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The Mule Shack Teaches Valuable Life Skills

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The recently opened Mule Shack is serving multiple functions at Poplar Bluff Junior High—in addition to serving customers—including teaching students business math, organization and social interaction.

“Every piece of the store is a teachable moment,” said Courtney Rutledge, the instructor over the life skills class, which runs the operation under teacher supervision.

After several months of planning, a ribbon cutting for the new store was held on Oct. 13. The Mule Shack sells snacks, school spirit items and other supplies during lunch every Friday next to the cafeteria. Proceeds go toward enhancing the life skills classroom, which is currently in the market for a stove to show students some basics on how to cook.

Over the summer, the district renovated the classroom, installing plumbing, sinks, countertops and cabinets so students—grades 7-8—can obtain practical knowledge that will help them manage the demands of everyday life beyond the school day. Students cleaned and painted the room, previously used as a storage space for gym equipment, and back in the day a place where students could get malts, according to Principal Candace Warren.

Before and after lunch, students gather at the service window to make their purchases. Seventh grader Nickolas Gallamore says he is saving up to one day buy a foam finger designed for sporting events. He had been anticipating opening day for quite some time.

“Finally, here’s the day,” Nickolas recalled thinking. He gave his early review of the store. “They have all the stuff people like... music, plus the name is catchy,” he exclaimed. “It’s sure to have success.”

The name of the store was chosen by incoming Junior High students at the end of last school year. The Parent Teacher Organization helped supply the initial inventory, along with donations from businesses. The plan is for the shop to eventually become self-sustaining once it achieves profitability.

Asked what his favorite part of working at the Mule Shack is, cashier Labron Thomas of the seventh grade replied: “What I like about the store is getting to know people, and [seeing] how they’re doing.”

Pictured: Life skills students man the Mule Shack under the direction of faculty during lunchtime.

Article and photo submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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