

Action Written Description

Summary of the Project

Project: GEAR UP is a school-year-long initiative designed to support youth in the Pomona Unified School District by providing essential academic supplies and basic necessities to ensure a successful start to the school year. The name “GEAR UP” reflects the project’s mission to “equip” and “elevate” students with the tools they need to thrive. The initiative focuses on reducing educational disparities caused by poverty, inspiring community investment in student success, and fostering a culture of giving.

Throughout the academic year, donations of new school supplies and basic essentials (such as clothing and hygiene items) are collected through physical donation drives, Amazon Wish Lists, and monetary contributions via GoFundMe. The project will culminate in a large-scale giveaway event during summer 2025, either independently or in collaboration with existing district events.

Project Lead

Project Lead: Erianah Benjamin

Dean of the College of Education and Integrative Studies: Dr Jenelle S. Pitt-Parker

Mentor: Dr. Liane Indira Hypolite

Collaborations and Positive Impact

Leah Mitchell: Black Student Success Coach Pomona Unified

Pomona Unified School District: Coordination underway with district administrators to determine event collaboration opportunities for distribution.

Amazon Wish List Platform: Used to streamline supply donations for supporters outside of the local area.

GoFundMe Campaign: A monetary option for community members and organizations to contribute to the purchase of high-need items.

Supplies and Essentials Being Collected

School Supplies: Pencils, pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue sticks, notebooks, paper, binders, folders, highlighters, rulers, calculators, backpacks, and pencil pouches.

Basic Necessities: New T-shirts, shoes, socks, jackets, and sweatpants (all sizes).

Next Steps

Develop a detailed marketing and outreach plan to engage local donors, businesses, and community partners.

Coordinate with Pomona Unified leadership to combine distribution efforts with an existing summer event.

Solidify physical donation box locations and community partners (such as bookstores or local shops).

Budget and Funding Strategy

A GoFundMe campaign is being launched to raise additional funds for purchasing supplies not received via donations.

No institutional funds have been requested yet; community-based support is the primary funding model at this stage.

Future partnerships with resource centers or university support programs may be explored for packaging or volunteer labor if needed.

Relation to Afrofuturism

Project: GEAR UP directly supports youth from historically underrepresented and underserved communities by addressing systemic barriers to academic preparation. By involving students, educators, parents, and local organizations, this initiative strengthens community ties and promotes collective investment in educational equity. The project also centers values of compassion, collaboration, and empowerment, especially within Black and Brown communities.

Impact Artifact: Backpack & School Supplies Drive

Project Overview

Over the summer, I organized a school supplies drive with the goal of directly supporting students in need. I collected enough donations to assemble **50 fully stocked backpacks**, each filled with essential items like notebooks, pencils, pens, folders, and other classroom materials. These backpacks were distributed to students in both **Pomona Unified School District** and **Los Angeles Unified School District**, ensuring that young learners entered the school year prepared and supported.

Purpose & Rationale

Many families face financial challenges that make it difficult to provide students with the supplies necessary for academic success. The project was designed to reduce these barriers by:

- Ensuring students had access to the tools required for learning.
- Alleviating financial stress for parents and guardians.
- Promoting equity by giving students in underserved communities the same opportunities to start the school year strong.

Community Impact

The project's impact was both immediate and lasting:

- **50 students** received complete backpacks, directly removing a barrier to classroom participation.
- Families expressed gratitude, noting that the support helped ease the transition into the school year.
- The initiative built connections between schools, community members, and student organizations, modeling how grassroots efforts can meet local needs.

Personal Leadership & Growth

This initiative allowed me to grow as a leader and community advocate. I developed skills in:

- **Organizing and mobilizing resources** through collection drives and partnerships.
- **Logistics and distribution management** to ensure fairness and efficiency in giving.
- **Community-centered leadership**, centering student and family voices in determining what support was most valuable.

Erianah Benjamin
Afrofuturism Scholarship

Long-Term Significance

Beyond the 50 backpacks, the project sparked conversations around sustainability and scaling. It laid the groundwork for ongoing school supply drives and inspired others to think creatively about ways to support youth in Pomona and Los Angeles.

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