

PHOENIX RISING

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL NEWSLETTER



WCESC STUDENT BUSINESSES

Rooted in
Responsibility

MD Makings

TLC Gardeners

Phoenix Fire Bakery

Phoenix Fire Pizza

Western Woof

ESCape the Grind

Cultivating Growth Through Mindset

At Warren County ESC, we believe growth doesn't happen by accident—it happens when students are placed in environments designed to help them thrive.

By weaving a growth mindset throughout our entrepreneurship programs and learning experiences, students are encouraged to try, reflect, adapt, and try again. They learn that progress comes through effort, feedback, and perseverance—not perfection. When students are supported in this way, growth becomes visible—not just in outcomes like increased sales or project success, but in confidence, ownership, and real-world skills.

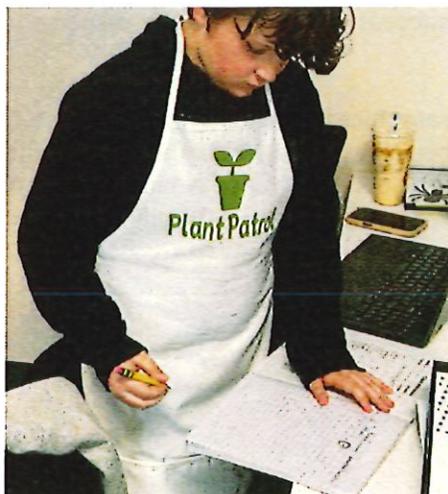
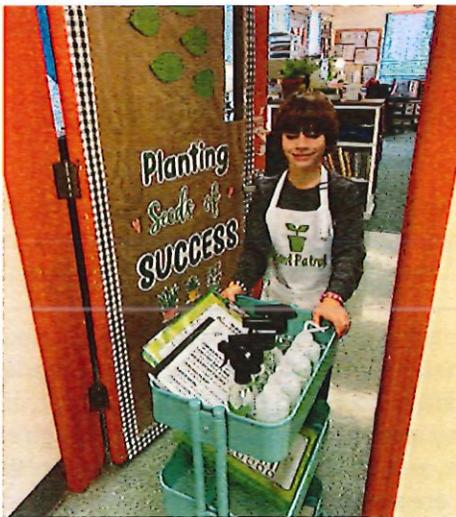
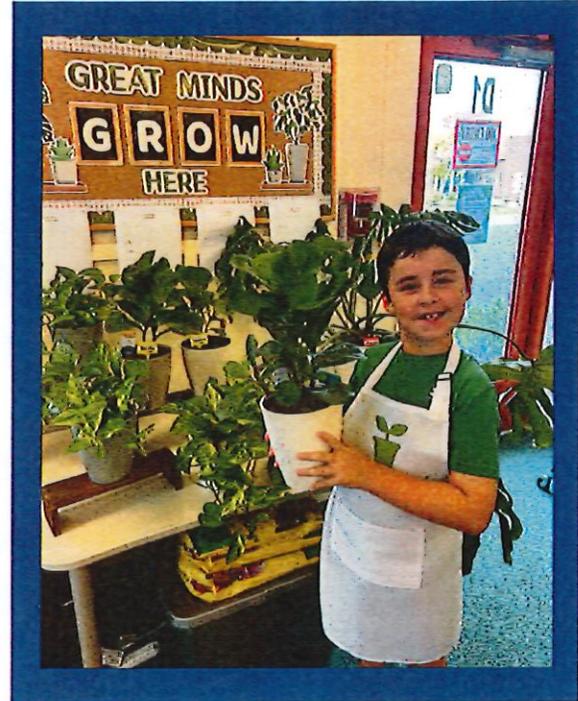
Just like anything healthy that grows, our students flourish when given the right combination of challenge, support, and opportunity. And when that environment is in place, growth follows—naturally and powerfully.

Rooted in Responsibility

Growing Wellness, One Plant at a Time

Wellness Center Phoenix Campus is proud to introduce **Rooted in Responsibility**, a new student-run initiative that brings entrepreneurship, wellness, and hands-on learning together - while quite literally helping our community grow.

Designed for our students in Kindergarten through 4th grade, Rooted in Responsibility is the first entrepreneurial opportunity housed at the Wellness Center, aligning with WCESC's commitment to fostering real-world learning experiences across programs. Through this initiative, students become members of the Plant Patrol Team, taking ownership of caring for plants that have been "adopted" by classrooms and office staff throughout the building.



Learning Through Living Things

At the heart of Rooted in Responsibility is experiential learning. Students explore how plants grow, what they need to thrive, and how environmental factors such as sunlight, water, and safety impact plant health. Before a plant is placed, Plant Patrol members interview staff adopters, asking thoughtful questions about lighting conditions, placement, and potential hazards providing an authentic opportunity to practice communication skills and problem-solving.

Once plants are placed, students complete scheduled "shifts" wearing special Plant Patrol uniforms. During each shift, they utilize a cart with their supplies:

- Check soil moisture and watering needs
- Prune and inspect plants
- Complete simple plant care checklists
- Log observations and monitor plant health over time

This process reinforces responsibility, follow-through, and pride in meaningful work.

Rooted in Responsibility

Social, Behavioral, and Emotional Growth

Rooted in Responsibility is also deeply rooted in social and behavioral skill development. Throughout the program, students actively practice:

- Taking turns
- Following directions
- Using kind and respectful language
- Problem-solving collaboratively
- Respecting living things
- Completing tasks with accountability

Students celebrate successes together - whether it's a thriving plant, a successful propagation, or positive feedback from a staff adopter. All of these help build confidence and a sense of belonging.

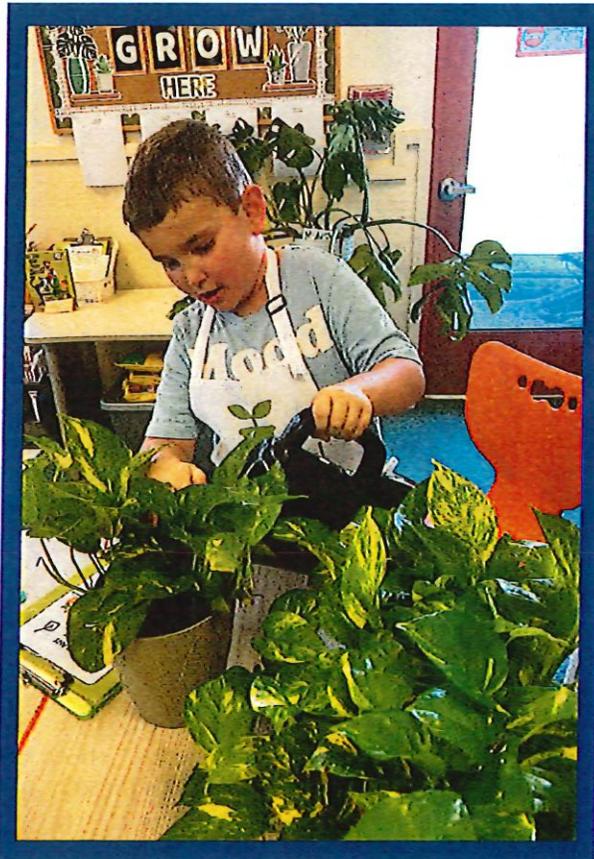


Wellness in Action

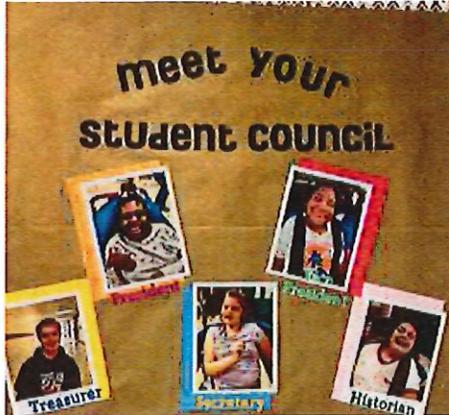
As a Wellness Center, we recognize the therapeutic power of nature. Research consistently shows that houseplants can reduce stress, improve focus, and promote emotional well-being. Caring for plants provides students with a calming, purposeful activity that encourages mindfulness and connection that makes Rooted in Responsibility a natural extension of our wellness mission.

Growing Beyond Expectations

What began as a small project has flourished. This fall alone, the Wellness Center's plant collection has grown from 5 plants to 51, thanks to student-led propagation efforts and generous donations. Students learned how to propagate plants, gaining insight into sustainability, patience, and long-term care. We are grateful for the partnerships that have helped this program thrive, including Lowe's Home and Garden, The Split Leaf Company, Warren County Water and Soil Conservation, and supportive friends of the Wellness Center.



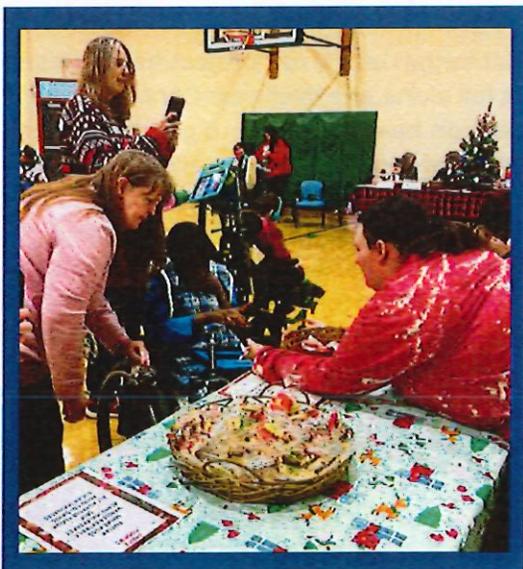
MD MAKINGS



New Student Council

MDESC began the school year with a highly engaging and competitive Student Council election. Campaigning took place over several weeks and included candidate promises, debates, slogans, and campaign signage displayed throughout the 500 wing of the Western Row Campus. Voting concluded on August 29, 2025, and all Student Council positions were filled. The presidential race generated significant interest, with Jessi Ingle ultimately elected President.

Student Council Spreads Holiday Cheer



Fall Fundraiser



MDESC Student Council led a successful T-shirt fundraiser, selling 207 shirts to WCESC staff as well as friends and families from Brookside Extended Care. Students negotiated pricing with Friday Threads to secure the best value and traveled to multiple WCESC sites to complete sales. Throughout the process, they used assistive technology to support transactions while demonstrating strong advocacy and real-world vocational skills.

A dedicated assembly and delivery team supported the effort, ensuring all orders were completed and distributed by Thanksgiving break.



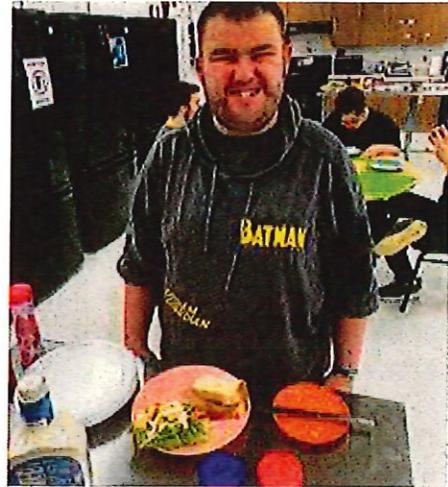
Former MDESC student Alexis Allen served as Chief Marketing Officer, leading sales with an impressive 52 shirts sold.

Check out a special video featuring Alexis on WCESC social media.

In alignment with MDESC's commitment to community engagement, a portion of fundraiser profits was reinvested through a nonprofit initiative. Student Council hosted a Holiday Market for the entire Western Row Campus, where each student received three "Jesi Bucks" to purchase gifts for their families. Every participant also received a holiday photo to take home. Additional funds were used to stock the MDESC art closet, ensuring ongoing creative opportunities, and to purchase wheelchair bags, blankets, and AFO bags for students as holiday gifts.

TLC Gardeners

TLC Gardeners have been busy—and very successful—in the garden! This season, students grew a healthy crop of lettuce that was strong enough to be harvested twice, a true testament to their care and consistency. The fresh lettuce didn't just look great; it was put to delicious use in side salads and as a crisp topping on sub sandwiches, allowing students to enjoy the fruits (and greens!) of their hard work from garden to table.

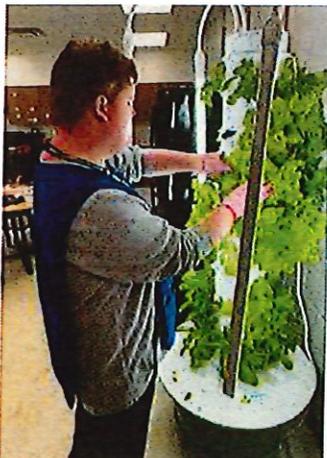


Sandwich Day

First Harvest



Second Harvest



No Bees? No Problem!

The TLC Gardeners also are growing tomatoes and learned through research that tomatoes need a little help with pollination. To make sure the plants thrive, TLC Interns manually pollinated the tomato flowers using a toothbrush, a simple and effective technique.

Unfortunately, we recently experienced a setback when power was removed from our tower, requiring us to start our tomato plants all over again—but we're eager to apply what we've learned and begin the growing process anew.

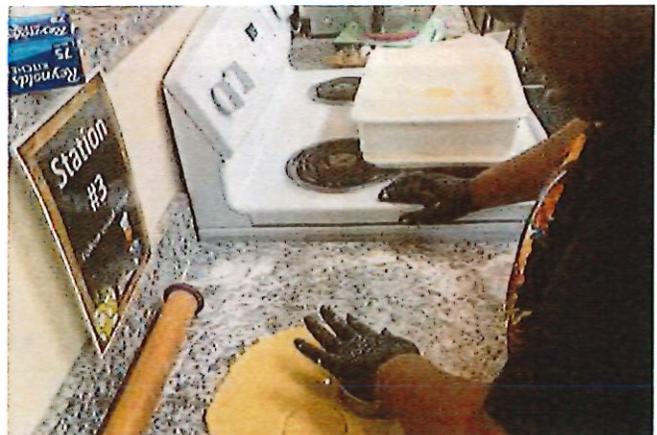
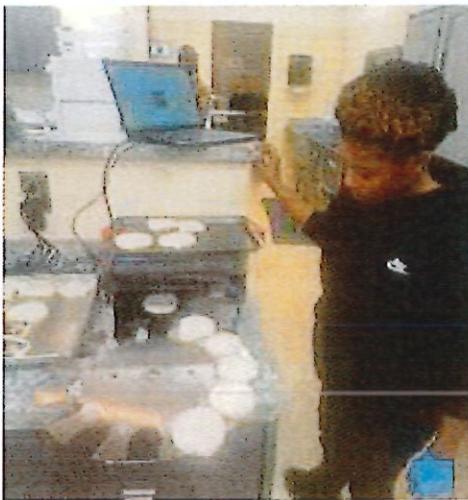


Phoenix Fire Bakery

Growth Fresh Out of the Oven

The Phoenix Fire Bakery, a 9th-grade student-led entrepreneurship business at the WCESC Learning Center, showcased how authentic business experiences lead to meaningful learning. By fulfilling one of the student business's largest catering-style orders, students applied real-world problem-solving skills while producing and delivering high-quality baked goods to both student and staff customers.

By approaching challenges with a growth mindset, students strengthened their adaptability, quality control skills, and perseverance. The Phoenix Fire Bakery experience delivered more than cookies—it built confidence, reinforced problem-solving skills, and provided students with a firsthand understanding of entrepreneurship in action.



Business Highlights

In November, Phoenix Fire Bakery was asked to prepare over 150 cookies for a Western Row Campus student lunch. To meet this request, bakers collaborated to ensure timely production, quality control, and successful delivery—essential elements of running a business.

In December, students produced their first 3D-printed cookies, which were individually packaged and delivered as holiday gifts. This project introduced new technology and elevated branding expectations, requiring precision and close attention to detail.

Along the way, students navigated real business challenges, including mastering icing consistency, learning to operate a 3D icing printer, and adapting to an unexpected snow day during final production.

Each challenge became a valuable learning opportunity.

Sparks on the Horizon

Get a glimpse of the ideas, projects, and student ventures that will light up our Spring edition!



Student Spotlights

Student Spotlights take center stage in our next newsletter!

This new section will highlight students' achievements, growth, and the unique ways they shine in and out of the student businesses. Stay tuned as we celebrate our students and their successes!



Phoenix Fire Pizza

Big flavors are on the horizon! Our student entrepreneurs are expanding the Phoenix Fire Pizza lineup with new menu items currently in development. Get ready for fresh ideas, bold choices, and even more ways to enjoy what our team is creating.



Business Goals

In our next newsletter, we will spotlight progress on business goals set for this year, including revenue targets and key skills they aim to develop. Join us as we highlight growth, innovation, and plans for continued success.

Contact Us

Phoenix Fire Pizza and Bakery

John Lazares CEC

Mike Bidwell Montaniz

(Mike.Montaniz@warrencountyesc.com)

ESCAPE the Grind, TLC Gardeners

Amanda Pennix

(Amanda.Pennix@warrencountyesc.com)

Western Woof

Katie Strubbe

(Katelin.Strubbe@warrencountyesc.com)

MD Makings

Jill Buffenbarger

(Jill.Buffenbarger@warrencountyesc.com)

Rooted in Responsibility

Tara Gee

(Tara.Gee@warrencountyesc.com)

