



KATRINA T. MCCOMBS  
ACTING SUPERINTENDENT

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### **Camden Students Build Life Skills at Tiger Cafe**

*Woodrow Wilson teacher builds coffee shop to give very special students the skills to transition successfully into adulthood*

**Wednesday, December 19, 2018** – Office of the Superintendent, Camden, NJ – Acting State Superintendent Katrina McCombs joined special education teacher Thomas Levy and his life skills students at Woodrow Wilson High School’s Tiger Café this morning to see firsthand how a crowdsourced school café is transforming the lives of teenagers with significant cognitive disabilities. The brainchild of Mr. Levy, the café was funded purely through donations raised on DonorsChoose.org and by generous contributions from local businesses like Wegmans and Loews. The café, which serves staff and parents, is part of the District’s Transition Services Program, which aims to ensure students with more severe learning disabilities have opportunities to develop functional academic skills along with skills that they need in everyday life such as: self-care, vocational, functional reading and math, money management, self-advocacy, and independent living.

Providing work experience for students in the Life Skills Program is a critical part of these young people’s transition into adulthood. Tired of seeing his students relegated to warehouse jobs, Mr. Levy began fundraising to give students exposure to the customer service, money management, and food service skills they will need to land jobs in the hospitality industry.

Launched this September, the Café is proving to have a major impact on the students. Mr. Levy is currently seeking donations to expand the small Café into a fully-fledged culinary center, and asking local coffee shops to get in touch about hiring some of his talented budding baristas.

“The kids run the café themselves,” he explained proudly. “Some of these kids were non-verbal when I first met them, and now they are taking orders, counting correct change, operating the point of sale system, and working together as a team to run their business.”

The Café is run in collaboration with the school’s business and entrepreneurship program, giving both general education and Life Skills students critical opportunities for inclusive education.

Donors interested in helping Mr. Levy expand this successful program should contact him at [tlevy@camden.k12.nj.us](mailto:tlevy@camden.k12.nj.us) or find him [here](#) on DonorsChoose.org. Employers interested in interviewing any of the student baristas should reach out to Mr. Levy as well.

