

Elementary students explore the Penny Harvest grant making process

Written by Darci Tomky



- With 1,020 pounds of pennies collected, Holyoke elementary and high school students have dived into the second phase of the Penny Harvest philanthropic project.
- The students have the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a non-profit organization. Now the question is: who should receive the money?
- A roundtable committee made up of 14 elementary students has been formed to answer that question. Meeting once a week with high school sponsor Tracy Trumper and her high school leadership class student coaches, they are learning about the grant making process.
- Members of the roundtable are second graders Kelyn Goldenstein and Alex Vieselmeyer; third graders Drew Stewart, Victoria Hatton and Tyler Lamm; fourth graders Wyatt McCallum, Morgan Philips, Zachary Churchwell and Logan Osborne; and fifth graders Edgar Cruz, Lori McWilliams, Taylor Mayden, Sierra Anderson and Bradley Cumming.
- The students have devoted themselves to being “a group of committed people working together to help meet important needs in the community.”
- On their fourth week of the project, Trumper noted the students have learned about the democratic process by taking oaths and assigning roles such as president and secretary. They have also explored terms like community and philanthropy.
- According to high schooler Briar Bergner, the project is not just about giving away money; it is also focused on service. One of the objectives of the Penny Harvest is to improve neighborhoods through service projects the students will plan and execute in addition to awarding a grant.
- The next step in the grant making process is to “identify the issue the kids as a whole care about,” said Trumper. The roundtable discussed the question, “What do you see around you that you want to see changed?”
- The roundtable developed a survey to find out what issues other elementary students care about. The survey, distributed by roundtable members on Thursday, March 5, gave students several options of who they would like to receive the funds such as sick animals, people without homes, disabled children and elderly people.
- Once the issues are narrowed down, students will research the them to find what causes the problems and ways to solve or improve the situation. The high school coaches will also research specific non-profit organizations that address those issues.
- The next step in the process will be to conduct an application and interview process with the non-profits. Students will follow up with letters of acceptance or decline.
- Once a non-profit is chosen, the roundtable will finish up by planning a celebration party for elementary students and the recipient of the Penny Harvest grant. They hope to award the check in late spring.