

Stimulus gives Bay Area schoolchildren supplies

[Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Wednesday, September 15, 2010



Lance Iversen / The Chronicle

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia gives supplies to Verde Elementary School students in Richmond.

Erasers, rulers, glue sticks, pencils and binder paper are raining down upon [Bay Area](#) schoolchildren, thanks to federal stimulus funds.

More than 150,000 elementary schoolchildren in San Francisco, Alameda and Contra Costa counties have begun to receive book bags brimming with free school supplies and will continue getting them over the next few weeks.

"It's fabulous. It's a big help," said Patricia Torres, a mother of three from Richmond, whose children received school supply kits last week. "Money is very tight right now."

Most of the kits will go to children whose families meet federal low-income standards. The first round of supplies was distributed last week at Verde [Elementary School](#) in North Richmond, which is among the poorest neighborhoods in western [Contra Costa County](#).

Children got canvas book bags filled with \$22 worth of paper, pencils, pens and other goodies. They pored through the bags like they were stockings on Christmas Day.

"I love the bag because it says education," said Karamia Brown, 7. Her classmate, Aerial Woodson, also 7, just stood and smiled.

"It's good. I like it. Really," Aerial said.

The \$10 million project was funded with federal, local and private funds to help children who lack the basics because of parents being out of work or schools cutting back funding for supplies.

Yearly event sought

The program started last year on a smaller scale, with 27,000 kits distributed in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. But teachers reported such success, the program was extended and organizers hope to give out the kits annually.

"The kids were so excited when they got those supplies. It was amazing - they were really inspired to work and stay focused," said Verde Elementary first-grade teacher Elona Dixon. "Parents do what they can, but these things can be expensive."

Dixon said she spends about \$200 of her own money every year on pencils and paper for her students.

The program was organized by a nonprofit called K to College, which lined up the funding and coordinated with the school districts. The kits were assembled by inmates at [Folsom State Prison](#).

In all, 30,000 kits will go to San Francisco children, 80,000 will go to youths in [Alameda County](#), and the remaining 40,000 will go to children in Contra Costa County.

"This is not a handout. These are materials you deserve," K to College, Director Benito Delgado-Olson told children at Verde. "These supplies are now yours and no one else's. And now you can use them."

'It's a very big help'

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia helped secure a portion of the funding through the county's social service agency.

"I think all of us know the difficulties schools are facing," he said. "We want to give all kids an equal chance of success, help them be fully prepared."

At Verde, the supply kits were given out just before the final bell rang. Parents and other grown-ups were almost as excited as the children to see what treasures lay inside the bags.

"This helps a whole bunch," said Tasha Epps, who was picking up her niece and nephew Thursday afternoon. "It's a very big help. Now it's time for ice cream."

E-mail Carolyn Jones at carolynjones@sfbay.com.