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RANDOM ACTS: Local giving is at head of the class

By Stephanie Green

August is here, kindly reminding parents -- and their often-reluctant children -- that school bells will be ringing soon.

For many families, especially in this difficult economic climate, back-to-school shopping can be a challenge. According to the National Retail Federation's 2009 Back to School Consumer Intentions and Actions Survey, the average family with students in kindergarten through 12th grade will spend more than \$500 on school merchandise this year.

Staples stores and DoSomething.org, a nonprofit started in 1993 by actor Andrew Shue, are partnering for the second year on a campaign to ask teenagers to help disadvantaged peers get enough school supplies for their transition back to class this fall, and they have recruited Grammy Award winner Ciara to help in their cause.

"We wanted someone that really resonated with young people like Ciara, and she was happy to do it," says Aria Finger from DoSomething.org.

Through Sept. 19, public-service announcements featuring Ciara will air, asking teens to collect supplies and drop them off at their local Staples.

Ciara led a bag-stuffing party in New York City to prepare 5,000 back-to-school goody bags. Staples donated \$125,000 in school supplies to be distributed to schools in New York state.

Ms. Finger explains that she expects 100,000 teenagers to be involved in the campaign between now and the end of September through the Web site, www.Dosomething101.org. There students can sign up for an action kit to host a school-supply drive at their own schools. According to Ms. Finger, about 1,000 schools are planning supply drives.

"The Do Something 101 campaign is such a great cause. I can't imagine going to school without pencils, notebooks and other basic supplies," Ciara says. "Every little bit counts, and through Do Something 101, the more we can get these essential products to teens, the more we help kids stay in school and excel even further."

Before the school year begins, the Web site suggests hosting a drive at summer camp, a neighborhood barbecue or a sporting event.

Joy Errico, director of community relations for Staples, says after doing some research, Staples discovered that the teenagers who shop at Staples are concerned with "social issues. We wanted an easy way to reach out to them," she says.

In addition to targeting young people through the Do Something 101 campaign, Staples is reaching out to customers by informing them at the register that they can make a donation and directing them to the supplies-donation bins throughout the store.

In addition to pencils and pens, Ms. Finger and Ms. Errico suggest donations of backpacks, binders, rulers and calculators. The supplies do not have to be purchased at Staples and don't have to be new, just in adequate condition.

All school supplies and donations given locally will stay in the community. In the Washington area, supplies will be going to the Communities in Schools of the Nation's Capital.