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AHEC Students Give Back Through Service Learning Projects

According to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) website, the mission of LLS is to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. LLS is the world's largest voluntary health agency dedicated to blood cancer. LLS funds lifesaving blood cancer research around the world and provides free information and support services.

This mission resonated with the Puxico Junior High School HOSA Future Health Professionals Club for a variety of reasons including several club members knowing a friend or family member who has been diagnosed with leukemia or another blood cancer. Therefore, club members decided to take up the cause by participating in the LLS Pennies for Patients campaign. During a three week period earlier this year, club members educated their peers and others on blood cancers and the need for research. The club also raised \$617.89 for LLS in the process!

Throughout the campaign, the Puxico Junior High School HOSA club members learned not only about the differences they can make, but also about leadership, teamwork, and what caring for others can mean. This project is just one example of the many service learning projects held by MAHEC students each year.

The National Service Learning Clearinghouse defines service learning as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities." Middle school and high school students across the state participating in MAHEC sponsored programs such as the AHEC Career Enhancement Scholars Program (ACES), the Oral Health Careers Awareness Program (OHCAP), and HOSA Future Health Professionals are encouraged to champion a cause by implementing a service learning project in their area.

One high school student active in the SEMO AHEC ACES program had this to say after completing her service learning project on proper oral care: *"I was able to increase my knowledge as well as the fourth grade students' knowledge of proper dental hygiene. I was grateful to be able to give them useful knowledge they can use for the rest of their lives."*



HOSA club members updated the goal poster

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the number of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the number of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University – Kirksville
- University of Missouri – Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC – St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC – St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC – Springfield