

Used Plastics Become ‘Buddy Benches’ At E.J. School

Throughout the winter, students at the Ethel A. Jacobsen Elementary School in Surf City collected household plastic items for a special project, spearheaded by first-grade teacher Sarah Esarey, that combined STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) – and delivered an exciting result.

For months the youngsters brought in used number 2, 4 and 5 plastics from home, for a total of 267 pounds of plastic bottle caps, containers and bags.

The collected items were then transported to Eco Plastics of Delaware for transformation into two colorful “Buddy Benches.”

“Buddy Benches” serve as places children can go and sit if they are seeking a playmate, and kids who see someone on the bench can then go over and ask them to join in a game. They’re a straightforward and effective way to learn empathy, and they also encourage children to ask for help.

“The students of Ethel Jacobsen Elementary School *loved* this project,” said Esarey. “Not one day went by when children were not bringing plastics down to the recycling bins. The children sorted the plastics and were so proud of their contributions.

“They not only brought items



Supplied Photo

TRASH TO THIS: (From left) First-graders Taylor Agnello, Emerson Mangle and Brody Rechenberg buddy up.

from home (plastic bags, washed-out restaurant containers, laundry detergent containers, etc.), children also proudly rinsed and brought down their finished snack and lunch containers (sandwich baggies, rinsed yogurt or applesauce containers, spin-off applesauce lids, etc.). The children worked so hard and are so proud of their accomplishments.”

As the staff reported, the students were “star-struck” by the final product of their venture.

“Some of the children believed the benches were going to be plastic bags and bottles literally piled up,” Esarey remarked. In fact, the schoolyard now has two eye-catching and empathy-effecting benches created from plastics that had otherwise served their

purpose.

According to school staff, the age group at the E.J. School learns best with hands-on activities, and this project drove home the concepts of recycling, ocean pollution, engineering innovation/design and mathematics, as well as addressing character education. —J.K.-H.