 In the final stage of the Penny Harvest project, Holyoke Community Helpers awarded grant money to the Colorado Humane Society, the Brittney Ferguson family and the Danny Vernon family. Checks were presented to the Fergusons and Vernons at an assembly for Holyoke elementary students on Thursday, May 21.

 After collecting over 1,000 pounds of pennies in the fall, a roundtable of 14 elementary students with assistance from the HHS student leadership class set out to determine who should receive the $1,100 in grant money available to them from the Penny Harvest.

 The committee polled fellow elementary students to see what issues are important to them. The top three issues were animals in need, children in need of a home and those who have lost their homes because of a disaster.

 With focus issues in place, the students researched animal shelters, orphanages and foster programs as well as disaster relief organizations. Phone interviews were set up to narrow down the possibilities even further.

 Advisor Tracy Trumper noted the phone interviews were helpful in preparing the elementary students with educated decision making skills as well as beneficial to their developing communication skills as they had the opportunity to interview and talk with adults.
 “We wanted to put money where we’re going to make an impact,” said Trumper. Therefore, the Holyoke Community Helpers chose recipients who would benefit from the grant money.
 Ferguson and Vernon are both community members who have recently spent time in the hospital, and the students noted how the money will help their families with the medical costs and additional medical needs they will face on their road to recovery.
 For the students, the Penny Harvest project was “not just about money,” said Trumper. “It’s about service, too.” In addition to grant money, the students are contributing to the Colorado Humane Society with a service project.
 Holyoke Community Helpers and the student leadership class are planning a trip to the Englewood Animal Shelter in early September where they will walk dogs and clean cages among other service projects at the shelter.
 Students also recently coordinated a service project for Angel Covers, a Colorado-based organization that supports children without homes. Hundreds of supplies like toothbrushes, school supplies and small toys that were collected in Holyoke were sent to the orphans at Angel Covers.
 Because the Holyoke Penny Harvest project met both fund raising and service requirements, Holyoke was named a School of Excellence by the Colorado Penny Harvest organization.
 Trumper noted she is excited about the students’ enthusiasm for philanthrophy and community service. She said Penny Harvest will definitely be back again next year, and the students plan to look at other issues specifically impacting Phillips County.