

East Bay students get supplies they need

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Hundreds of children filed into the cafeteria at Richmond's Nystrom Elementary School, excitedly eyeing the burgundy tote bags arranged on the tables. They sat quietly, listening to their principal speak about the surprise event.

After the totes were distributed, students made their way outside the building and eagerly examined the contents: colorful folders, fresh pencils, new rulers and binder paper.

"It's not a gift. It's not a handout," said Benito Delgado-Olson, co-founder and president of K to College, the nonprofit that organized Monday's giveaway. "It's what you deserve."

All 440 students at the school got one of the kits — worth about \$70 each — as part of the School Supply Initiative. The program is the brainchild of Delgado-Olson's organization, along with county and federal officials, the West Contra Costa school district, Mechanics Bank and the Richmond Children's Foundation.

The supplies are being distributed to 26,000 low-income students in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, with the largest number — 6,000 kits — going to children in West Contra Costa. To be eligible, students must qualify through the federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

"We're really thankful for this," said Marin Trujillo, a spokesman for the West Contra Costa school district, where about a dozen elementary schools will benefit. "These are things that many of our school families cannot afford to replenish every

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year."

Sixth-grader Michael Barragan, who likes to draw, said he was most excited about the package of colored paper.

"We thought we would just get some binders and notebook paper," he said.

The supplies were paid for with \$350,000 in federal stimulus money, as well as grants and private donations. Delgado-Olson said Monday's event was a practice run and kickoff for more of its kind. In the fall, he hopes to expand the program to middle and high schools.

The challenge, he said, will be keeping things going after federal stimulus money runs out.

"Little things like that have a really big impact," he said of the school supplies. "For the kids, it tells them that they matter."

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