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Community unites for children at Back to School Celebration

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Community unites for children at Back to School Celebration

From Central Carolina Community College

SANFORD, N.C. - As Elvira Garcia led her four-year-old daughter Celeste toward a table piled high with backpacks, the array of colorful options made the rising Pre-K student gasp.

Garcia and her children were among an estimated 1,000 people who attended the Let's Do It Together Foundation's fourth-annual Back to School Celebration, held at Central Carolina Community College's Dennis A. Wicker Civic & Conference Center in Sanford on Aug. 2.

The foundation partnered with CCCC, Manna Church, and El Refugio to put on the event, which featured food, games, giveaways, and a variety of booths where families connected with key local resources and services. Special thanks to the CCCC Foundation for their support in helping make the event possible.

More than 565 children received backpacks and school supplies from the celebration.

"Our goal is to let students know that this community is rallying behind them," said Jeanette Peace, the foundation's lead administrator. "Everybody can't be a teacher. Everybody can't be in the schools, but everybody can support an effort like this."

Each year, she said, the Back to School Celebration continues to grow and improve.

This year's event kicked off with a keynote address by Ben David, a former district attorney and current CEO of the Community Justice Center in New Hanover County.

David shared how leaders in his community embraced a "starfish model," with the five "arms" (government, education, business, faith, and non-profit organizations) working together on goals to improve community health and prevent childhood trauma.

"This day is really about our children," he said at the end of his presentation. "It's about making sure that they grow up healthy and that they grow up safe. That's something that we can all agree on."

Central Carolina Community College President Lisa Chapman saw CCCC students and alumni among those attending the Back-to-School Celebration, including parents and grandparents who brought their children.

“We want everyone in Sanford and Lee County, and Harnett and Chatham, to know CCCC is their college,” she said.

She said she hopes CCCC’s involvement helps encourage other groups to participate and to see the benefits of community partnership. It can be attractive to businesses, she said, to invest in places where groups and organizations come together for the common good.

“I’m incredibly proud of our community, because of how we take care of our people,” Dr. Chapman said.

In the center’s exhibition hall, the smell of fresh-spun cotton candy wafted through the air, as children and their families grabbed snacks and tried their hand at games like Skee-Ball. Many of those helping lead the fun wore red “Manna Church” T-shirts.

“We believe that outreach is the heart of the church,” Manna Church Lead Pastor Tom Johnson said. “We know that we can do a little bit for our community, but when we partner with others ... look at all the people we can help.”

In a meeting room on the other side of the center, Celeste picked out her first-ever backpack: pink with unicorns and rainbows. Garcia said getting new supplies and going-back-to-school shopping helps her children get excited for the new year.

Katrina Vaughan, who brought two of her children to the event, said time spent caring for a child with special needs makes it more difficult to bring in income, so she appreciated the opportunity to pick up supplies for her children at the Back to School Celebration.

“I think it’s awesome,” she said, “because it helps so many people.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Child_receives_cotton_candy_08-02-2025.jpg

Children enjoy cotton candy at the Back to School Celebration.

Child_with_backpacks_08-02-2025.jpg

A child checks out the backpack options at the Back to School Celebration.

Children_and_backpacks_08022025.jpg

Children receive backpacks at the Back to School Celebration.



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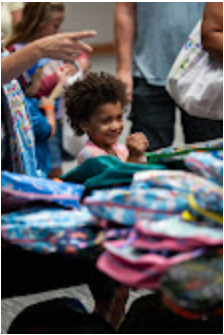
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