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Theodora Smiley Lacey School Officially Reopens in Teaneck, New Jersey

Teaneck, NJ: The Theodora Smiley Lacey School officially reopened its doors to honor the lifelong Black American civil rights activist and educator. For her unending drive for human rights activism, the Teaneck School District renamed its newly refurbished kindergarten building in her honor during a ceremony on September 17, 2020.

Lacey is best known for her work in organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, in close partnership with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She is dedicated to affordable housing justice reform and racially integrating public schools in New Jersey. Residents refer to her as “The First Lady of Teaneck”. The school is the first in Bergen County township named after an African American woman.

“We all know that the name on the building is what's most noticeable,” Lacey said. “But it's what's going on inside that's so significant. Remember the adage by Robert Fulghum, “all I needed to know, I learned in kindergarten.” – Theodora Smiley Lacey



The two-story structure was built in 1956 and originally named for children’s poet Eugene Field. Di Cara | Rubino Architects, a long-time partner with the district of Teaneck, provided design services to renovate the structure from a board office to a kindergarten building, which now services 180 students. The building includes nine classrooms, a nurse suite, main office, and faculty room. Each classroom houses state-of-the-art educational technology and “person trap” security to respond immediately to any threat. Phase II renovations included a multipurpose room, media center and kitchen. A new elevator was also built, along with HVAC units. Energy-efficient mechanical units were installed throughout the facility, including LED lights with sensors and HD security cameras. Mr. Rodney Watkins, an active ACE mentor, was the senior project manager for the project.

