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For more information, contact:

Ken Valenti, Public Information Officer

914-576-4305 / 914-563-5078

kvalenti@nredlearn.org

Buddy Bench Fosters Friendship at Jefferson Elementary School

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. (October 23, 2018) – In the Jefferson Elementary School play yard, there is a new spot just for making friends. It's a Buddy Bench - a brightly colored seat where students go when they want to meet someone new.

Jefferson's bench is named in memory of Elena Braia, a third-grade teacher who the school lost to cancer two years ago.

"If somebody doesn't have a friend, they could sit right here and somebody could ask them to play," explained third-grader Ivette Moreno.

Buddy Benches have been popping up in many schoolyards since 2013 when the first was erected in the United States by a student in Pennsylvania. The student discovered the idea on a website for a school in Germany.

Jefferson's seat is in the school's colors - bright red with the words "Elena's Buddy Bench" in white. It is flanked by red chrysanthemums in two oversized flower pots donated by the school's PTA.

"The Buddy Bench symbolizes the friendship that Ms. Elena Braia gave to the entire Jefferson Community," said Principal Kimmerly Nieves. "It is a testament to Ms. Braia's commitment to the social and emotional development of our children. I am looking forward to observing the use of the bench and seeing children make new friends."

"She was always smiling, always laughing. She was dedicated to the kids - how they behave and how they learn," Assistant Principal Leann Bruno recalled. "The bench is a simple way to

eliminate loneliness and foster friendship on the playground. It spreads the message of inclusion and kindness."

Jefferson teachers have been telling students about the bench so that they will be on the lookout for anyone who wants to make a new friend. With that instruction in mind, third-grader Jesus Barajas said he knows what to do when he sees someone sitting there.

"Talk to them or sit with them," he said. "That makes them feel better if they're lonely."

About the City School District of New Rochelle

With nearly 11,000 students in 10 schools, the City School District of New Rochelle, through an active partnership amongst community, parents, staff and students, provides a high-quality and challenging education for every child, in a safe, nurturing environment that embraces rich diversity and drives success.

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