

Drive is on to equip students for school

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As the principal of a Broomfield school with one of the largest number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, Larry Leatherman understands need.

But even in the face of an economic downturn, the Emerald Elementary principal is confident his students won't go without essential learning tools. Even in the worst of times, Leatherman has seen miracles worked through supply drives.

"Programs like Crayons to Calculators help out a bunch," Leatherman said. "I'm sure that even this year, our kids and parents will be OK and won't hurt for supplies."

District-based programs, such as Crayons to Calculators, are the lifeblood of supply drives. Run through Boulder Valley School District-focused nonprofit, Impact for Education, the program has had amazing results.

In 2008, Crayons to Calculators blew past the district's requested 4,800 backpacks, allowing it to also help students in the St. Vrain School District. And the program is not alone in getting students outfitted with the basics.

Adams County's Goals Inc. runs a similar program, also filling backpacks with paper, pencils and other school supplies for students in need. Last year, the program collected 1,500 backpacks, helping students in Adams 12 and other school districts. Though successful, each supply drive expects the demand to be stepped up this year.

"We have fallen short in the past," Goals Inc. executive director Deb Mares said. "But a lot of people forget we cover south Thornton and Northglenn and the Mapleton School District, where there is a lot of need."

Crayons to Calculators project manager Catherine Bedell reported the same dire outlook for BVSD.

"If we were going to fall short, this would be the year," she said.

There are worries that need could exceed supply. But both programs also believe they have an ace up their sleeves -- their communities.

"Just over last weekend, (Louisville's) Flatiron Community Church collected 1,064 backpacks," Bedell said. "That's a good sign."

Goals Inc. and Adams 12 have seen a similar outpouring.

Broomfield-based food bank FISH donated supplies, Adams 12 spokeswoman Janelle Albertson said. And a local motorcycle club gave Goals Inc. five or six cases of notebooks, Mares said. Even some local community organizations are getting into the act, away from the district programs.

Broomfield nonprofit A Precious Child Inc. through Aug. 15 is running a Fill-a-Backpack program with help from North Metro Fire Rescue District and Chick-fil-A. The drive will collect supplies that will primarily be distributed in Adams 12 and to child-advocacy group Court Appointed Special Advocates.

"This is not to say that what we collect won't go to other school districts," said North Metro spokeswoman Wendy Forbes. "But those are the main two places we're trying to get supplies to."

Even if the supply drives don't meet the need of every student, almost every school has a backup plan. Schools in each district collect extra supplies, just in case students come to class unprepared. And there always seems to be a bit of money stashed away for schools that need it.

"Impact on Education always gives us a chunk of money for students that can't afford field trips or supplies," Leatherman said.

"So, we'll find a way to provide."

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