

Supplying Student Needs Outline

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Many children don't have what they need to succeed in school.

- Basic nutrition
- School supplies
- Clothing or school uniforms
- Books

Examples of congregational efforts to address these needs

- Filling "snack packs" or backpacks with food to be taken home over the weekend
- Offering a summer lunch program
- Collecting and distributing school supplies
- Collecting books to be used in the classroom or taken home
- Outfitting kids with needed school uniforms, shoes, winter wear, or athletic gear

First steps

- Talk with the school about what is needed.
- Determine if programs already exist in your community. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Assess your congregation's capacity and passion.

Weekend food

- Sometimes called "backpack" or "snack pack" or "smart sack" ministries
- A preset collection of food items to be sent home with children on Friday afternoon

There are many variations of this model

- What food is provided?
- How is it packaged?
- Where does the food come from?
- Who receives the food?
- How is it distributed?

Volunteers needed for a weekend food ministry

- Hands on workers to:
 - Buy and store the food
 - Pack the food
 - Deliver the food
- Leaders to:
 - Coordinate efforts
 - Be a liaison with the school and/or partners
 - Fundraise
 - Communicate

School supplies

- Find out what supplies are required for different grades.
- Provide a detailed “shopping list” for congregants who wish to contribute.
- Can be distributed by the local school, your church or a partner church, or at a special event.
- Donate classroom supplies to teachers.

Clothing and uniforms

- Provide school uniforms or school clothes.
- Set up a back-to-school giveaway “store” for families and children to “shop” for what they need.
- Supply winter-weather wear.
- Provide gift cards.

Key considerations

- Cost
- Sustainability
- Quality control

Best practices for ministries involving the donation of goods

- Always ask what is needed.
- If asking congregants to purchase items, provide very clear instructions.
- If collecting used items, do some education around what “good condition” means.
- Consider storage and transportation issues.
- Conduct giveaways with dignity and discretion to avoid stigmatizing recipients.
- Use donations as a stepping stone to a broader, more relational engagement.
- Take the opportunity to educate your congregation about the need you are addressing.

Source: *7 Creative Models for Community Ministry* by Joy Skjegstad

Resources

- Blessings in a Back Pack: www.blessingsinabackpack.org
- Floris UMC Helping Hungry Kids program: www.florisumc.org/helphungrykids

Prayer

Almighty God, We pray for children who don't have enough food to eat, adequate clothing to wear, or the tools they need to learn. We pray for their parents who struggle to provide for them. And we pray for schools and teachers attempting to care for children whose needs exceed their resources. We pray that we might find ways to meet these needs in appropriate and dignified ways. But we pray also for the coming of a day when no child is hungry, ill-fed, or inadequately clothed, for a time when families have adequate resources to care for their children and schools are given what they need to help children succeed. Lord, make us instruments of your justice as we work toward the coming of this day. We pray that your kingdom might come, on earth as in heaven. Amen.

