

Education

Penny Harvest program helps students make a difference in their community

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Students from 19 elementary schools in the Columbus and Worthington City School Districts are participating in a year-long service learning program called the Penny Harvest.

Last fall over 7,500 elementary students went door-to-door collecting spare change. Their efforts really added up as they filled over 300 bank sacks. But the penny gathering is just the first step in the year-long program. For the next 12 weeks the students in each school will collaborate to conduct research and identify community issues and needs. Doing their research will give them a deeper knowledge of their community while they work together to try to solve and address the issues they discover.



Involvement in Penny Harvest increased interest in academics and the development of leadership skills.

Ultimately, the students will invite organizations to submit grant requests which they will review. In the spring the students decide who they will award grants to and they will also complete service projects as they give every penny of the money they collected to local charities.

The Penny Harvest is the nation's largest youth philanthropy program and it is being introduced to Columbus by a local not-for-profit called See Kids Dream. It empowers students to become engaged and uses a proven curriculum to help the students make a difference in their community. Research on the program conducted by Columbus University has shown there are great benefits for the students including an increased interest in academics, improved attendance and the development of skills such as leadership, communication, organization, research and collaboration.

The driving principle of the program is that the students make all the decisions and Pat Price, principal at Devonshire Elementary, a Columbus City School, said she saw added benefits when they ran the program for the first time last year. "It's a great program, it does all the things See Kids Dream wants it to do in terms of getting children to see that they are empowered and they can give back. But selfishly, from a principal point of view, it builds great community within our school."

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.

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 the local students

raised \$15,114.16 which they used to award grants or complete service projects for 22 different organizations in the community. They addressed needs ranging from homelessness, hunger, and helping people with cancer, to providing care for animals, and a letter writing campaign to ask state legislatures to outlaw texting while driving.

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.