

EDUCATION FOUNDATION OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

BACKPACK INITIATIVE

More than 30,000 Palm Beach County students started the school year with brand new free backpacks filled with school supplies, thanks to the **Education Foundation of Palm Beach County**. The Foundation and its community partners delivered the stuffed bags during back-to-school events across 48 Title 1 elementary schools, grades K–5.

The Education Foundation of Palm Beach County serves as a nexus between public schools, the private sector and the community. The Foundation awards grants and scholarships and operates over 100 programs that close achievement gaps in learning, prepare students for post-secondary success and create positive, measurable change for over 100,000 students.

“When we started the *Backpack Initiative* seven years ago, we handed out 2,500 bags,” said **James Gavrilos**, President and CEO of the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County. “This year our goal was 30,000 and we filled 30,543. It’s a sad statistic that nearly 40,000 children in Palm Beach County live below the poverty level and will return to school without basic supplies like pencils, backpacks and glue sticks. A backpack filled with supplies is one of the simplest solutions to inequity in the classroom. But it’s more than that. It provides hope, motivation and opportunity for a child.”

The *Backpack Initiative* is part of the Foundation’s signature program, **Red Apple Supplies**, a free resource store for teachers from the highest-need schools in the School District of Palm Beach County to stock their classrooms with school supplies. Since opening in 2016, Red Apple Supplies has distributed over \$8 million in school supplies. By the end of the 2024-2025 school year, the program included 96 schools with an eventual goal of serving all 183 schools in the District.

The program is vital to Palm Beach County as teachers typically spend anywhere from \$500 - \$800 annually out-of-pocket for supplies students can’t afford.

“We want to thank all our partners and volunteers who helped fill the backpacks and deliver them to thousands of happy children,” said **Teresa West**, Chief Engagement Officer for the Education Foundation. “Surpassing our goal was only possible because of the community’s support. This initiative is about more than just handing out school supplies — it’s about showing students that they are seen, supported and valued. Watching a child’s face light up when they receive a new backpack is a powerful reminder of why we do this work. It’s a small gesture that can have a lifelong impact.”

Sponsors that supported the initiative included **Amazon, BenteK, B&I Contractors, Carrier, CORE Construction, Gehring Group, Gold Coast Federal Credit Union, Good Greek Moving and Storage, Gunster, Jezerinac Group, NCCI, Office Depot, Proctor Construction, U.S. Sugar, Palm**



TOP ROW: Barton Elementary student with Sarah Testa with Proctor Construction; Gove Elementary and US Sugar PBSO; **BOTTOM ROW:** Grassy Waters - 5th grader; U.S. Sugar Brannan Thomas with 2nd graders from Pahokee Elementary

Beach Sheriff’s Office, Polen Capital, Pratt & Whitney, Seacoast Bank, Universal Engineering Sciences, United Franchise Group, Ventus Charitable Foundation, Wharton-Smith, Guardian Fleet Services, Comcast, NAI/ Merin Hunter Codman, Goldman Sachs, Wycliffe Charities Foundation, The GEO Group, and The Weitz Company.

Visit educationfoundationpbc.org for more information on the Education Foundation. To make a donation or become a community partner email Teresa@EducationFoundationPBC.org or call 561.351.7196.