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REV! MAGAZINE

Reaching Out to Schools and Students

It's back-to-school time. Hey, as long as families are out buying school supplies and backpacks and getting their kids set for school, why not organize and carry out some local school-related service projects. Here are five service project ideas your church can take on for back-to-school time—plus a few bonus suggestions.

1] Who needs school supplies? As the summer draws to a close and school officials prepare for the academic year, school supply lists are readily available. Yet not all parents can afford to buy everything for their kids. Talk to a teacher, a principal, or other school officials and ask if your church can help. Groups can sell cookies or crafts to earn money to purchase supplies. Or you can simply make supply lists available to church members. You could also partner with an inner-city church, matching the supply lists of needy families with families in your congregation—even getting the children in your church involved with their parents in selecting the supplies while out shopping for their own.

2] What needs sprucing up? Visit a neighborhood school, survey the facility, and talk with administrators to find out what practical needs the school has that your church can help with. Maybe the outdoor

picnic tables need painting or refurbishing, or graffiti needs to be painted over. Pull together the manpower, tools, and supplies, and get to work. Whatever you do, do it with excellence! Leave a phone number to call in case similar needs arise during the academic year.

3] Who needs a tutor? Chances are, there are gifted people in your church who would enjoy the opportunity to tutor students struggling with math, English, reading, and the like. Contact your local school district to get the word out. Parents will be more likely to tap into this option for their kids if it's presented among others suggested by the school. Make it clear that this isn't a child care option—it's free tutoring for students who need help. Schedule the tutoring at the church so that the adult volunteer and the child being tutored are never alone together, and follow the local district's policy (or your church's if it's stricter) for background checks

on adults working with children.

4] Who wants to join the club? Create an after-school “club” at your church for youth in the area. Make it a safe place where kids can come and hang out. If your facility has a gym, create an after-school basketball league. Or get the kids in your church involved in creating a skaters’ park on the edge of the church parking lot. Again, be sure to put adult volunteers through background checks.

5] How can we help? Contact school administrators to find out what specific needs they have. What’s on their “wish list”? Maybe it’s a software package for reading, new sporting equipment, or donations of old books to the school library. See how your congregation might make their dreams a reality.

More ideas to consider:

- Help with fund-raising. Some schools collect Campbell’s Soup labels for education (www.labelsforeducation.com) or Box Tops for Education (www.boxtops4education.com). Others collect aluminum cans, hold silent auctions, or sponsor special events.

- Start a breakfast program for community kids, serving a hot meal one or more times each week.

- Institute a mentoring or Big Brother/Big Sister program.

- Partner with school officials to conduct a special class to train kids to be peer-mediators at school.

- Host a MOPS (www.mops.org) or Moms in Touch (www.momsintouch.org) group at your church—praying for students and staff at schools in your area, and supporting school officials in practical ways.

- Keep an eye on the school calendar as the academic year progresses, identifying teacher work days when kids will be out of school, and provide special programs during those times. You might adapt VBS curriculum, but for just a day or two at a time.

- Set up a computer lab at your church for students who don’t have access to current computers or supplies.

- Adopt the teachers in your congregation and see how you can support them as the year progresses.

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