

# Play's the thing in Ocean Gate

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OCEAN GATE — Students at the Ocean Gate Elementary School didn't go right to class when they went back to school last week.

Instead, the 160 students assembled on the sidewalk, and were walked around back so they could see their updated, brand new playground and soccer field.

The sparkling new area, dubbed "Peg's Playground" — named after the school's former nurse and longtime borough resident Peg Althouse — is one of the crowning jewels of the school district's summer-time refurbishing, which has included a new roof, improved bathrooms for the pre-kindergarten class and new boilers for the heating system.

Undoubtedly, it was the new playground that the students were most excited about.

"Before we started school, we wanted the students to see the new playground equipment," said Ocean Gate Elementary School Superintendent Frank B. Vanalesti. "We just wanted them to see how different it was from when they left in June."

Vanalesti said the new playground equipment cost between \$30,000 and \$35,000. Funding came from a variety of sources, including money appropriated for school projects by the Board of Education, private donors and a community athletic association.

The superintendent said this is all part of the district's theme for the school year — a celebration of pride in Ocean Gate schools. During the first day of school, the student body and parents were invited to a school assembly, in part to discuss the changes.

"Our school is a small school and a small district, but that's good," said Vanalesti. "Smaller is better. With the new playground and the new soccer field and all the work that has been done to improve the school, it should make everyone feel good about going to school in Ocean Gate."

Vanalesti said district personnel, with the help of volunteers, converted the school field, which until this summer was an unattractive grass and dirt field, into a well-manicured soccer pitch.

The Borough Council gifted the field to the school.

"It was little more than a sandpit," said Vanalesti. "Now it is totally different. The field has beautiful grass that is hundreds of feet long. The field is entirely different than it was."

Over the summer months, workers seeded the grass instead of installing sod in order to cut down on costs.

The superintendent is banking on the improvements, which also included a new coat of paint on the three buildings of the district, upping the self-esteem of everyone involved with the district.

"The construction that we did positively affects the whole district," said Vanalesti. "Taking pride in your school will only help everyone."

The school district also added a new literacy program, expanded its computer technology department and enriched its advanced supplemental programs.