

Local unions support kindergarten classrooms

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Karalee Graves' kindergarten class at Howard Elementary School was one of 56 to receive donations of school supplies from labor unions.

(Editor's note: This article ran as part of the Kokomo Perspective's 2018 Salute to FCA US edition.) Local unions are doing their part to help make United Way's 75 in 5 a success.

This year, the organizations have adopted 56 kindergarten classrooms in Howard County and donated totes full of school supplies to the teachers. The goal is to help the more-than 1,200 students finish their last semester strong.

"Over the past 21 years, unions have led a coalition committed to education for families through our School S.U.P.P.L.I.E.S. program," said Cheryl Graham, AFL-CIO Labor Activity Director for United Way. "The union community wanted to expand this commitment to teachers and classrooms and the 75 in 5 initiative proved to be the best way to expand our commitment."

The various unions have been dropping off their supplies since last month. On Feb. 2, UAW 1302 members made their rounds at the area schools, dropping off supplies. The union, headed up by Weed Widup, started at Taylor Elementary School. Ten classrooms were adopted by this union alone.

Representing FCA US, UAW 685, UAW 685 Retirees, and UAW 1166 also participated in this initiatives.

"I'm pretty passionate about the 75 in 5 incentive," said Scott Flatford, president of UAW 1166. "I keep talking about it every time we get around somebody."

The unions each provided decorated totes and supportive notes for the classroom. The totes included items such as electric crayon sharpeners, glue sticks, pencils, crayons, colored pencils, Play-Doh, construction paper, Kleenex, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and sensory table consumables, like shaving cream, bubbles, or sand.

The 75 in 5 initiative is a community-wide goal working to increase Kindergarten readiness levels from 45 percent (currently) to 75 percent by 2022.

In addition, several other organizations throughout the community were on board. Those organizations were USW 2958, Noon Kiwanis, AFL-CIO Howard County, Haynes International, IBEW 873, Indiana Health Center, Indiana American Water, Indiana Black Expo, UAFF 396, UAW 292, CVS, UAW 685 Retirees, the Hough Family, Solidarity Federal Credit Union, and Kokomo Heritage Federal Credit Union.