

ELK RAPIDS NEWS

February 2
2023

Volume XVII
Issue No. 37
75¢



Cole Rose sports the logo he designed for the alternative education program's spirit wear. Elk Rapids High School logos will also be featured on products to be sold at a school store opening soon.
Courtesy photo

Budding businesses will teach workplace and life skills

BY BARB MOSHER,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Shauna Phillips is making lists and checking them twice. And checking them again and again. That's how the lead teacher of Sunrise Academy (Elk Rapids School District's alternative education program) is keeping track of the myriad details surrounding a collaborative effort between her students and those of Elk Rapids High School's special education Transitions class to start up not one but two small businesses.

If all goes according to plan, a coffee cart will start rolling through the high school's hallways by the first of March with a school store soon to follow

offering spirit wear and accessories. Proceeds from the two enterprises will fund community-based instruction field trips for both groups of students.

"It's a big project," Phillips said. "The size of it is growing really fast as the students and I continue to understand exactly what we're doing."

It's a project that came about last fall as Phillips was filling out an application for a grant from 100 Women Who Care/Elk Rapids Area, an organization that selects local nonprofits three times a year to receive a collective donation from its members. Phillips realized that if her grant was chosen, the funds would cover field trip expenses for a few years but would then need to be replaced. She wondered if there was a better way to use the grant, perhaps to start up something that would

generate continuous funding for field trips.

"We thought about how we could give the program more longevity," Phillips said about changing the application to propose a coffee cart/school store that would do just that. "The idea is to make these experiences sustainable for years to come and give the students opportunities to develop workplace, life, communication, and social skills."

The members of 100 Women Who Care/Elk Rapids Area heard a presentation on the coffee cart/school store plan in December and selected it to receive a donation totaling nearly \$23,000.

"Our membership voted to support this project because of its innovation and sustainability moving forward," said Carol Heles, co-founder of 100 Women Who Care/Elk Rapids Area. "We also recognized the educational value of collaboration, mentorship, and relationship building, all characteristics of this program."

Sunrise Academy students have been busy surveying high school students and district staff to determine interest and product preferences; budgeting; designing product logos; ordering, inventorying and pricing merchandise; and creating job descriptions for positions including manager, assistant manager, cashiers, stockers, inventory clerks, order fulfillment, and marketing/communications manager. They're also writing cover letters and resumes and preparing for job interviews.

Phillips will also guide her students as they investigate options and make purchasing decisions for coffee-making equipment, a cart, a cash register, cups and lids, creamers, and pre-packaged snacks. They are continuing to explore potential merchandise for the school store including t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants, hats, foam fingers, key chains, bleacher seats, and pencils. A mobile kiosk will host the store while the current high school construction project is underway and until a permanent space is designated.

Phillips said the coffee cart will open first, on Wednesdays and Fridays from 7:20 to 7:45 a.m.

continued on page 2



Sunrise Academy lead teacher Shauna Phillips (far right) and her students take a break from writing job descriptions for the coffee cart and school store they will be opening and staffing soon. Photo by Barb Mosher

Postal
Customer

PRESORT STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
ELK RAPIDS, MI
PERMIT NO. 10

SERVING THE ELK RAPIDS ALDEN KEWADIN RAPID CITY
EASTPORT TORCH RIVER BRIDGE WILLIAMSBURG ACME AREAS



Madison Duncan counts school store inventory. Courtesy photo

with staff encouraged to submit orders ahead for delivery direct to their rooms. Students will be able to purchase coffee direct from the cart. Once the coffee cart is up and running smoothly, the school store will open during the same morning time, as well as Wednesday and Friday lunch hours and during select home sporting events.

Sunrise Academy students have also been discussing with Phillips and special education instructor Aimee Heinzelman a plan for integrating the Transitions class students into the businesses.

“They’ve been asking her about the best way to go about this, how we can better support her students,” Phillips said. “We’ll come up with a process to bring them in and mentor them in different aspects of running these businesses as well as planning and budgeting for the field trips.”

Heinzelman anticipates tremendous benefits for her students with mild to moderate disabilities who will be making the transition to life after

high school and are learning the skills that are key to success in post-secondary life.

“This project will benefit both entities by building relationships, expanding existing yet unknown leadership skills, and by giving students the opportunity to show empathy for others, build positive relationships, and generally make good decisions,” she explained. “When students with disabilities are educated with their peers and are allowed the benefits of both social and emotional connections, they learn age-appropriate social skills. Broadening integrated settings provide a challenging environment for students with disabilities. Students learn to be more independent and acquire developmentally advanced skills.”

“It will do wonders for (my students’) social skills, as well,” Phillips added. “A lot suffer from anxiety in social situations. This will allow them to work in a safer, controlled environment. The grant from 100 Women Who Care was the deciding factor. We wouldn’t have been able to begin this process without that donation. We’ve been super amazed and overwhelmed by the support.”



Sunrise Academy lead teacher Shauna Phillips (second from left) discusses school store plans with students: Daniel Wildfong, Braiden DePew, Nicholas Perez, and Cole Rose. Photo by Barb Mosher