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ALERT

TOP STORY

“Education is everyone’s business”: AAU Junior Olympics partners with teacher supply warehouse in Greensboro

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GREENSBORO — Tucked inside an unassuming brick building on 311 Pomona Drive, a teacher's paradise awaits.

Through the glass door, a white-walled room hosts teal shelves stacked to the brim with classroom supplies. A colorful "Welcome, We Love GCS Teachers" sign hangs by the entrance. Adele plays softly from a record player in the corner.

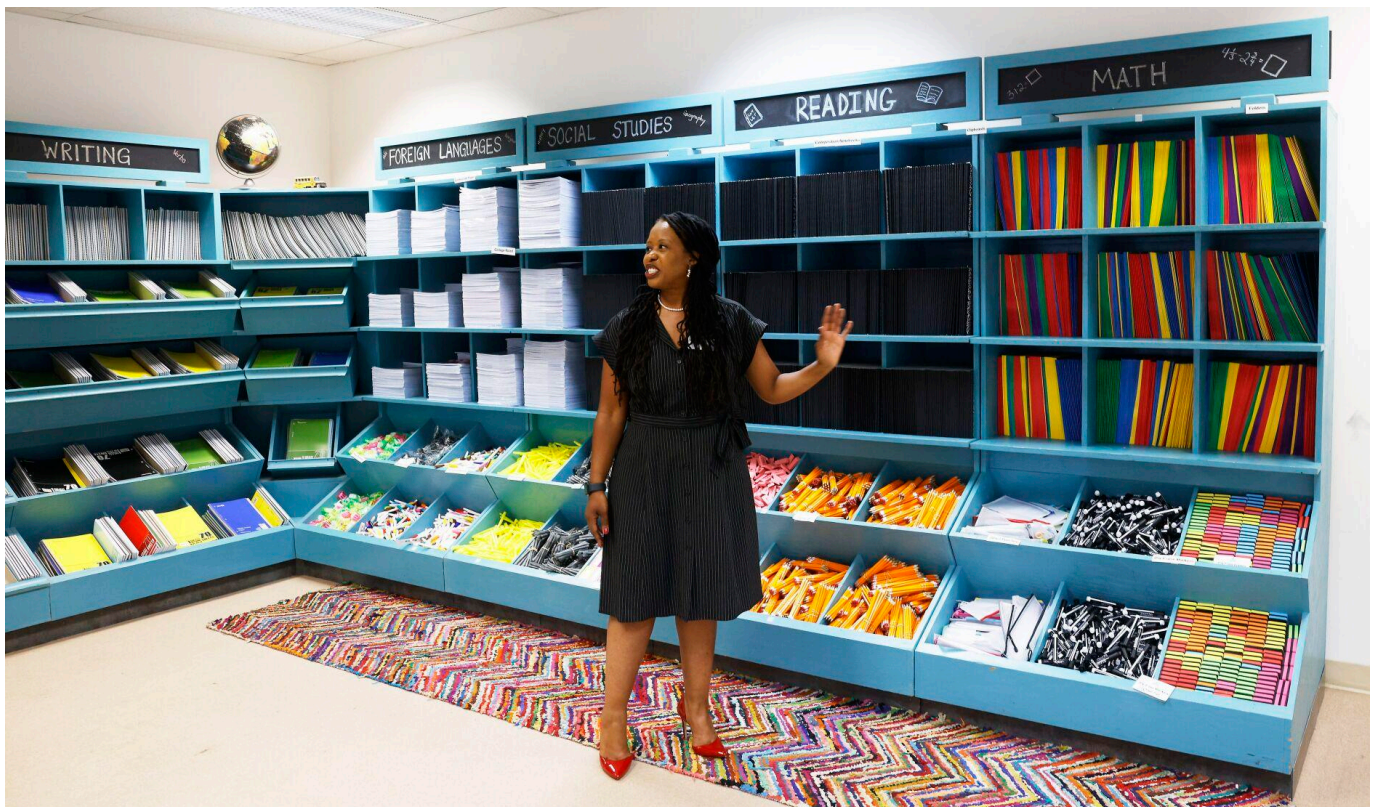
Chalkboard signs designate the different school subjects with related supplies stocked below. Under Arts and Music signs, colored pencils, crayons and construction paper fill the shelving. Across the room, paper, composition notebook and pencils populate the Social Studies, Reading and Math sections.

This is the Guilford Education Alliance's teacher-supply warehouse. The home to a free-of-charge shopping experience for Guilford County educators.

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"In the absence of having those much needed increases in teacher pay, we don't want them to have to dip into their already, arguably low, salaries to get pencils," GEA president Zithobile "Zitty" Nxumalo said. "We've got all of that here."



Zitty Nxumalo, president of Guilford Education Alliance, with some of the supplies that Guilford County School teachers can pick up at their office in Greensboro, N.C., on Monday, July 29, 2024.

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On June 26, the AAU Junior Olympic Games announced its partnership with the GEA. With a virtual school-supply drive, AAU hopes to stock the shelves of the warehouse in preparation for back-to-school shopping.

According to Sarah Lanse, the director of marketing for the Greensboro Convention & Visitors Bureau, the AAU Cares Program selects a local cause annually to support as a way of giving back to the community that is hosting the Junior Olympic Games. This year, AAU chose Guilford County educators.

With teachers spending an estimated \$650 to \$1,000 out of their own pocket on annual school supplies, GEA steps in to provide access to classroom essentials at no cost.

Instead of donating new or gently used supplies, the virtual drive asks for people to donate money online. GEA will use that money to purchase school supplies from their vendors and wholesale partners, which allows the nonprofit to buy more for less. As a

result, the impact of each donation is enhanced, and the money goes further than a typical purchase at Walmart or Office Depot.

Last year, the warehouse distributed roughly \$600,000 worth of supplies and filled more than 4,000 orders, according to a press release from the Greensboro's Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The AAU virtual supply drive can be accessed at **<https://bit.ly/AAUSupplyDrive>**. Donations start at \$5, which is the equivalent of 36 big pink erasers, and go up to \$252, the cost of 336 composition notebooks.

“If we underestimate the importance of quality teachers and we don't do everything we can to support them in any way we can, we're shooting ourselves in the foot,” Nxumalo said. “Our future is in the hands of our kids who are being educated by teachers.”

When teachers enter the warehouse, they take one of the blue, green or black shopping baskets stacked by the door and a clipboard with a “cost” breakdown.

Every visitor is awarded 25 points to “spend” during their shopping experience. Items range from costing 0.25 to 1.25 points. Notebooks go for 0.75 points each, while a ten-count bundle of pencils amounts to 0.50 points.

Inside the “Get Lucky Bins,” items that generally cost more in-store, like staplers, charge 1-3 points.

At the back of the store, a room filled with metal shelving offers gently used books, ranging from picture books to chapter books to textbooks, as well as classroom cleaning supplies and scraps of fabric for art projects.

Anything a teacher may need to start the school year, GEA has it. To give back to not only the educators, but to the community as a whole.

“Education is everyone’s business,” Nxumalo said. “Quality educators mean that we can produce quality contributors to our economy. Anybody who cares about the future of our society and the future of our economy needs to care about education.”



Louise Courts, director of development, at Guilford Education Alliance explains how Guilford County School teachers can pick up supplies at their office in Greensboro, N.C., on Monday, July 29, 2024.

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