

Rapoport to finance reforms in Waco child care, education

Volunteers needed in drive to better assist schoolchildren

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Calling education a drawbridge out of poverty's prison, Waco philanthropist Bernard Rapoport on Monday announced plans to revamp Waco's child-care system to give small children a better chance at succeeding in school — and life.

While launching a crusade during a speech to the Rotary Club of Waco to recruit 1,000 adult tutors for Waco schoolchildren, Rapoport said his foundation, worth about \$50 million, plans to pump millions into Waco's educational system over the next few years.

"We want to talk about public child-care centers so that every newborn child and little children will have good nutrition and won't just be housed," Rapoport said. "So by the time where they're the age to go into Head Start programs, they'll be equipped to come. And when they are ready for school . . . they'll know how to read."

Martin Hassner, executive director of the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Foundation, said the foundation plans to organize a meeting in January of all Waco child-care providers, both public and private, to try to come up with standards for developmental child care.

"We've been planning this now for three months. We're working the whole field in Waco; that includes everybody who takes care of kids," Hassner said. "We'll see if we can't find the way to reach standards to make developmental child care possible. Then we'll see what the bill will be and how we'll get to pay for it."



Local philanthropist Bernard Rapoport challenges 1,000 adults to join his volunteer tutoring campaign.

As an immediate boost to the Waco educational system, Rapoport said he is signing up to tutor Waco schoolchildren and wants 999 others to go along.

"We are going to try to get the business community . . . men and women that would devote time to disadvantaged children," he said. "We're going to see if we can get 1,000 people to do that."

The tutors, focusing on reading and arithmetic, will be assigned to a specific school and will help children having trouble with those topics. Each volunteer will spend one hour per week in their school, Rapoport said.

"One hour a week is an ideal commitment," he said. "It means that for an hour you are committing yourself to helping one child, perhaps helping him or her so much you can save their lives."

Rapoport said he got the idea for the 1,000-tutor effort after visiting his granddaughter's second-grade class. After reading to a student, Rapoport said he asked the child to read to him for a while, but quickly realized that the second-grader still did not know how to read.

Waco ISD Superintendent Fred Zachary

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said he plans to sign up as one of Rapoport's 1,000 tutors and added that the recruitment drive is a great gift to the district.

"To get these people into the schools and involved with our kids on a one-to-one basis is an inestimable value," he said. "I think they recognized the problem he described is a real problem and we're all part of the solution."

Kay Metz, WISD coordinator of school and community partnerships, will help match tutors with schools. Waco's five low-performing campuses will get top priority in the pro-

gram, she added.

"We need adult interaction with our children, in terms of working one on one with them when they are behind," she said. "They need that special additional attention that tutors can give. In the long run, it means the success of our children."

Hassner said he hopes the 1,000 tutors all will be recruited and assigned to a school by February. Rapoport seemed to have found an enthusiastic audience Monday, with many Rotarians leaving the meeting with tutor sign-up forms in hand.

Rapoport's foundation was given a huge financial boost last year when he donated his share of the sale of American Income Life — about \$44 million — to his foundation. Under the terms of the foundation, at least one-third of the foundation's income must be spent on local projects.