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# Back to School: Help Homeless Students Get Ready for the Classroom

by [Danny Jensen](#) · August 17, 2010

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Summertime seems to really pick up speed once you start seeing ads for "Back to School" promotions. As reluctant as I was to say goodbye to lazy fun in the sun when I was growing up, there was always a certain buzz of excitement when stocking up on new supplies for the classroom. Unfortunately, for the roughly one million students across the country who are struggling with homelessness, those supplies and clothes can be difficult to come by. The good news is that there are programs in many communities that collect donated supplies to provide students in need with backpacks, binders and the other things they need to succeed in school.

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The number of homeless students has jumped **41 percent** (pdf) over the last two years, according to recently-released data from the Department of Education. In the 2008-2009 school year, the last year for which data is available, 956,914 students didn't have a permanent address where their report card could be mailed. School districts across the U.S. are also **reporting** dramatic increases in the number of homeless students. While increases in funding for schools to identify and assist these students are urgently needed, donations provide a critical, if short-term, supplement to existing programs.

Recently, volunteers in [Ventura County, California](#) assembled backpacks filled with donated school supplies for the United Way's *Stuff the Bus* campaign, and the Education Project in [Ann Arbor, Michigan](#) is currently looking for supplies for the more than 600 homeless students in that community. Volunteers in [St. Petersburg, Florida](#) handed out supplies to homeless students as part of the *School Tools for Cool Kids* program, which also offered students lunch, clothes, haircuts and physicals. And the North Shore Bank in [Massachusetts](#) has partnered with [School On Wheels Massachusetts](#) in collecting donated bags and supplies at its branches.

[School On Wheels](#) is an amazing program that was started in 1993 in Los Angeles by former teacher [Agnes Stevens](#) to provide one-on-one tutoring for homeless youth living in shelters, motels, group homes and on the street. The success of School On Wheels has inspired other similar programs across the country, including in [Massachusetts](#) and [Indianapolis](#), all of which would greatly welcome donations of school supplies, in addition to financial support and volunteer tutors. Staples stores nationwide have also partnered with [DoSomething.org](#) to collect school supplies for kids in need. Through Sept. 18, anything you drop off at Staples will be given to a local non-profit to distribute to local students.

Heading back to school should be an exciting time for all young people, even those who lack permanent housing. Though they may face daunting uncertainties in their daily lives, providing them with the school supplies they need will help launch them into the school year on a positive note.

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 [Danny Jensen](#) has written for [TakePart.com](#) and [Intent.com](#) and has volunteered with a variety of homeless organizations and school gardening programs.

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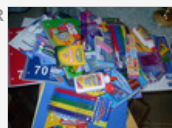
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