to be risky by some, to be considered and implemented. The superintendent communicates goals across the district and to the board of education.

The single point of contact for this project, Joe Biluck, was open and communicative about processes, ideas and lessons learned. He invited various parties to the conversation to develop ideas from multiple perspectives, especially beyond his role in facilities. His ability to navigate organizational politics and his willingness to collaborate for the advancement of the district's vision and priorities are two valuable characteristics of a change leader. Initially, he admits that sustainability projects were driven by economic benefits and that those projects were led by his department. Over time, various stakeholders joined the conversation and that approach has become part of the culture at Medford. When sustainability permeates the operations, education and leadership of a district, it is not easily cast aside with administrative transitions.

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE

Reduce energy consumption by **5%**

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

- interpersonal skills
- collaboration
- sensitivity to needs of other departments
- trustworthiness
- communication
- patience and willingness to accept some risk

“ WORDS OF WISDOM

Open your mind to other methods that improve the culture and climate of your district. Traditional methods no longer apply to solving the many challenges faced by districts and the communities they serve. Sustainable strategies rely on the tenets of collaboration and problem-solving. These same tenets provide the foundation used by all high performing districts.

Joe Biluck, Jr.,
team leader ”