

East Central Celebrates We Care Service Center Opening



“Here at East Central, we help with Helping Hands and we send food to people who need it for their families. It is important that we do this work because people need to live, and survive, and have food so that they can come to school and learn. We collect fruit cups, milk and other stuff, and we put it into a fridge. We then put all that stuff into bags for people who need it. I am excited about it. I think it is a good idea.”—Jude Parker, East Central second grade student

ROME, GA — Basic needs are essential to learning. Food, clothing, a warm place to sleep and cleanliness all must be addressed before studying fractions and the history of the Great Pyramids.

East Central Elementary has recognized the plight of families who may need a little extra help from time to time. In an effort to be a part of the solution and teach their students about being sensitive to the needs of others, administrators, community partners and dedicated faculty members now have a hub for all-things-needed to facilitate educational success of their children. And their reach does not stop at the doors to the schools.

With the grand opening of the East Central’s We Care Service Center, educators hope to reach out and wrap their arms around all of their families to let them know that at this school, everyone cares.

Central Office administrators, community partners, EC faculty, Rome City School Board members and even the students watched live via live stream as Principal Kristin Teems welcomed visitors to a new room repurposed for service. Inside the room, racks of clothing, school supplies and more line the walls, all labeled and waiting to be issued to anyone who may need help.

Teachers use project-based learning activities to show their students how to apply classroom lessons to their community. All of the children take part in organizing the stock, finding creative ways to gather donations and many even donate supplies of their own.

“Something we often hear in education,” said Teems to the hallway full of involved partners, “is that you can’t get to the curriculum and the content until you get to the child. Children must first know how much you care before they care about what you know and can teach them. Supporting relationships have to happen before rigor and relevance in the classroom.”

Not only will the school assist with ending hunger through the Helping Hands Ending Hunger program, they will also assist parents with job searches, offer clothing for job interviews, and link them with service providers; they will help with literacy by donating books to children and teaching their Spanish-speaking population how to speak English; they have collected school supplies to fill the gaps in tiny backpacks, and if there is not room in the family budget, they will provide a backpack if one has been donated; and the school is accepting the donations of a laundry machine and dryer they can use to wash clothing if there is nothing in their clothes bank to fit a child in need.

“As Rome City Schools continues to work on building our relationships with the community, and creating opportunities to support our students and parents, it is so important for us to address the needs that are sometimes forgotten. We feel that East Central’s We Care Service Center is a great example of our efforts,” said Tashia Twyman, Director of Communications and Public Engagement for Rome City Schools. “Services like helping families find jobs, providing clothing and connecting parents to services is important if we hope to see our students succeed in the classroom.”

“I am so proud for East Central. I can honestly feel the love they have for their students,” smiled Jill Fisher, Vice-Chair for the Rome City Schools Board of Education. “This is an awesome example of what they want to do to help. I agree with their thoughts. We must help the whole student and not just teach. Projects like the We Care Service Center make a huge difference in the environment of the school.”

Fisher also noted that each one of Rome City Schools’ elementary schools has an element of community outreach coupled with classroom work. “I am happy to see things like this at all of our schools because there is a need across our entire system. East Central addressing the parents needing assistance is an added service that I think really expands our ability to help. This is so good to see,” said Fisher.

One of the key partners in the Helping Hands Ending Hunger (HHEH) food pantry at EC is Carla Harward, CEO of the non-profit tasked with finding creative ways to curb student hunger. She was present to celebrate the growth of a seed she has helped to plant with the food pantry.

“I remember one Thanksgiving when we had a family in Trion City Schools that had not been able to cook Thanksgiving dinner. The children came to school crying,” Harward said. “These kids were starving over the weekend and I noticed all the food that just my family alone had thrown away. It kept bothering me and I could not get those kids out of my mind. I thought that the solution was simple and I asked the school if we could use the food they were throwing away in the cafeteria to feed hungry children. What I found was there was a labyrinth of food service rules that precluded it.”

Through her prior work as an attorney in Florida, Harward had the legal tools needed to find a way to have the food donated, opening the door for all the wasted food to be used and not thrown away. And with the addition of East Central’s We Care Service Center, she is even more excited about the new ways schools can help those in need.

“Your system really has a great group of teachers and administrators, and they have been great to work with,” Harward smiled. “I am so proud to see this program expand, because you can see the good that can come from it. I think it would be a good idea to start something like the We Care Service Center in Chattooga County and in a few other schools we are working with. The wrap-around service concept is the topic of this day and it is a good one. We need to make sure basic needs are being met before we can expect students to excel in school.”

“This is a dream come true for us here at East Central.” said Miriam Loveless, East Central guidance counselor. “Ms. Teems, Coach Day and I attended a staff development conference about poverty. There was a speaker who talked with us about the puzzle pieces of things that need to be put together to break down the barriers preventing kids from learning. They mentioned a closet and a washer and dryer. I hope that vision becomes a reality later on. They also mentioned food, the parent resource center and school supplies. We all had an ‘ah-ha’ moment. We were already doing many of the things we offer in the We Care Service Center. We had not allocated the space for it, so we were keeping things on a smaller scale. We decided that I could

use my room as the service center and offer so much more. We are so happy to see all of the hard work of our teachers and students have a place to grow.”

“Any word I would pick would be almost trite to describe my emotions and my excitement about the day,” said Teems. “At East Central we have been successful in developing a culture where we do whatever it takes for children and their families. Every single one of our teachers does whatever it takes. They have all bought in and the We Care Service center is a direct result of all of their hard work and the work of our students. It is really kind of humbling to be the principal of a faculty like the one we have at East Central. Here, we really do care. Everyone cares.”

For information about how you can help, please contact an educator at East Central.