

# SUSTAINABILITY HERO

## December 2021



**Joseph J. Isola**

Superintendent of Schools, Howell Township Public Schools  
(Monmouth County)

Joseph Isola has served as the Superintendent of Schools for [Howell Township Public Schools](#) for over eight years. Under his leadership, all twelve of the schools in the district achieved [Sustainable Jersey for Schools](#) certification at the silver-level and were among the first schools to earn the [Digital Schools Star Recognition](#). Two schools in the district were awarded the Sustainability Champion Award: Ramtown Elementary School (2020) and Howell Middle School North (2021). In total, Howell Township Public Schools has received \$78,000 in Sustainable Jersey grants to support sustainability efforts.

“These accomplishments do not happen by accident,” said Mr. Isola. “They happen because we have built a cohesive approach to sustainable practices. We have twelve schools, but it is one community. We know this work matters and we are glad to be a part of it.” Known for his passionate approach, empathy and enthusiasm for the district, Mr. Isola brings almost three decades of experience in education—he has served as a teacher, principal, district administrator and more.

In 2018, Memorial Elementary School achieved certification at the bronze-level. Howell Township Board of Education Member, MaryRose Malley, challenged Mr. Isola to get the additional eleven schools certified. Mr. Isola admits he is competitive. He loves sports and has spent years coaching his three sons. “My mindset as a coach is to win. If you challenge me; I go all in,” he said. By the next certification year, all twelve schools in the district achieved Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification.

Mr. Isola credits the impressive success of the district to a dedicated and talented staff along with a supportive Board of Education. He said, “Everyone goes above and beyond—from facilities staff, to administration, to teachers and students and our Board of Education that encourages sustainability innovation. Our community takes the time to think creatively about what will work best in our schools and then do the work to implement the sustainability actions.”



Mr. Isola said the district sees the value in Sustainable Jersey for Schools program; he knew the district could benefit from the cost savings incurred from increasing the energy efficiency of its buildings, improving student and staff health and wellness and engaging students with digital learning. “We are striving for long term benefits. I am not afraid of taking risks. I have embraced the concept of ‘failing forward.’ We may make mistakes but the goal is to make progress that will ultimately drive sustainability and teach collaboration, empowerment and resilience.” Mr. Isola was named the 2021 New Jersey Association for School Administrators Central Regional Superintendent of the Year and the 2020 Monmouth County Superintendent of the Year.

**District Contribution to Sustainable Jersey for Schools Application:** Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification is not awarded to school districts, but districts have their own application which they use to contribute points towards their schools’ certification efforts. Some actions, such as policies, can only be completed by districts. Howell Township Public Schools documented actions that resulted in 135 points in the district application that were added to the applications of all

of the schools in the district. Each Howell Township school submitted documentation to show it completed a balanced portfolio of the program's [sustainability actions](#). To see each school's complete certification report, visit: [Participating Districts and Schools](#). Follow #HTPSSustainable for school sustainability highlights.

**Digital Schools Star Recognition:** Howell Township Public Schools has the distinction of being the only multi-school district with all schools earning silver-level certification as well as [Digital School Star Recognition](#). Mr. Isola participated on Sustainable Jersey's committee to oversee the launch of the Digital Schools Star recognition program and he has spoken at numerous webinars and events to share its success and assist other districts in their journey. He said, "This effort is not about waving a new laptop around. It is about instruction and learning. At Howell Township Public Schools, we leveraged our technology and pushed forward on personalized instruction and it was a game changer." Mr. Isola has his sights on the future and is working with partners to assess what has been learned from the pandemic-forced remote learning experience in order to shape the future.



Students in Howell Township are fortunate in that they are immersed in a technological atmosphere and educated in the areas of both technology and computers. Mr. Isola credits the work of Claire Engle, the Howell Township Schools Director of Digital Learning and Innovation, for success in Digital Schools and beyond. Students are able to gain an appreciation for, and an understanding of, the relationship between technology and society through hands-on, problem-solving activities.

Howell Township Public Schools' commitment to digital learning began in 2012 with the establishment of a Technology Task Force (TTF) consisting of community members, teachers, administrators, support staff, students and members of the Board of Education. The task force was charged with establishing a 21st century learning environment. The TTF identified the knowledge and skills that students are required to master and researched key pillars for achieving a 1:1 digital environment. In 2014, the task force presented a recommendation to the Board of Education and the Board adopted the district's [21st Century Digital Learning Environment Plan](#). To achieve the Digital School Star Recognition, Howell Township Public Schools completed the required actions including: [District Commitment to Digital Learning](#); [Digital Citizenship](#); [Data Safety and Security Policy](#); [Digital Device Life Cycle Management](#); [Infrastructure](#); [Support for Digital Teaching and Learning](#); [Community Engagement](#); [District Professional Development Plan](#) and [Equitable Access to Digital Learning](#).



**Energy Savings Improvement Program (ESIP):** Howell Township Public Schools has just completed a \$16 million [Energy Savings Improvement Program \(ESIP\)](#) inclusive of all the district's schools and buildings. The district ESIP is a New Jersey Board of Public Utilities-monitored program that enables public entities to fund energy and capital improvement projects at no cost to the taxpayer—the municipality continuously pays for the recommended projects using the energy savings each improvement provides. Implementation of the ESIP starts with a [Local Government Energy Audit](#). The audit of the twelve schools and five satellite buildings identified the updates needed. This work was overseen by Ronald Sanasac, the Howell Township Public Schools Assistant Superintendent of Business Administration.

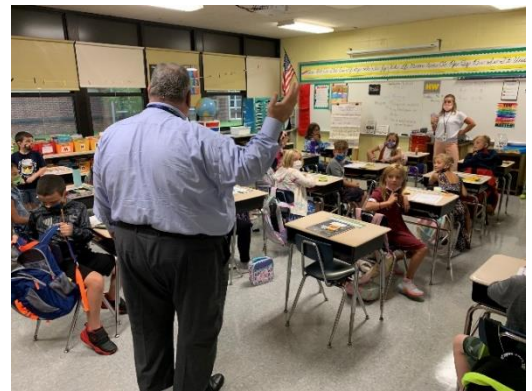
Following a formal Request for Proposal process, the Howell Township Board of Education approved the selection of DCO Energy as its partner Energy Services Company (ESCO) to collaboratively design, develop and implement the district ESIP. A major driver of the program is the extensive solar component creating the opportunity for a minimal electricity cost solution for the Howell Township Public Schools. The wide range of proposed building improvements includes: new LED lighting; a new district-wide energy management system; boiler and chiller replacements at Middle School North and South; building weatherproofing improvements; classroom unit ventilator replacements and the addition of air conditioning in the classrooms for eight buildings that are not currently climate-controlled.

As a result of these improvements, Howell Township Public Schools will reduce its carbon footprint by 3,821 tons of carbon dioxide. Mr. Isola said, “We are excited for our students to see innovative renewable energy and sustainability measures firsthand and to help promote science through STEM programs and educational materials. This project will yield benefits for our physical plants but even more importantly, for our entire school community for years to come.” For this work, Howell Township Public Schools received Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification points for each school by documenting the action: [Energy Efficiency for School Facilities](#).



**District's Solar Dashboard:** Howell Township Public Schools installed solar at all of the schools in the district as part of the ESIP. The entire project consists of 13,126 solar modules and multiple inverters, which convert the solar energy into usable electricity for the buildings. The systems are projected to produce over five MWh of electricity in year one, replacing over 75 percent of the schools’ electrical consumption with clean, renewable energy. Each school site has a kiosk so that the students and teachers can follow the production as well and use it in lessons.

**District Sustainability Policy:** The Howell Township Board of Education adopted a [District Sustainability Policy](#) in 2019. Mr. Isola explained, “We are aiming to enhance sustainability measures to reduce, reuse and recycle across our entire district. This includes increased recycling and reducing waste, the use of consumable products and food waste. We plan to reduce our carbon footprint through a multitude of measures including lessening the emissions from our transportation department. There will be an expansion of educational opportunities for both students and staff on how to enhance efforts towards environmental protection and preservation.” Howell Township Public Schools received Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification points for each school by completing the actions: [District Sustainability Policy](#) and [Green Enhancement of District Strategic Plans](#).



**Education and Experience:** Mr. Isola has a B.S. in Business Administration from Wagner College, and earned a M.S. in Special Education and completed a sixth-year certification program in school leadership from the City University of New York. Before becoming the superintendent, Mr. Isola was the assistant superintendent for Howell Township Public Schools for three years and the principal of Howell Middle School North for seven years. He spent twelve years working in administration and in the classroom as a teacher at Intermediate School 318, District 14, in Brooklyn, New York. He participates in a number of organizations. Currently, Mr. Isola is a member of the Monmouth County Schools Partnership for Wellness; New Jersey Association for School Administrators; American Association for School Administrators; Monmouth County Superintendent’s Roundtable, Executive Committee; Monmouth University Superintendent’s Academy; NJ School Development Council; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Monmouth University Superintendent’s Academy Steering Committee; Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools Task Force and NJASA Virtual/Remote Learning Working Group.

**More About Mr. Isola:** Mr. Isola was born at Fort Dix, New Jersey while his father was stationed there as a captain in the U.S. Army. Although, the Isola family business was dentistry—with his grandfather, father and two brothers involved—Joseph Isola chose a career in education. Mr. Isola and his wife Pamela have three grown sons--Joseph, Nicholas and Andrew—as well as two pugs, Doc and Bella. Education is a common topic of conversation in the household, with Pamela, Nicholas and Andrew also working in education. With Joseph Jr.’s law degree, the conversation often shifts to current school law and policy. Mr. Isola enjoyed coaching his children in multiple youth sports as they grew up. He is a dedicated fan of the New York Yankees and Jets. He remains an active member within the community, volunteering within many of the youth organizations including previously serving as president of the Pop Warner Football and Cheer organization and currently serving as the chairman of the Monroe Township Recreation Advisory Board.