



Berks County Intermediate Unit  
An Educational Service Agency

## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

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### **BCIU and Feed the Children to “H.E.L.P.” Berks Homeless Students**

**Reading, PA** – On March 20 at 2 p.m., 800 backpacks will be delivered to the Berks County Intermediate Unit for homeless children in Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Schuylkill counties.

Homeless Education and Literacy Program (H.E.L.P.), an outreach program of Feed The Children, has partnered with the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) to distribute backpacks filled with school supplies, non-perishable food and personal care items, and books to Berks County homeless students.

BCIU’s Pennsylvania Homeless Children’s Initiative (HCI) works with Children’s Home of Reading, Opportunity House, Driven Ministries, and Berks County Children and Youth Services foster care unit to distribute the backpacks. The backpacks will be distributed to students throughout the year as they enter the shelters.

Budget cuts and unfulfilled requests for federal funding have left schools in need of education resources. Schools in the eastern Pennsylvania region are no exception. Thanks to donations, the BCIU will be able to deliver 480 backpacks to elementary schools and 320 backpacks to junior high schools. Though this is the third straight year that Feed The Children has distributed backpacks in Pennsylvania, it is the first delivery to the local region.

“Many individuals and businesses have been donating backpacks to the program and local shelters for several years through the United Way,” said Beth Winterbottom, BCIU Region 2 coordinator for the Pennsylvania HCI. “This is a great opportunity for our community to see that donations to national organizations have a direct impact on our local families and schools.”

Last year, more than 2,000 homeless students and families were served by HCI in this region. The number has been gradually increasing and with the recent rise in home

foreclosures, a continued increase is expected. Feed the Children distributed 47,000 backpacks in 2006-07 and plans to double that number in the current school year.

### **About the BCIU Homeless Children's Initiative**

The BCIU Homeless Children's Initiative (HCI), a project site of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, provides support to Berks County children experiencing homelessness so they can continue their education experience with as few interruptions as possible. The program offers enrollment assistance, transportation assistance, and educational and recreational experiences to homeless preschool and school-age children. Countywide, the program provides school supplies, clothing, and assistance with arranging transportation to and from school. The HCI site coordinator also ensures that Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Schuylkill County schools are familiar with their responsibilities to homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act. For more information, visit [www.berksiu.org](http://www.berksiu.org).

### **About Feed The Children**

Feed The Children is an international, nonprofit relief organization headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, that delivers food, medicine, clothing, and other necessities to individuals, children, and families who lack these essentials due to famine, war, poverty, or natural disaster. Though Feed The Children focuses on hungry children, it also understands the importance of feeding a child's mind. As a result, it launched H.E.L.P. and began working with homeless outreach coordinators in elementary and middle schools to provide essential school supplies, books, food, and personal care items to homeless students. For more information, visit [www.feedthechildren.org](http://www.feedthechildren.org).