



Cape May City School District

Cape May City or the “U.S. Coast Guard Hometown” is where all newly enlisted members of the U.S. Coast Guard Corps must conduct their initial training. Superintendent Victoria Zelenak acknowledges that ensuring students from all over the country meet the rigorous New Jersey Student Learning Standards can be challenging. However, Cape May City educators are proud of the impact of their school. Zelenak explains “we like to think that we raise a child’s understanding, knowledge and skill base, so once they leave us, their knowledge is spread throughout the country.”

Zelenak and her small staff focus on providing all students with an inclusive and welcoming environment. Teachers use various assessments like DIBELS, MAP and DLM benchmarks to adjust curricula and pacing guides and to identify when students need targeted support. Using information from the assessments, educators identify what specific in-class or out-of-class support students need; programmatic changes; and educators’ professional learning and support needs. Teacher Patti Marten explains that they collect formative data throughout the year and use that data to inform personalized supports for students. Zelenak attributes a great deal of success to Cape May’s active District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC), which meets regularly and helps determine what the students in Cape May need to succeed. The district then adjusts their focus within their teacher evaluation and professional learning system.

District Profile

- Schools: 1
- Grades Served: PK-6
- Total Enrollment: 205
- Economically Disadvantaged: 55%

To determine what math program was the right fit for their students, staff piloted two different programs, visited other schools to see the program in action, invited teachers and curriculum directors from nearby school districts to discuss their experiences. Educators at Cape May City don’t just pull programs off a shelf and hope it works, they implement the program, assess its efficacy and continually improve.

Every effort is made to include all students, which often requires providing multiple students with paraprofessional, rather than sending a student out of the district for special services. A new educator to the district who after one day with a student recommended sending the student out of the district for services was told by another teacher, “Oh no, we don’t send children away; we make magic here.”

The “magic” of Cape May City includes a laser focus on each and every “whole” child. Over the last several years, Zelenak and her team implemented a MindUP Program, which offers students techniques to manage emotions and behavior. The curriculum includes lessons on practices such as the Core Breathing Practice. The program helps them develop calmness and focusing skills. Cape May City increased family engagement opportunities to ensure families felt welcomed day and night into the building. Marten refers to her experience at Cape May as a “team effort:” everyone is always asking each other, “what do you need?” and working to make sure all needs are met. Through these efforts and implementing an “every Day Counts” attendance program, Cape May City School District increased attendance from 94.2% to 95.2% in 2017. A community member once remarked, “every time I come to this school, something wonderful is happening.”

Ask Cape May to tell its story:

- Increased attendance
- Piloting two different math programs
- MindUP Program
- Teacher reflection through the lens of student learning
- Green Dot H.I.B. Program



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