



NORWALK-LA MIRADA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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More than 100 families receive gifts for children

'Toy Shop' Brightens Season for Families in Need

Elizabeth, a mother of four young children attending Norwalk-La Mirada Unified schools, almost didn't have the opportunity to surprise her kids with gifts this Christmas. Newly on her own and struggling financially, her story represents the challenges some families may face this holiday season.

It's the reason the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District six years ago created the inaugural Toy Shop event, to allow families to hand-pick gifts for their own children. On Dec. 18, more than 100 families had the opportunity to choose from hundreds of presents to give to their kids this holiday. At the same time, parents received help wrapping gifts and were treated to breakfast and other community-building activities.

"This event is wonderful," Elizabeth said as a volunteer helped wrap gifts for her boys. "If not for this, I wouldn't have had been able to buy presents."

The McKinney-Vento Program serves about 500 District families in transition -- those who live in motels or with others because they have lost their homes.

"This gives the parents a chance to enjoy the holidays without worry and helps them build memories with their kids," said McKinney-Vento Program Coordinator Rosa Barragan. "For a few hours, they can just focus on celebrating the season."

A one-stop resource center, McKinney-Vento provides families with community agency referrals according to their individual needs in a manner that helps them navigate the bureaucratic maze to get the services they need when they need them.

"McKinney-Vento has been a lifeline for so many students and their families," said NLMUSD Interim Superintendent Ginger Shattuck. "With this event, we try to do more than provide gifts for kids who might have gone without; we are also hoping to relieve some of the burden of their circumstances from the parents, for whom this time year can be especially stressful."

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The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is a federal law that provides states with funding to ensure educational stability and support for homeless children, youths and their families.

Barragan said gifts for about 350 children were donated by District faculty, staff and administrators as well as community partners such as the Office of Assemblyman Ian Calderon, Girls' Soft Pitch of Norwalk and CareFirst.

"I want to thank our communities, our partners and our staff for making the season a little brighter for our families," said NLMUSD Board of Education President Jesse Urquidi. "It's so important that in times of need, we lean on one another and support each other."

PHOTO CAPTION

TOYSHOP1: Gloria Lopez and her 3-year-old son pose while selecting presents for her children at the sixth annual Toy Shop on Dec. 18.

TOYSHOP2: A parent receives help wrapping toys for her kids on Thursday, Dec. 18 at the annual McKinney-Vento Education Program's Toy Shop at the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District.

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