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Foothill Unity Center Back to School event welcomes 1,000 students

The nonprofit distributed vackpacks and other supplies to local families ahead of new school year



Roberto Gonzalez, dressed as Spiderman, hands out balloons during the Foothill Unity Center's Back to School Event at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia on Jul. 29, 2026. (Photo by Connor Terry, Contributing Photographer)

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One of San Gabriel Valley's largest community events welcomed more than 1,000 students and their families to Santa Anita Park Wednesday.

For more than 25 years, Foothill Unity Center's annual Back to School distribution event has gathered volunteers, nonprofits, schools, businesses, service clubs, local government and organizations in making sure local students start the school year as prepared as possible. This year, the nonprofit served a record amount of local students, indicative of sharp need and a growing financial burden facing families.

Wildfire recovery, inflation, cuts to assistance programs and fear of ICE federal immigration enforcement are pushing more families to dire economic straits, according to Jhoana Hirasuna, executive director of [Foothill Unity Center](#), with locations in Pasadena and Monrovia.

The cost of preparing a child for school can range from \$345 to nearly \$1,000, including technology needs and rising costs of school supplies such as backpacks. This event alleviates significant financial pressure on struggling families, organizers said.



The nonprofit still needs to bridge a \$76,000 funding gap for the event. It has raised \$26,000 of a \$125,000 goal and hopes businesses, foundations and other donors will help.

Seeing the distribution firsthand were city and school officials from Altadena, Arcadia, Duarte, Monrovia, South Pasadena and Pasadena, including mayors Paul Cheung of Arcadia, Tera Martin Del Campo of Duarte and Kristine Lowe, mayor of Sierra Madre.

Foothill Unity Center helps individuals and families with food, health, crisis management, job development, and housing.

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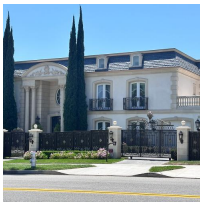
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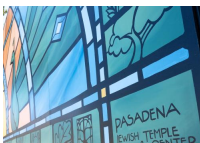
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