



NEWS RELEASE

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Local school district's Committed Community 'shows up' for students

*Cumberland County Schools, Carolina Panthers and Balm in Gilead
'team up' for back-to-school event*

Fayetteville, N.C. – On the evening of Monday, Aug. 22, 2022, in partnership with Cumberland County Schools (CCS) and the Carolina Panthers, Balm in Gilead staff and volunteers distributed free backpacks, school supplies and fresh hot meals to Cumberland County families. The distribution took place during a drive-thru back-to-school event at Balm in Gilead's Doc Bennett Road campus in Fayetteville, N.C.

Over the summer, the Carolina Panthers donated 5,000 backpacks and school supplies to CCS for distribution to students in need. More than 2,500 students received their own bundles during Monday's event.

"We are here to help each other," said Dr. Vivian Rhone, the founding director, president and CEO of Balm in Gilead Family Counseling Ministries. "It's so important to realize that there are people who get into circumstances that they never thought they would be in and are facing a dilemma."

In addition to the backpacks, volunteers distributed 2,480 hygiene supply bags, 748 grocery bundles and 2,361 hot meals to families in need.

"Today is an example of what we mean in our strategic plan about successful students and committed community," said CCS Superintendent Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr. "Today, we are handing out backpacks donated by the Carolina Panthers and food — even some grocery bundles with over 70 pounds of food per family. This event is to let families know that we are here to support them in collaboration with our community."

The volunteer group included students and staff members from every traditional CCS high school and several central services departments. Students from athletic teams and student government associations (SGA) shared their excitement about volunteering during the event.

Cape Fear High School's SGA had several representatives present, including Executive Council Vice President and senior Miranda Lee as well as Junior

Class President Taylor Woodard.

“I am most excited about seeing people's faces when they receive their goods,” said Lee. “I am so glad we get this opportunity to help people in their time of need but my goal is just to make one person smile.”

Woodard agreed and said, “My goal for today is to make everybody happy and try to help as many people as we can. That’s something that makes me happy and is something we should do.”

Alysia Allen, a cheerleader from Gray’s Creek High School, noted the importance of giving back through volunteerism, stating, “It's really great that all of these communities can come together. We could all be in the same predicament as those in need, so I think it's really important to give back.”

While non-traditional calendar students have been returning to their schools since mid-July, the majority of the district’s nearly 50,000 students will celebrate their first day of the 2022-2023 school year on Monday, August 29. Those who could not attend the event are encouraged to contact Balm in Gilead for additional distribution opportunities by calling 910-424-2645.

Dawn Larson, the Health Science Education teacher in South View High School’s Career and Technical Education program, was among the volunteers and stated, “Students come back soon, and you can feel the excitement out here today with all of these families. There are a lot of hard things about teaching but this is the good stuff — seeing the community come together and seeing students out here helping each other.”

Events like the drive-thru back-to-school event help the district realize its vision of providing equitable access to engaging learning for every student and would not be possible without the support of community partnerships.

“This is about helping each student be successful on ‘day one’ and be prepared,” said Associate Superintendent of Communications and Community Engagement Dr. Lindsay Whitley. “We are fortunate here in CCS to have so many great partners. To the Carolina Panthers, to Balm in Gilead, to everyone that is here for our students today — thank you for your continued support. We are surely ‘Cumberland Strong,’ and, together, we will rise!”

If individuals would like to donate school supplies, they can contact their neighborhood schools and/or the Communications and Community Engagement Office at 910-678-2303.

Photos were captured throughout the event. To view an album of high-resolution pictures, click [here](#).



Dr. Vivian Rhone greets volunteers prior to the Drive-Thru Back-to-School Community Event at Balm in Gilead's Doc Bennett Road campus on Monday, August 22, 2022.



CCS students assemble meals prior to the Drive-Thru Back-to-School Community Event at Balm in Gilead's Doc Bennett Road campus on Monday, August 22, 2022.



Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr., and central services employees pose with backpacks during the Drive-Thru Back-to-School Community Event at Balm in Gilead's Doc Bennett Road campus on Monday, August 22, 2022.

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