

## Kevin Warren hosts backpack giveaway at Lucy Craft Laney

Written by Ivan Phifer

Wednesday, 05 September 2012 01:06

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A new school year has started in the Twin Cities.

Pictured: Vikings Vice President Kevin Warren (top left) and his family donated backpacks filled with school supplies to the students of Lucy Craft Laney Community. The donation is part of a broader commitment to the school by the Warren family and the MN Vikings. Also pictured is Vikings Mascot Viktor and former Vikings Punter Greg Coleman (top right).

At Lucy Craft Laney, 3333 Penn Ave. N, the students eagerly started the school year with the help of the Star Spangle Banner performed by the late Whitney Houston, encouraging words from the new principal, Mauri Melander, and a backpack giveaway by Minnesota Vikings' Vice President of Legal Affairs and Chief Administrative Officer, Kevin Warren.

"The foundation called Kids In Need was able to help us coordinate the delivery of the backpacks; each grade specific," said Warren. "We will continue to give this school the resources they need to learn, grow and become productive citizens."

Melander said community support is key in providing students with a successful learning environment.

"I have had the privilege of being a kid on the Northside," Melander said. "I went to Lincoln (Elementary School) when it was a Minneapolis Public School. I knew what it meant to have a strong school in my community and I want a strong school in this community."

Melander started the new school year by providing her students with a history of the woman for whom the school is named.

Lucy Craft Laney was a part of the first ever class at Atlanta University (later Clark Atlanta University), graduating from the Normal Department, teacher's training in 1873.

Laney began her lifelong mission to educate with an appeal for funding by traveling to a meeting

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of the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis in 1886.

"She stood before all these men and women and said, 'I have a dream. I want to teach children. I want my own school. I want them to learn how to read and write, but I do not have the money to do it. Will anybody help open my own school, anybody,'" said Melander.

Melander said a few days later, a woman, Francine E. H. Haines, helped fund Laney's school.

Lucy Craft Laney School grew from six students to 800.

"That woman (Laney) is our ancestor. Her blood may not run through our veins, but her DNA does. We live out her legacy and hold her banner high," said Melander.

"I grew up just like you all grew up," said Warren. "I had a lot of people along the way tell me things I could not do." But Warren told the students about the teachers who positively impacted his life, including his 1st grade teacher, a football coach and his 4th grade teacher.

Warren is the highest-ranking African-American executive working on the business side for a National Football League team.

"My family; the Vikings family, have now become a part of your family. We are going to be here for you," Warren told the students.

"It is reassuring to know that there are other people here who want to be alongside of us," said Melander. She told the students, "When you see (people in the community), make sure you ask them questions, talk to them, they are a part of us now."