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Parents urged to avoid Wal-Mart

■ In Oakland and nationwide, groups call for a back-to-school boycott

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

OAKLAND — About a dozen union leaders and organizers gathered at a new Oakland Wal-Mart store Wednesday to urge shoppers to avoid the store when buying back-to-school supplies.

"Wal-Mart is not good for kids," said Sharon Cornu of the Central Labor Council of Alameda County. She said people who work at Wal-Mart have to work two or three jobs, thereby not having enough time to spend with family. She added that Wal-Mart employees, who are not unionized, have no health care and no benefits.

Cornu was joined at the Hegenberger Road store by representatives of U.S. Rep. Barbara

Lee's office, members of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Low-Income Families Empowerment Through Education and the United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 870.

The demonstration in front of Wal-Mart was part of a nationwide boycott of the stores organized by the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers and the United Food and Commercial Workers unions. Protesters tried to get others to sign a pledge to buy their school supplies elsewhere.

Cynthia Lin, Wal-Mart's director of corporate affairs for California, disputed the charges that Wal-Mart is a bad employer. Oakland's Wal-Mart store has yet to open to the public, and the company has already received 10,000 applications from people looking for work there.