

# 5 LI SCHOOLS WIN GRANTS IN STEM CONTEST

Each gets \$2,500 to build water quality projects

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Five Long Island schools each received \$2,500 grants to help students build projects that help their schools improve water quality and reduce nitrogen pollution on school grounds.

Grants in the Long Island Water Quality STEM Challenge were awarded by the Long Island Regional Planning Council to Walt Whitman High School in the South Huntington School District, Sewanhaka Central High School, Elmont Memorial High School, West Hempstead Secondary School and Island Trees Memorial Middle School.

The grants were awarded to student-designed projects that

included creating wetlands, improving drainage and diverting runoff to reduce contaminants.

"The passion and innovation displayed by the students and encouragement received from their teachers is inspiring," the planning council's chairman John Cameron said in a statement. "As Long Islanders, we need to do what we can to reduce nitrogen pollution which is one of the most serious environmental and economic challenges facing our region."

Water quality experts, including from the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the planning council, the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Peconic Estuary Partnership selected the winners.

Projects included eighth and ninth graders in Island Trees, who formed a SEEDS Club (Students Embrace Environmental Decisions and Solutions) and proposed planting a rain gar-



Elmont Memorial High School students tested soil on school grounds for the water quality challenge.

den using water from a rooftop and runoff drains.

Sewanhaka students invented bioretention areas using fungi and plants, with planter boxes around a constructed wetland/pond.

Elmont students tested soil on school grounds and found the highest nitrogen levels at the softball field. Students then suggested adding vertical planter boxes along the field.

In West Hempstead, students proposed a rain garden and a tiered drainage system for a part of the school property that was prone to flooding from

heavy rain.

Walt Whitman High School Students in Huntington Station planned to add a filter in a downspout diverter to get rid of contaminants directly from the rooftops and collect water in a storage tank.

Students in the STEM challenge were tasked with making green infrastructure, which was meant to teach students about the importance of reducing nitrogen in Long Island's waters, starting at schools.

Officials said nitrogen is the leading cause of deterioration in Long Island's estuaries,

threatening ecosystems and creating toxic algal blooms that can kill fish, damage wetlands and other marine life.

"By providing Long Island students with access to resources and programs that help foster an appreciation of Long Island's natural beauty, we are not only safeguarding critical ecosystems and ecosystem functions, but also providing a springboard for Long Island students to pursue meaningful and impactful careers in environmental stewardship," said Derek Betts of the Nassau County Soil & Water Conservation District.