

Warminster ShopRite opens branch at William Tennent High School

By Crissa Shoemaker DeBree Staff writer | Posted: Monday, October 27, 2014 1:00 pm

Students at William Tennent High School can do their banking and buy school supplies without leaving school grounds. And now, they can get some grocery shopping done, too.

School officials Monday opened a mini-supermarket inside the school as part of a partnership with the district, the Warminster ShopRite and Wakefern Corp., the food cooperative that oversees ShopRite stores.

The Tennent ShopRite will be run by students, who will do everything from check out customers to decide what to sell on store shelves.

"I like that it gives me business intelligence," said senior Alex Shapiro, one of several students who helped build the store from the ground up. "It really was a reality check, to see how businesses actually open and run. There are so many behind-the-scenes things you don't even realize."

The store is part of the ShopRite Supermarket Careers program, which began in 1988 to provide special needs students with vocational training in their schools, said Philip Solomon, a retail initiatives specialist for Wakefern.

"We created a learning lab atmosphere," Solomon said. "They learn their regular studies, plus they learn how to work in the supermarket, and have the opportunity to work in different areas of the supermarket."

The program has grown over the years to include all students, regardless of their abilities, Solomon said. More than 3,000 students have graduated from the program since its inception. Nearly 500 are enrolled in programs at more than a dozen schools, and three new schools will be added over the next two years, Solomon said.

Tennent is the second school in Pennsylvania to have an in-store ShopRite; the other is Roxborough High School in Philadelphia.

Wakefern and ShopRite provide all of the equipment to open the store, including the checkout stand, shelves and the first order of food, Solomon said. Tennent received a grant to cover other costs associated with starting the program, said business education teacher Al Catarro, and the school will use money from sales to keep the shelves stocked and grow the program.

Student Sarah Vickalitis, who along with sister Rachel worked to help launch the ShopRite, said they're already planning to expand by offering space for art students to sell their works and building an in-school coffee shop. Students earn high school credits for working in the store, which will be open before and after school and during other periods yet to be determined.

Catarro said the market is an extension of Tennent's desire for "in-sourcing" vocational learning programs that were once outside the school.

"We have the credit union downstairs," Catarro said. "We have the school store. This was just a logical kind of extension, especially the fact that Wakefern and ShopRite have been doing this a long time. There's a success behind it."

Warminster ShopRite owner Joe Cowhey said the partnership will help ensure future generations of customers and employees.

"We don't take what you did for us lightly," Cowhey said, referring to Tennent's partnership with his company. "It's a major responsibility."