Students celebrate the results of the second penny harvest in Columbus
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Students, parents, teachers, representatives of not for profit organizations and other members of the community came together at Thomas Worthington High School on December 10th to celebrate the results of the first phase of the Penny Harvest service learning program. The Penny Harvest is the nation's largest youth philanthropy program and it was brought to Columbus by a local not-for-profit called See Kids Dream last year. For about six weeks over 7,500 students from nineteen area elementary schools from Columbus City and Worthington City Schools went door-to-door to connect with neighbors, family and friends to collect spare change. The students have filled the equivalent of 340 bank sacks full of change so far. Two schools, started the program late, so they are still gathering pennies and will continue harvesting through the first week of January.

Prior to the collection each classroom of students identified a community issue they would like to address. The needs from every classroom are assembled onto what is called a Wheel of Caring that is kept in each building all year. The Wheel of Caring serves as a guide for the students as they spend the winter months researching needs, and debating causes. In the spring the student decide how to make the greatest impact in their community by issuing grants and giving back every penny of the money they collected.

Thanks to a grant from the Columbus Foundation's J. Ray and Lillian W. Waller, and Richard C. and Manikin Kaufman Ninde funds and support from Crimson Cup, Tehio Credit Union and Huntington Bank, the program has grown from seven schools last year to 19 schools this year. Last year students from seven schools raised $15,114.16 which they used to award grants or complete service projects for 22 different organizations in the community. The students addressed needs ranging from homelessness, hunger, and helping people with cancer, to providing care for animals, and a letter writing campaign asking state legislatures to outlaw texting while driving.

The program teaches students about citizenship and democracy while empowering them to make a difference in their community. "They develop life skills, teamwork, communication and leadership, said Bill Grindle, one of See Kid Dream's founders. "It allows them to connect classroom lessons to the real world." While the student's receive guidance from teacher volunteers, the driving principle of the program is that the students make all the decisions.
The Penny Harvest service-learning program started in New York City as one father's response to his four-year-old daughter's wish to comfort a homeless man in 1991. Teddy Gross's quest to provide a meaningful way for his daughter, Nora, to help that man, gave birth to a program that now provides all children a way to help.

See Kids Dream was founded by Bill and Laura Grindle, parents of two elementary age children who are seeing the benefits of participating in the program. The couple had learned of the Penny Harvest's success in New York and spent more than four years trying to find a way to bring it to Columbus. Last year, the couple founded See Kids Dream with support from a board of directors which includes executives from Huntington Bank, Capital Square Limited, Clearview Management Resources, Irvin Public Relations, Avatar Syndicate and Telhio to help bring their dream to life. See Kids Dream provides the Penny Harvest to area schools free of charge and they hope the student's success will inspire support from local donors to enable them to expand to additional schools and districts next year.

See Kids Dream's board members are pursuing grants, corporate sponsorships and individual gifts to fund the administration of the program. To learn more about See Kids Dream and how you can help bring the Penny Harvest to more schools and children in Columbus, visit www.SeeKidsDream.org