



Principal Cindy Riddle, left, picks up school supplies for Eastside Elementary School from Assessor Jeff Taylor, center, and Brent Dugas, right, during the 2009 Assess the Need drive that provides supplies to needy children throughout Livingston Parish.

Assess the Need marks a decade of helping local children

By Helen Wale Turner

Looking back on the last 10 years, Livingston Parish Assessor Jeff Taylor is surprised that the Assess the Need project has grown as much as it has – but then, he admits he was surprised the project ever got off the ground back in the summer of 2000. That’s when Taylor learned there were a number of students whose families couldn’t afford to buy them school supplies and decided to take on the project of providing supplies for those children.

“The idea grew out of conversations with

friends and family members who worked in the school system and shared stories about how they purchased supplies out of their own paychecks for needy children,” Taylor explained. “I began making plans based on my own estimate of about 200 needy students.

“I figured we could raise \$5,000 which would give us \$25 to spend on each student, so we plowed ahead,” Taylor said. “When I called the school superintendent to tell him what we were planning to do, I was shocked to learn that the

actual number of children who needed help was about 10 percent of the system’s 15,000 enrollment – which meant 1,500 kids instead of the 200 we had planned for. It also meant we would have to raise more than \$30,000.”

The news disheartened Taylor to the point where he was considering abandoning the project – until he had a heart-to-heart talk with his mother.

“She told me that if I felt called to do this, I

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If everybody who walks by the tables would give one quarter, Assess the Need would have enough money to do the program twice each year.

Jeff Taylor,
Livingston Parish Assessor



Volunteers of all ages sort supplies and help make Assess the Need a success each year.

should do it on faith and the Lord would provide what we needed," he said. "I thought about it a long time and decided to go ahead. We got permission from Wal-Mart to set up in front of their store to solicit donations. Wal-Mart has been a wonderful partner to us from the beginning. Once we saw how great the need was and we shared that with the public, the outpouring of support was just overwhelming."

That first year, Assess the Need raised a couple hundred dollars more than they needed to provide for those 1,500 children. Each year that number grows, and each year, somehow, they receive just a little more in donations than they need. Over the years, the program has helped thousands of families and provided more than \$380,000 in supplies to parish schools.

There is no application process for assistance from the Assess the Need campaign. Families needing help should contact their child's principal or school counselor who are responsible for identifying needy children and distributing supplies to them.

This year, Taylor anticipates they will need supplies for about 2,300 children. To meet that goal, volunteers will be outside both parish Wal-Mart stores later this month. If everybody who walks by their tables would

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These supplies help to send a strong message to these children that they matter and that our communities believe in them. That's the most powerful aspect of this program.

Jeff Taylor,
Livingston Parish Assessor

give one quarter, they would have enough money to do the program not once but twice each year. Donations of cash and supplies are accepted, but cash donations allow them to make the money go further since their bulk purchases are discounted by Wal-Mart and are tax-free. Each year the goal includes providing not only items such as notebooks and pencils, but also a brand new booksack for every child.

"You can't underestimate how much it means to a child for them to have a booksack of their own," said Taylor. "You also can't underestimate how important it is for a child to have the supplies they need to do their lessons and for them not to have to say several times a day, 'I don't have one,' when instructed to take out a notebook, ruler, etc. The supplies give students the tools they need to do their work

and be successful in the classroom, but more than that, these supplies help to send a strong message to the children that they matter and that the community believes in them. That's the most powerful aspect of this program.

"We starting providing supplies to kids 10 years ago, so that means the first group of kids we helped are now entering 11th grade," Taylor noted. "We'll never know how many made it that far, instead of dropping out, because they had the supplies to do their school work. We'll never know how many of them will go on to become a great doctor, journalist, teacher or maybe the next assessor. But we know we're making a difference. But it's not this office that deserves the credit; it's the volunteers and the people and businesses who donate money and make this possible."

How you can help a child succeed

Basic school supplies such as notebooks, paper, scissors, glue, crayons, markers, pencils, rulers, pocket folders and a book bag can be purchased by the Assess the Need program for about \$20 to \$25 for each child, although any amount - even a dollar - will help reach the goal of providing supplies to 2,300 children this year. Here's how you can help give local children the tools they need to learn and succeed:

- Donate cash to the volunteers who will be outside the Wal-Mart stores in Denham Springs and Walker July 18 -19, 25-26 and Aug 1-2.
- Mail your donation to P. O. Box 1802, Denham Springs, LA 70727
- Drop off donations at the Livingston Parish Assessor's Office, 29940 Magnolia Street, Livingston. Call 225-686-7278 for more information.
- Visit their website AssesstheNeed.com and make an online contribution through Pay Pal.
- Volunteer to help, even if just for 30 minutes. For volunteer information, call 225-938-4386.

Sponsors who help make Assess the Need a success

This year's Assess the Need generous partners include Wal-Mart stores of Denham Springs, Walker, BR-O'Neal Lane and Central; media sponsors are Livingston Business & Real Estate Journal; WAFB-TV; The Advocate; Livingston Parish News.

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