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**In Their Own Words
Schools and Students
Overcoming Adversity**

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OCTOBER 2007

**Prepared for:
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Student Achievement and Student Accountability Programs**

**Prepared by:
National Center for Homeless Education**

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U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings
Secretary

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary

Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs
Zollie Stevenson, Jr., Ph.D.
Acting Director

October 2007

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The authors, interviewers and National Center for Homeless Education staff wish to express their deepest gratitude to those individuals who shared their experiences for this report. They exhibited courage and patience in responding to our questions, which required an honest evaluation of their personal and professional responses to Hurricane Katrina. It was a privilege to listen to each of them.

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Executive Summary

We wanted to serve them, but we get hung up on the paperwork requirements. The [McKinney-Vento] law allowed the district to move very expediently. It gave us the flexibility to serve the human being and not worry about the documentation.

—School District Administrator
Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

In 2005, Gulf Coast states faced unprecedented devastation from seasonal hurricanes. Following Hurricane Katrina,¹ Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings immediately contacted the affected states to see what the U.S. Department of Education could do to support the enrollment of displaced students. The Department developed a Hurricane Help for Schools Web site, <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html> (accessed Feb. 12, 2007) to: provide quick responses to states asking for flexibility in managing school programs, as well as guidance and resources for states, districts and schools; and to identify helping agencies, organizations, places for donations, and federal aid for displaced and homeless students. Pieces of information about the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*² were among the first resources included on the Web site.



The nation's public schools played a critical role in the response to Hurricane Katrina, and they continue to contribute to the recovery of individual families and entire communities. The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* and the public school staff charged with implementing it form the basis for this contribution. By enrolling displaced children with compassion and efficiency in areas unaffected by the storms, providing parents with information and assistance, and supporting the mental, physical and intellectual well-being of students and families on a daily basis, the schools were and continue to be a key to healing and recovery.

In Their Own Words: Schools and Students Overcoming Adversity was born of the need to provide educators, families, policymakers and the communities nationwide with a window into the daily challenges and triumphs of the schools and

students affected by Hurricane Katrina. To accomplish this goal, this is in large part a first-person account of the hurricane's effects on education on the Gulf Coast during the few weeks and months after landfall and since. It is the voices of the students and the school, district and relief agency staff who were closest to the challenges that resulted from the hurricane.

The information in this report was collected from February to May 2006 via telephone interviews and e-mail surveys of 32 individuals in eight school districts in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.³ Those interviewed were comprised of school district homeless education liaisons, school administrators, relief agency staff, school counselors and students.

The narrative section of *In Their Own Words* consists entirely of the verbatim responses of the interviewees to oral and written questions, with no editorializing or commentary. Only minor changes to the punctuation and basic grammar were made to ensure the responses would be clear and understandable to readers. Therefore the information contained in this report accurately portrays interviewees' experiences as they were related to the interviewers. To protect the anonymity of those interviewed, the text does not identify the specific source of each statement, only the interviewees' roles and their school districts.

In Their Own Words invites readers into an unabridged and accessible conversation with students, school staff and relief agency personnel. The text weaves together responses from interviewees to create the sense of a group discussion. Juxtaposing comments from various communities, both differences representing the interviewees' diversity and trends and common experiences are represented in this report.

It is important to note that there was no effort to distort or bias the document by selecting interviewees with particularly provocative stories or particularly successful responses to Hurricane Katrina. The interviewees shared stories that were moving, admirable and positive. Those same stories also spoke of challenge, struggle and loss. Flaws at every level of the hurricane response have been documented, including weaknesses in school districts. Those problems must be confronted and corrected. However, the outlook and experiences of those interviewed for *In Their Own Words* demonstrate the competence, compassion and strength that are present in schools across the country. They also demonstrate the value of *McKinney-Vento* programs.

In Their Own Words begins with the experiences of the district homeless liaisons who were the primary architects of school districts' overall responses to Hurricane Katrina. These experiences range from meeting many of the families' immediate needs to enrolling displaced students in schools nationwide and from supporting parents to confronting mental health, academic and housing needs. The experiences of school administrators, relief agencies and school

counselors—those who provided strong leadership, immediate basic services and vital mental health support—then follow. The report concludes with students’ experiences, because they were, and continue to be, the purpose of the work of the other interviewees. More than any others, students’ interviews touched the heart of the daily challenges and triumphs of those affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Following is a brief summary of observations and thoughts expressed by each group of interviewees. Readers are, however, strongly encouraged to read the entire document.

School District Homeless Education Liaisons

If the McKinney-Vento Act was not in existence, a lot of our children would’ve fallen through the cracks because of policy. Kids would’ve been turned away for not having records, even though we knew their records were under water.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We are in a housing crisis.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.



The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* mandates the placement of a homeless education liaison in every school district in the United States. These liaisons manage their districts’ homeless education programs and work to ensure that homeless or displaced students can enroll and succeed in school. Liaisons serve all homeless children and youths in their school districts, regardless of the reason for their homelessness. As such, students who were forced to live in temporary or inadequate housing due to the 2005 hurricanes received the protection and services provided by the *McKinney-Vento Act*.

Because liaisons were at the front line of districts' hurricane responses, they faced possible significant logistical challenges in the wake of the storm, including the ability to meet students' physical needs, coordinate enrollment and manage data. However, their *McKinney-Vento* programs allowed them to meet those challenges efficiently. For example, most families who fled the storm or the subsequent flooding arrived in their new communities with nothing. They could not provide proof of residency, school records or other documents that are typically required for school enrollment. These basic requirements might have barred displaced children from enrolling in school and accessing services. Fortunately, because the *McKinney-Vento Act* gives homeless or displaced students the right to enroll in school immediately, without documents, such as health records, birth certificates and school records, and provides them with free meals without income verification, students and staff worked together immediately to ensure the smoothest transition to new schools possible. Homeless education liaisons continued to address students' needs, including providing mental health services and academic support. Today, ongoing challenges include a severe lack of affordable housing and difficulties in coordinating needs with services provided by disaster relief agencies.

School Administrators

It was important to do due diligence in relocating students in school sites that closely matched where they came from, pairing them with students, pairing them with faculty members, and trying to lessen the emotional burden—because it's one thing to accommodate students in your school that are displaced, but it's another thing to get them in school and actively engaged in learning again.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We don't want to be considered a babysitter. We want students to be learning. And in order to do that, you have to address the human side of the displacement.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

School and school district administrators faced significant logistical challenges associated with enrolling large numbers of students displaced by the hurricane, while simultaneously struggling to repair storm-damaged facilities. To overcome these issues, they relied on partnerships with community members. Administrators are now focusing on the long-term mental and intellectual well-being of their students. A lack of funding and facilities complicates these efforts. However, because of strong leadership and rigorous disaster-planning activities, they are optimistic about the future.

Relief Agency Staff

At our headquarters location, we could fairly comfortably accommodate 250 clients a day. The day after we hit 250 clients, we operated and served 500 people, and literally had as many as three caseworkers operating out of closets. The next day we jumped to 1,000.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Since January [2006], we've had more people come out of the Katrina situation than we did in August or September [2005]. It's just that the other kinds of housing allowances provided to them right after the hurricane have run out.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, relief agencies faced a disaster of unprecedented proportions in the United States. They overcame significant practical challenges, such as providing facilities, communication, and coordination to meet their clients' most basic needs. Staff members also were faced with the severe emotional trauma of their clients. Even today, relief agencies are supporting the basic needs of thousands of families and individuals, since many displaced and affected people are still struggling to provide themselves with food, housing, medicine and employment. Relief agencies are working to meet the demand for long-term case management and housing, while at the same time preparing for the next storm by strengthening their disaster response plans and their collaborative relationships within their communities.

School Counselors

I would see parents that just couldn't speak. They were still thinking about the devastation.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District Houston, Texas

Wherever we could, we've made ourselves available here at the school to make the students feel comfortable, a part of our family, not so much as just being displaced students, although they are... However, to us, they're our students.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

School counselors were among the very first school staff members to speak with displaced students and families. They ensured that basic needs were met, assisted with enrollment and orientation, worked to support each student's

academic success, and provided essential immediate and long-term mental health care to children and youths. Despite facing some significant challenges, school counselors agreed that their districts and their schools responded well to the disaster. Displaced students are now their students, participating in classes and after-school activities and looking toward the future.

Students

We called home, and everyone said everything was fine. It was sunny. Only our fence was down. So we started driving home. And then we got close to home, and there was the National Guard turning everyone off the road. We really didn't know what was going on.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

At first I didn't talk, because I just didn't feel right. But then I did, and people were still nice to me. And they understood when I would sit there and cry, and they would comfort me, and they wouldn't just send me to [the school counselor] all the time. And then I quit being shy and started being myself again.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Although there are no definitive numbers, it is clear that Hurricane Katrina forced hundreds of thousands of young people to flee their homes. They suffered unspeakable physical and emotional losses that will shape their views of the world and themselves for the rest of their lives. Ten months after the hurricane, they continued to feel sad, fearful and confused. Yet, in the face of profound adversity, these young students have shown extraordinary strength and optimism. Their counselors and new friends have been important elements in their recovery. They are maintaining positive attitudes and looking toward their futures with determination and resilience.

1. Hurricane Katrina and its effects was the primary motivation for this report; however, the impact of Katrina was exacerbated by the effects of several other hurricanes including Rita, Ivan, Dennis and Wilma that struck the southern states between September 2004 and October 2005. It is important to understand that Hurricane Katrina compounded the effects of these storms and made it more difficult to respond to subsequent disasters.
2. See Appendix A for a description of the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*.
3. See Appendix A for a further description of how information was collected for this report.

The General Impact of Hurricane Katrina On Schools and Students

I was telling my daughter, you cannot look at these pictures and understand. It's the fact that it's 100 degrees, and there's no air conditioning, and there's no electricity, and the chainsaws are buzzing, and the wasps have lost their habitats too, so they're buzzing, and the smells of decaying leaves and trees—it's everything. You have to see, smell and hear it. You can't just look at the pictures.

School Administrator
—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Hurricane Katrina directly impacted over 110,000 square miles in Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama.¹ As of Dec. 16, 2005, 1,321 casualties had been attributed to the hurricane—over 1,100 of those casualties were in Louisiana.² The storm left 527,000 people homeless,³ and nearly two million households requested individual assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).⁴ Damage estimates exceeded \$34.4 billion, with \$22 billion from Louisiana alone.⁵

This devastation resulted in the massive displacement of Gulf Coast residents. Over 1 million people evacuated the affected parishes in Louisiana, representing 80-90 percent of the population.⁶ In three coastal counties in Mississippi, as many as 66,000 people were displaced from their homes due to flooding or structural damage.⁷ Many families were separated during the evacuation, particularly those who left New Orleans after the storm. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 5,200 children were reported missing, although all of those cases were resolved by March 2006.⁸ The Congressional Research Service estimates that: 20 percent of the people displaced were poor; 30 percent had incomes below one and a half times the federal poverty level; and 44 percent were African-American.⁹

The interviews shared in this publication were conducted between six and seven months after Hurricane Katrina made landfall. At that time, nearly 800,000 families remained displaced.¹⁰ As of March 2006, 1,276 evacuated households were living on cruise ships, 10,266 in hotels, 83,500 in trailer or mobile homes, and over 700,000 were receiving rental assistance.¹¹

Although there is no definitive count of the number of children displaced by Hurricane Katrina, the following statistics gathered at the end of 2005 sketch an image:

- The Government Accounting Office reported that over 150,000 K-12 students

from Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas were displaced.¹²

- 372,000 students from Louisiana and Mississippi were not able to return to class in their local public or private schools.¹³
- In New Orleans alone, about 183,000 children and youths, including 47,000 under the age of five, lived in areas with significant damage.¹⁴
- 2,000 of Louisiana's 5,000 foster children were displaced.¹⁵

The storms interrupted school services for weeks or months across the Southeast, as indicated by the following statistics:

- Approximately 1,500 of Louisiana's 2,000 primary schools were located within affected parishes.¹⁶
- Hurricane Katrina directly impacted 930 schools, affecting over 480,000 students and teachers.¹⁷
- In New Orleans alone, 98 of the city's 117 public schools remained closed as of January 2006.¹⁸ Of the 19 that had reopened, eight had been converted to charter schools.¹⁹
- Where New Orleans Public Schools had served 60,000 students prior to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, only 13,000 students were attending as of January 2006.²⁰

Displaced families found refuge in every corner of the country. According to FEMA, applications for assistance came in from 18,700 zip codes in all 50 states—half of the nation's residential postal zones.²¹ Most evacuees remained within 250 miles of New Orleans; however, 240,000 households went to Houston and other cities over 250 miles away, and another 60,000 households went over 750 miles away.²²

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Crowley, S. Briefing to the U.S. House of Representatives Gulf Coast Recovery and Rebuilding Caucus. <http://www.nlihc.org/news/030706.html> (accessed March 7, 2006).

5. See note 3.
6. Quigley, B. "Six months after Katrina: Who was left behind." <http://www.justiceforneworleans.org/index.php?module=article&view=44&dc52b43c12ed9bc9f48a4c2aae71dc77=266d637e02049139cdccaf8f57f534bd> (accessed March, 2006).
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8. U.S. Government Accountability Office. 2006. *Lessons Learned for Protecting and Educating Children After the Gulf Coast Hurricanes*. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06680r.pdf> (accessed May, 2006).
9. See note 4. See also: Gabe, Thomas et al. 2005. "Hurricane Katrina: Social-Demographic Characteristics of Impacted Areas," Library of Congress Congressional Research Service. <http://www.gnocdc.org/reports/crsrept.pdf#search=%22%22Hurricane%20Katrina%3A%20Social-Demographic%20Characteristics%20of%20Impacted%20Areas%22%22>. (accessed November, 2005).
10. Katz, B., M. Fellowes and M. Mabanta. 2005. *Katrina Index: Tracking Variables of Post-Katrina Reconstruction*. http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200601_KatrinaIndex.pdf (accessed March, 2006).
11. Ibid.
12. See note 9.
13. U.S. Department of Education. 2005. *U.S. Department of Education Fiscal Year 2005 Performance and Accountability Report*. "Meeting the Needs of Katrina Evacuees" <http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/2005report/1a/edlite-1a2a-katrina.html> (accessed November, 2005).
14. See note 6.
15. See note 9.
16. See note 1.
17. U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2005 Performance and Accountability Report*.
18. See note 6.
19. See note 6.
20. U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2005 Performance and Accountability Report*.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

Snapshots

I lost one of my friends because of the hurricane, because she stayed [behind]. And she didn't make it. At first I blamed myself, because I thought I could've taken her with me, but then I realized it wasn't my fault. It's hard losing everything, and seeing places that you loved not there. And you want to live there so bad, and you know you can't. And that hurts.

Ninth-grade Student
Lafayette Parish School System
Lafayette, La.



When my staff go through and do one-on-ones with the parents, they are elated that someone is talking to and concerned about their kids. We are listening, trying to solve their issues, and reporting back to parents with ideas and solutions.

District Homeless Liaison
East Baton Rouge Parish School System
Baton Rouge, La.

Snapshots

Any agency that revolves around children, I think it's very important that it use the school board and the guidance counselors and social workers as guides. They know firsthand what the children need. With the situation with the disaster, it helped to use the school system, and they did a wonderful job.

Relief Agency Staff
Santa Rosa County School District
Milton, Fla.

We had one couple who had just registered their children, and the door opens, and another family walks in, and they all just start sobbing. It turns out they went to the same school back in New Orleans. We just cried with them, because what could we do? We were able to put the kids in the same class.

School Counselor
Escambia County School District
Pensacola, Fla.

This has made more people aware of the homeless situation, but I don't want the people to forget about the homeless kids we constantly have, and not just from Katrina.

District Homeless Liaison
Jackson Public Schools
Jackson, Miss.

The Daily Challenges and Triumphs of School District Homeless Education Liaisons

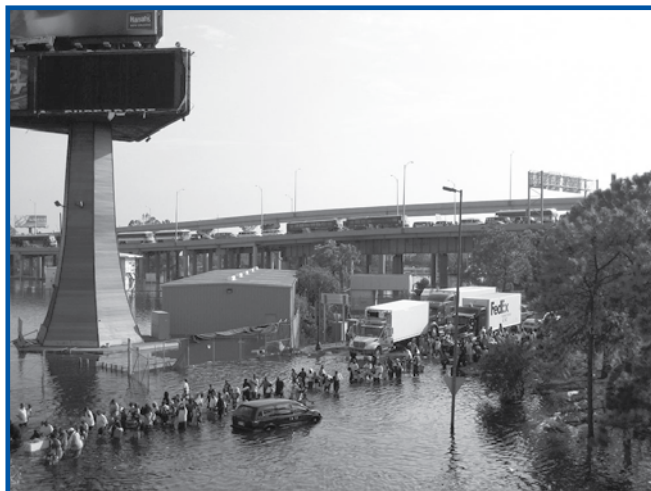
I have spoken to parents who have called my office telling me that enrolling their students has been a turning point on their road to recovery. Knowing their children are somewhere 'safe' while they struggle with the tough decisions about the future...what could be a better service for a public school system to offer?

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

What scares me the most is, where are these people going to go when their vouchers run out?

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* mandates the placement of a homeless education liaison in every school district in the United States. These liaisons manage their districts' homeless education programs and work to ensure that homeless students can access and succeed in school. Since the vast majority of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were now homeless, liaisons coordinated school enrollment and the subsequent services received by students and their families. Liaisons were the cornerstone to school districts' responses to the hurricane.



The General Impact of the Hurricane on the Homeless Program

Depending on their locations and the sizes of their school districts, liaisons served varying numbers of displaced students.

After Katrina, we registered more than 9,000 students in schools, with almost 5,000 enrolled in our district.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We ended up serving 451 evacuees over time.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We enrolled a little over 5,000 kids.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We reopened Sept. 12 and had 95 new students enrolled that first week.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Notwithstanding such differences, the hurricanes of 2005 profoundly affected homeless programs. Generally, homeless education programs are small programs within the context of a school district. When Hurricane Katrina struck, however, the liaisons and the programs they managed were suddenly thrust front and center. Their policies and procedures allowed displaced students to: enroll in school; receive uniforms, supplies and meals; access mental and physical health services; receive academic support and transportation services; make friends; and feel safe again. These stunning successes gave the homeless programs new prominence and distinction in their districts.

When you're faced with a disaster like that, you just have to step up and do what has to be done.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We already had our program, and we were already working with homeless families, so it was easier to respond to the hurricane.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

There were very few bumps in the road—we're good!

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I was invited to the superintendent's executive board meeting for the first time, and all the things they were stressing about we already had in place.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

I was there to answer the tough questions about how this would work. All of a sudden, we had a place at the table when it came to making decisions, and they listened to us. Suddenly they learned we were there, we were prepared, and there were policies and procedures in place that made things easy...

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

It also brought about a lot more awareness. Everybody knows about the McKinney-Vento Act now. Every memo that went out mentioned McKinney and our board policies on homeless students. I had a couple of top administrators say to me, 'I never knew about this act before.' And that surprised me, because we've been around for 15 years. One said, 'I'm so busy with state laws and other federal laws...I knew you worked with homeless children, but it never dawned on me the extent of the problems that they had.'

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The hurricane helped me get a few things done that I've been wanting to do—things are moving even faster than they used to.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

It all fell into place.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The Immediate Impact of the Hurricanes: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Weeks After Landfall

Since liaisons were at the front line of school districts' hurricane responses, they faced significant logistical challenges in the initial weeks following landfall. Students entered new schools in unprecedented numbers, and liaisons coordinated the efforts to ensure that all children and youths had their immediate physical needs met, were enrolled in and attending appropriate schools and classes, and were being tracked by schools and data systems.

Meeting Immediate Physical Needs, Including Clothing, Health Care and Food

Some students showed up with absolutely nothing—no clothes, very emotionally needy and very scared, both those who had gotten out before the storm and those who got out later. The schools were just incredible in meeting those needs.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

The district helped me coordinate the uniforms and supplies by notifying the schools of where and when they could pick those up. And we had a list of how many students they had, so we could make sure we had enough for them.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We had to call in volunteers to transport supplies and uniforms to our 42 schools. We had to get them uniforms and school supplies by the end of the first week, per our superintendent's order. I didn't think we could do it, but we did.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

They were immediately put into the free lunch program.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We had nurses who did triage on-site. Students got their medications right there.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We were fortunate to have a lot of donors who donated uniforms, supplies and funds.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

I spent about \$70,000 just on uniforms. We could have never have done it without donations. We hadn't even received our McKinney-Vento grant money yet.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Ensuring That Students Were Enrolled in and Attending Appropriate Schools and Classes

The day after the storm, I contacted the superintendent and said we needed to have a procedure in place. So we met with the principals and told them everyone would be registered through our office. Everyone was registered through our program.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We set up a district-level registration with my team, and then the students went to school the next day.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We just used our regular McKinney-Vento policies that we already had. I can't think of any new policies I'd want, because I think McKinney-Vento really addresses the issues of homelessness. So it really helped out with enrollment without a parent, immunizations, and... transportation. We set up enrollment

centers at the Reliant Astrodome. We had all the forms students needed to enroll, and we had the special education people doing ARD [Admission, Review and Dismissal] meetings right on-site, so the kids got to school with a current IEP [Individualized Education Program]. We were looking at graduation requirements to make sure we got high school students in the right classes. As soon as records came, if we needed to adjust, we put them in the right class.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Other people who were doubled-up with families went to the pupil placement office. But getting to those people who did not come to pupil placement was a big problem. The shelters were spread out all over the city.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

My responsibility was to get teams out everywhere in the parish to register children—shelters, hotels, homes, etc. They were registered with a paper registration form.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We had to prepare our staff to be ready to move at a moment's notice. So I set up a voice mail where I'd leave a message at night about where and when we were going to meet up the next morning, and staff could call in to find out. I'd just say, 'This church shelter, 7:30.' And that's where we'd meet. We had 11 people on my team that weekend. Our outreach efforts that we had with our community worked really well. Churches and shelters all knew I was the homeless liaison, so they contacted me to tell me when they were bringing people from the Reliant Astrodome. So with my team, I went to the shelters and churches with enrollment packets, did the enrollments there, contacted transportation, and made arrangements. The schools had night meetings at the shelters to orient the families and kids to the school, policies, etc. We did enrollment over Labor Day weekend, and the kids were in school Tuesday or Wednesday, at the latest.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

What came along with that was the lack of documentation. Some of the kids were unaccompanied, so we didn't even have guardianship. Some actually had some information with them. Basically, what I did was a series of conference calls, a series of immediate education where I reminded school staff about the definitions and indicators of homelessness.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We told the school people, 'When they show up, we're just going to enroll them and deal with paperwork and other issues later.'

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We inserted a checklist in every child's folder, documenting our efforts to get documents and immunizations, showing what we'd done and tried to get. The Mississippi and Louisiana health departments committed to getting us the immunization information, and our state's health department also helped us with that.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Once they were registered at school, the school did the schedules for those children. Every school had an enrollment team with every needed staff member on it—pre-K, special education, regular education, etc. They started with the basic schedule, and made adjustments based on the information the family could provide.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

If they did not have school records, the schools would just take the parents' word and assign the kids in age-appropriate classes, making whatever necessary adjustments once the records came in.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

We didn't have a lot in changes in school placements after records came in.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We only had two to three cases where kids needed to be reassigned once records came in.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

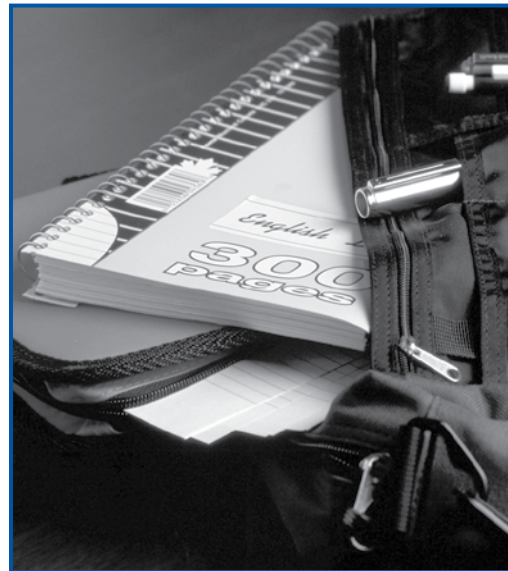
Most mistakes were at the high school level, where the students hadn't actually passed certain classes.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We had a lot of seniors who weren't seniors, so we gently put them back into the right grade.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The hardest were kids with special needs, because we basically had to go by what the parents said, and we put emergency IEPs [Individual Education Programs] in place the day that the children arrived at the building. And then we went back and did full



IEPs with the parents. Also, some parents came in with special education students and didn't tell us, because they didn't want their children receiving those services.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

The state's Department of Education was able to give us information on the majority of the children through a statewide database that the school counselors could access. That database even had special education information. They were able to be placed and served right away, thanks to the state database.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

And we had the athletic department there at the Astrodome to hook them up with the coaches. So they might say, 'You're tall—you look like maybe you play basketball,' or 'You look strong—did you play football?' And we had a lot of kids who started right away. They waived a lot of the eligibility requirements.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We had school counselors on-site as well, to address some of the emotional needs. We gave out teddy bears to the kids, and they loved it.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We also brought counselors to the registration area who talked to families and children, welcomed them, and did some counseling in that situation. Each school had an orientation for parents and children, and offered counseling services at that orientation. The district assigned to us a group of secretaries, social workers and supervisors. About 20–25 people were placed here from other positions. Our normal staff size is five.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We wanted these families to make just one stop at one school and have everything taken care of, right then and there. So we told our schools, 'If you know from what they're telling you that you're not going to be able to serve them in your school—that they have special needs—tell them about their options right then. Then you make the phone calls to put everything in place for special needs with the district and the receiving school. Make sure that everything that you can do to make that transition easy is taken care of. We want them to make only one stop, but if you can't serve them, you make the arrangements so that their second stop is their last.' And our principals followed through on it, and they did a great job.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Students were assigned based on where they were living, like all our other students. We did have an American Red Cross shelter, and those kids were

assigned to one of four schools, based on capacity, and were bused there every day. We moved in portable buildings and hired new teachers as necessary.

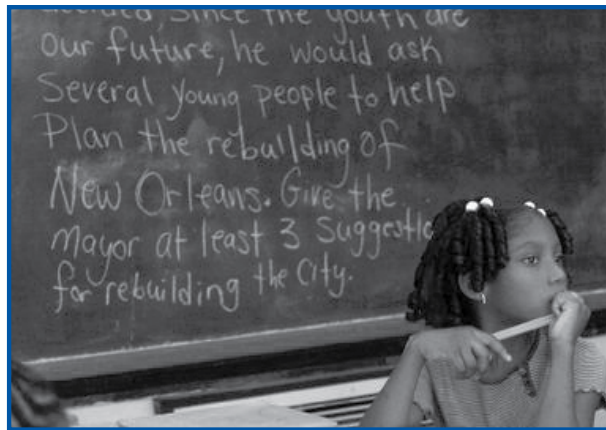
—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We had a major problem with overcrowding. We didn't have the staff and the space for those students at that time. So we were just overcrowded, and we got waivers. Eventually we hired more staff to bring the ratio down.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

There were some sacred cows here, some schools and magnet programs—we have only two magnet schools—and so there were some board members and other people who didn't want to enroll Hurricane Katrina kids. And as of today very few Katrina kids are in those schools.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



Transportation worked well. I use a certification form that I fax to the transportation office to reroute, and then I set up new transportation. We can get school of origin transportation in place very, very quickly.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Our transportation department was on-site with us, coordinating transportation right there. We put an armband on them with their name, school and bus route. It was removable, but most of them kept it on. It would've been chaos without it, because we had so many bus routes, and they wouldn't remember which was theirs. After a while, they got the opportunity to take it off.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

It wasn't the bus routes that were so hard, but just finding space on the bus.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We are facing a shortage of bus drivers—drivers from New Orleans can get more from unemployment than from working with us. It has raised a lot of awareness about transportation and made it easier for us.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

When Katrina happened, a lot of people left to go to Louisiana and Texas, into FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] jobs and construction work. So it left a void in our workforce, including janitors, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, construction workers, etc. We handled it and provided transportation, but it was a strain.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I would characterize school of origin as a very minor issue.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

For the most part, we honored parents' requests for school of origin when they moved.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Some of the parents were really concerned. They had no car, they didn't know Houston, and they put a kindergartner or first-grader on a bus going to a school they didn't know anything about. The parents didn't know where they were going to be, because they didn't know Houston. So we probably could've let the parents ride the bus too. But some of them couldn't, because they were working on getting food, housing, FEMA support and everything. We wanted to have a parent meeting at the Reliant Astrodome, but we couldn't do that because there were so many people constantly moving around, and the PA system wasn't good enough. Also for many people, school just wasn't a priority. They'd had the opportunity at the Reliant Astrodome, but didn't enroll there, and then they went to hotels. They were working on clothes, food and housing, and not enrolling their kids. So we went out to hotels and enrolled there. HEB is a grocery store, and they donated \$100 gift cards, so we gave out a gift card when they enrolled, and then a second gift card when they got on the bus.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Ensuring That Students Were Tracked by Schools and Data Systems

There was so much mobility; families used shelters as a stopover before finding family to take them in, or making other arrangements. So there was so much turnover, we couldn't keep up with them.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Getting in touch and keeping in touch with parents was a challenge.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

One of the most obvious questions is, do you have a way of accounting for the kids who are coming in, as well as those who are already here? We have a student information system, which is set up to flag kids who are eligible for McKinney-Vento services. We have different codes for the different living situations, as well as a code for unaccompanied youths. Our programmers also entered a second code for hurricanes, with different letters for all the different hurricanes that have affected us. We also coded what state they came from.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We had technology there on-site to enter kids right away into the system, so they were already in the system when they arrived at school.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

At first we had the schools report to us daily when new students came in, and later on, when we became aware of more funding, we had to identify specifically where students were living, if they were doubled up, or in a trailer, or whatever. We had to start keeping track of that, and also changes in their living situations. So if this happens again, we'll start tracking that from the beginning. As money was coming in, [administrators] were requiring new data, and we had to figure out how to get that data.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Children who are homeless as a result of [Hurricane] Katrina are in a separate data system.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We use the TERMS [Total Education Record Management System] database.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

MSIS [Mississippi School Information System] is used to track displaced students.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

We used the local school district management information system called SIS [Student Information System].

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Secondary Impact of the Hurricanes: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Months After Landfall



Following the initial wave of enrollment, homeless programs faced different challenges. Significant mental health needs among displaced students, and to a lesser extent preexisting students, began to emerge. These difficulties sometimes erupted into conflicts among students. Liaisons were also confronting an extraordinarily high mobility rate among displaced families, which complicated transportation services and school placement. Unfortunately, inadequate communication and coordination with disaster relief agencies exacerbated these and other challenges. Liaisons reported excellent relations with many relief agencies, but a lack of communication from others. Good communication is essential for schools to serve displaced children and youths effectively.

Dealing with Significant Mental Health Needs

Being frightened was definitely the outstanding theme.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I don't think anyone, unless you were here, really understood the enormity of the disaster. You know it's true, and that it happened, but it's just so hard to believe.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

When you're in a house, and the wind is howling for 10 or 12 hours, and you don't know if your house is going to stand—it's impossible to explain.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Dealing with the counseling piece was huge. Counseling services had to be put in place, because these children had to adapt to a totally different culture. It was a really big adjustment, and still is for a lot of these children. A lot of the children were still in shelters, dealing with the changes in their living situations. Compassion and patience are really the only strategies—putting your traditional ways of dealing with things to the side. Compassion and understanding are your only tools.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

It has exacerbated pre-existing emotional issues for those who had problems before. The ones who were doing well and in a stable family environment before the storms are pretty okay. But others are struggling emotionally.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I have a sense of real urgency to get the kids enrolled, but in hindsight, it might be better to wait a little while. The parents need to have the kids near them, to feel safe and together. We need to leave that up to the parent more.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We're educators, and we wanted to get them in school. But I think that we need to remove barriers to learning and teaching, and those emotional, physical and trauma issues are barriers. And I don't think we addressed those right away. We had students in the classroom, at a desk, but it was a challenge to address those emotional issues. A memo went out from our superintendent telling schools to assign buddies to the new children, to give them an orientation to the building, to welcome our parents, to be kind and compassionate. And in the homeroom period, they were supposed to have meetings with the children to tell them new students were coming and that we needed to welcome them. And individual schools did their own things as well, like have assemblies or other creative activities. Many principals met the school bus every morning at the Reliant Astrodome, to welcome and meet the kids. They were walking around saying, 'Good morning, I'm the principal, we're so glad to have you here.'

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

At a lot of the schools, the PTA set up activities to welcome new families. We also had parent meetings at the trailer parks. We brought that feedback to the schools, and then the schools came up with strategies to meet the needs.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The schools used their school counselors to meet with the new students. We talked with the teachers beforehand about being aware of the needs of the students, giving them some extra attention, making sure they were included in classroom activities, etc. A lot of it comes down to the teacher, who is the first person they connect with one-on-one.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We did have a crisis response team of counselors and psychologists who were available to be deployed out to the school, if the school called and said this child was really having a bad day.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Another part of our recovery component is service learning. We have a large group of middle school students, including some evacuees, involved in creating hurricane kits for the elderly. Giving the kids proactive activities to engage them in preparation, response and recovery is critical to the healing process.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I hired a police officer who is teaching them team-building and conflict resolution skills through sports. There are also people going to the trailer parks four times a week to interact with the parents, talking and listening, and doing grassroots work with them—helping them with tracking down their belongings, getting medical cards and doctor appointments, and other meeting needs. They get them to write their stories, if they can write, or tape their stories. People weren't ready to talk at the beginning, but as time goes on, they share their experiences with us. The local rabbi is working with the schools. And for the "Week Without Violence" Youth Summit, they brought homeless and non-homeless kids together for activities. We also have taken parents and children to local sports events and other outings. I find that if you can get them in these kinds of activities, beyond just the sit-down-at-your-desk kind of conversation—because you'll lose them—you're developing teams and reaching people.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We are one of the few school districts in the country with school-based mental health services for students. We have school resource offices, after-school programs, mental health, physical health, crisis counselors, adult education and adult enrichment, and our school buildings are open seven days a week and all summer. So there are lots of support systems in place right at the school sites. Many schools also set up support groups with the guidance counselor or crisis counselor.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We didn't have enough social workers to go around—I only have two social workers in the program. And we don't have counselors on all of our elementary school campuses. Our social workers were constantly going out. So we hired extra counselors to go out to the schools where we had a high concentration of kids from New Orleans, and provide counseling to them, starting in November or December [2005]. There was also the challenge of making sure we didn't have any conflict, making sure those children felt they belonged in the school. We probably could've done some more cultural sensitivity for those kids. We had to look at conflict resolution and different cultures.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We did have turf issues and conflicts between new and old students. Not a whole lot, but I have heard of three incidents. I don't believe there's any place where that wasn't a problem. The new kids didn't have the chance to go over the student handbook to know the consequences for behaviors—that would've been good, to have an orientation to the student handbook. I think we need to have a policy in place to set up an orientation for new students who come in.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Many of our students were still coming out of trauma from hurricanes Ivan and Dennis the year before. Some of ours had been in shelters and were wearing donated clothes the year before. They knew how the new students felt. It gave them the opportunity to give back and feel a sense of control, whereas others had been helping them before.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Our schools had dinners, picnics and welcoming backpacks (with help from community agencies) full of school supplies and extra books. The younger kids were especially supportive. We had almost no problems with turf issues.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Responding to High Student Mobility

Our attendance was changing from day to day, with little or no notice. As things got better where they came from, and as the schools opened back up on the coast, we lost students. But then some came back because they decided they liked it better up here.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

It was a constant movement. They moved in and out of friends' houses, in and out of hotel rooms as they became available. People wanted to be as close to New Orleans as possible, because they were going back on the weekends to work on their homes.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Getting transportation to follow them as they moved out of the Reliant Astrodome was hard. When they all started moving into hotels, I did what I could to work with transportation services to pick them up. And then when there weren't many people left at the Astrodome, we still had to send the bus to get them, with maybe four or five kids on a bus sometimes.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Two months after the storm we were still registering about 25 families a day. A lot of them had been to Texas, a lot were coming back from wherever they had been bused or flown to when they were rescued from New Orleans.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We even had new kids from Katrina enrolling in January, who'd been in other parts of the country, and they didn't feel welcome, or they finally found their family in Texas, so they came to us.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The biggest challenge was not knowing when they were coming and going. With an influx of evacuees like that, you gear up for additional kids and capacity. But then after a time, they start leaving. So you put services and staff in place, and then the kids leave. Once they started leaving, we had to deal with the expense of putting up a portable [trailer], put in extra books, etc. It makes it really hard to plan.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Facing Inadequate Communication and Coordination with Disaster Relief Agencies

The positioning of the trailers was done with no consideration whatsoever of school issues. The kids from the trailers are going to three different districts, because the trailer park is geographically divided among three districts. Having Katrina kids was an advantage for Baker School District, which was struggling, because they got the kids before they submitted their per-pupil count. So they actually benefited financially from the influx. But it would probably have been better to have them all in one district.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

FEMA will not share information with school districts. They put a whole bunch of kids in hotels and motels, and we had no clue if they were enrolled or being served. They won't even let us into the parks to give out flyers or supplies, or to talk to parents, because they have guards. They won't let us go door to door, and we can't even put a flyer in a mailbox. I find it ludicrous. We had 15 FEMA parks at one point after hurricanes Ivan and Dennis. We had kids who needed to be in school and weren't, because we couldn't get to them. We could've given the kids a sense of normalcy, free meals, and time and space for themselves. The Red Cross did the same thing. They set up shelters, and wouldn't let the school district in to talk to the parents. FEMA also closes its parks without telling us in advance, without telling us about the affected children, so we can't set up continuing transportation, ensure continued enrollment, etc. We just hear it through the grapevine. It's infuriating. Outstanding reimbursement from

FEMA is also a big issue—we're looking at \$8-10 million in repairs to school buildings. We don't know if they'll pay, and that will be a huge capital outlay for us.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

When there's an emergency or disaster that sends evacuees into an area that's already suffering, that area should be included in the federal disaster area declared. We couldn't get FEMA trailers because we were not a designated area, but we didn't have any housing, because we were still recovering from hurricanes Ivan and Dennis. Since we weren't hit, we weren't designated. Our Red Cross and services were working well, so many people came to us from Alabama and Mississippi. But we still can't house the evacuees.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

The Long-Term Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues Today and Looking Forward

Many challenges remain for homeless programs. Currently, liaisons are dedicating significant efforts to supporting the academic success and mental health of displaced students. They are also very concerned about the extraordinary pressure that the massive relocation of families has put on an already severely inadequate supply of affordable housing. Looking forward, homeless liaisons are likely to face a housing crisis and inadequate funding to respond to the increased demand for services.

Supporting Academic Success

Many of the kids who went to public schools in New Orleans are behind, and we are working to catch them up.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Now that we've identified the weaknesses, we want to turn them into strengths.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We still have a lot of kids who are out of school, truant. A lot of them are going back to New Orleans every other week, and the kids are missing school. And we have a lot of kids who were dropouts, but they came back. So that's good, that they dropped back in. But they're really behind.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We are also dealing with truancy issues in the trailer parks. We are working with truancy officers. It is the truancy issue from New Orleans just brought here, exacerbated by mental health issues and the living situation.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



We're looking at our state testing now, which is in May. You're looking at students who've been in and out [of school], not being able to concentrate and learn—how will that affect our test scores? How will they be ready for the tests?

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We just finished our state testing. And there was just a report in the newspaper, that the percentage of kids who passed our tests is very, very low. So we're having summer school, and they can go to summer school and take the test again. I'm going to be hiring 25 teachers to tutor homeless children in the summer. But I think we may find, it's a possibility, that many of our children might be retained.

—Houston Independent School District,
Houston, Texas

We are using several different funding sources to provide extra tutors to come in during the day, in addition to after-school tutoring services for students who are struggling. Those programs are open for any student, including displaced students. We use some Title I money, a Title VI Grant, a Reading First Grant, and a 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant for the after-school component. We work really hard at making the funding work so we can provide the services the students need.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Also, because of Katrina, we cut a tutor and hired a certified counselor to work in the shelters. Title I has provided tutors, and we send our kids to their programs. They have tutorials after school in all the middle schools, plus we have a tutorial in our building, all supplied through Title I. Our tutors go to shelters and to schools with a lot of homeless children in the building.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

A lot of the children from Louisiana refused to take our state-mandated tests, because they say they're going back. I see their desire to have a Louisiana diploma, and not a Texas diploma. Many of them might not do well, but they should take the Texas test just in case, because if they stay in Texas, they will need it to graduate. They might not be able to go back, but they're banking on going back.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Many of them don't have the academics to pass our test. With the seniors, they can get a Louisiana diploma if they pass the Louisiana test online, or in Texas if they can pass our test. So many kids are taking the online Louisiana test, which forces them to miss class time to take the test, and there have been a lot of problems with the system crashing. So then they have to miss classes again to take it again. And they have to have a counselor monitoring the process, so it takes up a lot of staff time.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Some of the kids who are graduating are wearing a gown in the colors of their old schools, because they requested that, and the schools [here] are letting them do that.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Supporting Mental Health



Next year, we need to do a lot of work with grief and loss. Those emotional needs are still going to be a challenge. It takes a while to get over that, when you're traumatized. And then they had to evacuate twice, because Hurricane Rita came through Houston. So they got here from New Orleans, and then they had to evacuate again.

—Houston Independent School District,
Houston, Texas

What people must realize is that we are talking about an entire city coming into another city. And the issues they had there follow the people here. The part of the population that wasn't working, or that was breaking laws, or that was working and trying their best—they are all here. And 500–600 trailers literally piled on top of each other is creating mental health issues, truancy and other problems that don't necessarily need to be the case.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We need intensive case management with the families to help them rebuild, find jobs, find housing, and do more than just providing money or motels and then cutting them off. Somewhere after month three or so, there needs to be more case management and more accountability for the evacuees.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We're trying to change our way of talking about the kids from New Orleans. We're working on not calling them Katrina kids. They are Houstonians now. We have to change our mindset.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Dealing with the Housing Crisis

We still have over 1,000 FEMA hotel rooms. One day FEMA is going to cut that off, and these people don't have any money to go anywhere. What are we going to do when these people are put out of those hotels? We have a really bad housing shortage anyway. They stopped taking Section 8 applications this week, because the waiting list is two to three years.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We still have about 1,500 hurricane students here who are now in transitional housing, some coming out of motels.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We have about 18,000 people still in hotels.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Our mayor is working with HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] to get people out of trailers, etc., but where will we house them? When the trailers shut down after 18 months, how will the families pay rent? It was an issue before Katrina, and it's more extreme now. Many are saying that the families are going to return to New Orleans. But return to what? I believe that, as our superintendent says, these are our children now.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Right before Katrina, the housing agency put a big ad in the paper, telling people to come and sign up for public housing. People camped out the night before—4,000 people showed up—but there wasn't housing available anyway. It was just to put people on the waiting list. So that created a lot of anger and problems that are worse now after Katrina. And there has been a rift between the locals and the

people from New Orleans, because priority has been given to Katrina people, even over people who have been on the waiting lists here, some for four to five years.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Many have plans to stay here because their homes were destroyed. Some have jobs, some do not, and many have no idea what they'll do when the subsidy ends. They can't afford to pay for the transitional housing once their voucher runs out. So we're anticipating that a lot of people will be homeless again. Everyone is trying to get on waiting lists for subsidized housing. I think we're going to retain about 85 percent of the students we have. We're still growing, just by word of mouth, where extended families who were relocated are trying to get back together in the same place. And since our district is so well-liked, with a great reputation, with a lot of services, people are coming here.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

They're not doing anything in New Orleans. They're not rebuilding—not where these kids come from. I've talked to a lot of parents who like it here, they like our standards, and they're not going back. Even some university kids have transferred to our community college.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We're still registering students. We are going to keep these children, and they are still going to be homeless under McKinney-Vento, so we will still provide services. But the cost issues are serious. We are not going to have the resources to serve them next year. Next year I'm not going to have those donations to cover costs and those waivers.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I need more funds. I'll need more staff. I hope our policymakers realize that this is an experience that can happen again. Maybe they need to spend some time stuck on a bridge or something. Sometimes you can be so removed from the situation. I hope people keep lobbying for more money. We need to put more funds out there for our kids.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

There are no plans in the works to deal with the crisis, that I know of.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Role of Collaborations and Contributions

Liaisons relied extensively on their community partners in all stages of their hurricane response. The strong, collaborative relationships that liaisons had built over the years were essential, and new partners also stepped forward to play their part. Community organizations, multinational corporations, local businesses, international nongovernmental organizations, local television and radio stations, civic clubs, local universities, law firms, and schools in the local areas and across the country all contributed to the liaisons' extraordinary accomplishments.

A crisis is not a good time to be asking for business cards. You need to have those relationships in place. We really, really rely on our community agencies. School districts need to be involved in the community, so there are strong connections already in place before a disaster, so everyone in the community is working together, ready and willing to help.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

School districts are not used to coordinating donations. The donations are a blessing and a curse, because sorting and distributing them can be nothing less than a nightmare, and we just don't have space to store them. So we decided not to accept those donations at the district level. Organizations that contacted me about donations, I asked for gift cards, which was the way to go. We were able to buy exactly what the families needed, without storage issues. The school counselors headed up meeting those needs, going shopping, and providing clothes for their school. With gift cards, you can use them over time, too. We also asked our United Way to coordinate cash donations, because we didn't want to take in cash. They were just amazing.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We have a Partnership Department in the district that handled our donations. In our district we coexisted together, we were not territorial, and we worked really well together to meet the needs of the families. Out of this you find a lot of compassionate people.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

I was in the Walgreens here in town, getting a prescription for a young man I was serving a few days after Katrina hit. The line was long, and I started talking with someone from Baton Rouge. We talked about our work and what we were doing, and he told me he was going to put someone in touch with me to help with my work. I had an e-mail waiting for me when I got back to the office, which put me in touch with ADRA [Adventist Development and Relief Agency, a nongovernmental

relief program from the Czech Republic], and got me funding from the Czech Republic: \$90,000. I have used that donation to place different counseling personnel at different sites.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Our local university has a writing project, and the director of the program sent an e-mail to her mailing list about all the writing projects in the country. That single e-mail generated hundreds of checks from around the country.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We also had schools from all over the country that adopted our schools and sent thousands of dollars to our schools. So we used that money to buy uniforms, school supplies, etc. And we got a truckload of full backpacks donated from another school district.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We had several organizations come in (Children's Defense Fund, Coalition to End Homelessness, and others) and had meetings with Katrina families, and provided advocates to speak to the families about their rights and needs, and serve as liaisons between families and schools. That was very necessary, because we needed outside resources to connect the families to the schools. We also had parent coordinators who worked with the families. There were people who were not coming into the schools because of stress or problems, but they would talk to other advocates who came out to them.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

We also had several lawyers volunteer to conduct classes for the parents on the paperwork involved with hurricanes, insurance, FEMA, services and benefits, etc. That was really a good thing to do, because lowering the stress level for the parents lowered the stress level for the kids.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

HUD has not been an effective partner, because their definition of homeless is different from McKinney-Vento. The Continuum of Care was working only with men until we stepped in last year to get involved. The hurricane intensified our work with the Continuum.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Our local cable company has done public service announcements for me and fundraisers to set up a summer camp.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

First Book, which is a national program for library books, is now working with us to put books in our backpacks, both for enrollment and for the summer.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

A local children's clothing store also gave us 173 \$50 gift certificates, and it's been wonderful. We are continuing to give those out.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Home Front Hugs sent us lunch boxes for the kids, just out of the blue.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We had a local Optimist's Club that called and volunteered to pay all the enrollment fees for the kids in one of the high schools—parking, sports, etc. The local TV station, an ABC affiliate, has consistently helped us with school supply drives.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

The Lafayette Community Foundation gave us \$15,000. We got \$50,000 from the Cargill Salt Company. Chevrolet gave us \$100,000. Our local schools had a 'Jeans Day', and that generated \$15,000 for us.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The local radio stations ran an 'Undie Monday,' with bins in front of the Wal-Mart and other stores. We got thousands of pairs of underwear from that.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Teaching Strategies—it's a book company, and they put us on their Web site to get donations.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



Lessons Learned

In reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of their response to the hurricanes, homeless liaisons identified four key elements: (1) the necessity of a rigorous disaster response and recovery plan; (2) the power of personal connections and sensitivity to homeless or displaced students; (3) the need for a positive, coordinated district response; and (4) the importance of electronic systems for sharing academic and medical records.

Recognizing the Necessity of a Rigorous Disaster Response and Recovery Plan

If it happens tomorrow, will we do a better job than we did last time? We need to have a plan in place! An evacuation plan, a response plan and a recovery plan. And it needs to be a city plan, in conjunction with the school districts.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We need to have a memo or briefing so everyone in the district can understand what we do, what role we play, and what role departments should play to work the most efficiently.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

We have a committee now reviewing all of our policies to see if there are changes we want to make. We have made up some pre-prepared disaster routes for when we need to transport people from motels, churches, etc. I think once our meetings are done, we'll have looked at our district all the way through and know where we stand, and what changes we need to make, if any.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Promoting Power of Personal Connections and Showing Sensitivity to Displaced and Homeless Students

If we really want to help these children, then what we really need to do is see this thing from the eyes of the children and their parents. And if we look at it from their eyes, then we can better serve them. So we had to have a lot of honest talks to sensitize the school staff to understand and see it through their eyes.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The fact that area restaurants donated lunch and we provided breakfast, so there was always something to eat or drink at registration, was really important. People

just went on and on about how nice we were to them. If they wanted to sit there all day, we let them. That worked really well. Also enrolling the students in our schools like any other child in our parish [instead of having separate schools], and treating them like everyone else, worked out really well. That made the biggest difference.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We really forgot about our own homeless children. We usually go out at the beginning of the year to identify our homeless students. We were focusing so much on enrolling the children from New Orleans that nobody in the district was identifying homeless children who normally live in the school district. And I think the children felt that. They felt that people were donating for New Orleans kids, but not for them. There were people who felt that these children and their families were getting more attention than they ever got in this school district.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

I sent out a memo to all the schools reminding them to check addresses and identify all homeless children in the school.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Recognizing the Need for a Positive, Coordinated District Response

We need to coordinate and be prepared in coalitions ahead of time.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Flexibility is number one. You can't stick to all the rules when stuff like this happens, and that's hard for school districts.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I think one of the most important things was the district response—their promptness, cooperation among personnel, and support. The assistant superintendent and superintendent listened to our concerns about the rights of these children under McKinney-Vento, and the district was very consistent with doing registration. Our superintendent met with all the principals and supervisors, and said regardless of your personal feelings about this, we are going to enroll them, and they will be our kids. The schools were very receptive, both students and faculty.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We were very well-organized; we worked with the city of Houston to plan for them to be here. We also had a debriefing in late September on what worked and didn't

work, so we can do better next time. It was important to this district to know what worked and what didn't work.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Now in my presentations I will expound a bit more on what homelessness really is, and look at disasters as being a homeless situation, and add that to the conversation. Even people who knew about the law may not have realized that these kids were covered.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Recognizing the Importance of Electronic Systems for Sharing Academic and Medical Records

We need some way to have a back-up system for records so that they can be easily transferred.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

About the second week of registration, the state put on a disk limited information about all the students from all five of the affected parishes. So we could verify grade level, and the special education department was able to pull up those records and get them special education services. We had some kids who were in gifted or special programs, and we verified their programming on the disk, and moved them into the appropriate program if they wanted to move.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Eventually, we were also able to access the Louisiana Public Schools' database, and we made placement corrections at that time, in a two- to three-week period. The database was great and helped a lot—it had information on grades and special ed.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The Daily Challenges and Triumphs of School Administrators

When you encounter a person, and they've gone through something, you relax your rules to give them a chance to come out of what they've gone through. But you can never lower your standards.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

It became our responsibility to meet the needs of those children. We just basically have been a family for a lot of students.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I have grown so much from this. I'm talking about the fact that every phase of my life has changed.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



School and school district administrators faced significant logistical challenges associated with enrolling large numbers of students displaced by the hurricane, while simultaneously struggling to repair storm-damaged facilities. To meet these challenges, they relied on partnerships with community members and the strengths of their allies. Administrators are now focusing on the long-term mental and intellectual well-being of their students. A lack of funding and facilities complicates these efforts. However, because of strong leadership and rigorous disaster planning activities, they are optimistic about the future.

The General Impact on the School District

From an administrative perspective, school districts were profoundly affected by the hurricanes. In some districts, buildings and other physical property were severely damaged. All directly affected districts closed their schools for a period of time. Unprecedented demands were placed on transportation and communications systems and staff. The most significant effect, however, was the influx of displaced students.

Our district was impacted in every way imaginable, because transportation was affected, the cafeteria staff, the feeding area—every area of our system.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We had significant property damage. We lost school days. We had an increase in student enrollment.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The biggest single impact was the influx of students.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Initially we had approximately 5,000 students who registered. And then it probably dropped down to about 1,500 to 2,000 students that remained for any length of time, and we currently have about 1,000 students that have remained since the hurricane. And we surveyed the parents of those students, and about half of those who responded said that they would be returning to the school district next year, and the other half we have not heard from.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Immediate Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Weeks After Landfall

Immediately after the hurricane, the administrators' main challenges were logistical. They needed to lead their schools and districts in meeting displaced students' basic needs, while quickly and significantly increasing their capacity to serve students. These capacity-related challenges included issues such as increasing staff, coordinating transportation and making appropriate academic placements.

Meeting Students' Basic Needs

The first thing that we wanted to do was welcome the families and children into our school, but then we had to ask, 'What are their needs?' and 'How can we help?' They left, many of them, with nothing. We were trying to identify medical needs. There were kids that came to our school who wore glasses, but no longer had those glasses. We were trying to help people get the resources that they needed as quickly as possible. That was the first thing—to make sure we had shelter and food and got those basic needs met, before we talked about 'Let's learn to read' or 'Let's learn to multiply.' So we felt that we had a responsibility to do that.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Overcoming Capacity-Related Challenges, Including Staffing and Transportation

What we did was basically just empower our district personnel to make it work.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We did sit down and try to develop a plan of action, but we had to alter it on a daily basis.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

We had all of our classes organized based on our counts from last year, so they were mostly full, or maybe had space for two or three students, but not this kind of volume. Getting enough teachers was a huge challenge. We have a teacher shortage as it is, and we were looking for retired teachers and substitute teachers overnight, which was very difficult. The district allowed us to get the teachers, but we were creating new classes with all New Orleans students, because our classes were full. But it wasn't the best solution to separate them. So we eventually redistributed our classes to mix them in with the other students.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Some of our buildings were damaged, so we had to relocate some of our students. If we had to purchase something, if we had to purchase an air-conditioning unit, we utilized the emergency purchasing procedures that the law allows us to do in the case of an emergency.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We did have to get portable buildings in some of the areas, and that was taken care of.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

This school was initially closed at the end of last year. The superintendent opened the entire school for Katrina, not only for the children, but for the teachers as well. All of my faculty were Katrina teachers with the exception of two. This was the only school that was opened totally for Katrina and [Hurricane] Rita kids. We received over 700 here at this school.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We had a formerly used elementary school that was sitting vacant, and in association with the Red Cross and local agencies, we retrofitted it into a long-term storm refugee shelter, housing displaced folks from the immediate west of us. That was challenging, but very rewarding. We took advantage of our Safety, Security and Emergency Operations Department. It pretty much created all the interagency links to work with the Red Cross, Rebuild Northwest Florida, and all the other agencies that were involved in restoring that facility. The Air Force, the Navy, local law enforcement, local retail vendors, and local labor forces did all that coordination through that office and used a lot of our own shelter prototypes, in conjunction with the Red Cross shelter prototypes, to develop what was put in place there.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.



Once it was up and operating, it posed additional problems with logistics, because we put a significant population into an attendance zone (at a school that fortunately had room), and so we had all the logistical concerns of rerouting buses to accommodate that facility and other facilities that had an influx of folks.

—Escambia County School District,
Pensacola, Fla.

The most pressing issue would have been fuel—gasoline.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We had to determine transportation for these children, because they had no transportation. So we start at 9:30 a.m. as opposed to 7:00 a.m. like other schools, because transportation goes and runs its regular route, then does a second route for us.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

And we had teams of people that went for duty in the morning to make sure that all the students were on the correct buses.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Making Appropriate Academic Placements

We had to determine who would attend what school. We let the children go to school in those particular areas where they were housed. We sent as many as we could to those schools.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

As they registered, we had teams of people that [asked] questions about preferences and what kind of programs they were in at the schools where they were living, and then we made the determination. Then we called all the principals in, and we gave them the names of the students so they would know exactly who it was that they were going to be receiving. I spent an entire month at the Vermillion Conference Center working on that day in and day out.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

When they relocated here, we [had] to be able to sit down with the parents, and without the benefit of an IEP or school records, we [had] to be able to say to the parents, 'Tell us what services your child was receiving,' so that we [could] then do our best to provide that service. And so we spent a lot of time—our school psychologist, our school counselors, myself, and our social workers—sitting down and listening to the parents.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

So as time went on, we were finding out information on the children, with their behavior and the way they acted and interacted in class, and it made a flag go up. We had placed a lot of these children in regular classes, and they should have been in a special needs class. We had to do our own assessment of these children.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



The Secondary Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Months After Landfall

Two months after the hurricane struck, administrators had resolved the initial logistical challenges and turned their attention to new issues. They confronted high rates of student mobility and significant mental health concerns.

Responding to High Student Mobility

The constant moving was more problematic than the initial infusion. Many students just got on a plane and left, without doing an official withdrawal. So we had constant turnover. It was very challenging for our paperwork.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

They were here for a couple of weeks, they would leave, they would come back.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

After the children were disbursed from the shelters, many went to the trailer parks, some went to apartments, some houses.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

For example, one of our families was actually living in the volunteer fire department. And then the fire department folks, who had been so generous to offer the place to begin with, really kind of wanted their fire department back. Housing is scarce at this point. I mean, people from [Hurricane] Ivan are in apartments because they're not in their homes, and so finding [hurricanes] Dennis, Katrina and Rita folks places to live is really, really difficult.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

And we had to go back and revamp our transportation, because the children were so transient that they had to get on different buses, because they were living in different places, so that was a big issue.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The mobility was very great, so some principals were hesitant to include the students in the full distribution of textbooks, etc., fearful that they would lose textbooks and lose money. So we had a series of principal meetings, to encourage them to completely include new students.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Many of the schools elected to assign permanent staff members, almost de facto case workers so to speak, for each of those students, so they could stay abreast of their changing status: whether they're in a shelter, whether they're permanently relocating, or whether they're intending to return. That case worker strategy seemed to work very, very well at the schools.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Dealing with Significant Mental Health Needs



I don't think any of us realized at the time the amount of counseling and support that would probably be needed by these people.

—Lafayette Parish School System,
Lafayette, La.

They came to school with some tremendous needs in terms of counseling, and at the same time there was some ridicule and some aspect of discomfort.

—Houston Independent School System,
Houston, Texas

Looking back, we would have probably needed more people for crisis management or crisis counseling. Because of it being such a traumatic experience, not everybody feels comfortable or feels equipped to be able to handle that kind of situation.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Whereas we were really concerned with academic-type things, those children were more concerned with the emotional-type issues. They were really not able to focus on academics. They were focusing more on life issues— 'How are my family members doing who are back in that area,' or 'What happened to certain people and my home, my dogs.'

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We really had to see how to help the children acclimate, and how to integrate them into our school and make sure that our children who were already our students were treating these children with compassion and respect. We were integrating children of different races and ethnicities to our school that we had not had before.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We actually had student pairings that took place in some schools. If you were a fifth-grade girl, you got paired with a fifth-grade girl at the school, at least for the first few weeks, just to add an element of familiarity. We also had some folks who actually had relatives in the area, and we would try and place them in schools in areas where their relatives lived.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

What we tried to do was spend a lot of time and listen to each other and listen to the children.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We've got to talk about it; we need to let them share stories, we need to find out 'Did you go to a hotel?' 'Did you go to grandma's house?' 'What did you pack?' That kind of thing. They have to talk it out. And so we deliberately take the time to share with each other.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

The superintendent brought in outside psychologists to help the schools and students deal with emotional issues, brought in the faith-based communities who sent ministers into the schools to help, and held a number of parent meetings to reassure the parents.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

When we came back to school, we had a lot of discipline issues. The hurricane had an impact on behavior. We had more fights in school, we had issues with kids who came from the New Orleans area, as opposed to the kids that were here—issues of disagreements because they were culturally different. So I'd say a priority for us was to get a handle on discipline again, and we spent a lot of time trying to get a hold of that throughout our district. It wasn't a difficult job, but it was a priority for us to focus on trying to get things under control.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We had some assemblies, and we allowed our student leaders to address the students and welcome them. And we also had some community members from New Orleans, some ministers and others, come to the school. We had a big fight that occurred between Houston and New Orleans students, so we brought in some professionals, celebrities from New Orleans and Houston, to talk to the students—rappers, sports figures, ministers.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

After we took care of that and said that's not the way we behave in this particular setting, a lot of that changed, and we have not had the problems after the initial start.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Long-Term Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues Today

Currently, school and district administrators remain concerned about the long-term mental health of their students, students' families and staff. They also are working to support academic success, including confronting issues of truancy and ongoing mobility. However, a lack of adequate funding and facilities complicates their responses to these challenges.

Facing Long-Term Mental Health Needs

They still have some mental blocks, some of them. Not only the child, but the family as well, because we had family members who came in and said, 'I can't handle it.' And so what we did was, we pulled in the social workers and counselors and had them talk with the families, and we had meetings at different intervals where the parents could come in and talk with people. And we found that that has been very helpful.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.



I started to see after a couple of months not only the stress of these families having moved, but also dealing with the stress of so many people living in one space. And even those children who didn't lose anything, but took in friends and family—you started to see the stress.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Supporting Academic Success

Certainly, the priority is to get them to the instructional level at which they should be. That's been a challenge. We still have people who are coming in and out.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

And another challenge that we've had and continue to have: the number of kids who never attended school after they left New Orleans. The homeless coordinator would go into some of these hotels and find that some children were not going to school. What we did when state testing was coming up was for two or three weeks prior to that, we opened a tutoring center specifically for them, and they would come in, and they would have access to tutors there in the evening after school and on weekends to try to help them with any areas they might have needed help in. You'd be amazed at the number of students who came for some assistance.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The children who relocated to another area but were bused here are only being bused here until the end of this school year. Next year they will have to go to the school nearest their home. So really, there'll be another adjustment process, and we're in the process now of making sure that those families understand that we have loved having [them]. But next year this busing situation will not continue, and [they'll] need to go to the school that's in [their] school district. And so it's a matter of informing families of what will happen in the following school year, and making sure they understand, and having some sensitivity about that.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Pursuing Funding and Searching for Facilities

Believe it or not, it all comes back to recovery dollars.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

I think the district is dealing with its financial future, asking the state for help, and not knowing how many people will be here next year or going back to New Orleans.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Each district gets so much money per child. None of that was in place for these children, because it just happened so fast. So the monies, if you will, for those children were actually in Orleans Parish, in the surrounding parishes. As a matter of fact, they're still working on that as of yesterday. We have not gotten anything districtwide for what we did with these children. That wasn't the initial reason for us

helping out, but at the same time, it cost money for these kinds of things to happen.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

You know, in most instances when you have displaced students or damaged infrastructures as a result of a natural incident, you have your insurance, and you have your FEMA recovery, but there are situations where neither of those apply, and you still have to provide the service. We've been fortunate in that the Florida Department of Education has been very generous in assisting with supplemental monies when we need it, but there are still occasions when it comes out of our pockets. Most of the reforms we'd like to see are on the financial side, in terms of the time it takes for monies to begin to flow in recovery, from insurance or with FEMA.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Truly some of the challenges are just the basic school structure. When we got the extra children from the hurricane, we really were growing much faster than we could build. We had to get portables. Well, you don't just put a portable down on the grass. You have to pour concrete, you have to build sidewalks, you have to make sure they're handicapped accessible with ramps as well as stairs. It has to be connected to the sewer and electrical systems. It's an enormously complicated process to add space to a school.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.



Our biggest struggle is actually infrastructure and reconstruction. September will be two years from [Hurricane] Ivan, and July will be one year from [Hurricane] Dennis, and we hope to have everything 100 percent completed in recovery by those anniversaries. I mean, we're still putting permanent roofs on, we're still repairing fences, we're still restoring water damage because of the significant impact of [Hurricane]

Ivan destroying or damaging 100 percent of our facilities. So while we were in the midst of recovering from these storms, we were also accommodating the other students from [Hurricane] Katrina and [Hurricane] Rita, subsequent storms. So that's the biggest challenge, getting things put together physically, both as a school district and as a community.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

The Role of Collaborations and Contributions

Administrators effectively made the most of their partnerships to facilitate their response to the hurricanes. Their partnerships were creative and savvy, and involved teamwork within the school district, in the broader local community, with other schools and districts, and with disaster relief agencies.

Collaborating with Others in the School District

It takes a team approach. The need keeps changing, so you're constantly changing. There can be no dictates at that point—you have to assess and make good decisions in the moment.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The school board was also involved. Our media department had to really get involved, because we had to have positive things out in the media about what was going on in our schools. So we made a deliberate effort with our media around the city to capture the positive things that were going on in our schools.

—Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

We did a food drive, drives for shoes, school supplies and all those types of things. Our PTA and the school worked to help those refugees that were here. Our PTA would go over and work with the local churches and cook for them and things like that.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We have one child in particular, she'd lived in New Orleans for a month. Before that, she came from Panama, and she spoke absolutely no English. We have a TV studio, and every morning we all turned to the same channel on our TVs. We have a news crew. They're fifth- and sixth-grade kids who run the controls, and who are the news anchors and do the sports and the weather, and there's of course written text that appears on the screen as well. So one of our Spanish-

speaking students translated everything into Spanish, so our student who was new to us from New Orleans would be able to see the Spanish text, as well as the English text. So we made efforts to learn her language, and then also to help her begin to learn English as well.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Collaborating with the Local Community: Businesses, Community Agencies, Faith-Based Organizations, and Others

We had e-mails, phone calls, letters—words can't even describe how many people called and said, 'What can we do?' The needs that we had, whether it was materials, physical bodies, assistance in terms of counseling or different areas, we had numerous people or organizations come in and say, 'How can we help?'

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

It was incredible when we thought about how books or uniforms might have been problems, but with the gifts and the charitable donations that we got from so many people, we were able to take care of those items and not have a problem.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We had many businesses that donated school supplies, uniforms and other things. Old Navy gave out \$100 vouchers. Our school transportation department carried students and parents to Old Navy to spend the vouchers. You can imagine, here are children who don't have anything, and they're going into high school. If you don't have the right tennis shoes, you are criticized. So you're going into high school, and you're used to having your necklace, your shoes, and now you don't have anything. So we had to arrange for the kids to feel comfortable and get some of these things. It was a huge success for all of us to be engaged in our business community like that.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Big Buddy, and the Boys/Girls Club of America actually had a staff member in each of our classes to assist the teachers. From time to time, they'd do something like a lunch for the staff members, and just numerous things.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

And our Ministers Against Crime, which was a cooperative of Houston and New Orleans ministers, gave personal counseling to a number of students who were a part of their congregations.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Collaborating with Other Schools and School Districts

We actually had a team of 13 people that went to [areas affected by] Katrina, on-site, living in trailers two weeks after the storm, working with all the school districts in the impacted areas, and each of those 13 team members had an area of expertise. I believe we talked and worked with about 20 to 25 of the school districts in all of the affected southern Mississippi school districts. In conjunction with the state emergency response team and some of the FEMA modules, we were able to get funding in order to pay for the team's mobility. It was a really proud moment for our district, doing good things for people hit by Katrina. The philosophy that we have adopted is that no school district in affected areas should ever have to make the same mistakes that we've already made. We've done several demonstrations, presentations and workshops in various parts of the Southeast trying to help folks not make the same mistakes we made.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

There happened to be a school in Louisiana, Springfield Elementary, that after Hurricane Ivan, decided to adopt our school. And so the boys and the girls at Springfield Elementary wrote letters to us and did a little fundraiser and sent us some money to help our kids. That was terrific. So when Katrina happened, they were right within the hurricane's path, and we tried for a couple of weeks to get a hold of them, to call, and we weren't able to get through. And then one day we called, and they answered, and they were just thrilled to hear from us, and so we responded in kind. We did a fundraiser here and raised about \$2,000. We used it to purchase gift cards from Wal-Mart, and we sent those gift cards to Springfield Elementary, and we also wrote our own letters of encouragement. And when they got the package of course they called, and we put the call on the speakerphone, and their folks over there were crying, and our folks over here were crying, and you know, the fact that we got to help them and they got to help us, and we'd both been through the same experience, was just really, really great.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We also worked with some former teachers from New Orleans who were invaluable. They came in every day, on a volunteer basis, to work with students. One teacher, for example, found all the New Orleans principals who were living in Houston and contacted them to get information about particular students who were struggling in Houston.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

We've partnered with some people from New Orleans in trying to find resources for what we call the W.D. Smith Career Center, where you have carpentry, plumbing,

and various things, because of the tremendous need in New Orleans for all those particular things. We are looking at finding resources or grants, funds that would be available to help fund some of these things, so that we could start training people.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Collaborating with Disaster Relief Agencies

Our relationship with the Red Cross, every time we have a storm, gets incrementally better, to the point where we're actually doing very aggressive modifications with not only local [chapters] but the national Red Cross and all the first-response agencies. That relationship just gets incrementally refined after every incident.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

In fact, we went through training the other day, a six-hour training with the Red Cross. So we're more familiar with the Red Cross rules and regulations. And we know what's expected of their shelter managers, and their shelter managers are more in a partnership with us, rather than two people being in charge. So it's a better partnership.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

What's called EOC, the Emergency Operations Center here in the city—without a doubt we've built a closer relationship with them. I say closer because we've always had a good relationship with them. We're asked to come to the meeting, so we have the opportunity to be a part of and hear directly from the national officials. Our school district sits on this panel, and when there is an emergency that impacts our school district as well as the community, then we have district employees who report to the Emergency Operations Center, and they're part of this group that is in on the decision-making.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We've also built relationships with the local police department, fire department, and Red Cross. So I think we've built some very good working relationships with them. We've even shared buses and worked with local officials. So it was more of a sharing and cooperation with local officials.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Lessons Learned

Administrators credit much of their success to strong and creative leadership. They also strongly emphasize the necessity of comprehensive disaster planning and preparation, including regular revision and improvement of plans and response systems. As key elements of emergency response plans, administrators cite communications, facilities, transportation and fuel, water, food, curriculum, psychological services and community resources.

Recognizing the Importance of Strong and Creative Leadership

We were given a fairly clear direction from the state level, because we're not the only county in the state that received these students. We have an Office of School Choice in our Comprehensive Planning Department that basically managed that whole effort.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

The superintendent made a decision that we as a district would embrace the displaced families and assist in whatever way we could, in order to bring some normalcy back into those families' lives. Initially, I had said, 'There's no way we can do this.' But looking back, it was one of the best decisions I think my superintendent has ever made. She said, 'We are going to do this,' and she got all of us to buy into what she said, and we just moved forward after that.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The superintendent did a great job of communicating effectively with all the stakeholders, keeping the community well-informed of everything that was taking place in our schools, and ensuring that they were safe and secure environments.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

One of the things that we learned to do that we had never done before was to have a central location for the registration of students. That worked so well as a result of Katrina, that the principals have asked if we could please institute that in the parish now, where you would have one location where people coming into the district would register.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Recognizing the Necessity of Comprehensive Disaster Planning and Preparation, Including Regular Revision and Improvement of Plans

Number one, be prepared.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

You can never plan enough.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

And that's [planning] in every area—transportation, food service, regular school sites, the whole nine yards.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Don't just have the plan written out, but even telephone numbers and specific resources that individuals identify, which includes a list of contractors to assist us with getting our facilities ready to open back up.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We probably will do that, in time, with the administrators—sit down and find out what some of the main problems were. And then as a result of that, possibly find out what are some of the community resources. And we'd probably make a catalog of services that are available in case of crisis. I think that would probably be very helpful.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I think that the first call should be to the education community from the area coming in. We should've had a meeting or breakfast or whatever for the education community from New Orleans. We did not value what the education community from New Orleans could've given us from the beginning.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

I would have a source of communication, at least, I would assume, walkie-talkies or some type of communication device, so that I could communicate with my team of administrators. I know that for a fact I would do more boarding up of my buildings. I would make sure that every single source of our transportation had gasoline in it. We are working toward resolving the issue of gasoline, to have a relationship with local vendors so that we can get gasoline when we need it to run our buses, to move people around. And then I would also store up additional supplies of water. And then I'd probably also make, in the future, my schools more accessible to the community, in terms of providing shelter for people to come.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

While we were out of school for 21 days post-Ivan, we actually had curriculum going to the students who were still digging out from the rubble, via our local news media. We had curriculum and study guides and lessons appropriate for each of the grades that we serve, K-12, going out through our local newspaper. We were conducting school while we were out of session, just to try and keep kids' heads in the game, so to speak.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Part of our storm preparedness and post-storm recovery plan is continuous improvement, so we take every lesson learned from our own storms and adjust our plans every year. So each year those plans have increasingly been addressed, refined, polished, lessons learned. And they have expanded from the traditional infrastructure, facilities, buildings and network locations to student services, family services, staff services, community services, and how we react to those. We have probably, with the exception of Miami-Dade County, the most comprehensive pre-storm preparedness and post-storm recovery plans in the country, related to significant weather occurrences. Those are available online [at <http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us/eert/>]. (accessed Feb. 12, 2007)

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We are having more Monday-morning meetings to prepare and talk about some of the concerns that we had. There's been a lot of information out there for us about how we could be better organized, and I think that we are probably better organized.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.



The Daily Challenges and Triumphs of Relief Agency Staff

It was everything from somebody didn't get out with their heart medicine, to a baby that needed formula, to whatever. So I'd say the first 72 hours, it was really push and go. You felt like sometimes the world was on your shoulders and that somebody was going to die if you didn't make the right decision.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

There is no affordable housing here at all.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, relief agencies faced a disaster of unprecedented proportions in the United States. They met significant challenges in areas such as facilities, communication and coordination, to meet their clients' most basic needs. Staff members also helped relieve the severe emotional trauma of their clients. Today, relief agencies are supporting the basic needs of thousands of families and individuals, as many displaced and affected people are still struggling to provide themselves with food, housing, medicine and employment. Relief agencies are working to meet the demand for long-term case management, while at the same time preparing for the next storm by strengthening their disaster response plans and their collaborative relationships with their community partners.

The General Impact on the Agency

The relief agencies' sizes and missions determined the magnitude of their response to the hurricanes. Among the agencies interviewed, some served a few families, while others served thousands. The services provided also varied based on the niche of the agency.

In a time of crisis, the Red Cross's immediate response is to provide mass care, which includes shelter—which we did for a lot of people from out of town, as well as people in town in substandard housing, or in our counties. Then, as quickly as we could, we started a feeding operation—one stationary and four that went to the different counties and different locations. So on the largest day we served 86,000 meals in the four counties. More likely I would say 30,000 to 50,000 a day in those first days.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Ultimately we served 27,000 families, approximately 100,000 people, from the impacted areas, providing \$32 million in financial assistance directly to those families, essentially within a 60-day period. I think by the end of the operation, between local volunteers and national volunteers and staff, we had about 1,400 total staff operating at one time or another during that 60-day period.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Probably within the first three to four days that people were showing up here, they were more concerned with getting their children in school and what to do, and they needed food and clothing and education for their kids. I serviced 402 children with full backpacks and school supplies to go to school.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.



Mainly what we did was a couple of days after Katrina, we started handing out Wal-Mart cards, one per household, and we ended up handing out 5,526 Wal-Mart cards to that many households, and we ended up spending a total of \$247,000 on that. We were able to offer assistance to people who were moving into housing, who were affected by the hurricanes—utility assistance and housing assistance as far as rent. And we were able to help with prescriptions, with eyeglasses, eye exams, gasoline, bus fare if they needed to get somewhere, birth certificates, and IDs. We ended up helping 358 households with that as well, at a total cost of \$62,000 combined.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I'm going to say overall we have served about 10 women and some children. But we really didn't get many from the start and that was very shocking to us. They came to us later, because they were coming back from other places or large shelters.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

The Immediate Impact of the Hurricanes: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Weeks After Landfall

In the first two weeks after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, the three most urgent challenges for relief agency staff members involved facilities, communication and coordination, and basic needs.

Accessing Facilities and Physical Space to Manage the Overwhelming Numbers Of Clients

Facilities was challenge number one.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We ended up with about 1,200 people in the Magnolia Center, which is a big building, adequate, but it also didn't have power. So we're down there in 100-degree weather with all these folks.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

It probably took us to about the two-week mark to have the substantial access to facilities that were needed. We were very fearful that children who were with their parents, on what is a fairly busy street, would run out into the road and become injured. So, through partnerships with the city of Pensacola, the Pensacola Fire Department and others, we were able to secure law enforcement support, parade barricades, to help keep the clients and their families on sidewalks as opposed to out in the streets, and keep them hydrated. There is a Children's Service Center diagonally across the street from the Red Cross. It is designed to be only an administrative facility, but they were wonderful to give up both personnel and facilities to allow their offices to be converted into essentially a childcare area, while their family members were in line or receiving case-management services and financial assistance.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Communicating and Coordinating With Volunteers, Clients and Community Partners

One of the most challenging obstacles, I believe, was the lack of local coordination efforts.

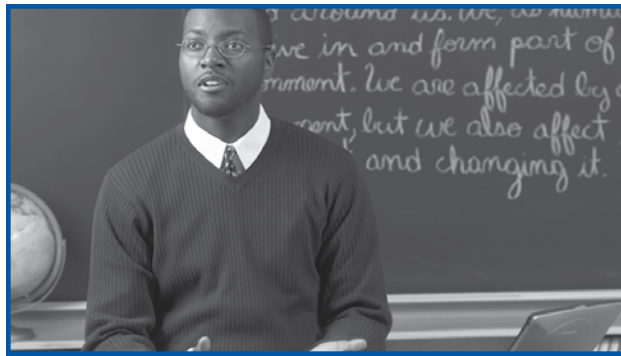
—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Communications was everybody's downfall. The communications process, whether it be telephoning, being able to get emergency personnel where they're needed, or just so that people knew where ice and water were going to be—we were just dead in the ditch, OK? We had an amateur radio group, which we've always depended on. [The communication process] has been identified by the county, I think, as one of the major problems.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Probably challenge number two would be our inability to manage the overwhelming number of phone calls from prospective volunteers who wanted to help and could not even get through on our phone lines. Ultimately, we reached out to the United Way, Hands On Pensacola, the RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) and other prospective or known volunteer partners that had some degree of capability of recruiting, managing and placing volunteers, and they were enormously helpful.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.



Meeting Clients' Basic, Immediate Needs: Food, Water, Medicine, Safety and Identification

I'd say probably the third issue was all of the other logistical support: erecting tents to provide shade for individuals in a hot September time frame to keep them from literally passing out, as some did; keeping clients hydrated while they were waiting, at times for hours, in line; and gaining the support—law enforcement support—to exercise some control over behavior—to encourage people to stay in line and not cut into the lines.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

In the meantime, we were providing food and medical supplies and treatment through our disaster health care, our health services. But we had a lot of problems. For instance, the dialysis patient who needed dialysis when the dialysis unit was down, and there was

nobody to take him to the nearest town because we're not supposed to transport.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I guess another challenge would have been verifying who people were. Now I know that if you'd had a driver's license or an ID card and you went to the local Department of Motor Vehicles, they would just pull up your picture and verify who you were and issue another one. So some people were able to do that. But we weren't able to issue the cards without some type of identification showing that you were from an affected area. We could only help people from an affected area.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Secondary Impact of the Hurricanes: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Months After Landfall

By two months after the hurricane, the relief agencies had largely resolved the early challenges of facilities, communication and coordination, and meeting clients' immediate needs. They continued to provide services to evacuees according to their missions. They faced new challenges, however, including preventing the duplication of services, helping with clients' emotional trauma and mental health needs, and preparing clients for the onset of winter.

Preventing Duplication of Services

By two months after the event, our biggest issue was mitigating the potential for duplication of assistance to clients. Some of our sister Red Cross chapters, the ones in the more directly affected areas, were not in a position to effectively use the coordinated assistance network, which is an Internet-based, information-sharing capacity to help mitigate the potential duplication of benefits. So in our case, because we recognized that many of our clients were coming from the affected areas, we engaged a CPA firm locally that captured names and addresses on every client that we saw. Then we were able to e-mail that information to our sister chapters, to help us identify duplication of services or help them avoid duplicating assistance that we had already provided at that point. The CPA firm was writing checks 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help keep up with the volume, but as each check was written, it was compared to the Excel spreadsheet of other checks written for similar family names or for similarly affected addresses, so that we could avoid duplicating benefits.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Helping With Clients' Emotional Trauma and Mental Health Needs

We're not a battered women's shelter, but during the Katrina situation, we found that our battered shelters did overflow. Emotions flow during such a time. We were able to house some of that overflow or find adequate shelter for some of those who were in a situation of being battered or being emotionally traumatized. So we learned that we needed to be everything.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Susie from the Catholic church, she's their youth director, came forward early and said, 'I would like to try to work with the children in the shelter, if that's all right.' I said, 'Susie, that's tremendous.' So I know that Susie immediately went to work, because we purchased tables and supplies, and she did a lot of work and brought in people to deal with mental health for the children that were stuck down there. Even to the point that she arranged for them all to go to a football game. You know, tried to do something to help them get their minds off of where they were.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Preparing Clients for the Onset of Winter

We were facing a cold snap in November, and someone from the school system called me and said, 'I've got 100 kids that don't have coats.' Most of them were evacuee children, in fact all of them were. So we got a community group and took some money that we'd been given from Unmet Needs and found good used coats that were serviceable and that were coming into the county from various places, and purchased coats and tried to put those on kids. Because again, when they left their coats in New Orleans in August, it was not cold.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Then as the winter months came, I have a program here at the United Way that is called Coats for Kids. Again I went through the counselors and the social workers in the school system and told them to let me know which children were in need, and we provided coats for any children who needed coats for the winter. And I want to say we probably gave out about 300 coats to hurricane evacuees alone.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

So you know that was a need that had to be met, and even though maybe FEMA and different agencies had given them clothing and whatever, it probably didn't include coats.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The Long-Term Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues Today

Although the immediate crisis is behind them, relief agencies continue to support their clients' basic needs. Many displaced and affected people are still struggling to provide themselves with food, housing, medicine and employment. At the same time, relief agencies are implementing long-term recovery strategies. The predominant challenges in recovery involve meeting the demands for long-term case management and housing.

Providing Continued Support for Basic Needs

We are still, even now, having people call us to see what assistance we can provide to hurricane victims, and basically what we're doing now is we're treating them just like they were our locals. They mainly need prescriptions, eyeglasses and rental assistance. We're running out of money faster because we have so many more people in the area who are in need of assistance.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.



We have an awful lot of our older generation here that raises vegetables in the winter and the summer, and they eat off of those all year. So when the freezers went down, they lost a year's worth of food, or at least until they could plant again. What we have is, I wouldn't say a food shortage, but they're having to take more money to go out and purchase food than they have probably in their lifetimes. So food stamps came through on a state level and gave out a one-time food-stamp card, based on the number in the family. So that assisted some. But then the final big, big issue is that the utility bills are so high. I'm talking a \$400 power bill. A lady the other day was in here with a \$600 gas bill and only gets \$500 a month. So we're talking particularly about fixed-income people and even non-fixed-income

people. It's really, really high. So I think we're looking at a real crisis. Well I think it's going to be tight for some of our fixed income people over the rest of this year.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Meeting the Demand for Long-Term Case Management

There are still an awful lot of folks that in those early days did not get situated, and they're still not. Yesterday, as an example, I had a man come in, and he had run into this man in the park who has a one-year-old and a six-month-pregnant wife. He broke his hand and he can't work, and they're from New Orleans, and they have nothing. They are living at the Salvation Army shelter right now, for however long that is.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The problem, without trying to sound judgmental, and I don't mean to do that at all, is that you have some people who have just—and it may be the shock, it may be the emotional impact of the storm, it may be their mindset prior to the storm—but they're just sitting, waiting for something to happen for them. And some people don't have that ability—they can't get on the Internet and find out stuff, because they don't know one end of a computer from the other. Some of them are not even capable of making telephone calls, and now that the FEMA office is closed here, there is no in-town ability to go and say, 'What's happening with my case?'

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

A lot of people got into places and maybe got FEMA money, and that helped them out for a couple of months. But now they're unemployed, or they're not making enough money to support the rent that they signed up to pay.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We've had two young ladies in the past week who had to vacate the hotels. One of them is still here. She decided to call me on my cell phone to tell me there is an evacuee, and she's with three children, and she's been sleeping in her car. That's one thing I don't understand. I mean what have they done? Have they just exhausted all the funds that were given them? That's pretty much a common situation for the folks that are coming to us right now.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

They now have three positions open to provide case management support for those in the community.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Meeting the Demand for Housing

We're a little town, and the apartment complexes are full. For at least five months the motels were all full. If they weren't full before the storm, by the time you put all the FEMA people and the construction people and all those into the mix, then they took up what was left in housing. So housing is just at a terrible shortage. And even though there are FEMA houses or trailers, hundreds of them, parked 35 miles from here, there are still people who don't have anywhere to live.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I had a lady who lives in our transitional housing program who was ready to move out. She had a good job, she was making good money, so she was getting to the point where she was ready to move out on her own, out of the transitional housing program. But there was no housing available at that time. So we ended up having to keep her longer than we anticipated.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Role of Collaborations and Donations

Many relief agencies collaborated with local schools to deliver services to children and families. Through these collaborations, families received food, clothing, school supplies, Christmas gifts and other support. Yet some agencies recognized that in focusing on the immediate needs of their clients, education sometimes received a lower priority.

Directly after these people came into our area, school was in session. So immediately, I was getting numbers to the school board on a daily basis. And as those children were coming in and being enrolled in our school systems, I would, on a daily basis, get a backpack, fill it up with the necessities and school supplies that they would need, and give it to the children. Then we would give a gift card so that the families could go get clothing for the children and for everybody in the family. And then in time for Christmas, we would also use the counselors and the social workers and go through the school board, and they would notify us if a family was still in a hotel and just had no work or any funds available. I think we helped 71 families for Christmas, and we provided bikes and basketball hoops and just toys for these kids.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

We've been blessed because Jackson Public Schools has been right there. They've been willing to supply uniforms, and we try to keep a supply of uniforms on hand. The Jackson Public Schools have been able to provide school supplies,

and they always keep us stocked with things like that. And they've been able to supply tutors for us, and it's just worked out beautifully.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Another thing that the school systems did was the day after the storm, the food coordinator for the Jones County Schools came to me and said, 'Look, we've got all this food about to spoil in our cafeteria, can you do something with it?' So we worked with Sanderson Farms, a local business with freezer trucks. And we were able to go empty all of those stores out of the freezers and refrigerators and then, turn around and feed the shelter people with it until we could get a cooking system set up. So by virtue of them donating that stuff, number one, it didn't spoil, and number two, it went to good use. I think schools were very important to us, but at the time it was more life and death. You've got to take care of what's happening right now, and then worry about getting them to school.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.



Lessons Learned

Following Hurricane Katrina, relief agencies served an overwhelming number of displaced people. Looking back on this experience, agency staff members cited two primary lessons learned: (1) the importance of preparedness; and (2) the need for strong, collaborative relationships. Agencies are reviewing their disaster response plans to prepare better for the practical and logistical challenges of receiving a large influx of evacuees. They are also working to build stronger relationships and communications systems at the local level. Their goal is to be able to confront future disasters with a coordinated, well-planned response by cohesive, diverse local teams.

Recognizing the Importance of Preparedness

I heard somebody say, 'When I went to school we did fire drills—the school never burned down, but we did them twice a year anyway.'

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I think you should always have a plan in place for disaster.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Supporting large numbers of evacuees from another state wasn't something that was honestly built into our disaster response plan, nor was it in the response plan of our voluntary agency partners, and, candidly, wasn't really in the playbook of local emergency management nor state emergency management—at least in the context of the extraordinary volumes that we saw coming into Florida. So one of the lessons learned is to plan for that eventuality in the future.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We are dividing up our four-county area according to fire departments. In the county you'll have a section of, say, 20 or 30 miles that is under the jurisdiction of one fire department. So we're asking that fire department to bring the churches in their jurisdiction together and divide every road that's within their area. And a church is going to go out and deliver to these people disaster preparedness information, find out if somebody is disabled, or if they've got special needs, or if they live by themselves, or if they're elderly. And then, let's say Joyful Church over here, they've got these five miles, and in their five miles they've got 12 special needs people. That'll come back to the fire department, who will bring that back to us. And every year we'll go back and visit them. But if a storm is coming, we'll know that we've got 12 people that Joyful Church has got to take care of. So we will gather the supplies, get them to them in advance—[enough] for two days—until such time as traditional programs can be put into play. And they're going to know that Joyful Church is coming. They're going to know that they're not going to sit out there with a tree on part of their house, scared to death because they don't know what to do. So we think that it's going to be a really, really effective thing. If we're going to be more prepared, if we're going to serve our outlying counties better, then somebody, somewhere, has got to put their money where their mouth is. Preparedness depends on how much money you have to spend. And let me also say this too: You can donate a million dollars, but if it's not used right, it's not going to do any good.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Recognizing the Need for Strong, Collaborative Relationships

Relationships are absolutely priceless. You've got to have the relationships, so that if you go to somebody and say, 'We think this could work,' then we all get excited about it, and our community gets behind it. But the relationships have to be established long before you've got a hurricane warning. I think what we saw in Katrina is what it can be like to be totally cut off. So the relationships with the county government, the city government, the schools, the vendors, the shelters, the people, and certainly the churches are so, so important for the community to come together and make sure that we meet people's needs. You've just got to get heads together. So I believe we've got to constantly work at our relationships, the improvement of communication—refining, always refining.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The partners involved in the long-term recovery effort from hurricanes Ivan and Dennis, on the impacts of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, concluded that we needed an organization that would be in existence for the sole purpose of bringing together community partners—community-based volunteer agencies and private and public organizations—that would plan and prepare on an ongoing basis and, when the time comes, respond, recover, and mitigate collaboratively. We have termed that initiative Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD). That will be a convening instrument to bring together a cross section of organizations from throughout the community for the purposes of disaster preparedness, disaster response, disaster recovery, and disaster mitigation. We're recognizing that the private sector has a great deal to offer, and that's a sector of the community that's historically been overlooked by the volunteer agencies. The many Chambers of Commerce in our two-county community are being engaged in this process, and they in turn, are engaging their members.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

I am the Red Cross lady in town, and I've been to so many different groups in 20 years, that the relationships that we had developed prior to this made such a difference. Like the county schools: [My colleague] and I both coached peewee basketball teams together, before he was the food coordinator. The Coca-Cola man, the bread man, the milk man, and the wholesale man all were sitting outside the Red Cross office at 8:00 the morning after the storm asking, 'What do you need?' So I think the community spirit, the ability we had as a community both in the county and the city, made it possible for us to not just kind of sit down and ask 'Who's coming to help us?'—we helped ourselves.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I think a very important key is having volunteers to help you out so that you're not doing it all by yourself. When you have volunteers, and numerous amounts of volunteers, it just seems to flow a lot easier.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Maybe the only thing that we'd probably do differently is to prepare volunteers before a hurricane comes.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Our churches are our greatest resource, as far as people and energy and interest, because so many churches wanted to do so much. But we didn't know where to plug them in.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

So bringing in resources to help train was a component of that lesson learned. We learned the importance of developing redundancy in our plans in the context of identifying and pairing with volunteer organizations that could: take the spontaneous volunteer load off of our shoulders; identify those individuals; determine their skill sets; identify, based on the needs that we had identified, where the individual was best-suited to provide support; and then develop plans to train those individuals when our entire training cadre was fully and directly engaged in the relief effort itself.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.



The Daily Challenges and Triumphs of School Counselors

By the time they got to us, we'd have them in the computer system. They'd come in dressed, we'd get their school supplies, and then go and put them in class. Now that I look back on it, you know, I'm amazed that we were able to do that that quickly. While we were going through it we kept saying, 'Oh my God, oh my God! They keep coming! We thought we were only getting thirty-seven.'

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

It has been a positive transition. They have learned and have met new friends. They feel more comfortable with the area. They're participating in the activities that we have here at school, and they feel like they're part of the school, and that the school is a part of them, which has been our goal all along.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Basically, once we let them know that we really cared about them and their families, I think that in itself kept any problems from occurring.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.



School counselors were among the very first school staff members to speak with displaced students and families. They ensured that basic needs were met, assisted with enrollment and orientation, worked to support each student's academic success, and provided essential immediate and long-term mental health care to children and youths. Despite facing some significant challenges, school counselors agreed that their districts and their schools responded well to the disaster. Displaced students are now their students, participating in classes and after-school activities and looking toward the future.

The General Impact on the School

Individual schools and their counselors were affected to varying degrees by the hurricanes, depending on the sizes and locations of the schools. Some received only a few displaced students; others received close to 200. While the storms did not touch some school buildings, others were closed for days or weeks. Of course, many schools that did not participate in this project remain closed due to significant damage or even destruction by water and winds.

With Katrina, we received 23 students. We received none from Rita that I'm aware of. We received no physical damage, but we are still somewhat recovering from hurricanes Dennis and Ivan.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We were closed for two weeks. Our gymnasium was heavily damaged. Our football field had some damage to it, as well as our field house, and our offices were flooded due to the rain coming through the gym. We had around a total of 25 new students.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

We were closed about a week. We had some schools with their roofs torn off from the wind. We had a lot of water damage to libraries and different flooring. We had some schools without electricity. Our school received 16 students.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Part of our gym, the roof was ripped off, but then they were able to make those repairs within the week, and so we were able to start school that next week. We were only out for two or three days, I think. In all, we gained about 180 students in our high school alone.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

In our school, we had around 140 new students.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

The schools were closed approximately a week due to the effects of hurricanes Rita and Katrina. There was no electricity, no telephone; you couldn't even use your cell phone because the towers were damaged.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The Immediate Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Weeks After Landfall

In the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina, school counselors were faced with unprecedented numbers of incoming students. They were also struggling to help students, parents and faculty members cope with the trauma of evacuation. Counselors identified three primary challenges during this time: (1) confronting practical issues (registering large numbers of students, placing them in classes, and providing them with uniforms and meals); (2) orienting new students to school policies; and (3) meeting the mental health needs of current students, new students, parents and faculty.

Confronting Practical Issues: Registering Large Numbers of Students, Placing Them in Classes, and Providing Them with Uniforms and Meals

Before we opened the school, of course, we had to have all the teachers and everybody come back and sit through a meeting with our superintendent and principals. So they informed us of the fact that we would possibly be getting new students, and that the regular things that we look for with a new student coming in, we were just to avoid those initial questions and just go ahead and take them in.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The students were immediately enrolled under the McKinney-Vento Act, no questions asked. That worked really well.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

The other thing was which schools the students were going to attend—how would we get these students registered, who was going to teach the students,—and where would we get the staff and the transportation needed. What the school district did was, every available body that they could use—administrators, community leaders, you know—they were all registering students in the trailer parks, different churches that were set up, and the other little community agencies that were open. And also, you had your administrators from the school system trying to hire some of New Orleans' and the surrounding parishes' employees who were displaced, also to work in these schools. For transportation, our students' school hours were from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., which is different from the regular time for the other students.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

They had kind of like a triage unit set up where they could enroll the students. They would register them on paper, find out where they were living at that moment, and make sure that they had housing. If they didn't, they would help them find a hotel or find the CAJUNDOME or get lined up as far as housing goes. So the kids would come in, and they would register at this Vermillion Conference Center, and they would tell them what high school to go to. And then the students would go down the line, and they would get their uniforms and everything set up to be able to come to school here.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We had ongoing registrations for several days. And there were meetings with individual counselors about the courses that we were going to place students in, but the majority of them did not have any records. For those students, of course, the parents would share with us if they were in special classes in Louisiana. So once we heard that, or once they wrote that on our initial papers here in administration, we contacted our student support specialist, here locally at our school. She would come and talk with them and ask the appropriate questions about which classes and what type of disability they had. Then we would place them in the right class.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas



Rarely did the parents tell us that the students were in special education, or that they had resource classes. I don't know—I think it was mostly shock. They just wanted to get their children back to some type of normalcy. So we just registered them as though they were regular students. A lot of these students had only been in school for two days when Hurricane Katrina hit. So they were up for re-evaluation and really had no idea where they were supposed to be going. And so we referred those students to our special education coordinator on campus. We have a program here called SEEDS [Special Education Electronic Data System], which is a statewide special ed data system. She was able to look them up and then go

back and do their IEPs and their re-evaluations. For those whose IEPs they could retrieve from their schools, they did, and for those that they couldn't, if the school was completely damaged, then they had to go into re-evaluation, and counselors rewrote the IEPs for those students.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

We did a uniform drive to have our new students acquire uniforms. Our PTA really did the drive for us, and the teachers went out and purchased the clothing. It took a while to get the uniforms together, so we excused them for about two weeks from wearing the uniform. We gave them a school T-shirt when they enrolled, so they could wear that the first day and feel like a part of our school. That was really good and important for them. Each of the children got a new backpack with the supplies they needed.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Most of our food and everything had come out of the New Orleans area, and so we had to find other vendors, I think in east Texas, to be able to supply our lunches for our students. And that was rough going for a while because there were several weeks when we could only have bag lunches for our students. We couldn't have cooked meals.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Orienting New Students to School Policies

The only challenge that we had was mostly meeting with the students and making them aware of our school policies and how they were also responsible for following our policies. Here in our district, we have a very structured system. We have zero tolerance. So our Louisiana students were not ready for those policies. After the displaced students became aware of our particular policies, they were able to follow them well enough. We had no problems. In fact, they were very good kids, they were very respectful, and we all understood their situation. I mean coming to a brand new school from different systems, it must have been traumatic. They were able to cope well, also because we gave them a lot of support. We had a good support system here.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Current Students, New Students, Parents, and Faculty

I think our challenge was basically helping students to adjust after the storm and just trying to get morale back up.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Understanding and being aware of the different losses and separations that occurred.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Our top priority was our students, because at that point we were going to be receiving new students, which was a major transition and adjustment for our regular students as well as our new students.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

It was just at the beginning of the school year—we hadn't been in for maybe two weeks—and then we also had to prepare for the new students that were coming in.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.



So we held faculty meetings, and I personally met with every teacher on campus. I explained to them what to expect out of the students who had suffered trauma from the hurricanes. What they could look for in the classroom, when they needed to come and talk to me, and things like that.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I, as the counselor, provided group and individual counseling to develop coping mechanisms and to develop transition strategies to cope with what had occurred in our area.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

We also had special counseling for the new students when they came in.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

A school in one of the Northeast states adopted our school and sent cameras and memory books for every one of our Katrina students. We knew that we wouldn't keep them permanently, so we wanted to give them something to help focus more on what they had gained than on what they'd lost. So we went out and took pictures and created books for them.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We were also dealing with the emotional needs of the families, not just the students.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We had contact with all the parents, because as they brought their kids in, they came in here, and so we made sure we talked with the parents as well as the students as they were registering.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

They were coming in totally devastated. The parents were worse than the children in some ways.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

One young man, he and his mom came to register—you know, you wonder if there's a God—they found his little sister sitting in my office. They had not seen her for two weeks. She got separated from them on the bus ride from New Orleans to here. It turns out that they, he and his mom, were staying at one end of the CAJUNDOME, and when she came back from Texas, she was staying on the other end of the CAJUNDOME. She said there was just a family that was there, and they said, 'Come with us, we'll make sure that you're okay,' and they just took care of her. She did not know them, she had never met them before. But she was sitting in my office, and she looked at me, and she said, 'That's my momma and that's my brother.' So it was very heart wrenching that they found each other, and the whole time she had been staying on the other end of the CAJUNDOME.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

This did impact our counselors and everyone that had contact with these families, because the families were coming, and of course some were in shock. And most of the counselors, I will tell you, we even cried with the families when they were sharing their experiences.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Our own families had been displaced during those hurricanes, so we were, as a faculty, dealing with our own losses and our own worries. One of our faculty members was notified that her grandparents were found a couple of weeks earlier. So that's what we're dealing with. Over the course of this school year, I've had a lot of teachers come into my office and just need to sit and talk, and it all goes back to the hurricanes and what happened. They just kind of have to vent about the year.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I lost my home to Hurricane Ivan. It was devastated. So I could somewhat understand—obviously I didn't have to move cities, and I can't imagine what it'd be like to lose my community, my church, my school—but I could somewhat relate to the trauma of seeing everything you own blown into the water. So that was kind of therapeutic for me to be able to relate to them.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.



The Secondary Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues During the First Two Months After Landfall

To some extent, school counselors felt that, after two months, the lasting effect of the hurricanes was minimal.

I think things had pretty much balanced themselves out by then, and we were just continuing as usual.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Everything to me flowed just like it would in a normal school year after that initial period of getting the students in and getting them oriented to our school district.

We gave them resources in the community that could help them as well as help parents. If they needed jobs, we'd direct them to places for employment opportunities as well.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Despite their success in incorporating new students into their schools, counselors continued to face certain challenges, including meeting ongoing mental health needs, supporting academic success and responding to high student mobility.

Meeting Ongoing Mental Health Needs

We were working through the grief and loss process for children.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

And we found ourselves not necessarily going with 'OK, this is how I was trained, this is what I have to do next,' but 'I've got to go with my gut, and this is what my gut tells me to do.' And most of the time it was right; it was what those kids needed.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

When the parents registered [at the elementary school], we shared with them that we had group counseling services, and every one of them wanted their children to participate. They signed the release to participate right at registration. Many of the younger children did not fully understand how devastated the area really was. Their parents had protected them from the extent of the damage, just saying there was a lot of rain and wind and they had to leave for a while. So I had to have a separate group for them, to treat them differently. But the older children had seen all the TV coverage, so they were pretty traumatized. The groups went on until Christmas. We did a lot of writing—writing and illustrating haiku—and then working together on the memory books. Mostly just having them together to share with each other was the most important thing.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

When we put the feelers out to see what our [high school] students wanted, they didn't want to meet in a group. They wanted to come in and talk and get their emotions out individually. I've had a lot of students who have said since then that they feel more comfortable coming to me whenever they feel they need to talk, rather than having a prescribed set time for group.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Our district provided two additional counselors to our school to come and meet with them two or three times a week. Both counselors have been here on campus

two or three times a week since Katrina.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

And the social workers with Big Buddies—they were here every day, and worked with students. I have to give them credit.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

The new challenges that we faced were really territorial issues with our students, because here they were trying to get into the swing of a new school year as well, and they had been hit by Hurricane Rita. We had our Hurricane Katrina students who were coming in, and really Hurricane Katrina students were given carte blanche as far as coming into the school. And our students who had gone through Hurricane Rita here at home, it was just back to normal for them, and it was as though they were kind of left out. So we did have some issues with that on campus that we had to deal with here in our department, to kind of settle those things as best we could—having our students here who had to deal with Hurricane Rita understand that Hurricane Katrina was different, in that those students lost everything.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

In my program I teach character all year long, so we actually had an opportunity to exercise those different traits. And it has been great, because our students have embraced these students. They've been very patient and understanding, and I think that is a plus for elementary students, because they've shown a lot of love to these people.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

I think we all had to step back as a faculty and kind of take stock, and say 'OK, what is it that's important here? Is it important that I teach them reading, writing and arithmetic, or is it important that I make sure that this child feels safe on this campus?' And most of us voted to make sure they feel safe here. So hopefully that's what our students will think too.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Supporting Academic Success

In the first six weeks that the students were here, it was part of our six-week grading period, and during that time we also got hit with Hurricane Rita. And so most of those students had extremely low grades. So what we did was we decided to wipe out those first six-week grades for our evacuee students, and we graded them based on their second six-weeks' and their third six-weeks' grades and their

mid-term exam grades to be able to get their first-semester grades. And after that, it was like they were able to get more into the routine of things and, you know, not necessarily get over the trauma, but come out of it to where they could at least go into a routine and work. And then with us starting the new comprehensive curriculum this year, it was complete chaos in the classroom. It's based on NCLB, which is No Child Left Behind, and it was that curriculum we started this year. It's based on a timeline of study, and when the students came in, they were already two and three weeks behind. So teachers were really having to backtrack a lot to catch those students up.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Recently they had to take the LEAP [Louisiana Educational Assessment Program] and ILEAP [Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program], so preparing them to be ready to take these exams and also their regular course work was a challenge.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

There's another group called Cityyear, they're from all over the United States. We have our second group that's with us this semester, and they're tutoring in the classes, helping out.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Responding to High Student Mobility

These children have been all over the United States. They've been to Houston, and they've lived in shelters; they've been to Georgia; they've tried to live with family. I've had some come in from Salt Lake City. So they've really been all over the United States over the last several months, trying to kind of settle down. And then they come back here because this is the closest that they feel they can get to where their home was and be able to start working on it and fixing it. Now we're in April [2006], and Katrina was at the end of August [2005], and we're still getting students in. So they're very mobile. Some come, and some go, and some come back. You know, they try to go home for a while but realize that they can't live there yet, so they come back. But most of my students talk about going home. They're here for this school year, but when next school year starts, they plan to be at home. So we'll just have to see.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

The Long-Term Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues Today

All the school counselors reported that many displaced students have left their schools to return home. Those who remain have been incorporated into the student body, leaving counselors with relatively few challenges related to the hurricanes. School counselors are focusing primarily on meeting the students' long-term mental health needs and ensuring that seniors can graduate and meet their professional goals. Some are also concerned about the long-term housing and employment needs of displaced families.

Meeting the Students' Long-Term Mental Health Needs

As of now, they've been here for months, and I meet with them off and on as the need arises. They continue to receive individual counseling and services, so that they can feel that if there is something that they need to talk about, the opportunity is there; because, as we know, the emotions will change from time to time. And we want to make sure that we keep a very close eye on that status for each student.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.



We have two other little girls who are still living with their grandparents. They're very overcrowded, with the whole family living in the dining room of this house. So we all pitched in some money and were able to provide them with about \$200 in gift certificates to eat out, to give them something to look forward to, to give them a little lift—just something to help, that says we haven't forgotten.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

Now the big issue is preparing them for the transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. And not just the transition from elementary to middle or middle to high, but also, this school's population is all students who were displaced. None of the students here are from East Baton Rouge Parish schools. So our students will be going to school with students from East Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas for the first time. So that's going to be a transition, and we're trying to prepare them for what's going to happen and how they need to handle the situation.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Ensuring That Seniors Can Graduate and Meet Their Professional Goals

We have several seniors, so we're just ensuring their graduation: helping them to talk about where they're planning on going to college; helping them with their long-term goal planning, and providing special tutoring if they need it for any classes that they may be failing.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

All of our seniors, they're hoping to go back and graduate from their Louisiana schools. They will finish here with us up until May, but they're planning to go back and get their diplomas in Louisiana. So we're trying to meet all their requirements here with us, but they don't want a diploma from Houston.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Expressing Concern About Long-Term Housing and Employment Needs

We still have trailers from Ivan. At first there was no housing, and now it's so overpriced, people just can't afford it. And if you still have your house, you still pay mortgage even if you can't live there, even if you're living in a FEMA trailer or apartment. The bills still come every month. I don't think people realize that.

—Escambia County School District, Pensacola, Fla.

We've had other agencies calling in for the parents regarding where they could possibly get jobs, and so I make sure I communicate that to the parents.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The Role of Collaborations and Contributions

School counselors worked with teachers and administrators in their schools to provide students with the smoothest and most positive adjustment possible. Through donations and a welcoming spirit, the broader community also supported the schools in these efforts.

Our teachers really pitched in, helping students in different areas, as well as administration. Even the way it was handled for us to make up our school time—we had to extend our school days—parents didn't complain, students didn't complain.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

It was just very helpful to us that our community was so welcoming to the new families; they just jumped in and helped. Like when students came in, we contacted local businesses to provide them with some school supplies, so all of them did get several school supplies like notebooks, folders, pencils—lots of supplies.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

A lot of donations came in, people from all over the world sending money, materials, books, gifts, dental floss, deodorant, backpacks, some of everything. The Big Buddy, and the Boys and Girls Club of America were the keys to the success of this school. I just have to give them credit. I just found out a couple of weeks ago that those people are from New Orleans. Most of them are displaced, but they actually came in, and without their help, I don't think things would have been as smooth as they are over here.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Lessons Learned

School counselors felt that their schools responded well to the disasters. Most displaced students have transitioned well to their new schools and are now participating as regular students. Some of the keys to this success were positive leadership, good preparation, an efficient registration process, and extra efforts to welcome the new students and boost the morale of pre-existing and new students. In thinking about preparing for future disasters, school counselors noted that they may have been able to be more immediately effective with extra staff and with a more agile and prominent district crisis plan.

Honestly, I think that our district was well-prepared, because when I look at it, we really didn't have any major problems. We had things in place. I mean, I just honestly believe that our superintendent did a wonderful job in informing every-

body as to what we should be doing, and how we should treat each situation. We were on-task in being prepared for everyone coming in, and especially setting up counseling, accepting the students in, helping them with clothing, and all that type of thing. So I just really feel like we did a pretty good job in doing that.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

At our school we have great leadership, and they all take action, including ourselves, the counselors. Our leaders are very good in problem solving, and all of us worked together in trying to problem-solve anything that happened, immediately.

—Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas

It has gone well. I actually get a chance to see all of our students once a week, as a routine, and it has been a positive transition. We have to use our resources and use our people in such a strategic way that it can be beneficial and effective, and I do believe that is what our district has done.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.



Another thing that happened with morale—what happened with our football field. The storm snapped some of the light poles and tore up some of our fencing around the football stadium. So they immediately cleaned as much as they could from that, and normally our games are on Friday nights, but we had our football games on Saturday afternoons. You know, that brought about a lot of support. And our new students were able to come in with free passes, to get them to become more of a family-oriented type school, to get them on track.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I would say, as far as helping the students and being available to them, I wouldn't necessarily want to have more counseling staff brought in. Because, as a counselor, I'm going to be the one building that rapport with those students. So I need to be the one doing the counseling. I would prefer to have someone else coming

in to do the paperwork for me. Let me meet with those kids, and let me kind of get in a little deeper with those kids, to be able to work with them on a deeper level, rather than sitting here building the schedule and getting them into class.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I felt that we needed more staff with special needs and a 504 [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act] background. And they should have had more counselors available from East Baton Rouge, rather than just putting people from New Orleans and different parishes who weren't familiar with the rules and regulations or policies for accommodation and modifications. It's okay to have the people in the community helping out, but there really needs to be a workshop or something ahead of time before they start going out.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

Our evacuation plan, it needs some work.

—East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Baton Rouge, La.

We did have a crisis plan, but in most cases when you don't use something, you become lackadaisical with the situation. You become so comfortable that if you don't make yourself aware and continue to be updated and even do drills in that area, you know, things can catch you off guard. But I think this situation has caused us to look at it, revise it, and update it to the point where everybody is involved. We've designed a more strategic crisis plan, to have more in place so that we'll actually always be ready. Everybody has a keen role, and everybody is aware of their roles.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

The Daily Challenges and Triumphs of Students

Finding the Debate, Speech and Theatre Team was one of the best parts. It has really supported and helped me. This year we've been all over the country to different universities to compete, and I've been doing really well. I took third place in Poetry Interpretations in the whole state of Texas.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

The house I am in is bigger, the school I am in is bigger, and the area I am in is more prosperous. With that being said, I wish the hurricane had never happened and that I would wake up tomorrow getting dressed for [my old high school].

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Although there are no definitive numbers, it is clear that Hurricane Katrina forced hundreds of thousands of children and youths to flee their homes. These young people suffered unspeakable physical and emotional losses that will shape their views of the world and themselves for the rest of their lives. Ten months after the hurricane, they continue to feel sad, fearful, and confused. Yet, in the face of profound adversity, these young students have shown extraordinary strength and optimism. Their counselors and new friends at school have been important elements in their recovery. They are maintaining positive attitudes and looking toward their futures with determination and resilience.

I'm from Venice, Louisiana. It's about an hour and a half further south from New Orleans. I'm 15 years old and in ninth grade.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I'm from the Ninth Ward, New Orleans. I lived there all my life. I'm 15 years old and in ninth grade.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I'm from Harrison County, Mississippi. It's about two and a half hours from Jackson. I'm 17 years old, and I'm in the ninth grade.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

I am originally from Gretna, Louisiana, and have lived in the area my whole life. I

am 17 years old, and I am a junior in high school.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I'm from New Orleans, where I'd lived my whole life. I'm 16 years old and in 11th grade, but I have enough credits to be a senior.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

The Immediate Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues of the Evacuation

The hurricanes profoundly affected the lives of the young women and men forced to flee their homes. Some had to evacuate twice: first from Hurricane Katrina and later from Hurricane Rita. They lost everything: homes, family members, friends, pets, communities, schools, photographs, possessions of sentimental and material value, privacy, intimacy, hobbies and hangouts. Perhaps most significantly, they lost their sense of safety and security.

We left Venice the day before the hurricane hit, because we didn't know that we were going to have to evacuate until two days before. So we had to hurry up and pack and leave, because we weren't going to risk our lives. But by the time we evacuated, everything was booked. We couldn't find a hotel closer than Arkansas. My dad's sister lived in Holly Beach, so we went to Holly Beach. We got there August 28, and we left September 23, because of Hurricane Rita. I have seven people in my family, and we didn't want to take any chances. It's my mom, my dad and my three sisters, and my oldest sister has a son, and they lived with us. The thought of packing and evacuating again—I really didn't want to do it, but we did. I have family in Opelousas, and we stayed there for about a week. And then my dad's company, Chevron, got us a place in Carencro. It's a trailer. It has three bedrooms, two bathrooms. It's all right. When you go from a two-story house to a trailer, it's kind of hard. Our other house had five bedrooms. I cried every day the first two or three months I was here.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

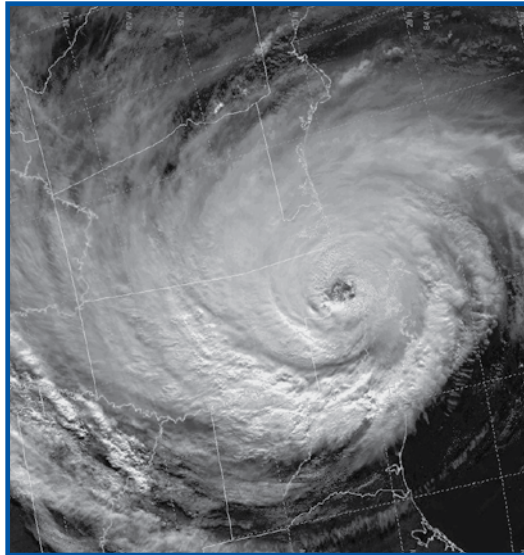
We moved to Jackson when they told us to leave. I wasn't able to take much with me, just some clothes. We didn't have family in Jackson, but we came here because there was room here. We came with my mother, three brothers and one sister. I'm the oldest. We stayed in a motel when we first came here, for about six months. We all just shared one room. Now we're living with a friend—a friend from New Orleans; we met her in Jackson. We've been living here about a month. It's better than the motel. We have more space here. I share a bedroom with my

brother. Our apartment is gone. We lived on the top. The storm took the roof off.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

The Sunday before the hurricane hit was when my mom felt it necessary to evacuate. My aunt and uncle were able to secure some hotel rooms in a La Quinta Inn in Beaumont, Texas. We left at about 10:00 Sunday night and drove for 12 hours to Texas. In the hotel room, we did nothing but watch the news, which turned out to be very hard at times. All we could do was speculate about the stability of our houses and whether or not we would have anything left to go home to. Then I stayed at my grandparents' house for a few days before moving into my aunt's house in Gulf Breeze. We also applied for government aid. My mom and uncle applied at the same time. My uncle got \$2,000 from FEMA and food stamps. My mom applied and got food stamps and nothing else. Things started off bad outside of school. My mom still didn't get any aid from the government even though she was a single mom, unemployed with two children. I kept getting bad news after bad news. My friends were relocating and not returning. My three cats I left behind survived the hurricane but were kicked out of the house two days later by our landlord, who said they would damage the property if left inside. And one of my best friends who relocated to Orlando, Florida, caught spinal meningitis and was in critical condition. My grandmother passed away three months after the hurricane.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.



That Friday before, I had just gotten a job interview at Subway, so I was excited about that. I remember I had just come home from planning the new student

parade at school, and we saw on TV that Hurricane Katrina was coming. But we really weren't planning on leaving, because when [Hurricane] Ivan came, we left for nothing. So we waited until the day before, and we decided to leave, and we just started driving. There were no hotels, so we kept driving. That night we couldn't go anywhere, so we slept in the car at a truck stop, and we spent the second night in the car. And then the third night we finally got through on the phone to our neighbor, and he told us that there was water coming in from everywhere, but no one knew where it was coming from. Then the fourth day, a woman came up to us and asked us if we were stranded, and she told us her brother had an extra house and was looking for people who needed a place to stay. So she brought us to stay at that house. We stayed for three weeks in that house. After three weeks, my grandmother and aunts decided to come to Texas, because everyone said you could get a lot of help in Texas. But my grandmother's car wasn't working, and all of us couldn't fit in one car. So my oldest cousin (he's 17) and I stayed at the house for a week while my grandmother and aunts went to Houston to get settled. Then my cousin's mom came to get him, but I was left for four days by myself. And the phone calls weren't going through, so I couldn't even talk to anyone. It was terrible. Finally, my grandmother and one of my aunts came back, and we stayed there for another three days, and then we drove to Houston. We stayed in hotels in Houston for two or three weeks, and then we finally got this apartment I'm in now. I stay with my grandmother, so I left with her and my aunts and cousins. My mother didn't leave. I thought they were going to Abramson School, and I heard on the news that the roof collapsed at Abramson, so my nerves were really getting up. Finally, I found out that my mother and brothers were at the Louisiana Superdome, and they weren't allowed to leave, but they snuck out and drove to Houston.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

We came to Laurel, Mississippi, to unite with my other family who lived here. My uncle's wife lived here. We left in a car before the hurricane — my grandmother, my mom, my sister, my two cousins and my mom's boyfriend. My other aunt was in Texas, and she flew here. When we first got to Laurel, we all stayed together for about a month. Now I live in a house, with my mom and my sister, and my grandmother stays with us sometimes.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

The Secondary Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues on Returning to School

Becoming accustomed to their new schools was a challenge for displaced students. While some missed only one day of school due to the storms, others missed several months. Once enrolled, the students struggled to adapt to new environments, new rules and routines, new curricula and standards, new teachers and peers—while continuing to work through the fears and losses caused by the hurricane. This initial transition was arduous.

In time, however, school became a place of comfort and closeness. Through new friendships, personal connections with school counselors and teachers, and their own extraordinary resilience, students ultimately came to enjoy and value their new schools. They felt welcome in their schools and enjoyed meeting new people. They also found the support of their counselors, peers, and teachers to be a central part of their personal recovery process outside of school.

The schools here started on the 12th, and I came a day after they started. I enrolled here right away. But I had been going in New Orleans, because we had started school August 18.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I started school in January. We were getting situated before that. I felt all right about it. I didn't go to school back home.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

The first thing I wanted to do was go to school. I was out for about eight weeks total. When we were in the hotel, I was doing a search on the Web in the business center... trying to find schools that were close, looking at maps, and looking at what their test scores were. And then I started calling a number of schools. I told them I was in town because of the hurricane, and that I was living in a hotel, and they told me I needed a permanent address to enroll in school, and some wanted proof of what grade I was in. So I didn't enroll. When we moved into this apartment, the very next day, I said, 'I am going to school!' I felt like I was getting stupid; I just needed to get back to school. At the first school I went to, the guy just turned me off completely. It was a really prestigious school, and I come from a really prestigious school. He gave me a speech about not bringing down his test scores. He gave me the speech three times. I signed all the papers, had my*

*The information provided by these schools was not correct. Homeless students do not need a permanent address, school records or other documents to enroll in school. On the contrary, the *McKinney-Vento Act* gives students the right to enroll in school immediately, despite a lack of documentation. The authors have brought this student's experience to the attention of relevant local and state *McKinney-Vento* staff members so that such misinformation can be corrected.

schedule, and I was set up to start on Monday, but I left and went to find a different school, because I didn't want to go there.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

I've been to three different schools this year. I started at Buras High School in Venice, then the hurricane came and I went to Holly Beach, Louisiana, to Johnson Bayou High School; then Hurricane Rita came, and we moved to Lafayette, to Carencro High School. I guess I probably missed about a month of school. I really didn't want to go to school. It was my third school, and I just didn't feel up to it anymore, because it wasn't my school. I just didn't like school right after the hurricane. The worst part was just being at a school that wasn't mine. The grading



scale was different than mine. And this is the biggest school I've been in. It has around 1,300 students. My other school was small, probably around 600, but only 90 in the freshman class. Here, there are around 500 freshmen. I went to [the school counselor] at least once a day for the first three weeks, because I just couldn't stop crying. I was crying in class. Then I went back home and saw that my town was in really bad shape and that I wasn't going to be able to go back, so I just had to get used to it. The people wanted to get to know me, and that was nice. They talked to me and asked me how it was going, and helped me with my work when I needed it.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I was nervous. I didn't know anybody. It was hard. The way that they do things is not like my school, like maybe the way that they take tests, the way that they do class work, stuff like that. It's a big change. The hardest part was just adapting to a new environment. I just tried hard to succeed and adapt to the environment. Since I've been here a while, it's gotten easier. The people that go here made me feel like I was welcome. Maybe it took, probably, about two or three months to start getting used to it. The best part was that I got to meet new people and know Mississippi.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I missed close to a month of school after the hurricane. I missed my school, and I missed the friends I had back home. I was thrown into a system I had never known and had to catch up with the class in a timely manner, all the while dealing with family issues and emotional issues. I felt nervous about returning to school

because I had never been in a school of that size before. But I had my cousin with me, which made it relatively easier. Inside school, things were hectic. As accommodating as the school was, I felt overwhelmed by the courses and was very distracted by the things happening outside of school. I felt like pressure was being poured on me to not complain and to not show how I felt, because I knew that if I did, it would be added pressure on my mom, and I felt that was the last thing she needed at that point. So the worst part would be that I didn't have a choice of liking the school or not, I had to tough it out regardless, and I bottled up my feelings and opinions. When a kid goes through a disaster like this, I think their parents are under a lot more pressure than they are. So I was thinking, 'If I let it get to me, it's just gonna be harder on my mom.'

So I just had to focus. The guidance counselor helped me kind of integrate into my classes, and he gave the teachers a heads-up on what I was doing. Whenever I had a problem I'd go to him with it, and he really helped me out. And the school had a pizza party thing for the displaced kids, and it gave us a chance to get together and get to know each other. The best part was the feeling of a clean slate. I felt I could start fresh, and that motivated me to start on the right foot.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.



I kind of went with a negative attitude when I first started. The day I started, they were talking on the news about all the fights, so I went saying, 'Okay, if anybody says anything to me, I'm ready.' I didn't want to be there as much as they didn't want me there. The first thing I did was look for a drama department, because that's what I've done basically my whole life. They didn't have a drama department, but they had a Debate, Speech and Theatre Team. So I met the

co-captain—he was in the hallway putting trophies in a trophy case—and he told me what it was all about, and that those were trophies from the Debate, Speech and Theatre Team. So I went after school to see a performance, and I talked to the coach. And he just started giving me pieces, prose and poetry, and I went to a tournament in a week, and I did really well. At the following tournament I took four first places, and I was hooked. It was the closest I could get to drama and to home for me. I did it every day, even when we didn't have practices. I was reciting speeches while I was brushing my teeth. It was my escape.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

The Long-Term Impact of the Hurricane: Key Challenges and Issues Today

Today, young people continue to adjust to the profound changes in their daily lives that were provoked by the hurricane. They are grieving for their emotional and physical losses, particularly their lost communities and routines. However, school remains a safe and positive refuge.

Occasionally, I still have bad days when I just want to go home. My sister [and her son] had to move back to New Orleans, because she's in college. So they don't live with us anymore. I miss having my sister and my nephew so much. We talk on the phone, but it's not the same as living with them. That was hard. I usually would be into clubs and all that, but now I'm not. I love softball, and I was gonna play, but it just didn't feel right, because I wasn't playing with my friends and my team. I've been playing that sport my whole life, since I was five. So I miss it. They have dances occasionally, and I like it, and I go to my friend's house now. At first I didn't, but now I like to go places, like I used to. At first, my grades were kind of slacking, because I just wasn't into it. But they're good now—I'm back to As and Bs. But I make a C every now and then.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Well, I'm in the jazz band. I play the drum set.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I'm happy to be in school. I like school, but I don't know. I just want to go home. It's strange living with another family. We didn't live with another family before. And there's nothing to do here. Back home, there were things we could do, like going to the arcade and stuff.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

I played football at the high school. I felt I had been given the opportunity to give football a shot before graduating, and I liked it very much. I used to play snare drum at my old school. There's a band here, but it's a totally different style than my other band, and I'm just not that interested in it. It's really good, but it's just really different. I'm taking drum lessons. I am enjoying the school, and my grades are Cs, and that's a very normal score for me.

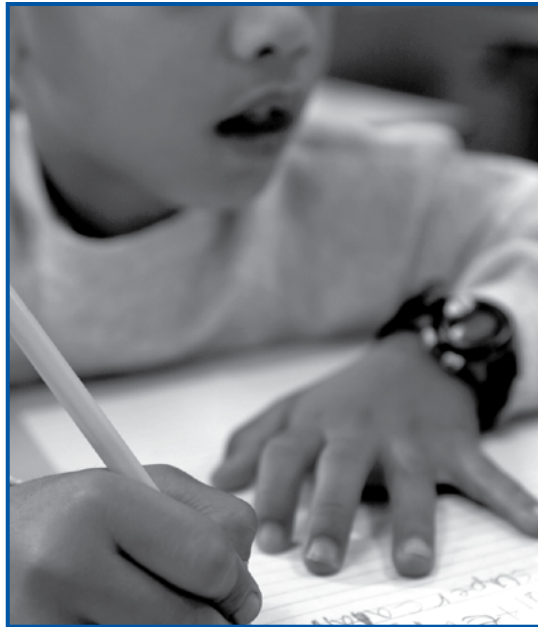
—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

My grades are exactly the same as before, all As and one B.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

The Role of the Schools: Advice For Teachers, Counselors and Administrators for Supporting Displaced Children and Youths

Students agreed that their schools were supportive and accommodating, and they particularly appreciated the efforts of their counselors and fellow students. The displaced students advised school staff to be flexible, to listen, to keep an open mind, and to treat them gently during their transition. They also asked for help in rebuilding their destroyed communities.



My advice to teachers about displaced students after a disaster is to be very flexible and accommodating, understand their stories and dilemmas, and help them cope with school. My advice for schools is to make it as easy as possible for the

students, to kind of let some things slide the first couple of weeks, until they get into a groove. Or maybe not let them slide, but just be understanding. You should realize the hardships and make it easier for them to deal with the problems that come along with being displaced students.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

When you've been put in a position like I was, there's not much people can do but listen. All they can do is listen and be there. I don't like hearing people say they understand, because they don't know what it's like. They should just treat the person normally. And don't tell them that you feel sorry for them, because that definitely will not help. Just listen if they need to talk to you.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

One thing I don't like is that they still ask you sometimes if you're from New Orleans or Texas. Like on the state-mandated tests, they ask who's from New Orleans, and you have to bubble in a certain area on the state-mandated tests. I don't like that at all. It really doesn't help, because it makes us feel like we're competing, like who's better than whom. Another thing I didn't like was when they had the counselors coming around. There was no such thing as 'Do you feel like you need to talk to somebody?'—they would just come and pull us out of class all the time, at any time, whenever someone was there. They didn't ask if we wanted to talk to anyone. They need to ask, and not assume someone needs help.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

We should have a counseling session just to clear our minds, and just have something to free our minds. Not to forget about it, but just to express our feelings toward it, and to help us to think of it as a good thing, not just a disaster.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

...Keep an open mind, and donate what they can, and pray for us. And they can help rebuild the places.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

Looking Toward the Future

The profound personal impact of the hurricane on these young men and women is only now beginning to surface. Indeed, the storm and its aftermath has forced students to reevaluate and redefine certain basic concepts in their lives, including home, friends and community, fear and loss, and themselves. Remarkably, they have all been able to attribute some positive outcomes to the hurricane.

It hurt me, but it really helped me a lot.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

In a way I don't think it's a good thing, but on the other hand I do, because I got to meet new people; I got to stay in a new place.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I think it made me a better person, a stronger person.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

I'm kind of happy this did happen for me. I've always said, the greater the struggle, the greater the success.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Redefining Home

Where I live, nothing's standing at all. But we're moving back down there. We're redoing our house. Because it's home, and you don't want to live somewhere else once you've lived there your whole life. I am gonna miss it up here. I hated it up here, but now I love it. I want to go home, but if another hurricane comes, I would come back here.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I love the new area I am in, but I have lived in Louisiana all of my life, and I have established a home in Gretna and the surrounding areas.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

I got to see and feel a new thing. I have never seen so many trees. We go on drives in the country, and it's different.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Redefining Friends and Community

I realized who my true friends were; who really sticks with you and is there when you need them. I'm not going to graduate with some of my friends because of the hurricane. I had a boyfriend—we were together for a year and a half. But when he left, he moved to Tennessee, and they're staying there. We still talk sometimes, but he's not coming back. I am still in touch with a friend who I've been friends with since I was two. She's not going back, but she'll only be an hour and a half away.

Her mom works near [our old school], and so she might just drive her there to school every day.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I had established friends throughout my life that I was very close with, most of whom I will see rarely anymore. Most of the kids I knew at my school left as a result of the hurricane. We had a lot of kids from a military base that was right next to the school, and they all got shipped out. So half of the kids from my school won't be there anymore.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.



I'm not really in touch with any of my old friends.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

I miss my other high school, just because all my friends went there. I still have some of my friends' numbers in my phone. Not all of them, but certain ones.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

Redefining Fear and Loss

I want to go home, but at the same time I don't, because the same thing could happen again in August.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

I lost my home, my memories, all my pictures. I don't want to experience that again.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I lost my house, I lost my city, I lost my friends, I lost my cats, I lost my school, I lost faith in the government, I almost lost one of my best friends at the age of 16 to meningitis. In January, I lost my grandmother, which was very hard to go through when I felt I had nothing left to lose. All I had was my small family and the will to believe things would get better. A lot of kids had it a lot worse than I did. I mean when the hurricane first hit, the first thing I wanted to do was just volunteer to help out. I just had to look at my situation, that I was really lucky to have family, and to have a house to go to. I wouldn't have been anywhere without them. There are a lot of people who don't have any place to go.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

Redefining Themselves

It made me realize who I am, and that I'm a really strong person, to go through two hurricanes like that. I used to hate change before the hurricanes, but now I know that things are going to change in your life, and you just have to get used to it. And if I want to do something, I need to do it and not sit around and wait. It made me think a lot about how I live my life, and how much I took things for granted and didn't appreciate much. The phrase 'You don't know what you've got until it's gone' is true. I thought I hated living down there, but when it happened, I realized how much I miss it. I'm happy now. I realize that everything happens for a reason, and so this happened for a reason. But I still ask why.

—Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Even though I'm in the ninth grade, I'm trying to see what I want to be. And I have to look at a college.

—Laurel Public Schools, Laurel, Miss.

I had never realized how much Mardi Gras meant to me until I didn't go to a single parade for the first time in my life. It's taught me that I have to look on the bright side of things, because if I look at the bad parts of what happened, it's just gonna make my situation worse. I can't feel like the victim—I just kind of have to suck it up and move on. Because if I sit there and just dope around, it's not going to help. I'm thinking about college, maybe the University of West Florida. I'm trying to go for a scholarship program. I'm definitely going, it just depends on where.

—Santa Rosa County School District, Milton, Fla.

You have to thank God for whatever you have materially, and appreciate what you have.

—Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, Miss.

You appreciate things more. When I was in New Orleans, I was just focusing on doing drama and theatre—that was going to be my way out of the ghetto, so to speak. I was going to get out of the South and never look back. But now—I don't know how to put it into words. I guess it makes me think about staying in the South now, instead of just making it and getting out.

—Houston Independent School System, Houston, Texas

Questions and Answers About This Report

What is the *McKinney-Vento Act*?

Originally passed in 1987, the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* is a federal law that provides federal funding for shelter programs for the homeless. Subtitle B of Title VII of the act protects the educational rights of homeless children and was reauthorized by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Under the *McKinney-Vento Act*, the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program provides grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) based on the number of students living under a state's poverty level. The SEAs conduct statewide activities such as training, and monitoring, and awarding competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state. LEAs use their subgrants to identify homeless students, enroll them in school, and support their academic success.

The *McKinney-Vento Act* also legally protects homeless children and youths, ensuring that their housing status does not prevent them from enrolling in, attending and succeeding in school. For example, homeless students are able to immediately enroll in school without the documents typically required for enrollment. They can stay in one school despite multiple residential moves, and they can receive transportation to that school. The act also provides a dispute resolution process and other legal protections.

Rather than being kept isolated in shelters or trailers, displaced children and youths were able to return to school in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, where they could make friends, play sports, study, and have their mental and physical health needs met. Going to school helped these students transition to new environments and reclaim the structure and routine that are essential to their health and well-being. The *McKinney-Vento Act* is what made that transition possible.

For more information about the *McKinney-Vento Act* including policy and program updates from the U.S. Department of Education, visit <http://www.serve.org/nche/m-v.php>. (accessed Feb. 15, 2007)

Who is Responsible for Implementing the *McKinney-Vento Act* in Schools?

Every school district has a *McKinney-Vento* homeless education liaison, who directs the district's services to children, youths and families. After Hurricane Katrina, these local liaisons coordinated schools' responses. Liaisons had pre-existing procedures for: enrolling students without documents in schools, placing them in the appropriate classes; providing them with free meals and uniforms; and welcoming them into new school environments. From communities receiving 10 displaced students to those receiving 10,000, liaisons incorporated new students with stunning efficiency.

For more information about the role of liaisons, visit <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/liaisons.pdf>. (accessed Feb. 15, 2007)

How was the Information in This Report Gathered?

The information contained in this report was collected through telephone interviews and e-mail surveys of 32 individuals in eight school districts. Those interviewed represented various roles within schools, including school district superintendents and assistant superintendents, school principals, staff from shelters and other relief agencies, school counselors, students, and school district homeless education liaisons. These positions were selected in an effort to show the storms' varied effects on different individuals in the selected school districts and the schools in those districts. Countless other school staff and community members also contributed to the well-being of displaced families, youths and children: teachers, coaches, janitors, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, maintenance workers, school social workers, businesses, neighbors and many others.

The school districts in this report were chosen because they were significantly impacted by the hurricane and represent one urban and one rural or suburban district in four states: Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The districts are: Escambia County School District, Fla.; Santa Rosa County School District, Fla.; East Baton Rouge Parish School System, La.; Lafayette Parish School System, La.; Jackson Public Schools, Miss.; Laurel Public Schools, Miss.; Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Texas; and Houston Independent School District, Texas.

Six of the school districts receive *McKinney-Vento* subgrants and have very experienced local liaisons. Two districts do not receive subgrants and have less-established programs. A basic demographic profile of each district can be found in Appendix B. The *McKinney-Vento* homeless education liaisons in the selected districts provided the names and contact information for the interviewees. It is important to note that there was no effort to distort or bias the document by selecting inter-

viewees with particularly provocative stories or successful responses to the hurricanes. However, the overall outlook and experiences of the interviewees demonstrate the competence, compassion and strength that are present in schools across the country.

Is the Report Only About Hurricane Katrina?

Something to remember is that a lot of people were kind of caught up by the second storm. A lot of people had gone from New Orleans to stay in Lake Charles, and then Hurricane Rita hit, and those people had to move again. So we can't really keep Katrina and Rita separate, because many people were affected by both.

—District Homeless Liaison
Lafayette Parish School System, Lafayette, La.

Hurricane Katrina was the primary motivation for this report, and its effects were the primary subject of the interviews. However, while Hurricane Katrina affected more people and produced more damage than other storms, the interviews made it clear that the southern states were reeling from the effects of **several** hurricanes. Hurricane Katrina (August 2005) profoundly impacted all of the interviewees, and most also experienced severe effects from the storm that immediately followed, Hurricane Rita (September 2005). The participants in Florida faced the additional challenges of a continuing recovery from hurricanes Ivan (September 2004) and Dennis (July 2005), and the further impact of Hurricane Wilma (October 2005). It is imperative to understand that Hurricane Katrina, devastating in itself, also compounded the effects of previous storms and complicated the capacity to respond to subsequent disasters.

What is the National Center for Homeless Education?

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) provides research, resources and information to enable communities to address the educational needs of homeless children and youths. The center also supports educators and service providers by producing training and awareness materials, and by providing training at regional and national conferences and events.

Profiles of the Interviewed School Districts

Escambia County School District, Fla.

<http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us>

Escambia County is the westernmost county in the Florida panhandle, bordering Mississippi and Alabama. It includes the urban area of Pensacola, and its population is roughly 300,000. Although Escambia County was not damaged by hurricanes Katrina or Rita, it is still recovering from hurricanes Ivan and Dennis.

Student population: 43,442

Number of schools: 60 (including urban, suburban and rural areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 62%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07). Florida Department of Education Information and Accountability Services; <http://www.fldoe.org/eias/flmove/escambia.asp> (accessed 7-26-07).

Santa Rosa County School District, Fla.

<http://www.santarosa.k12.fl.us>

Santa Rosa County is in the western panhandle of Florida, adjacent to Escambia County. Its population is 150,000. Although Santa Rosa County was not damaged by hurricanes Katrina or Rita, it is still recovering from hurricanes Ivan and Dennis.

Student population: 25,038

Number of schools: 37 (including suburban and rural areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 32%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07). Florida Department of Education Information and Accountability Services; <http://www.fldoe.org/eias/flmove/santaros.asp> (accessed 7-26-07).

East Baton Rouge Parish School System, La.

<http://www.ebrpss.k12.la.us>

East Baton Rouge Parish is located northwest of New Orleans. It has a population of roughly 200,000. East Baton Rouge Parish has both the highest high school graduation rate (82.2 percent), and the highest percentage of residents holding at least a bachelor's degree (33.3 percent) in the state of Louisiana. It was hit by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Student population: 46,408

Number of schools: 95 (primarily urban and suburban areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 32%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07). Louisiana State Department of Education; <http://www.doe.state.la.us/ide/> (accessed 7-26-07).

Lafayette Parish School System, La.

<http://www.lpssonline.com/site.php>

Lafayette Parish, with a population of roughly 200,000, is located west of New Orleans. The parish was hit by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Student population: 29,816

Number of schools: 44 (primarily suburban and rural areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 54%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07). Louisiana State Department of Education; <http://www.doe.state.la.us/ide/> (accessed 7-26-07).

Jackson Public Schools, Miss.

<http://www.jackson.k12.ms.us>

Jackson is both the capital and the largest city in Mississippi, with over 500,000 people living in the metropolitan area. It is slightly south of the center of the state. Jackson was hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Student population: 31,611

Number of schools: 61 (including urban and suburban areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 68%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07). Mississippi Department of Education; <http://webapps.mde.k12.ms.us/census/public/> (accessed 7-26-07).

Laurel Public Schools, Miss.

<http://www.laurelschools.org>

Laurel is a small town in southeast Mississippi, with approximately 20,000 residents. Laurel was hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Student population: 3,018

Number of schools: 8 (including suburban and rural areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 89%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07).
Mississippi Department of Education; <http://webapps.mde.k12.ms.us/census/public/> (accessed 7-26-07).

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Texas

<http://www.cfishd.net>

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District is located in a suburb northwest of Houston. The Cypress-Fairbanks urban cluster was hit by Hurricane Rita.

Student population: 79,314

Number of schools: 66 (including suburban and urban areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 19%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07).
Texas Education Agency; <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/> (accessed 7-26-07).

Houston Independent School System, Texas

<http://www.houstonisd.org>

Houston is the largest city in Texas, with a population of over two million. It is located in the southeastern part of the state, and was hit by Hurricane Rita.

Student population: 208,945

Number of schools: 313 (including urban and suburban areas)

Free or reduced-price lunch eligible: 83%

National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/> (accessed 7-26-07).
Texas Education Agency; <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/> (accessed 7-26-07).

**For additional information on providing assistance
to schools serving students displaced
by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes,
visit Hurricane Help for Schools at
<http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html>.**



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