Students Show Community How to Make Every Penny Count

Tuesday, May 25, 2010 8:38 AM

The wheel of caring helps students decide how to give back the funds raised in their buildings.

Every day when you read the paper, turn on the television, or listen to the radio you are reminded of the challenging times we live in. There are countless stories about the need for help in our local community.

By participating in a powerful service learning program called the Penny Harvest, students from 19 area elementary schools in the Columbus City and Worthington City school districts are working together to address these needs and make a difference. Last fall 7,500 students from kindergarten through sixth grade helped raise funds one penny at a time. They went door-to-door, called their families, and a student from Colonial Hills Elementary in Worthington even raked leaves for neighbors. In total, the students filled over 300 bank sacks full of change and collected more than 3 million pennies, to raise $30,075.95.

Since January, the students in all 19 schools have been meeting, researching and debating ways to address the needs in our community. At the beginning of the year the entire student body in each school had discussions in individual classrooms to identify issues they wanted to address. Each class had to come to consensus on one issue that they wrote down and presented in a school wide assembly.

When all the issues were put together they form a wheel of caring, which serves as a reminder of the purpose for their Penny Harvesting efforts. The wheel of caring also provides the basis for the research students conducted to decide how they would give back all the funds raised in their building. To gain insight students investigate issues online, they conducted interviews with neighbors and in many schools they invited leaders from local non-profit organizations such as
the Homeless Families Foundation, United Methodist Children's Home, Mid-Ohio Foodbank, Salvation Army, Strategies Against Violence Everywhere, A Kid Again and others to come to their school to make a brief presentation and participate in discussion.

"These students are addressing many of the critical needs in our community today with the money they raised and with so many of them participating in service learning at an early age, I think our community will better off in the future." said Bill Grindle, See Kids Dream executive director.

As the students finalize their decisions on how to give back the funds they raised, many schools have decided to award funds to multiple organizations. In addition to issuing checks, the students are conducting canned food drives, collecting essential household supplies for local shelters and volunteering to participate in service projects together to help others.

The Penny Harvest is in its second year in central Ohio and is provided to schools by a local non-profit organization called See Kids Dream. While the entire program is student-lead, a teacher or teachers in each school volunteers to support the student leaders who run the program. See Kids Dream provides the training, materials and the year-long support needed to run the Penny Harvest. Programs like the Penny Harvest engage students in their learning and use community service as an educational strategy. Research has shown that students who participate in programs like the Penny Harvest benefit from higher academic achievement, increased self esteem and the development of research, organization, communication and leadership skills.

See Kids Dream was able to expand from the seven schools who ran the Penny Harvest last year to a total of 19 schools this school year 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, Telhio Credit Union, Weltman Weinberg & Reiss, Huntington Bank, and donations from individuals in our community. The organization hopes the student's success will inspire support from other local donors to enable expansion to additional schools and districts in the future "See Kids Dream does not charge schools for the support and materials they provide to run the Penny Harvest service learning program. Additional funding will be critical to maintain and expand the program" Grindle said. 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

LINK: http://www.columbusparent.com/live/content/education/stories/2010/05/penny-harvest.html?sid=107