

Community Comes Together to Help Hunterdon County Students Start School Strong

United Way's second annual initiative brings resources, healthcare, school supplies and family support to seven communities across Hunterdon County.

FLEMINGTON, NJ, UNITED STATES, September 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As students return to classrooms this fall, more than 800 Hunterdon County children are beginning the school year with more than backpacks—they're starting with the support of an entire community.

Now in its second year, [Start School Strong](#), led by [United Way of Hunterdon County](#), has evolved beyond a traditional backpack giveaway into a countywide series of Community Resource Days designed to bring essential services and family supports directly to where they're needed most.

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Watching families connect with so many resources in one place was inspiring. It showed what's possible when a community comes together to help every child start the school year strong.”

Volunteer, Start School Strong



Volunteers Gather to Support Local Children

Rather than asking families to travel to a single location, United Way partnered with schools, municipalities, healthcare providers, nonprofits and businesses to host seven events across Hunterdon County, including Clinton, Milford, Glen Gardner and Flemington, creating convenient access points for families throughout the region.

Each event combined practical support with celebration. While children received backpacks filled with school supplies, families also connected with healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations and community resources. Food trucks, games, face painting and family

activities transformed each location into a welcoming community gathering, while children took time to write down their personal goals for the upcoming school year—encouraging them to begin the year with purpose, confidence and optimism.

“Starting school should be exciting, not stressful,” said Jennifer Thompson, CEO of United Way of Hunterdon County. “We wanted families to leave with more than supplies. We wanted them to leave knowing their community is behind them, that help is available when they need it, and that every child deserves the opportunity to start the year feeling confident and prepared.”



Youth Set Goals For New Year

The impact extended well beyond the day itself.

Across the seven Community Resource Days, volunteers and partners distributed 803 backpacks filled with school supplies, representing an estimated \$80,300 in direct value for local families.

Volunteers also helped families complete 258 school meal applications unlocking an estimated \$309,600 in annual food savings through New Jersey’s free school meals program.

Healthcare partners provided 195 biometric health screenings, giving children access to preventive health checks before the school year began, while families learned about NJ FamilyCare, healthy eating, food pantry resources, bike safety, financial wellness, youth savings tools and other services available throughout the year.

In total, the initiative generated an estimated \$389,900 in direct household value and savings, while connecting hundreds of families to ongoing community resources that extend well beyond the start of school.

Making that impact possible required the collective effort of 35 community partners, including sponsors, nonprofit organizations and local businesses, who worked alongside schools and municipalities to bring services directly into communities across Hunterdon County.

The initiative also represented a significant investment of time and talent, over 150 volunteers gave over 560 hours of their time planning, coordinating and staffing the events, making the effort possible.

“One of the things we’re most proud of is that families didn’t have to choose between getting school supplies, talking with a healthcare provider or learning about community resources,” Thompson said. “They could do it all in one place, close to home, in an environment that felt welcoming and fun. That’s what community should look like.”

For many families, Start School Strong served as an introduction to resources they may not have otherwise discovered. A parent picking up a backpack might leave with information about free school meals, health coverage, food assistance or financial education. A child might leave with school supplies, a new sense of confidence and a written goal for the year ahead.

United Way believes that combination of practical support, personal encouragement and community connection is what makes the initiative unique.

“When we remove barriers and meet families where they are, we create opportunities for children to thrive,” Thompson said. “Every backpack, every conversation, every new connection is an investment in a child’s future. Together, our community is making sure children don’t just start school—they start strong.”

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