

# Andrew students don't chicken out in fight against hunger

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Andrew (Iowa) Middle School eighth-grader Jariyana Burnett (from left), eighth-grader Kayla Bruggenwirth and sixth-grader Hannah Bickel complete chores in the school's chicken coop on Friday. NICKI KOHL

ANDREW, Iowa — Hannah Bickel and two classmates checked for eggs Friday morning in the chicken coop near their school.

They completed chores, collecting the eggs and filling up a bucket with food for six chickens in the pen. They then headed back inside to wash the eggs and place them in a refrigerator.

“It teaches you a work expectation because you have to have responsibility and you get rewarded,” said Hannah, a sixth-grader.

Middle school students in the Andrew Community School district brought the chickens to campus this year as part of an ongoing initiative to help them better connect with their learning and solve real-world issues.

In addition to presenting real-world applications to their classroom lessons, the project has been a lesson in responsibility and maturity, according to school employees.

“It has really helped them build their capacity ... to find issues they are passionate about and concerned about and apply their learning to something that’s authentic,” Principal Tara Notz said.

Students rotate taking care of the chickens each week, letting the animals out of the coop, giving them food and water, collecting and washing eggs, and cleaning up, said math and Spanish teacher Elise Cullers.

At the end of the week, the students who cared for the chickens split up and take home the eggs they collected.

The teachers make sure everything goes smoothly, but the responsibility for caring for the chickens largely falls on the students, Cullers said.

“I think it’s brought out maturity in kids and a level of responsibility they didn’t think they had,” she said.

The effort grew out of a project-based learning initiative in the district aimed at giving students more of a voice in their learning and seeking solutions to community and state issues, Notz said.

Toward the end of last school year, students looked into an issue they could try to solve, landing on world hunger, Notz said. They eventually narrowed their focus to hunger in the community and how they could produce their own food.

Students had the idea to start a school farm. Teachers decided starting a chicken coop would be a good first step, Cullers said.

When students began this school year, they set to work to make it happen.

They learned about the birds and how to care for them, and then sought approval from the mayor and City Council. They also called stores to get quotes on supplies they would need and then helped pick them up.

“The kids are in the process throughout the whole thing,” Cullers said. “We try to give them as much responsibility as we can.”

Eighth-grader Jariyana Burnett said she never thought she would end up knowing so much about chickens. Before embarking on the project, she had never touched a chicken before, she said

“It was kind of weird at first, but then I got used to it,” she said.

Kayla Bruggenwirth, also an eighth-grader, said participating in the project helped her learn about working hard to reach a goal. She also appreciates the reward of getting to take some of the eggs home at the end of the week.

“It’s like being an adult,” she said. “You can’t go to work, do nothing and expect to get paid.”

Kayla said the eggs could help families who have tighter budgets, and she appreciated the chance to give back.

She also enjoyed learning how eggs get from a chicken “to your mouth,” she said.

“It’s just cool to eat your own chickens’ eggs,” Kayla said, laughing.