

OCEAN CITY SENTINEL



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HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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Eric Avedissian/SENTINEL

Ford family history at museum

Members of Ocean City's Ford family at an exhibit honoring their military service. See story, page A5.

Minimum wage rising in spite of opposition from business groups

By ERIC AVEDISSIAN
Sentinel staff

OCEAN CITY – In a move that will impact small businesses along the Jersey shore, Gov. Phil Murphy signed legislation on Feb. 4 raising the state's minimum wage to \$15 by 2024.

The bill (A-15), sponsored by Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, hopes to grow and raise wages for more than one million New Jersey workers.

"For far too long, many of our fellow New Jersey-

'It really is on the backs of small businesses Right away we will be at \$10 an hour this summer ... With this kind of legislation many small companies won't be hiring at the entrance level.'

–Michele Gillian, Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce

ans have been struggling to survive on wages that have not kept up with the cost of living," Murphy said. "I am incredibly proud to sign legislation that raises the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, ensuring that the most vulnerable among us will have the means to put food on the table, while growing our economy and addressing priorities of the small business community."

Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce opposed the move, send-

ing a letter to state lawmakers warning of negative ramifications hiking the minimum wage would have on local businesses.

"Two years ago, the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce wrote to Governor Christie, Lieutenant Governor Guadagno, Congressman LoBiondo, Senator Van Drew, Assemblyman Andrzejczak and Assemblyman Land encouraging them not to support the minimum wage increase. We believed then and still believe now that it will severely hurt small businesses," the chamber's letter read.

According to the letter, chamber representatives traveled to Trenton in May 2018 and met with Sweeney and Van Drew, along with members of the South Jersey business community to discuss the impact to small businesses.

"Now more than ever, we need to continue expressing our opposition to the \$15 minimum wage increase. We will continue to voice our concerns with almost doubling minimum wage," according to the letter.

The letter encourages chamber members to write to their elected representatives and express their opposition to the bill.

The current minimum wage in New Jersey is \$8.85 per hour. Under the new law, the base minimum wage for New Jersey workers will increase to \$10 per hour on July 1. By January 1, 2020, the statewide minimum wage will

See **Minimum**, AX

School Choice: A series

Sentinel looks at the impact on OCHS, region

OCEAN CITY – Ocean City High School is not the same school it has been for decades. Since 2011, its mission has expanded along with its reach.

Its student body used to comprise teenagers from Ocean City and three official sending districts – Upper Township, Sea Isle City and Corbin City.

Now, it enrolls students from 18 additional school districts and has added Longport as an official sending district.

When the school administration and Board of Education decided to take part in Interdistrict Public School Choice in 2011, they started with 10 students. Now, School Choice in Ocean City has grown to 194 students.

The composition of the student body has changed along with the education offered.

The number of students from Upper Township has fallen steadily over the

years. There were 853 Upper Township students in the 2004-05 school year – when the new high school opened after being constructed across Atlantic Avenue from the old one. The Upper Township numbers had fallen to 588 last year. That decline has been offset with the influx of

district views itself.

Ocean City High School sees itself as a south Jersey regional high school.

It isn't filled with students from one place or another, each carrying the label the nearly two dozen disparate communities from which it draws. Ocean City High School is filled with a sea of

Ocean City High School has become the second or third largest School Choice district in the State of New Jersey, taking advantage of planning and foresight – and facilities that were constructed more than a decade ago to house a population beyond what existed before the new school was built.

The Ocean City Sentinel and Upper Township Sentinel, after conducting interviews with eight administrators and school board members, in addition to students, has put together a series of stories and charts to explain how school choice began, how it works, and what it means for students who have always been part of the district and those who have the opportunity to apply to become a Red Raider. The stories begin this week and will continue over the next few issues.

–DAVID NAHAN,
SENTINEL EDITOR

SCHOOL CHOICE

A SENTINEL SERIES

How it works, how it has affected Ocean City High School and surrounding school districts

School Choice students.

Although Upper Township students still comprise the largest bloc at the high school from any community, including Ocean City, the very concept of island kid versus township kid has become anachronistic because of the new way the

Red Raiders.

Where students are from – island versus mainland – has become less of an issue because students come from all over, but they all arrive at the high school at the same time – in ninth grade. They all start at the school as freshmen.

Officials: Money is not main motivator

By DAVID NAHAN
Sentinel staff

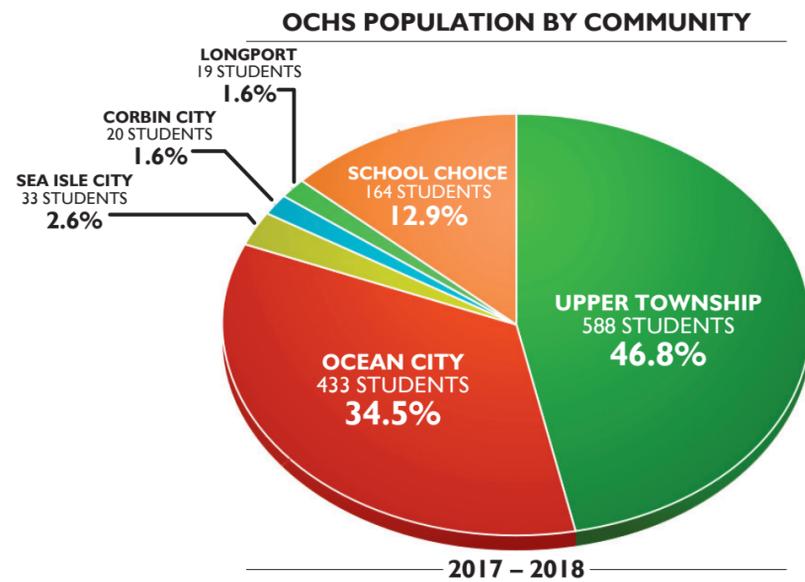
OCEAN CITY – The Ocean City School District received \$2.65 million in state School Choice aid last year – money that goes a long way paying for teachers and programs – but officials say money wasn't the motivating factor in their decision to start accepting Interdistrict Public School Choice students back in 2011.

That decision, they say, was because their relatively new high school, opened seven years earlier, had the capacity, School Choice offered a way to maintain enrollment and an opportunity to benefit the students in the district and others who wanted to become Red Raiders.

"It wasn't financial," Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Taylor said. "It was really giving students opportunities, opening our doors."

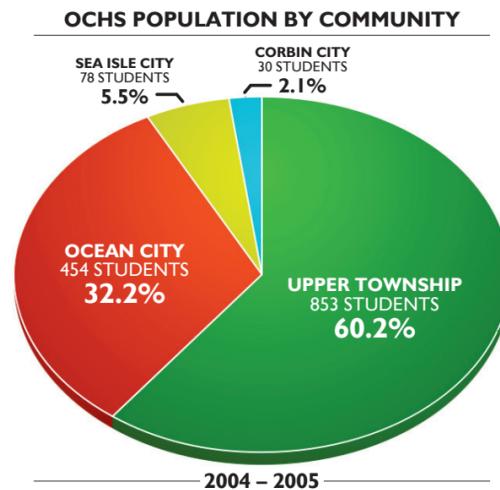
The high school was built for 1,400 students and there were just more than 1,200 enrolled.

See **Money**, page A12



Graphics by Sam Hutchins
Sentinel

These graphs show the diversity in student population in the 2004-05 school year, right, compared to the 2017-18 school year. The statistics were gleaned through an Open Public Records Act request by Sentinel reporter Kristen Kelleher and provided by Ocean City School District Business Administrator Timothy E. Kelley. There are a total of 194 School Choice students in the district, 30 at the primary and intermediate schools.



Population shift at the high school

Editor's note: These statistics were acquired through an Open Public Records Act request by Sentinel reporter Kristen Kelleher and provided to the Sentinel by Timothy E. Kelley, business administrator for the Ocean City School District.

By DAVID NAHAN
Sentinel staff

OCEAN CITY – The

school population at Ocean City High School has shifted substantially over the past 13 years, with Interdistrict Public School Choice students replacing falling numbers from its official sending districts, particularly Upper Township.

If the school district had not opted to become a School Choice district, it would be down by about 300 students now.

In the 2004-05, when the

new high school opened, Ocean City had 454 resident students going to the high school compared to 853 coming across the bridge from Upper Township.

The other two official sending districts, Sea Isle City and Corbin City, contributed 78 and 30 students, respectively.

In the 2008-09 year, Ocean City had 445 students at OCHS, with Up-

per Township sending 813, Sea Isle City 59 and Corbin City 29.

School Choice began in Ocean City in 2011-12, with 10 students from outside districts.

By 2013-14, there were 64 School Choice students at OCHS.

That same year, Ocean City had 455 students, Upper Township had dropped

See **Population**, page A12

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Money not motivation

Continued from page A1

“We knew that we had room, thought it was unique opportunity for our students as well as for students out of the area,” Taylor said. “Any time you can diversify your student body, I think that it a very positive influence and helps with our school culture and experiences for our students.”

When the state opened School Choice to more than

one district per county, Taylor added, “We were the first to put our hands up and say, ‘Yeah, we’ll do this.’”

It was a decision that didn’t come without discussion.

Joseph Clark, president of the Ocean City Board of Education, said they got questions from the community.

“I think there was some nervousness about who it would bring,” Clark said. “I remember the debates

at the table and there were individuals on the (school) board that felt we were only going to attract from certain schools, inner-city schools, and most of the board didn’t believe that.”

Clark said they believed the interest would come mostly from families with the wherewithal to investigate the school to see what it had to offer and parents who wanted other options. He noted the initial belief, which turned out to be true, was that it could impact parochial schools such as Holy Spirit in Absecon where parents pay tuition.

The board figured there were families in the area who were looking for options.

“We saw the positive sides of it,” Clark said. “We also saw statistics where we saw declining enrollment in our sending districts, our own district, and how do you preserve this high school that was built for a certain size?”

The financial aspect was “really secondary,” he said. On that note, he said other school districts were wary because they worried the state funding for School Choice would not last or that the idea of School Choice wasn’t right.

“We looked at the diversity, the opportunity, we just thought it was a great opportunity,” Clark said. “We had a lot of naysayers in the county The board debated it at quite a number of the meetings before finally deciding to move forward with it.”

“The genesis of our application was that we have some really great programs here that would present opportunities to students of other communities and we also had great facilities,” Dr. Matthew Jamison, principal at the high school, said.

“But we had a choice. I think that was a lot of the hesitancy from our neighbors. You really had a choice – open general admission or programmatic admissions. And we, from the outset, when Dr. Taylor and I worked on the application, we wanted to offer programmatic admissions.” Jamison explained that open general admission

Minimum wage

Continued from page A1

increase to \$11 per hour, and then will increase by \$1 per hour every January until it reaches \$15 per hour on Jan. 1, 2024.

The move makes New Jersey the fourth state to raise the minimum wage to \$15, along with California, Massachusetts, and New York. The District of Columbia also increased minimum wage.

For seasonal workers and employees at small businesses with five or fewer workers, the base minimum wage will reach \$15 per hour by January 1, 2026. By Jan. 1, 2028, workers in these group will receive the minim wage inclusive of inflation adjustments that take place from 2024 to 2028, equalizing the minimum wage with the main cohort of New Jersey workers.

For agricultural workers, the base minimum wage will increase to \$12.50 per hour by Jan. 1, 2024. No later than March 31, 2024, the New Jersey Labor Commissioner and Secretary of Agriculture will jointly decide whether to recommend that the minimum wage for agricultural workers increase to \$15 per hour by Jan. 1, 2027, as specified in the bill.

Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Michele Gillian said the minimum wage hike would be “defining” for small businesses, especially seasonal businesses.

“New Jersey’s made it extremely difficult with taxation and overregulation and now \$15 an hour for small businesses,” Gillian said. “It really is on the backs of small businesses because most big companies that employ people start them at a minimum wage and they move up quite quickly to \$12 to \$15 an hour. This seems to be extremely harsh for small businesses to take. Right away we will be at \$10 an hour this summer.”

Gillian said the wage hike makes a different in the bottom line for seasonal businesses.

“We’re tourism driven and service oriented which

means those are entry level jobs,” Gillian said.

According to Gillian, the wage hike disincentivizes businesses to hire inexperienced student workers. She said students comprise the bulk of summertime employment at the Jersey shore.

“With this kind of legislation many small companies won’t be hiring at the entrance level. That doesn’t give students the opportunity to work which I think it’s a valuable tool for them,” Gillian said. “I think it’s going to curtail young students from getting jobs.”

Gillian said the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce has been on the “forefront” of opposing the minimum wage increase since Murphy entered office in 2018.

“Obviously I think the governor doesn’t understand south Jersey business because we aren’t industry-driven and we’re not a New York City suburb. We have a different employment cycle down here. We’re very seasonal tourism-driven. There’s not big industry. There aren’t gigantic companies that are employing people,” Gillian said. “We’re not on his radar. It will affect small businesses and mom and pop businesses.”

Gillian noted the city hires 300 seasonal employees every summer.

“The bottom line is the taxpayers are being taxed again,” Gillian said.

In a statement, Sweeney said the minimum wage should be a “living wage.”

“We can now achieve greater economic fairness by closing the wealth gap that has separated segments of society,” Sweeney said.

For many small local businesses, the increase will hurt, Gillian said.

“I just don’t think it needed to be legislated. I think when you have really good year-round employees you give them health care, you give them benefits, and their paychecks rise as their skills do,” Gillian said. “This is going to be very burdensome for small businesses.”

Population

Continued from page A1

to 669 students, Sea Isle was sending 35 to the high school (and 62 more to the primary and intermediate schools after it closed its own schools), and Corbin City was sending 17.

By last year – 2017-18 – Ocean City had 433 of its own residents at the high school, but Upper Township was down to 588.

Sea Isle had 33 (and 47 in the lower grades), Corbin City sent 20 and Longport, the barrier island just north of Ocean City which became an official sending district, had 19 at the high school.

In the 2017-18 school year, there were 164 School Choice students from 18 other school districts at the high school. (There were 30 School Choice students at Ocean City Primary School and Intermediate School, but the district changed its policy and now only enrolls Choice students starting in ninth grade at the high school.)

School officials, when they were considering becoming an Interdistrict Public School Choice institution in 2010, said one factor was to maintain enrollment at the high school, which was built to accommodate 1,400 students.

In 2017-18, there were 1,255 students at the high school.

In 2013-14, that number was 1,233.

In the 2008-09 school year, when it was only Ocean City, Upper Township, Sea Isle City and Corbin City contribution

students, the OCHS population was 1,345 – before the coming slide in enroll-

ment from Upper Township.

In 2004-05, right when the new school opened, the OCHS population was 1,415.

That same year, Upper Township was sending 853 students.

Thirteen years later, by 2017-18, that number had fallen to 588.

The regular sending districts had dropped from 961 in 2004-05 to 660 – a decline of just more than 300 students.

Adding Longport as a sending district had added 19 students last year, but School Choice was the big difference – with 164 at the high school and another 30 in the primary and intermediate schools.

Upper Township

Students from Upper Township comprise the largest number of students at Ocean City High School. That hasn’t changed over the past 13 years.

What has changed is the proportion.

In 2004-05, Upper Township contributed 60 percent of the students to the high school.

By last year, its percentage had dropped below 47 percent.

During that time, Ocean City’s proportion of the high school population has remained fairly steady at about a third. In 2004-05, students from the island were 34.5 percent of the population. As of 2017-18, they were 32 percent.

By last year, School Choice students have increased from less than a percent in 2011 to about 13 percent last year.



UPPER TOWNSHIP
Business Association
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Membership & Community Guide



Membership & Community Guide



This guide to Upper Township will display all that Upper Township has to offer. This special magazine format publication will cover everything from current businesses, history to government with pages for all of the unique villages within the community:

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Contact Information

Steve Zellers • Cell: 609-231-6726
Office: 609-399-1220 • Fax: 609-399-9304
PO Box 238 • Ocean City, NJ 08226

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