



**A Conversation with Andrew Muñoz, Ed.D.
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One of the philosophical underpinnings of the Office Depot Foundation National Backpack Program is the belief that the backpacks that the Foundation donates give children important tools they need to succeed in school. We asked Andrew Muñoz, vice president of the Center for Youth Development at the Academy for Educational Development in Washington, D.C., for his observations. The Harvard-trained educator and child psychologist is also a certified Child and Youth Care Professional (CYC-P).

(Note to Editors: Dr. Muñoz has granted permission for these quotes to be used by media.)

Q. What role can a backpack play in a child’s success in school?

A. In addition to having skills, kids need tools. Providing a backpack is one of the most important things we can do to promote success and resilience. And they need symbols – or what we call transitional objects – to hold onto that represent the knowledge and the citizenship skills that children are gaining. Because it’s personal, a backpack helps a child to know that we care. The backpacks and all that they represent fill that developmental role in a powerful way; in the same way that a basketball signals teamwork to a young person, a backpack signals the potential for success.

Q. You suggest that the act of *giving* a child a backpack, in and of itself, is also very important.

A. In local philanthropy, there is increasingly the notion of “reach one, teach one.” The giving of these backpacks represents a very personal and very tangible connection with these young people. It’s powerful in their lives and enables them to experience a level of support that they carry with them each and every day throughout the year.

Q. Can these backpacks also play a role that goes beyond academic success?

A. As child psychologists, we’re finding that youth not only need organization to succeed in school, but they need fun, too. There is a crying need in this country for children to develop hobbies. A backpack enables a child to carry not only the items necessary for school, but also the items necessary for having a healthy childhood – baseball cards, bottle caps, software that goes with the games they play.

In addition, some child psychologists have observed that our society does not have a rite of passage. Making sure that young people have backpacks is something that could fill that role. We might see a day when every child in this country has a backpack presented by the caring adults in the community as a way of saying that we are preparing together for young people to succeed and thrive. What’s key here is for communities to come together to provide these backpacks – and also to



model to youth the kind of volunteer service that our country desperately needs. Giving a backpack is one of the most powerful strategies we have to invest in the future.

Q. You can relate personally to the importance of a backpack based in part on your own childhood. Would you elaborate?

A. I'm from a family that immigrated from some pretty hard circumstances to the promises of this country. I remember from that process that the backpacks my brothers and sisters and I had meant everything to us. The backpack showed that we were organized, ready to go and looking to succeed in school; that we had become a part of everything this country has to offer.

