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TPS Holiday Shop to assist students with gift shopping

Toledo Public Schools has turned an office at Westfield at Phoenix High School into a special shopping center for Westfield and Robinson Achievement students with learning and behavioral disabilities.

The annual Holiday Shop created by Westfield guidance counselor Susan Nahhas opened Wednesday. It offers a variety of gifts such as books, toys, household items, and clothes. Mrs. Nahhas said the shop was created six years ago and is sustained by donations from TPS staff and community members.

"A lot of our students come from great need," Mrs. Nahhas said.

She has been collecting items for two months, and partnered with Grace United Methodist Church and 9 round Fitness in Perrysburg as drop-off locations.

Volunteers from the Toledo Juvenile Court system assisted with gift wrapping, as did representatives from **Bags of Love — a nonprofit organization that partners with Toledo Police Department, TPS, and several local missions to distribute toiletry bags to community members in need.**

"I thought it would be a good chance to come over here and get to know some youth just in case we have to interact later. This is a good way to relationship build and better understand what's going on with the youth," Lucas County Juvenile Justice Center Educational specialist Ebony Porter said.

Westfield Principal Kate Snyder said the project is specifically beneficial for the SMARTS — Students Making Achievements Right This Second — committee, which is a student leadership organization that encompasses the district's 10 high schools. Committee members help organize and promote the Holiday Shop, Ms. Snyder said.

"It's important for our students to know the importance of caring and sharing with others," she said.

Exzavir Morrow, 17, is a committee member, and said it took the committee about a week to set up the shop.

"It was a phenomenal week for me. I like to help people regardless, I like to do anything to keep my mind off negativity," he said.

The shop will remain open for the next three to four school days. Students can pick out items for free anytime during school hours. There is no limit amount and all remaining items are donated to local missions and charities.