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Officials present Nutley outdoor classroom plans



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Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr., center, joins the Nutley Educational Foundation, Nutley Board of Education and other officials near the banks of the Third River, where an outdoor classroom will be constructed.

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Nutley's first outdoor classroom will be coming to Yanticaw Park in September.

On Tuesday, state and local officials gathered in the park to hear plans for the project between Essex County, the Passaic Valley Sewage Commission and the Nutley Educational Foundation.

"This is a great partnership between private and public entities, coming together to put in the outdoor classroom," Mayor and Public Works Commissioner Joseph Scarpelli said. "We're looking forward to it coming to fruition and seeing our students enjoy the classroom, outside the four walls, and fresh air we have here in our beautiful park."

On behalf of the Nutley Board of Commissioners, Scarpelli thanked PVSC, the county executive and the board of education.

Science teachers from Nutley presented the idea to the NEF and PVSC, and as a result, gained Essex County's permission to use the space.

District Science Coordinator Kent Bania, John H. Walker Middle School science teacher Lynn Zazzali, and Walker Middle School Principal Tracy Egan were recognized for spearheading the idea.



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New Jersey Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-28th), Nutley Superintendent Julie Glazer, Nutley Board of Education President Charles Kucinski and Nutley Mayor Joseph Scarpelli react to Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr.'s comments at Yanticaw Park.

Zazzali told the crowd that the idea came about in June 2014, when PVSC came to the middle school as part of an outreach program. "As a teacher, I just know that myself and other teachers, and of course the students will benefit the most," she said.

"I couldn't do this without all of the members of the Nutley Educational Foundation," NEF President Lorraine Kucinski stated. "[They] have really inspired us on the board of trustees, because they give unselfishly of their time and their talent."

"The project also speaks directly to the NEF mission and what we actually aspire to do," Kucinski added.

In June, Kucinski presented a letter to the Nutley Board of Education, indicating a forthcoming \$3,635 check to pay for the project.

DiVincenzo, who lived in Nutley for 34 years, said "We're happy to be part of it." His children are former Nutley teachers.

He gave "Kucinski and her team" credit and said, "We're a team, and let's continue doing good things for Essex County."

New Nutley Superintendent Julie Glazer said that the project would "extend the school beyond the four walls, beyond what's traditional." She added that she was "so excited to see how the curriculum develops for the students."

New Jersey Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-28th) said that the classroom "is a great thing. Even Greeks did this thousands of years ago, so now we're bringing it back."

Nutley Board of Education President Charlie Kucinski said that he appreciated what teachers do, and added that the classroom was "just an extension of our wonderful classrooms in Nutley."

Essex County Freeholder Patricia Sebold, who taught for 30 years at West Orange High School, said she wished she "had the opportunity that the teachers and the students are going to have" with an outdoor classroom.

Attendees also included Brian Davenport, PVSC superintendent of river restoration, and Christopher Brooks, PVSC environment education outreach coordinator.

"We hope that Nutley children and residents of Essex County will be able to enjoy this unique learning environment for years to come," PVSC Chairman Thomas Tucci Jr. stated in a press release.

Classroom

During a May 23 Nutley Board of Education meeting, PVSC's Brooks presented a slideshow of the proposed classroom.

The classroom will be located close to Nutley High School along the Third River and will also provide easy access for middle school and elementary students.

Three tiers of seating, approximately 30 feet in width, will be built into the natural slope of the park. Seating could accommodate up to 30 students. While seated, students would be looking toward the Third River.

A podium of reclaimed wood would be installed in front of the stadium seating.

According to Brooks, in 2012, the Bloomfield school district opened an outdoor classroom at Clark's Pond. He said it had been a "dream of a group of kids to have an outdoor classroom right outside of Bloomfield Middle School."

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