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## **Estudiantes Exitosos**

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# MONTEREY COUNTY STUDENTS FALLING BEHIND

Monterey County students falling behind

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## Author Note

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### **Abstract**

Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey is a faith based non profit organization that provides aid to individuals and families in need. Catholic Charities focuses on three main areas of services, immigration and citizen services, family supportive services, and tattoo removal program. They provide services that help people regardless of their faith who struggle with poverty and complex issues. Every year low income families struggle to provide their children with the basic school supplies they need to start a new school year. This contributes to families not being able to afford school supplies, and because of the unexpected pandemic a shortage in school supplies. This causes low grades and low graduation rates within low income families. The capstone project, “Estudiantes Exitosos”, will provide low income families with immediate access to many of the school supplies that their children need to begin the school year. The expected outcomes are to help children and students throughout Monterey County begin the school year at the same level as other students. This project should eliminate the barrier of low income children not being prepared for school.

*Keywords:* Catholic Charities, Monterey County, Estudiantes Exitosos, Low Income Families.

### **Agency & Communities Served**

This internship is with Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey. Catholic Charities is a faith based non profit social service agency providing aid to individuals and families. The main focus is to provide people with the tools and resources to help meet the basic necessities in life. Catholic charities mission statement is, “our mission is to provide service to people in need, to advocate for social justice, and to call other people of good will to do the same.”

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At Catholic Charities help is provided to all people regardless of their faith, who are struggling with poverty and complex issues. Catholic Charities have a widespread number of programs available for the community. The agency provides help and creates hope for many people living through poverty. Volunteers and staff strive to help all in need making services, resources, and case management available. Many services are provided like Supportive services provided for first steps towards stabilization, Cal-fresh applications, nutrition education programs, Legal immigration and citizenship services, and Laser tattoo removal. The populations they serve can be based off or vary by age, sex, and locations simply because we serve different demographics. Their services target low-income families and individuals in need. Low-income individuals are faced with complex issues that may trigger a financial crisis at any time. Many people who seek services are people facing things like unemployment, health related issues, death in a family, divorce, unexpected debt, reduced income, or seasonal work/jobs. Catholic Charities serves a large Hispanic and Latino population. According to Public Policy Institute, it states, “More than one in five (21.4%) Latinos lived in poverty, compared to 17.4% of African Americans, 14.5% of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, and 12.1% of whites. Though the Latino poverty rate has fallen from 30.9% in 2011, Latinos remain disproportionately poor—comprising 51.6% of poor Californians but only 39.7% of the state population. Poverty was 7.2% among college graduates aged 25–64 and 29.1% among adults aged 25–64 without a high school diploma”. (Bohn and Danielson, 2021) This provides a clear example in which latinos are disproportionately served and Cathloic Charities focuses on these low income populations the most. Some of our services and grants are focused on migrant and undocumented individuals. The services mainly focused on are Cal-fresh and the Nutrition program. Cal-Fresh is known as SNAP, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. We focus on the most needed

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areas of our counties, connecting families and individuals to Cal-Fresh benefits by completing applications, advocating, and providing education to reduce the fear of applying for benefits.

### **Problem Description**

Too many low income Monterey County students are falling behind in school. The contributing factors to this problem are families can't afford school supplies, and there's a shortage of school supplies causing low grades and low graduation rates within low income families.

### **Contributing Factors**

Throughout the years we've been focused on many factors that lead up to students falling behind in school. Yet, we haven't focused on the basic needs for students. Low income families throughout the country can not afford school supplies, and a shortage in school supplies also makes it hard for students to excel. According to Amy Chillag, "When a teacher hands out a list for parents of basic school supplies, it's a real problem for at least one in five children in the US who live below the federally defined poverty line. In many districts, teachers don't even publish a list because they know parents can't afford the items." (Chillag, 2020) Most students fall behind in school because they focus more on figuring out a way to find the supplies they need rather than focusing on the importance of learning. There is a stigma created where if students have a backpack then everyone should have a backpack, and the same goes for notebooks and other supplies. According to Alan Wang, "The average family spends more than \$700 each year on backpacks, school supplies, and new clothes for their children. Many low-income families are struggling to make ends meet and cannot afford these back-to-school expenses. Thousands of children enter schools every year ready to learn, but without all the needed resources to help

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them get the most out of their educational experience.”(Wang, 2019) Every year the prices on school supplies increase and for most low income families it is hard for parents to purchase school supplies for all of their kids. Parents deal with the pressure of not knowing how to split their money whether it's paying rent, putting food on the table and or fully preparing their kids for a new school year. In experience, looking back at the list of school supplies that were needed or asked for by schools and depending on your grade level was gnarly. Walking into Walmart or Target back in the day you would go to a small station set up with a school supplies list by grade level. My parents would proceed to buy my three other siblings and me everything on the list. These lists went on for 10 to 15 items. For a family of 4 kids that was about 60 items and in most cases from experience not all of the supplies were really needed. This created extra spending that my parents could have used to pay bills or put food on the table.

Throughout the years there has been more of a problem finding certain items for school as the shortage of school supplies increases. According to Kierra Frazier, ‘As more students return to the classroom in the coming weeks, parents across the country are finding back-to-school shopping even more stressful due to a shortage of supplies and rising prices.’ (Frazier, 2021) There have been supply chain issues as a result of covid, and customers can expect to pay 10 to 15 percent more on items to return back to school. According to Fox Business, “Supply chain challenges and shortages are resulting in fewer back-to-school deals and scarce items like tech and apparel on shelves, consumer analysts explain. Backpacks, clothing, sneakers, stationery, tech gadgets and laptops are expected to be in short supply, Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail said. "It’s not so much that consumers won’t be able to get hold of these items at all, but that stock levels are reduced and there is less choice than in usual years. People may have to shop around more to find what they want. Prices are going up, both because

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of inflation and because inventory levels are down so retailers don't need to discount as much to sell products," Saunders told FOX News in an email." (Settembre, 2021) With less discounts and less reasonably priced items to choose from, low income families suffer by having to choose what items their kids will get and what items they just might have to wait on. No family should have to be stuck in making a decision on whether their kids will receive the education they deserve because of little to no school supplies. Another contributing factor is transportation. According to Ben Mcgrow, he states, "As families return their children to in-person instruction, urgent for them to catch up, it's likely that even more will be looking for a different school setting. Among some lower-income families, transportation figures to be a barrier". (Mackinac Center, 2021) Transportation is a barrier for many reasons. From having one to no car available. Or from having to leave to work extra early creates a burden for children because they miss out on a lot of things. Some of those things are children run the risk of something happening to them while they walk to school. Typically low income families live in low income neighborhoods, missing the opportunity to attend schools that are well served compared to a low income neighborhood school.

### **Consequences**

Low income families mostly suffer from financial burdens. This causes families not being able to afford school supplies and their students in most cases fall behind. This causes low grades and low graduation rates amongst low income families. According to John Fensterwald, "On the MAP fourth-grade and eighth-grade English language arts test, low-income students showed a 7% decline in the normal rate of learning, while wealthier students showed a 5% faster than normal growth rate. Combining the two rates equals a one-year learning gap of 12%. On the fifth-grade MAP English language arts test, English language learners showed 30% less growth

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than normal, while non-English learners showed only a 10% drop — a gap of 20 percentage points.” (Edsource, 2021) The decline within low income students comes with the sudden change of distance learning. The causes might be that students weren’t prepared at the beginning of this learning change, whether it was with the necessary electronics or having accessible internet access, which caused these students to fall behind. This leads up to low income families having lower graduation rates. Many students fall behind and this causes them not to think about higher education. Richard Whitmore states, “We know that both black and Hispanic students take the most remediation courses in college, which greatly increases their odds of dropping out. For poor students, no-credit classes that cost money are non-starters.” (T74, 2019) When students fall behind in elementary school or high school, consequences like falling behind affect students because it follows them throughout college. When it comes to college remedial courses are needed and these courses take up for courses that are actually needed to move up to higher level classes. Financial aid is used for unnecessary classes and it all goes back because students did not have the ability to be prepared for school because of a financial burden. Some more consequences are low income families don't have the necessary access to devices or wifi when needed and creates a huge setback from other students. According to Heather Long, she states, “The lower enrollment figures are the latest sign of how the economic devastation unleashed by the coronavirus crisis has weighed more heavily on lower-income Americans and minorities, who have suffered higher levels of unemployment and a higher incidence of covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Students from families with incomes under \$75,000 are nearly twice as likely to say they “canceled all plans” to take classes this fall as students from families with incomes over \$100,000, according to a U.S. Census Bureau survey in late August”. (Washington Post, 2020) A great example would be how the Covid-19 pandemic affected low



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income families. From no stable wifi connections to not having the necessary materials, students dropped out from college simply because they knew they wouldn't survive. This creates a problem in the real world in which jobs that need to be filled aren't necessarily being filled creating a deficit in the job industry.

### Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Families can't afford school supplies.	Too many students in Monterey County are falling behind in school.	Low Grades
Shortage of school supplies.		Low graduation rates
Transportation to school		Students dropping out, affecting employment prospects

### Capstone Project Description and Justification

#### Capstone Project

Catholic charities needs a place in which low income families can stop by year round while school is in session and get the necessary school supplies that their children need in order to be successful. The idea is to create a little shop in which we get items donated by organizations that are partnered with Catholic Charities. All of the items would be donated and free for students of all ages. The problem is that school supplies are getting expensive and while it creates a burden for families to afford them, the burden is passed on to the students making them less prepared than other students when it comes to their education. This little shop is meant to benefit students in hopes for them to receive pencils, erasers, notebooks, and even backpacks.

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### **Project Purpose**

The capstone project will benefit and improve the level of preparedness that low income students face. Having easy access to school supplies will make it easier for families to be ready and prepared for incoming school years. The families that Catholic Charities serve are low income families. If a service like this is not created many students will fall behind. We can not fix a problem that has been a disadvantage for low income families for decades, but we can start somewhere and stop this disadvantage from continuing on to the next generation of learners. This leaves one less barrier to conquer when it comes to providing the necessary school supplies for their children. The purpose is to help low income families.

### **Project Justification**

The idea of creating a capstone project that focuses on providing financial relief by creating a free program in which school supplies are free is important. According to Backpacks USA, “Everyone values stability. Though kids may not say so, knowing they can depend on a backpack full of organized papers, pens, pencils, and art supplies is comforting for them. Arriving equipped for the school day also helps them feel confident in their ability to function in the classroom. Rather than depending on others for a pencil, they can, with the right supplies, achieve added independence.” (Backpacks USA, 2020) For instance, another way school supplies benefit students' learning is by engaging with their assignments. Students can follow along and work on problems that their teachers are showing them to create hands-on experience and to better their learning process. School supplies are valuable in a classroom, they eliminate disruptions and distractions in a classroom by keeping students focused. When a student does not have the necessary supplies they can cause disruptions by simply not staying quiet or distracting

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other students. This shows that if we implement the school supplies program, there is a purpose to this project because it benefits both teachers and students.

### **Project Implementation**

The capstone project will be implemented by creating a donation letter in which the capstone project will be explained and the purpose of the project will also be available. Once there has been supplies donated and set up in the office, we will create a flyer stating this new resource that becomes available, and we will either send it electronically or mail it out to families that have given us their information. The focus is to create a clear message in which no judgment will be made and no question will be asked. This will create a safer environment for families and the Implementation process will be a lot smoother. The information will be shared with all of the different programs within the agency and we will create flyers in which we will send out a message in support of families and the success of their children's schooling.

### **Assessment Plan**

We plan to measure the effectiveness in a few ways. The first one is to run surveys across a period of time to see how many people are stopping by and using the little shop. The surveys could be sent out electronically, or by mail. Another idea would be by writing down the information of the person who stopped by to pick up supplies and later making a phone call and asking how they feel about this new help that is being provided. We then will compare how the traffic to the shop services has improved in families. The second way is communicating with clients face to face asking how they are benefiting from the shop and if it is a helpful resource that has become available to them. Another way that we can measure the success of the project is to document which supplies are being donated and how many of each item is being donated.

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### **Expected Outcomes**

The capstone project will create financial relief for low income families making school supplies available for all ages. Clients will be able to access all of the supplies and request anything that is needed with no questions asked. The hope of this is to have the shop available for families which will benefit everyone in the long run. The outcome expected overall is to create trust within the community and make them realize it is okay to look for help when it comes to their students' education. No student should have to struggle or worry about not having a decent notebook or pencil. Everyone should have an equal chance to succeed in the education system.

### **Project Results**

Future project results can be looking at the traffic the shop is receiving. We can also see if anyone has donated and how much of things are being used. Some expected results are to gather as many partners from Catholic Charities and have them donate year round at least once, to have this shop running on its own with donations. The donation letter and list of supplies has been completed. My mentor believes that this is a great idea for catholic charities to provide since their main focus is helping low income families be successful.

### **Recommendations**

When I created a project for Catholic Charities in which it opens the doors for future interns to take over and enhance the project as needed. My recommendations for the agency would be to assign any future intern to oversee the program and continue growing and pushing the project to start. This shall be necessary until someone from the agency can take this project over and permanently become a part of what they do. The new person in charge shall oversee any new and future donations. Update the donation letter that was created, and finally keep an

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updated list on what is available for inventory. The new intern involved shall seek to find new donations on items that the shop runs low on. The new intern shall try to engage Catholic Charities partners and give them motives to continue donating to this project that will benefit low income families, hopefully for the coming years.

### **Personal Reflection**

Despite not being able to implement my capstone project, I am happy with the work that I have done. Changing my capstone project and focusing on a minor problem or issue that I didn't really know existed changed my perspective. I realized that low income families struggle with providing their children with school supplies because of financial burdens. While I did research I saw new perspectives that I would have never noticed. For example, I never realized how much a student can fall behind for not being prepared the correct way for the beginning of the school year. This capstone project has a strong foundation, creating a free school supplies program for families should have been implemented years ago. Something I learned throughout this process on a personal level is to be ready for unexpected changes whether it's in the project or having to change ideas multiple times. Not getting overwhelmed is something I would give as advice simply because even though you begin to work on this project months in advance, anything can happen and you might have to start all over again. Advice for future interns is don't give up so easily, i didn't think i was going to be able to finish in time and for a second i got discouraged. I didn't let that stop me from creating a capstone project that I am satisfied with.

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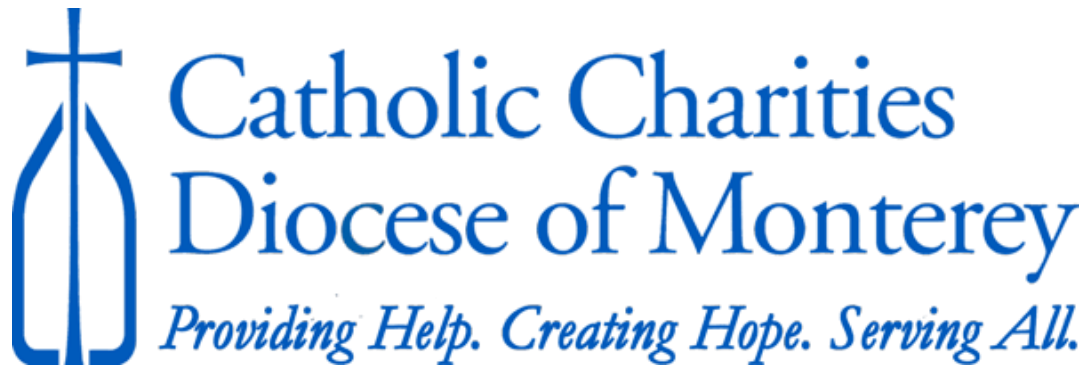
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## Appendix A

### Scope of Work

- Donation Letter sent to all of Catholic Charities Partners





November 10, 2021

To whom it may concern:

My name is Erik Rocha Estrada, and I am an Intern at Catholic Charities. I'm a fourth-year student at California State University Monterey Bay. As I wrap up my journey in both school and my internship, I've decided to create a Capstone project in which families benefit from an idea in hopes to release some stress from low-income families. The vision that I have is creating a program that helps families. It would be called "Estudiantes Exitosos". The purpose of this program is to provide the basic needs that families need for their kids to start school. From erasers to pencils, to notebooks, and maybe even backpacks. This letter is being written in hopes that you are willing to donate anything that you can. Anything will be greatly appreciated, and I don't have a doubt that families will appreciate everything that is given to them.

Please feel free to contact Ulises or me if you have any questions and or if you would like to hear more about my capstone project.

Sincerely,

Erik Rocha Estrada  
Errochaestrada @csumb.edu  
Catholic Charities Intern

*Ulises Cisneros-Abrego*  
*CalFresh & Nutrition Education Coordinator*  
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- **List of supplies that can be donated.**



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Below is a list of school supplies that can be donated.

- Pencils
- Erasers
- Notebooks
- Binders
- Pens
- Erasers
- Sharpeners
- Markers
- Crayons
- Highlighters
- Gluesticks
- Scissors
- Colored pencils
- Rulers
- Index cards
- Lined paper
- Graphing paper
- Calculators
- Backpacks

Anything that can be of use by students in a classroom can be donated. Thank you for being a part of the success of younger generations in school!