STUDENT IMMIGRATION STORIES PROJECT WINS HONOR FROM THE N.J. SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Public School No. 21 ESL teacher’s assignment cited as an outstanding program

PATERNON – What began as a teacher’s simple writing prompt and later grew into a published book and a museum exhibit is now being recognized as an outstanding educational program by the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA). Paterson Public Schools officials today announced they received word from the NJSBA earlier this month that the Why I Came To America project will receive the association’s School Leader Award at its annual convention in Atlantic City in October.

Two years ago, Jason Velante, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at Public School No. 21, began giving his students a simple writing prompt: “Why I came to America.” Since then, students’ immigration stories have been published and circulated through the Paterson Free Public Library and the Wanaque Library. They have been exhibited at the Paterson Museum, and they have received a special commendation from the Paterson Board of Education. This year, the judges of the NJSBA’s School Leader Award selected the district’s Why I Came To America project as an outstanding program.

“This is a great honor that speaks to who we are as a school district,” said Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer. “I’m very proud that Mr. Velante is being recognized for his creative ability to engage students. And I’m equally proud that our district is being recognized as a place where all students have the opportunity to learn and be educated regardless of where they came from. I want to thank everyone at the New Jersey School Board Association for this very special honor.”

Photo caption: Jason Velante presenting his ESL students before the Paterson Board of Education on October 18, 2018, when the board issued a special commendation to the Why I Came To America project. At the far right is Assistant Superintendent Cicely Warren.