

Hopkins Hill students start food pantry

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COVENTRY — Students and staff at Hopkins Hill Elementary have come up with a creative way to give back to the community with their new mobile food pantry, offering food items for local people and families in need.

The mobile food pantry is set up at the front of the school and is accessible to anyone in the community. It includes a large wooden cabinet and several bins and tables full of everything ranging from canned vegetables to cereal and much more. It is open every day in the morning to Hopkins Hill families from 7:45 to 8:45 a.m. and Thursdays after school from 3:45 to 4:45 p.m. It is also open to the public any time there is an evening event being hosted

at the school.

"The mission of the food pantry is to be accessible to everyone," according to Hopkins Hill Kindergarten Teacher DeAnna Cotoia. "Anybody can come. It's open to everybody and meant to service anyone in the community."

The concept is similar to that of a food exchange, Cotoia explained. Say you bought a large box of fruit snacks and your child isn't a fan of them — bring them by the food pantry and trade them in for a different snack. It's a win-win for everyone.

The school recently celebrated a "Kindness Week," where students and staff celebrated acts of kindness and hosted a food drive to stock the pantry. Hopkins Hill is also a Feinstein Leadership School and is committed to doing good deeds.

"We talked about what it means

to be kind and how do we empower each other and help with our community," said Cotoia.

Thursday, Feb. 16 was their very first community launch. There will be another on Feb. 26.

"DeAnna conceived of this project as part of her Principal Residency Program," said Hopkins Hill Principal Kathryn Tancrelle. "It was a great idea that is really taking off. We will have certain community hours when school is not in session and will find ways to let the community know. We hope that neighborhood and Coventry families will take advantage of it as well as our HH families."

"It's an idea I had because I really saw a need," said Cotoia. "I thought it would be a good program that



Photo by Kendra Lolio

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Students and staff at Hopkins Hill Elementary created a mobile food pantry at the front of the school for school families and members of the community.

Pantry

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benefits our families and the community. I hope it grows and can help the whole community at large. That's really the goal."

The students also designed boxes that will be sent out into the community to continue gathering food for the pantry. DeCotoia said the school is actively looking for new community partners to host boxes.

As part of the school's mentoring program art teacher Sarah Hemmendinger painted and decorated the wooden pantry and accompanying tables and bins to make the space warm and inviting.

"It started off small and we're really growing it," said Cotoia. "We've had a lot of families come in to use it. It makes me so happy to see whole community involved."

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