

LIFE

Groups offer help with school supplies

Organizations that collect school supplies for needy children are bracing for bigger need this school year.

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During early registration for the school year that starts next week, Sanchez Elementary School Principal Azucena Garcia saw signs that the recession is preventing some parents from buying the basics: school supplies and clothing.

"They were asking for help in getting ready for school," she said.

This year, educators and community organizations that fill the void with school-supplies drives say they are seeing a bigger need.

For the Children, a nonprofit group that serves 10 Central Texas school districts, has been collecting school supplies for 20 years. Last school year, it served 54,000 children in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and spent \$120,000. "More kids are in need every year, always," said Timy Baranoff, a former curriculum director for the Austin Independent School District who serves on the board of For the Children. "This year, because of the downturn in the economy, there are greater needs."

The Town Lake YMCA is collecting school supplies for Zavala and Mathews elementary schools. Jason Daniel, the youth and family director, said that this year the YMCA has seen a 70 percent increase in families seeking financial assistance with membership. "Our assumption is that there will be more of a demand for school supplies because of the increase in financial aid assistance," he said.

Twenty-eight Austin elementary schools have 500 or more students each who qualify to receive school supplies from For the Children, said volunteer Narda Martinez Hurt. "These are all kids who qualify for the federally funded free or reduced lunch program," she said.

Last week, Central Texas students in need got an early boost when For the Children gave out paper, pencils, crayons, markers, glue sticks and spiral notebooks at the Sanchez Elementary School gym. The organization depends on private and business donations and grants to purchase the supplies in bulk and get better prices.

"With a \$3.50 donation, we can get \$15 to \$20 in school supplies," said Martinez Hurt. "One hundred

