

# Equity Takes A Stand: Backpacks Are Just The Beginning



More than two years into the pandemic, shockwaves are still resonating through NYC's most vulnerable communities. COVID accelerated preexisting inequities, and the effects are still playing out in our schools. Students from Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and immigrant communities continue to be disproportionately affected by the virus and resulting economic impact. A study by McKinsey found students in majority Black schools are five months behind in math and reading. The Northwest Evaluation Association reports Hispanic student achievement has dropped twice as much as their white counterparts. Children who have been historically underserved remain at even higher risk of falling further behind. Without the right interventions, we risk letting the next generation fall deeper into the cycle of poverty.

At New York Cares, all hands are on deck during our third annual Stand With Students campaign as we commit to creating greater equity in our schools. We accomplish this by providing vital resources like backpacks and warm winter coats, year-round programs that promote fitness, provide College Access, educate with Virtual Storytime, and countless hours of after-school tutoring and SAT prep sessions.

Earlier this month, we launched a year of educational outreach with our 2022 Backpack Packing Kickoff, a three-day event at the Salvation Army Harlem Temple, that brought together donors, volunteers, and community and corporate partners.

Iris Zalun, an Event Production Specialist with New York Cares is the lead organizer behind packing more than 16,500 backpacks with a year's worth of quality school supplies. Iris said, "It's amazing to see our volunteer community come together to work hard and pack thousands of backpacks for NYC students. The Stand with Students packing events are a great way to make an impact and provide some small relief for families."

One of the public schools receiving backpacks full of supplies is Patrick Henry P.S. 171 M. Vanessa Spears is the Parent Coordinator there, and she told us, "At Patrick Henry, Stand with Students means everything to our community. We're going to see the smiles on our students' faces on the first day of school when they come with their new backpacks and school supplies, ready to tackle the year. This partnership with New York Cares has been amazing for our community."



Davin Turkewitz

Wednesday, August 31, 2022 - 11:46am

Maanya is one of many volunteers who attended our Kickoff. She is a first generation American, and a graduate of the NYC public school system. Maanya came to volunteer alongside her mother, a NYC public school teacher, and younger sister. Together, they contributed to the packing of 8,000 backpacks for students across 30 public schools.

In Maanya's words, "Volunteering is really rewarding. As somebody who is from the New York City public school system, it feels great to give back to the community that gave me so much and made me the person I am today."

Later in August, we joined [Henry Street Settlement](#) at Jacob Riis Cornerstone Community Center, one of the oldest social service agencies in America, for another round of backpack packing. David Garza is the President and CEO of Henry Street. He said, "Children have been out of school, with their social lives disrupted. Anytime you can provide a little bit of support and love, it goes a long way. New York Cares makes that happen quite literally. They not only give them support and resources, but confidence."

Volunteer-powered programs, whether they are virtual or in-person, make a tangible impact on communities. New York Cares' Executive Director, Sapreet K. Saluja said, "I Stand with Students because it's a real way to make a difference in the lives of so many NYC public school students and their families. It's a way to help them and make sure they know they're seen and loved by so many people in New York City."

With the first day of school right around the corner, New York Cares is just getting started. We believe every student deserves a quality education, the supplies they need to succeed, and a supportive learning environment. Our kickoff event is only the beginning of a vibrant year of hard and rewarding work to create equity in our schools.

***Are you ready to Take a Stand for equity in our schools? Attend an orientation, volunteer on a project, or donate today.***