



Frankfort-Schuyler

CENTRAL SCHOOL

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For Immediate Release

Life Skills Class Opens Coffee Cart Business at Frankfort-Schuyler

Jan. 22, 2018 (Frankfort, NY) - Starting a successful business from scratch would be an accomplishment for anyone, but the achievement becomes that much more impressive when it's done by a group of teenagers still in high school.

Students in Ashley Christofaro's life skills class at Frankfort-Schuyler Jr./Sr. High School began serving made-to-order hot beverages from their new student-run coffee cart business this past fall.

The life skills class focuses on preparing students with skills for everyday life including social-emotional skills, academic development and career and technical education. The class uses functional academics to teach students transferable skills and to help them work toward reaching independence.

The new coffee cart business is proving to be a win-win situation for the school's staff and the student-baristas. The staff get to enjoy their fresh morning cup of coffee delivered right to their classroom or office and Christofaro's students are learning skills that they will be able to apply in all aspects of their lives.

The coffee cart is providing opportunities for students to learn and practice a variety of skills including how to work as a team, acknowledging each other's strengths and roles and being responsible for oneself. The business is also serving as a great venue to exercise math skills like maintaining inventory and counting money and practicing effectively communicating among themselves and with customers.

When Christofaro began teaching at Frankfort-Schuyler a year and a half ago, most of the students in her middle school classroom were between the ages of 14 and 16, an age group that she knew could benefit from a more vocational-based approach to learning.

"We were trying to think of an ongoing project that we could do within the school. We already do the mail and sometimes we'll help the custodians, but we wanted something that could become just their own," said Christofaro.

After pitching the coffee cart idea to school administration and having it approved, the hard work of getting the business up and running began.

The first step was making sure that all of the students knew and understood what it takes to run a successful business. Christofaro and her teaching assistants, Ro Gatto and Linda Carnright, talked to their students about the small details that go into making things run smoothly on a daily basis, like proper preparation, accurate inventory and good customer service.

Contact: Rebecca Neary • Public Relations Assistant • School Communication Service
Phone: 315.520.0116 • Fax: 315.223.4701 • E-mail: rneary@oneida-boces.org



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With the help of their teachers, students chose a logo and name for their business, developed a communication system for staff who wanted to purchase a beverage, practiced how to deal with different situations that may arise, and created a budget, price list and ledger.

Once the groundwork for the coffee cart was in place, the students opened the business for sales – and the coffee cart’s success has only increased since then.

On a typical day, teachers and staff place their coffee cart orders by filling out a laminated card and hanging it on the outside of their classroom door. Drink options include coffee, hot chocolate or a variety of teas, and all drinks can be customized with sugars, milk and flavored creamers.

Each morning, the life skills students travel the halls of the school with the coffee cart, retrieving order cards and making custom drinks onsite. After each drink is made, it is personally delivered to the customer’s classroom or office.

Students are rewarding their customers’ loyalty with a punch card program that gives customers a free beverage after they purchase five, and other students at the school have also begun to take advantage of the coffee cart services, buying cups of hot chocolate for themselves and their friends in between morning classes.

Christofaro noted the positive impact that the program is already having on her life skills students. “It’s been really good for them. Their social skills have noticeably improved, as well as their pride and confidence.”

Later in the day, the life skills students are responsible for cleaning up the cart, taking inventory and restocking to prepare for the next day’s coffee service.

With the positive reception for the original coffee cart, the project has now expanded to include a popcorn cart on Fridays during lunch and Christofaro hopes to occasionally offer baked goods on the coffee cart in the future.

Along with the success of the business, students have also had to make decisions about how to use their profits.

“At the beginning, most of the money just got recycled back into buying supplies and we made a donation to a charity that the school was collecting for,” said Christofaro. “Eventually we want to get aprons and hats with our logo on them to make the business a little more formal and professional.”

Most recently, the class used their coffee cart profits to buy presents for a secret Santa gift exchange in their classroom. The shopping trip became an educational experience, as students practiced shopping for a gift for another person, staying within a budget and advocating for themselves when they needed help finding an item in the store.

Christofaro sees how much her students are enjoying their time working on the coffee cart and hopes to see the project continue.

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“They love it! Everything seems to be working well, so hopefully it keeps going. It’s been really good for both the students in our class and the faculty.”

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Pictured (from left): Life Skills students Dylan Williams and Austin Klein prepare orders during a coffee cart run at Frankfort-Schuyler Jr./Sr. High School.