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New Suffolk Just Kids Students Put New Communication Board To Good Use

Nicole Wagner | 12/24/25

A student at Just Kids in New Suffolk “lit up” after seeing the school’s new communication board, eagerly pointing to images that display playground activities.

The \$3,000 board — donated to the school by Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital during a ceremony Wednesday, Dec. 17 — features 80 images and words in Spanish and English designed to help children communicate during playtime.

“One of our little girls has just lit up when she sees this board,” said Jennifer Bachisin, director of clinical services at Just Kids New Suffolk.

The board uses a grid-style symbol layout that allows the school’s 18 students, who receive individualized instruction as part of a K-2 program serving children on the autism spectrum, to express their thoughts, needs, wants and ideas.



A communication board at Just Kids New Suffolk features 80 images and words in Spanish and English to help children communicate during play time. (Courtesy Jennifer Bachisin)

The kids point to the icons to tell teachers what they’d like to do on the playground.



The board, positioned next to the playground, helps children communicate their thoughts, needs, wants and ideas. (Courtesy Jennifer Bachisin)

Catherine Bosco, director of nursing for psychiatry at SBELIH and the mother of a 4-year-old son with autism, emphasized the importance of having communication boards at playgrounds.

“The goal was to try to have these things more well known so that when kids like my son [go play] ... they can fit in, and they can talk and make friends,” Ms. Bosco said. “Kids are so moldable at this age to where that’s going to be second nature.”

If communication boards become more common at playgrounds, Ms. Bosco said their use would be normalized when kids play together. Beyond reducing stigma, the boards could also ease concerns for parents with autistic children might otherwise need to bring a speech-assistive device.

“Communication comes so easy to us, but once you lack it, it’s very challenging,” Ms. Bosco said.

Beyond the school’s students, the board is also being used by members of the New Suffolk community.

A neighbor who lives across the street and is hard of hearing said the board has helped him communicate with his grandchildren.

Others have brought their grandkids to the playground when school is not in session and are “loving it,” said Donna Morrison, director of educational programming at Just Kids.

Students attending Just Kids New Suffolk, which opened in July 2024, come from the Mattituck-Cutchogue, Riverhead, Hampton Bays and William Floyd school districts. The program has a waiting list of about 100 students. There are 19 other Just Kids schools across Long Island.

Just Kids Early Childhood Learning Center Executive Director Steve Held praised the compassion, patience and professionalism of the staff, saying their work helps change the trajectory of students’ lives.

“For us, it’s just a privilege to see what our staff do,” Mr. Held said.

The picture board is the second of its kind installed with support from SBELIH, following the placement of one at Greenport School in September 2024.

“I’m so proud to be a part of this and for our hospital to be a part of this,” said Paul Connor, chief administrative officer at SBELIH.

For more information about Just Kids, visit justkidsschool.com.



Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital leadership, Just Kids executive director Steve Held and Just Kids staff celebrate the installation of the communication board. (Nicole Wagner photo)