



Weehawken Public School District

Recognized as a Lighthouse Awardee during the 2021-2023 term for increased equity in student enrollment in postsecondary institutions.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Lighthouse District Initiative recognizes districts that have demonstrated measurable progress for equitable outcomes. The NJDOE is proud to welcome the Weehawken Public School District to the third cohort of Lighthouse Districts.

Weehawken Public School District Demographics

- 1,355 Total Students
- PK–12 Grades Offered
- 34.2% Economically Disadvantaged
- 10.6% Students with Disabilities
- 6.6% English Learners
- 11:1 Student to Teacher Ratio

Want to learn more? Contact us.

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Weehawken Public School District Equity Story

Below, you will find a narrative describing the ways that Weehawken Public School District has increased equity in student enrollment in postsecondary institutions.

Engaging Underrepresented Student Groups for Equity in Postsecondary Enrollment

Our students and parents are prepared for the college enrollment process even before students arrive in ninth grade. We make a conscious effort to meet with our English language learners and our economically disadvantaged students and families to provide them with programs to ensure they have the information and guidance to be successful in college and career readiness. In order to do this, we use the following information to accomplish our goal of preparing our students and parents for the different stages of postsecondary enrollment. The local education agency (LEA) team has developed relationships with students and families. Counselors meet with students to discuss their career interest inventory in Naviance. Parents and students are given a series of night time meetings such as Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) night, Equal Opportunity Fund (EOF) night, Junior parent night, college fair, career day, and much more. Colleges around the tri-state area are invited to attend the fair. Career day is set up where students select careers they are interested in. Individuals with different career backgrounds attend and present on their career of choice. Early in ninth grade, students and parents are invited to a College Information Session where they learn about what they could do to improve their chances of being admitted to the college of their choice in the future. We also have a robust internship program called the Weehawken Senior Experience where students link their interests and future majors with internships.

Along with these resources, we have partnered with Command Education. Command Education is a program used for grades 9-12 to provide college readiness skills and information. During the summer of junior year, students are linked to a one on one mentor to help with the college application process. Colleges are invited throughout the fall school year to visit the students and give information about their specific schools. Academically, we have instituted additional half year classes in Writing and Math to support our middle school students. Teachers, parents, and even students, have found this to be beneficial to them.

Collaboration Between Guidance Counselors and Other Staff for Equity in Postsecondary Enrollment

Staff and counselors work together during professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development days to collaborate with students. They also collaborate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings. The goal is to ensure that each student's individual circumstance is considered, and their educational plan is implemented. Counselors work with students, families, teachers, administrators and the Child Study Team to ensure that everyone is aware of the college or postsecondary career process. Further, we have contracted with multiple vendors, such as Accel Learning to ensure that all students are able to get SAT/ACT prep class for FREE and Command Education, who reached out to all students to ensure they were able to learn all about the college admissions process.

Engaging Families of Historically Underrepresented Students for Equity in Postsecondary Enrollment

The Weehawken Public School District continues to strive for parental involvement to assist families to ensure realistic goal setting, resulting in increasing postsecondary options. This is being achieved through informing parents of student progress by providing information to parents regarding their child's achievements and abilities. Also, district staff, and when a student is of the appropriate age, are being included in this process. The goal of assisting parents and staff in understanding a student's needs occurs continuously throughout a school year. Specifically, for the student who is identified as needing special education and related service this begins with the Evaluation process, Initial Classification as well as re-evaluation options and culminates in the yearly formation of the Individualized Education Plan. To further parental knowledge in the special education process, printed information concerning their child is provided, thoroughly explained, and referenced in relation to specialized evaluations. If warranted, specialized evaluations are conducted bilingually, and extensively through the utilization of assessments conducted for multiple areas. Evaluations are conducted in many areas, beyond the minimum requirement and can include medical, psychological, learning, occupational therapy and physical therapy assessments as warranted. Information about ability and achievement can not only further the goal of postsecondary opportunities but serve to narrow the scope of which ones can be pursued successfully. The district puts into effect the belief that best practices are appropriate for students with disabilities with academic support, as well as no disability at all. The predominant special education district service delivery model used is an Inclusion Model. If some students need a different approach and more intensive services, this will occur. There is ongoing analysis and review of individual student's needs that occurs beyond the standard special education process. Over the last several years, we have increased our special education staff to ensure that as much inclusion via coteaching can occur in all three schools. Our focus in the district is on student growth and results and along with this, including parents with available information occurs. Additionally, we have two dedicated mental health clinicians who work with these students to support their success.

Structural Changes to Increase Stakeholder Feedback for Equity in Postsecondary Enrollment

Increased attainment of equity is being achieved by focusing on effective education instruction. Because we know that higher performance of general education students correlates to higher performance of students with disabilities, structuring more effective instruction for all students is key. Our instructional model is heavily weighted with inclusion classrooms where students with special needs and students who experience challenges spend the majority of the day. This means that general education classrooms are key because core instruction is provided by the classroom teacher, and when students need more support this is available in a few different options. Because our students are better served academically when a general education teacher takes primary responsibility for their learning there is support provided by special education teachers, academic skills support teachers, related service providers in Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy. Earlier interventions are often first provided by general education staff, which is the hallmark of RTI. RTI and those efforts to assist with academic concerns begin with general education as the foundation for all students' success. There are several ways the district has worked and will continue to pursue collaborating with faculty, parents, and when appropriate the student themselves. This has as its basis that all students receive instruction to ensure they are able to read. Extra Instruction time is available for those students who struggle with reading by the services of a reading specialist. Additional extra instruction time is provided for students

who struggle to pre teach materials, reteach the day's lesson and address missing foundational skills. Currently the district provides for teachers who have particular strengths in academic content areas for instruction in grade 3- 6 allowing teachers to focus on maximizing their time supporting students in their academic area of specialization. Specialists providing social-emotional or behavior support to students have been added to deliver these important supports. Through support staff the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students are being achieved by additional counselors from Pre-K through 12th grade, therapeutic support staff for grade 3-12, a district BCBA, and an increased paraprofessional force. Feedback from staff and parents were the impetus for increasing the above-mentioned support staff. This is continuously being assessed by the district in each instructional grade with feedback from families, students, and staff.

Integration of Two or More Quantitative Sources for Improvement in Postsecondary Enrollment

Our students and staff bring their personal backgrounds and identities into our schools and create welcoming and equitable spaces for all, which we feel is foundational to the success of our students. While the district believes addressing racial disparities within the district's culture and in all areas of operation is a priority, we also know that developing a finely tuned racial equity lens will positively impact all students and staff who may be marginalized due to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, sexual/gender identity, class, socioeconomics, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cognitive/physical ability, diverse language fluency, religion, status as an English language learner, or other characteristic protected by federal law. We address the culture impacts of our students and staff, and examine the ways we partner with and engage members of our community; we address the curriculum that guides the learning in our classrooms, and make a conscious effort to represent a variety of cultures reflecting the diverse stories and histories of all students; and we address the instructional practices of our staff, and focus on research data-based instructional strategies designed to meet the academic needs of all students and change disparate outcomes for students of color, exceptional students, English language learners and economically disadvantaged students. We use the following information to guide our teaching, additional programs and curriculum. We provide after school programs to provide additional instruction where additional instruction is needed. We use our Quantile and Lexile levels to determine which students need additional help.

We will also be implementing new programs such as our WISE program. WISE stands for Weehawken Intervention Supports and Enrichment. WISE will be a before and after school program staffed by teachers and open to students recommended for intervention and/or enrichment. We will be revising our Academic Support Program using small-group, pull out instruction model that targets instruction for 8-week cycles and pauses after each cycle for data analysis.