

Guest Opinion: Crayons to calculators

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Help! I can't afford the first day of school for my child!

I said that once. It involved the need for a Power Ranger backpack, deluxe watercolors and spiral notebooks with sporty covers. There were also pencils, crayons, rulers, glue, paper, markers, scissors, highlighters and a calculator. The future of my son's successful second-grade education depended on buying the right supplies.

It was a rough summer with soaring gas prices, food expenses and clothing needs for a growing, grubby boy. Nine years ago I couldn't afford the first day of school. It may as well be today.

Over 11,000 students in the St. Vrain Valley and Boulder Valley school districts are from economically disadvantaged families who qualify for the federal lunch assistance program, an indicator of family poverty. For reduced-price lunches, a family's income must be at or below \$38,203 for a family of four. For free lunches, a family's income must be at or below \$26,845 for a family of four. Looking back to my "poor-little-me-moment," I was wealthy then and now. Imagine living, let alone thriving, with a family of four, and less than \$39,000 to live on all year long. Many of these children routinely start school without basic school supplies for learning.

It doesn't help to reminisce about the good old days when you used a fat pencil and Big Chief tablet to get a great education. Yes, I was a dinosaur too. I used a sharp stick on dark slate and turned out just fine. Today, every child deserves the opportunity to learn, excel, and succeed regardless of how much money is home. According to the latest "Kids Count in Colorado" study from the Colorado Children's Campaign, "Children living in poverty are more likely to drop out of school, perform below grade level, miss more school due to illness or injury, and earn less as adults."

Beginning this year, St. Vrain Valley public schools, the Education Foundation for the St. Vrain Valley and FISH, Inc. of Broomfield will join in the Crayons to Calculators program to ensure that an increasing number of our students receive school supplies.

Crayons to Calculators is a unique collaboration among the Boulder Rotary Club Foundation, Western Disposal Services, I Have a Dream Foundation of Boulder County, Impact on Education, Sister Carmen Community Center, Foothills United Way, and the Boulder Valley School District. Working together, the program's goal is to provide at least 4,000 backpacks with supplies students in need at all grade levels by the time school starts in August.

Last year, Crayons to Calculators provided backpacks with supplies to 3,641 students. Students in need at Boulder Valley public schools simply pickup a backpack from their school on Aug. 14 and 15. St. Vrain students in need should call their school after Aug. 4 to reserve a backpack and to receive distribution information.

Crayons to Calculators invites community members to fill a backpack, or donate cash that is used to purchase supplies at cost from Corporate Express. Donation sites for supplies are available in all communities throughout the districts. Supply lists, donation sites, volunteer opportunities and more information on how to participate can be found at www.CrayonsToCalculators.org

This miraculous drive for supplies ends on Aug. 7. With or without the coolest backpack, it's so simple to make a huge difference in our community. Let's make sure all children start school with the supplies to succeed - this year and every year.

Catherine Bedell is Project Director Crayons to Calculators

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This is important. But even more important is that we need to address the way too high failure rate of BVSD. We are failing to educate 30% of our students (details at <http://www.davidthielen.info/politics/2008/04/bvsvd---no-impro.html> and <http://www.davidthielen.info/politics/2008/06/bvsvd---lies-dam.html>) This is horrible.

If you really want to help the students, you need to vote in a school board that can effect a change for the better.

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