

Burlington County Times

Special Services School District creates transition campus

By Kelly Kultys

Posted at 7:00 AM

Updated at 12:18 PM

Burlington County Special Services School District is expanding its offerings for students with special needs between 18 and 21 years old with its new transition campus.

WESTAMPTON — Joyce DeVito envisioned a program for her students that simulated an actual work environment as closely as possible. That meant no bells telling students what time they needed to be at their next class, and no public announcements reminding them about a scheduling change that day.

DeVito wanted them to be able to learn real-life skills, such as interacting with customers and operating a cash register, without having familiar school items around them.

This year, she got her wish. The Burlington County Special Services School District has expanded its transition program into a transition campus.

“This is such an exciting opportunity for our teachers and for our students,” said DeVito, the new principal of the transition campus. “We moved our transition kids to the back building where Bancroft was, and we kind of set it up as a work environment.”

The Bancroft at Burlington Adult Day Program, for people with developmental disabilities, had been operating out of the former Junior/Senior High School building since 2015. But a few months ago, the program moved to Burlington Township, according to Lori Shaffer, Bancroft’s director of communications.

“We are still in Burlington County,” Shaffer said. “We renovated space there and got a long-term lease.”

The lease agreement with Special Services ran until mid-September, according to Board of Education minutes.

With the new space available, the district decided to expand its transition program for special needs students between the ages of 18 and 21.

“What we’ve been trying to do is provide an appropriate opportunity for students to be very successful beyond the classroom,” Superintendent Christopher Nagy said. “We had students throughout the campus that were part of this transition team.”

The program offers students both the education and the experience they need to succeed in the workplace or in future educational opportunities, according to James Brand, coordinator of the structured learning experience. They’re able to work at real jobs in the community and sometimes even earn money, as well as gain skills in the classrooms. While in class, they learn a variety of skills, from goal setting to communication to personal planning and responsibility. They also practice some of the things they do at work, such as using a cash register.

Brand founded the program about 15 years ago to fill a “niche for the county,” according to Nagy.

It offers community-based instruction, in which the students are not paid but learn on-the-job skills in the community, and also a structured learning experience, where students are paid to work at a local business and continue to develop their skills.

“We go out in the community and we find positions that our students can fill, highlighting their abilities,” Brand said.

During the last school year, students earned about \$86,000 for themselves through the work program, he said.

One of Brand’s responsibilities is to visit the students’ work sites and speak with their managers about how they’re doing. Brand tries to get them into a business as close to their homes as possible so the students can get there on their own, if necessary.

He said seeing the students improve is one of his favorite parts.

“One (student) is working at ShopRite. He’s been there two years now,” Brand said. “He struggled so hard collecting carts in the parking lot, and now he works four to five days a week. I was there yesterday, and they never have a complaint.”

About 40 students attend the transition campus through the different programs, but the district hopes to increase participation now that there is more space, Nagy said.

The district is also looking to add partnerships to provide more locations where students can work. The Special Services district is in talks with the Eastampton School District, but nothing official has been set up yet, DeVito said.



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day’s top news, delivered to your inbox
