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Coppery coin collection will help kids' favorite charities

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A passion for pennies is sweeping over two Worthington elementary schools as students help out local charities with a month-long Penny Harvest.

Granby and Wilson Hill elementary schools both kicked off Penny Harvest drives during assemblies held Friday, Nov. 7, asking students to begin collecting pennies and consider which organizations will receive donations.

Penny Harvest coaches at Granby are fourth-grade teacher Rachel Dawson and kindergarten teacher Cindy Schlarb.

"Penny Harvest is a year-long service-learning program that engages students in community building, character education and leadership,"

Dawson said. "Students and staff work together to collect pennies from friends and neighbors during a collection period that ends Dec. 1.

"After all the pennies are collected, our school will come together again for a tally rally to celebrate all the money we raised," she said.

Dawson said 27 student leaders were selected through an interview process and asked to harvest pennies for two weeks before the assembly.

"The student leaders shared the program with the school by showing a DVD and performing skits to model good ways to collect pennies safely," she said. "We also built a Wheel of Caring, which is a wheel divided into many slices, one for each classroom. Each class chose one cause they would like to support with the money raised and wrote that cause on their piece of the wheel."

Dawson said each class presented the cause they care the most about to the entire school.

"Although the student leadership team will ultimately be the one researching organizations and deciding who to write grants to, the choices are based out of community concerns expressed by the student population at Granby."

Students also will have the potential to get involved in a variety of service learning projects, depending on the organization.

Dawson said students could end up actively participating in the organization or learn by researching and interviewing people from various organizations.

"Penny Harvest is not just another fundraiser; it is a service learning initiative that will help introduce students to the power of giving and service and engage them more in the world around them," she said.



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Granby Elementary School fourth-grader Allison Garvin (center left) and fifth-grader Emma Catalogna are flanked by teachers Rachel Dawson (left) and Cindy Schlarb during an assembly last week to kick off the school's Penny Harvest fundraiser. Wilson Hill Elementary School also is participating in the charity drive.

Dawson said the school will place coffee cans bearing Penny Harvest labels in local businesses for penny collection.

After pennies are collected through Dec. 1, student leaders will research organizations until spring, then announce in another school assembly where the money collected will be allocated and ways students can become involved in those organizations, Dawson said.

At Wilson Hill, Principal Pat Reeder said 24 students in grades 4-6 were chosen as Penny Harvest leaders and students will collect pennies until Christmas.

"We've been excited about getting involved in this process, because one of our values as a school is helping children understand how to be advocates within the community," she said.

Two teachers, Brian Leist and Erin Kosanovich, are in charge of the project, Reeder said.

Wilson Hill's Wheel of Caring also illustrates community needs students hope to fund.

"We talked about what makes a happy community and all the different student groups brought their ideas to the Wheel of Caring, everything from helping homeless pets to working with people with disabilities," Reeder said. "Then we gave students individual bags to collect pennies in."

The school will create a Philanthropy Roundtable to begin learning more about community needs so students can make decisions on who they want to contact to create grants using collected funds, Reeder said.

"In the spring, we'd like to create some hands-on experiences where kids can volunteer, because the last phase of this project is 'taking your hands to the community,' " she said.

Reeder said Penny Harvest projects in schools began in New York, and only recently came to the Columbus area.

For more information, visit the Web site pennyharvest.org.