



CROTCHED MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Retail Therapy: Students Learn Critical Skills for Independent Living



Greeting customers. Arranging merchandise. Running the cash register. Pricing inventory with stickers. Counting money. Tidying up the store. Collecting a paycheck. These are the tasks and rewards that students who work at The Eagle's Nest experience each week -- activities that keep the school store operating while honing critical skills for independent living.

Josh and Jaclyn, two students with autism, have been working in the store since it re-opened in March 2014. With the help of their teacher, Jessica Granger, both students have learned a number of social, academic and life skills aiding in their growth and independence. And by running an active and vibrant store, Josh and Jaclyn are, in turn, helping their classmates gain important life skills when they stop by to shop.

A Center of Commerce

Josh loves to welcome visitors to the store with the use of his Augmentative and Alternative Communication device. He also enjoys reconciling the cash register and keeping the store tidy, jobs that help Josh practice staying on task. In fact, Josh is one of the reasons the school store re-opened.

When Josh began school at Crotched Mountain, his IEP included a personal goal of working in a store and greeting people.

“This is a very real experience for Josh to partake in and we love that he works at the store,” says Josh’s dad, Darren. “From what we see, Josh really enjoys helping to keep things organized and greeting people – new faces as well as regular customers. Being a part of the store has been wonderful for Josh.”

Jessica adds, “Josh’s interest in this area gave us the incentive to open the store in a new, inviting location, where there is a lot of foot traffic.” Today, people flow in and out of the store regularly, creating a lively and vibrant atmosphere, she says.

Earning Opportunities to Work and to Buy

“The store creates great opportunities to get our students involved, yet we want to teach them that they have to earn the privilege,” says Jessica. Students wanting a job must fill out an application, interview for the position and make the commitment to show up for their 30-minute shifts. Those who do not show up consistently must re-apply for the job.

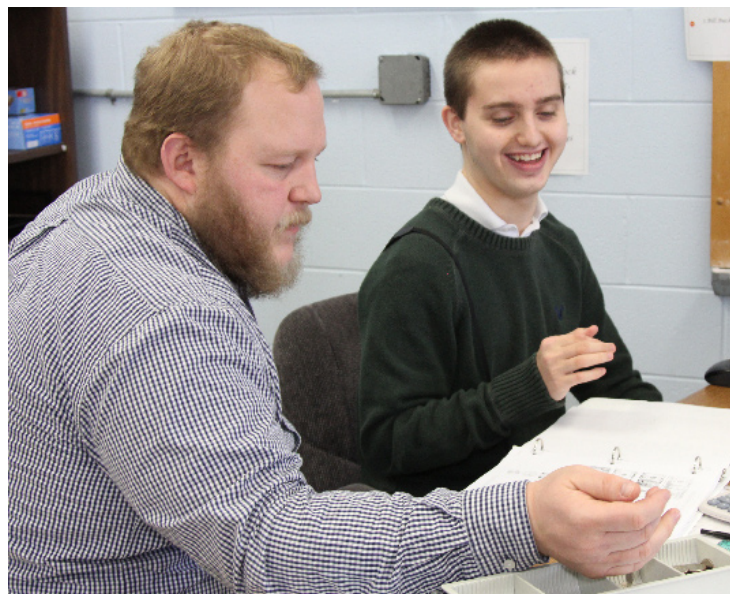
Running the store also means stocking it, and many of the student employees join Jessica on outings to shop at local stores to buy inventory. Jessica says this teaches them math, personal finance, multi-step tasks and sequencing, responsibility, and critical social skills as they work with a store owner or clerk to buy supplies.

As a paycheck, student employees earn Bill Bucks and Don Dollars – Crotoned Mountain School currency featuring CMS’s principal and physical education teacher – that can be spent in the store.

“This process teaches great life skills and helps students stay motivated,” says Jessica. She adds that students who don’t work in the store can earn Bill Bucks and Don Dollars from their classroom teachers for helping out staff, doing vocational work and completing special school assignments.

The students can use the currency in a special section of the school store filled with fun items such as puzzles, stickers, necklaces, stuffed animals, movies, clothes and more.

Most items cost between one and five Bill Bucks and Don Dollars. “Our students can save their money to buy a bigger ticket item they’ve really wanted, or they can buy little items along the way,” says Jessica.



The Rewards of a Job Well Done

Jaclyn loves music – especially playing the piano. “After a recent work shift, Jaclyn collected her paycheck of Bill Bucks and Don Dollars and excitedly purchased a musical microphone she had been eyeing to use as she plays the piano,” notes Jessica.

Before enrolling at CMS in 2012, Jaclyn frequently exhibited challenging behaviors. Through her educational and therapeutic programming, she has learned to regulate her emotions and respond in ways that enable her to learn and be independent. Working at the store – operating the cash register, entering items into the log book, tallying purchases and interacting with customers – has continued to help her grow and succeed.

“In addition to the store, Jaclyn now works at a hair salon, Meals on Wheels and our Farm Program. These experiences provide her with great opportunities to express herself and learn long-lasting life skills,” says Jessica.

When asked, Jaclyn agrees that what she likes best about working in the store is counting money and saying hi to people.

“We have witnessed the most amazing changes in Jaclyn,” says Cindy, Jaclyn’s mom. “She has learned such independence and confidence in her abilities. She’s funny and smart and loved by many. Best of all, she knows that people here believe in her!”

Contact us to learn how our services can help children to learn and thrive.



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