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Local News - Friday, October 31, 2003

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Cleary School addition validates funding

By **GISELLE SOTELO**
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BUENA -- They liked what they saw at J.P. Cleary Middle School.

Representatives of the New Jersey Schools Construction Corp. nodded approvingly Thursday afternoon as they surveyed the well-lighted, multiclassroom addition to the Central Avenue building.

The SCC oversees design and construction in school districts such as Buena Regional, where state aid accounts for 55 percent or more of the budget.

It contributed nearly 65 percent of the expansion's estimated \$812,642 cost, said district Business Administrator Tom Kearney.

"It's really exciting to see the projects that were just a dream 2 1/2 years ago, and now it's real," said John Sullivan, SCC's southern regional director, referring to agency-funded construction projects in Vineland, Millville and other communities he visited Thursday. "It looks wonderful, and seeing it occupied makes it all worthwhile."

The 4,960-square-foot addition -- completed in September -- offers three extra classrooms and a small instructional area for special-needs students, Superintendent Diane DiGiacomo said.

Seventh-grade language arts teacher Doris Paladino was among those on hand to greet SCC representatives. She was seated at her permanent desk and surrounded by substantial professional space, storage space, a bulletin board and a large computer area in a room equipped with air conditioning.

She didn't always have such luxuries. Previously, Paladino would travel to teach in two separate classrooms -- one upstairs, one downstairs.

Principal Vito Robert Paladino said the addition has noticeably improved flexibility at the school.

"It helped us tremendously as far as class size, staffing, and being able have people in one area longer," he said.

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