

First Graders First Class Community Service

Written by Marshall Ashcraft, WC Schools
Monday, 18 March 2013 07:59

Integrating different subject areas into project based learning has been a growing trend in education for years and it's vividly on display in Amy Eberle's first grade classroom at Hardin Park School. Her young students are getting acquainted with basic business concepts, developing collaboration and decision making skills, learning about community service, and experiencing some of the ways in which math applies to the real world as part of a service learning project they've named "Aprons to Apples."

Aprons to Apples has its roots in Eberle's concern about the substantial and growing prevalence of hunger in Watauga County. "I've always been worried about the problem of hunger in our community, and in the 12 years I've been here, it seems to always be getting worse." The statistics bear out her observation: the proportion of Watauga County Schools students receiving free or reduced price school meals has reached 40% this year, the highest on record, and the figure is slightly higher at Hardin Park School, the largest K-8 school in the system. While Eberle's previous classes have worked on hunger related service projects, this year's project is different in that the focus is primarily on Hardin Park families. That focus began with a class discussion of wants and needs and distinguishing between the two.

Borrowing an idea used by Hardin Park colleague Maria Nash, Eberle asked students to list 20 items they would need for a trip to another planet. Those lists then had to be pared back to 10 items and finally to just three. Until the time came to discuss and reflect on the difference between wants and needs, some of the three items lists included a bedroom and a television or a computer but no food.

After identifying and highlighting the basic need for food, students toured the school's food pantry, where donated food is made available to families. After the tour, they began to address the challenge of how to raise money to support the pantry with a project that was connected to food. The idea of selling aprons to raise money soon emerged and Aprons to Apples began to take shape. Students designed different logos in small groups, voted to select the best design, adopted Hardin Park's school colors of maroon and gold for the color scheme, and received a very basic primer on the concept of a business plan. However, producing the aprons required professional assistance.

Local vendor M-Prints took on that role and Eberle praised the business for their donation of time and graphic services to make the aprons a reality. "M-Prints only charged us for the actual production cost. They were just awesome to work with and we are very grateful for their assistance."

A total of 72 aprons were produced, priced at \$15 each. As of March 14, 24 have been sold and production costs have been recovered. Although students now know the concept of breaking even, they don't want to stop there and neither does Eberle. She's hoping to sell the remaining aprons so that students will experience earning a profit for making a product and the satisfaction of helping others at the same time.

"Aprons to Apples will give us some wonderful immediate benefits in student learning and community service," said Eberle, "but the longer term payoff could be even more important. We're hoping many of these young people will grow up to be successful entrepreneurs and that all of them will be compassionate human beings, successful in their careers and caring for their communities. As educators, it doesn't get any better than that."

Aprons can be purchased by contacting Amy Eberle at eberlea@watauga.k12.nc.us or by calling her at the school between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m. at 264-8481.

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Eberle is a former Hardin Park Teacher of the Year and a National Board Certified teacher. Hardin Park School serves 792 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and is rated a School of Distinction and a high growth school under the NC ABCs school accountability system.

Photo: First graders Carter Nelson, Maria Resendiz, Jossue Alcaraz-Galan, Jose Miguel Mejia Izaguirre, and Austin Dyer display an apron created as part of their service learning project.