



U.S. Department of Education

LESSONS LEARNED

From School Crises and Emergencies

Vol. 2, Issue 5, 2007

RECOVERING FROM NATURAL DISASTERS: PREPARATION IS KEY

“Preparation ... is less costly than learning through tragedy.”

—Bill Proenza, Director,
National Weather Service’s Southern Region Center

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, forest fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, snowstorms or volcanic eruptions, are unpredictable and can lead to massive financial, structural and even human losses. The extent of the losses can be impacted by the extent to which a state education agency (SEA)¹ and local education agency (LEA)² are prepared to work with first responders and partners, such as public health agencies, mental health professionals, and police and fire department personnel, to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters. Hurricanes, such as Katrina, Rita, Ivan, Charley and Hugo, demonstrated that the degree to which states, communities, schools and families prepare for a disaster is critical to the recovery process. The most devastating of these storms—Hurricane Katrina—made landfall in the Gulf Coast region of the United States on Aug. 29, 2005, bringing storm

surges, strong winds, and heavy rains to Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Perhaps the most widespread devastation occurred in New Orleans, La., where the storm caused breaches in the levee system, and destroyed hundreds of homes and other buildings. Katrina was the deadliest hurricane since the famous Galveston Hurricane of September 1900. Hurricane Katrina took the lives of approximately 1,800 people and caused approximately \$81 billion in damage, making it the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.³ Four weeks later, on Sept. 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita hit the Texas and Louisiana borders’ coastal regions compounding the recovery efforts after Katrina.

Months after the hurricanes, children and their families tried to regain a sense of normalcy. However, there was a need to reconsider what is “normal.” For many families and community members, a “return to normal” meant that schools reopened. Numerous challenges, however, such as major damage to the school structure prevented schools in some areas, such as New Orleans, from reopening. Even if schools could physically be reopened, many teachers and other staff who lost their homes had left the area. Thus, there was insufficient staff to teach the classes and maintain the buildings. For families that evacuated to areas not impacted by the storm, there were

1 State education agency - The term means the agency primarily responsible for the state supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools; <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/sec14101.html>. (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007.)

2 Local education agency - The term means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or of or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools; <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/sec14101.html>. (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007.)

3 Burton, Mark L., Hicks, Michael J.; Hurricane Katrina: Preliminary Estimates of Commercial and Public Sector Damages; Marshall University: Center for Business and Economic Research; September, 2005; <http://www.marshall.edu/cber/research/katrina/Katrina-Estimates.pdf>. (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007.)

enrollment and documentation requirements that initially presented barriers to enrolling displaced students. Districts across the country accepting displaced students had to supplement teaching staff, obtain supplies and generally ramp-up for the influx of new students. Despite these challenges, districts responded quickly to enroll students in schools, arrange housing and restore some sense of normalcy for both the students and families displaced by the storm. Said one former assistant superintendent, “We made decisions that would help the students and their families, and figured we would ask for forgiveness later.”

This issue of Lessons Learned summarizes the discussions that occurred at a U.S. Department of Education-sponsored meeting held November 2006 with representatives of five states—Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas—that have suffered damage from one or more hurricanes. Meeting participants emphasized the need for leadership and readiness at both the SEA and LEA to prepare for and quickly respond to a disaster, and to begin the recovery process by establishing partnerships well before the onset of a disaster.

Lessons for the State Education Agency

In general, each level of government will respond to an incident using available resources and may request assistance from the next higher level of government, if required (i.e., municipality to state and state to federal government). Preparation at the SEA level is integral for facilitating response and recovery activities for LEAs. SEA personnel must be integrated into the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the role of which is to address the response to consequences of any disaster or emergency situation that affects a state’s population, property in a state, or both.

Preparation at the SEA level is integral for facilitating response and recovery activities for LEAs. SEA personnel must be integrated into the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the role of which is to address the response to consequences of any disaster or emergency situation that affects a state’s population, property in a state, or both.

SEAs must have such personnel with knowledge and experience managing multi-hazard emergencies and responding to crises. States, local jurisdictions, LEAs and schools should begin to collaborate on executing the emergency management plans as a situation is developing, preferably up to a week before the disaster hits. The following lessons can help strengthen SEAs’ efforts to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from major natural disasters:

Use the State Education Agency to Support Local School Districts and Communities

During the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, the Florida SEA had a full-time person assigned to the district superintendent or designee throughout the seasons. This “buddy link” supported each Florida LEA in verifying information to ensure accuracy, tracking events, identifying solutions for problems, and expediting deliveries of necessary supplies (e.g., fuel, building and school supplies, food). The buddies also provided support by conducting facility assessments, identifying sources of mutual aid, obtaining portable or temporary classrooms, answering health and safety questions and securing

buses and bus drivers. As an equitable partner on Florida's EOC, the SEA was able to continually update the SEA Web site to provide accurate and timely information for LEAs across the state.

If schools will be used as shelters, SEA personnel also can be used to help district school personnel and shelter management teams designate what part of the school or other facility would be used as a shelter; outline criteria and expectations for closing and consolidating shelters so that schools could resume normal learning operations; and designate the initial assessment of a school's physical environment to be completed by maintenance staff, then by the principal.

Establish State Education Agency and Local Education Agency Continuity of Operations Plans

A Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) ensures that both SEAs and LEAs will have the capability to continue essential functions across a wide range of hazards. The object of a COOP is to ensure continued performance of essential educational functions, reduce or mitigate disruptions to operations and achieve a timely recovery and reconstitution of the learning environment. COOPs should include procedures to: institute a system for registering out-of-state and district students; registering students into other district schools; identifying, in advance, who has responsibility for closing schools; and sending students and staff to alternate locations.

COOPs also should include succession plans that designate who is in charge if a leader or leaders are unavailable to make decisions. Emergency management experts suggest that up to five people should be delegated to make decisions, and to account for those who evacuated and cannot return to the damaged area. For example, after consulting with the SEA, decision-making authority at the

LEA should begin with the superintendent and director of operations consulting with partners (e.g., those in the fire department, public safety) to determine which schools can reopen. The school principal and assistant principal, and such others as the building engineers who know the school grounds, school layout and the community should be involved in decisions about opening specific school buildings. It is important that the right people be accessible to be involved in the decision-making processes, therefore, the LEA COOPs should be shared with the local EOC and should include local and out-of-state contact information for each person.

Additionally, in conjunction with the SEA, LEAs may consider developing a business continuity plan (BCP). BCPs include such activities as: ensuring systems are in place for rapid contract execution in the event of an emergency; ensuring the identification, protection and sustainability of all vital records and databases; and addressing other procedures that will help restore LEA business and administrative functions as soon as possible. One of the most important activities is installing backup power systems or sending all

Emergency management experts suggest that up to five people should be delegated to make decisions, and to account for those who evacuated and cannot return to the damaged area. For example, after consulting with the SEA, decision-making authority at the LEA should begin with the superintendent and director of operations consulting with partners (e.g., those in the fire department, public safety) to determine which schools can reopen.

records to other locations for quick retrieval for all “core” functions (e.g., data processing, payroll, student records). For example, when severe storms are anticipated, Florida LEAs run paychecks prior to the closing of schools and administrative offices and store them in a vault for future distribution. The state encourages all employees to arrange for direct deposits of their paychecks. For those without direct deposit, there are alternative regional paycheck distribution sites, each with law enforcement personnel to maintain security since the distribution sites are generally announced through the media. Another important process that should be included in the BCP is the renegotiation of contracts with vendors or contractors for food service maintenance and cleanup services for schools damaged during the disaster or used as shelters during the response. The contracts should be based on pre-storm costs, so that both the SEA and the LEAs will not compete for valuable and scarce services and commodities once a disaster does strike.

Finally, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) provides both material and fiscal support for areas that have been impacted by natural hazards. FEMA paperwork and resulting audits place time and personnel burdens on the receiving agency. Both the COOP and BCP should include procedures for hiring additional personnel to manage and complete FEMA-related tasks to ensure timely and complete reimbursement for disaster-related expenses.

Work With State Education Agencies in Other States to Obtain Recovery Support

For a hazard the magnitude of Katrina, no single state or local jurisdiction will have all the personnel, equipment and materials required to cope with a major emergency or disaster. Additional assistance may be obtained through prior mutual aid agreements (MAAs), which will

Mutual aid agreements are an essential component of emergency management planning, response and recovery activities. These agreements can significantly increase the availability of critical resources and improve response and recovery efforts. See figure 1 for a list of common contents of MAAs.

focus on procedures to obtain resources, facilities, services and other required support resources from jurisdictions, government agencies, and other organizations not impacted by the hazard. Mutual aid agreements are an essential component of emergency management planning, response and recovery activities. These agreements can significantly increase the availability of critical resources and improve response and recovery efforts. See figure 1 for a list of common contents of MAAs.

The pre-negotiated MAAs by the state EOC and SEAs with incident management teams from non-devastated states (or, from non-devastated parts of the same state) can help supplement the SEA’s support that the SEA provides to an LEA’s preparedness, response and recovery efforts. In Mississippi, the state Office of School Safety assigned personnel from non-devastated LEAs to organize RV travel units to help counselors in impacted areas over a three- to five-day period and make return visits on a monthly basis after the storm. The Escambia (Fla.) School District, LEA established and maintains the Escambia Educational Recovery Team (EERT), a fully self-

FIGURE 1. COMMON CONTENTS OF MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Definitions of key terms used in the agreement■ Roles and responsibilities of individual parties■ Procedures for requesting and providing assistance■ Procedures, authorities, and rules for payment, reimbursement, and allocation of costs■ Notification procedures■ Protocols for interoperable communications | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Relationships with other agreements among jurisdictions■ Workers compensation terms or stipulations■ Treatment of liability and immunity■ Listing qualifications and certifications of personnel from each agency■ Sharing agreements, as required, among all agencies that signed the agreement |
|--|--|

contained comprehensive team that provides all essential logistics and support equipment while traveling to impacted areas. EERT may visit the impacted area about a week after the disaster and spend approximately two-weeks on site. The team operates independent of the affected area agencies and provides on-scene recovery consultation, such as pre-event preparedness and technical assistance, post-event technical assistance, and crisis management and mitigation workshops. Prior to accepting support from such teams, it is important to pre-negotiate who will arrange and pay for housing, per diem, long-distance and local travel expenses, and other resources, such as gas for the visiting teams.

Determine Appropriate Roles and Responsibilities for SEA and LEA Staff Members

It is critical that in a time of an emergency, SEAs and LEAs not attempt to “take on” more than they can effectively manage. School-based professionals have expertise in students and student learning, but may not have expertise needed to manage all of the activities that will be necessary following an emergency or crisis. It is helpful for SEAs to establish guidelines and processes for how LEAs can identify which activities they will be able to effectively manage following a crisis, and which activities they will need to partner with, or outsource to, other entities to ensure successful completion.

For example, to guide the Mobile Public School System’s decisions about what services they would provide in response and recovery efforts after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the case manager who coordinates the services asked four guiding questions about each possible activity:

Is this a good idea? If, so,

1. Is this something that we should do? If not, refer to the appropriate agency. If so,
2. Is this something we can do? If not, refer; if so
3. Is this something we can do well? If not, refer; if so, take action.

The Escambia (Fla.) School District established and maintains the Escambia Educational Recovery Team (EERT), a fully self-contained comprehensive team that provides all essential logistics and support equipment while traveling to impacted areas. EERT may visit the impacted area about a week after the disaster and spend approximately two-weeks on site.

Utilizing a decision process, such as the one noted above, to determine what responsibilities are appropriate for school-based staff in the time of an emergency can help ensure school staff are able to effectively manage activities within their realm of control, while not overcommitting to activities that could be better served by another entity or agency.

Plan Processes and Strategies for the SEAs to Communicate With LEA Administrators, Teachers and Staff Following a Disaster

Peer-to-peer relationships are critical during a disaster. The first step for reestablishing these relationships after a disaster is to communicate with staff to: (1) obtain information about the location and well-being of each person, (2) disseminate key messages about the conditions of the schools and (3) determine the location and basic needs of the employees. For example, the Mississippi SEA has established a predetermined communication process in the EOC so that staff can inform the SEA of their location. Preplanned coordinated communication strategies should include both traditional (e.g., phone lines, cell phones) and nontraditional (e.g., ham radios) communication mechanisms and equipment.

In 2005, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) established an internal hurricane task force to coordinate a central response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Task force members consisted of three retired TEA administrators who devoted their full attention to response and recovery efforts. TEA established two hotlines following Hurricane Katrina—one for teachers and another for LEA administrators. The hotline phones were located in the state’s hurricane center and were managed by two TEA staff members from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The staff created a list of frequently asked questions and answers that were prepared and approved by the task force. Thus, everyone received consistent answers through

Peer-to-peer relationships are critical during a disaster. The first step for reestablishing these relationships after a disaster is to communicate with staff to: (1) obtain information about the location and well-being of each person, (2) disseminate key messages about the conditions of the schools and (3) determine the location and basic needs of the employees.

both the hotlines and Web sites that were vetted by professionals with the expertise and authority to prepare a response. Additional responsibilities of the task force included: managing, coordinating, and distributing offers of support and resources to the LEAs and students, and coordinating with other social service agencies and organizations, such as the student athletic union, to determine player eligibility and game schedules.

Determine and Assign SEA and LEA Roles in Shelter Oversight

In many states, the American Red Cross or FEMA establish shelters or FEMA disaster recovery centers in one or more schools in an impacted area. FEMA disaster recovery centers exist to help families obtain information on resources that may be available to them. Some states may desire to assign one or more representatives from the SEA or LEA to be present at each center or shelter because school staff is most familiar with school facilities.⁴ The role of school-based or SEA staff in shelter monitoring or management

⁴ This placement of a school or state employee may involve consulting with an employee union to determine if this responsibility falls within the employee’s contract and how the employee will be compensated for such work.

should be clearly determined via memorandums of understanding (MOUs) well in advance of any emergency or activation of shelter sites.

Equipping, managing, and monitoring a school shelter also requires advanced planning. Shelter managers may work with other public agencies or with private businesses to supply shelters with food and other supplies. The American Red Cross recommends stockpiling a three- to seven-day supply of food,⁵ and arranging for the transfer or distribution of unspoiled food and the disposal of food spoiled due to loss of power. Other important considerations for shelter management include working with transportation officials to park buses in a safe location, mapping alternative routes for buses to reach communities, and identifying shelter locations for bus pickups. To reduce stress and allow workers time to spend with their families and to attend to restoring their own homes and property, shelter managers can assign two management teams to each school shelter so that each team can rotate in and out every two to three days.

Lessons Learned for Local Education Agencies

In addition to lessons learned by SEAs, LEAs also have also learned from recent natural hazards. LEAs, which should each have emergency management plans that are coordinated with SEAs, have unique responsibilities to their individual communities that become critical during any type of emergency. LEAs are also uniquely positioned to provide services to students, staff and faculty who are impacted by major natural disasters because of their close proximity, and relative familiarity, with the local community. The following lessons can

help strengthen LEAs' efforts to plan for major natural disasters:

Work With First Responders and Community Partners to Develop an All-hazards Emergency Management Plan Tailored to Specific Disasters

Working with all first responders and community partners to establish an emergency management plan is essential to preparing for, responding to and recovering from a disaster. Establishing a strong relationship with state and local public safety officials, emergency operations centers, local first responders, community partners, such as public and mental health agencies, and developing interdistrict and interagency agreements will foster the sharing of human and material resources well before a disaster occurs.

Collaborating together, partners can develop agreements and emergency management plans that focus on all hazards within the context of the four phases (e.g., prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery) of emergency management to ensure the safety of the whole school community, including students, staff and visitors

Shelter managers may work with other public agencies or with private businesses to supply shelters with food and other supplies. The American Red Cross recommends stockpiling a three- to seven-day supply of food, and arranging for the transfer or distribution of unspoiled food and the disposal of food spoiled due to loss of power.

⁵ For additional information about stockpiling food for a natural disaster see: <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/food.html> (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007)

with disabilities and special needs. The plans should reflect the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a unified national system for managing domestic incidents, suitable for schools nationwide to use.

If the state or community is vulnerable to a particular hazard, such as hurricanes, earthquakes or tornadoes, the plan should outline procedures and strategies for the specific disaster. Instituting preparedness and response plans that are geographically based, rather than time-based may ease the burden of evacuating a whole city. Many emergency planners suggest that if schools are closed several days prior to the anticipated beginning of forecasted storms, families will evacuate well before the advent of the storm.

State and local policymakers and elected officials also are valuable partners. SEAs can work with policymakers and legislators to develop and pass disaster-related legislation for contracts, resources and waivers for bids and procurements for disaster recovery in advance that can be of assistance to LEAs in the case of an actual event.

Work With Community Partners to Develop Processes and Strategies to Help Students and Families Recover Following a Disaster

After a major disaster, such as a hurricane, there is an immediate need for LEAs to work with their community partners to support both students enrolled in the LEA and displaced students. LEAs will need to develop tools, processes, and services to provide a seamless integration back into an academic environment for all students, regardless of their place of residence prior to the disaster. The Mobile (Ala.) Public School System developed a recovery plan to provide both short- and long-term emotional support for students and families. Key to the success of the plan was the partnerships formed with other organizations prior to the

State and local policymakers and elected officials also are valuable partners. SEAs can work with policymakers and legislators to develop and pass disaster-related legislation for contracts, resources and waivers for bids and procurements for disaster recovery in advance that can be of assistance to LEAs in the case of an actual event.

storm that provided for preexisting systems to use existing resources to identify and remove barriers for obtaining the services.

The cornerstone of the Mobile recovery plan was family case management to link children and families with needed services in an efficient manner. The LEA convened a team of professionals from the various LEA offices: curriculum and instruction, student services, special education, transportation, operations and logistics, and finance. Partnership organizations included universities, a mobile mental health center, a child advocacy center and faith-based institutions. Each group contributed personnel, services, expertise and an understanding of the value of cultural competency when working with the families. All personnel, including administrators, served as case managers to three to five families. Additionally, each case manager had a specialty that included, but was not limited to, education, nursing or mental health. The case management model helped all partners focus on doing a select number of tasks that would make the biggest difference to students and their families, and that did not provide redundant services or overlap with the services provided by other agencies.

To encourage reenrollment in schools, flexibility may be expanded. For example, the Mobile Public School System allowed students to attend schools of choice, regardless of housing location, and gave school administrators permission to enroll students without the necessary documentation. In some cases, partners from the case management program visited shelters to identify students, help them enroll in schools, and obtain the necessary information (e.g., size of uniform the student will need) for the schools.

As a result of Katrina and Rita, some legislation was amended to provide immediate support to both students and their families. Under the *McKinney-Vento Act*, students and families who are in a homeless or emergency situation, such as a natural disaster, do not need the required documentation (e.g., school records, medical records, birth certificate, etc.) to enroll a child in school.

Develop Strategies to Address Survivors Short- and Long-term Mental Health Treatment Needs Using State and Community Resources

Feelings of stress and hopelessness are common after catastrophic disasters, such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Therefore, it is imperative to work with state agencies and community partners, such as mental health and other community agencies, to increase the type and availability of mental health services available to students, families and school staff. Disaster victims will experience a sense of loss for elements of or related to basic day-to-day living, such as security, safety, ease of routine activities, jobs, salary, family and community surroundings, and services, including transportation, water, sewage, and police protection. In response to the hurricanes, the Louisiana state Office of Mental Health began the Louisiana Spirit Hurricane Recovery Initiative (Louisiana Spirit), which provided support for post-disaster mental health needs, such as trauma, grief, loss and resiliency.

Louisiana Spirit offered information dissemination and education, psychiatric and medical referrals, counseling (in such areas as psycho-educational, supportive, crisis, trauma, grief and loss), resilience support, psychological first aid and community-level education and training. Louisiana Spirit also provided community education and training to professionals and volunteers who worked with impacted consumers. In addition to supporting the community, Louisiana Spirit has facilitated the integration of services provided by the LEAs, mental health service providers and community service providers.

Developing strategies and supports for keeping the school community emotionally and physically healthy during the response and recovery phases is essential for reducing post-traumatic stress and adapting to new living and educational environments. Immediately after the storm, the Louisiana SEA used funds from Project SERV⁶ to develop training modules⁷ to assist school personnel in understanding the impact of trauma and the needs of displaced students and their families. Mobile teams of displaced professionals used the modules to train school teams.

6 Project SERV - (School Emergency Response to Violence) focuses on recovery efforts following a violent or traumatic event in which the learning environment has been disrupted. Project SERV funds reasonable, necessary and essential costs for education-related activities for restoring the learning environment following a violent or traumatic event. This program also supports activities that assist LEAs in managing the practical problems created by the traumatic event. Project SERV can provide immediate assistance to an LEA to enable it to reopen or keep open a school disrupted by a traumatic event, and to begin the recovery process necessary for teaching and learning to continue. These funds are intended to serve the short-term needs of an LEA. Immediate services grants under Project SERV generally are limited to a maximum of \$50,000. Project SERV also provides for the longer-term needs of an LEA. Extended services grants may provide a maximum of \$250,000 (the maximum amount can be waived in special circumstances) over a period of up to 18 months to help maintain safety and security in an affected school and to help students, teachers, school staff and family members recover from the traumatic event. As a result of Katrina and Rita, the Department of Education received authority to provide the SEAs of the five states most affected by the hurricanes.

7 The modules are part of *Rebuilding Louisiana through Education: Creating & Maintaining Healthful Psychosocial Environments in the Aftermath of Disasters* and can be downloaded at <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/8043.pdf> (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007).

Many schools experienced an increase in discipline problems after the storms, often from displaced students expressing trauma or students returning to school, yet no longer living with their parents. The Recovery School District (RSD), a state school district administered by the Louisiana Department of Education, worked with the Louisiana Spirit and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to obtain support to develop school-based mental health clinics. To plan for a surge in volunteers to provide mental health services for schools, the Florida SEA suggested that LEAs establish a process or an information center for prospective volunteer mental health professionals. The professionals should understand that they will be invited to help only after their credentials and affiliations can be verified and screened. The state mental health association can be a valuable partner to help screen mental health professionals. Once screened, the mental health professionals can be used as consultants, advocates, trainers and interventionists as appropriate.

Develop Procedures for Managing and Distributing Donations

The high level of media attention after major disasters often brings an outpouring of donations and volunteers at affected schools. The amount and type of donations and support are often sizable, presenting numerous challenges for tracking, receiving, storing and distributing the donations to the disaster victims. Volunteers may arrive unannounced with donated goods in large trucks, and truck drivers may want to unload cargo and move on. Also, it is not unusual for shelters to receive trucks carrying an abundance of just one item, such as diapers, pajamas or hot dogs, posing both storage and usage challenges.

A donations management plan should be part of the emergency management plan and should

To plan for a surge in volunteers to provide mental health services for schools, the Florida SEA suggested that LEAs establish a process or an information center for prospective volunteer mental health professionals. The state mental health association can be a valuable partner to help screen mental health professionals. Once screened, the mental health professionals can be used as consultants, advocates, trainers and interventionists as appropriate.

outline procedures for 1) establishing a database to manage all donations and offers of support, 2) establishing and maintaining a phone bank and a Web site, 3) processing and matching the goods and services donated with those who need them the most and 4) identifying community organizations and places that can serve as points of distribution for the donations. The media should be considered an important partner in the donations process. For example, the media can inform the community about what donations and services are needed and drop-off locations. Providing guidance for potential donors is useful. For example, it was learned during Hurricane Katrina that LEAs can request gift cards that can be used to purchase gas, food, clothing and household supplies for affected families.

Balance the Decision to Open Schools Following a Crisis With Infrastructure Conditions

The opening of schools signals that the recovery process is well underway and there is some semblance of normalcy in the community. The challenges of opening schools include having an adequate tax base and cash flow, sufficient number of certified teachers, adequate support staff,

operational cafeteria, transportation, textbooks and furniture. As a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, LEAs that experienced severe damage and suffered large-scale evacuations lost sales tax revenues because many people evacuated and did not return to their homes, which placed a further burden on school operating budgets. LEAs were then more restricted in the amount of goods and services that could be purchased to restore the learning environment. Coupled with inadequate insurance coverage, most LEAs had to develop creative options for effectively and efficiently using the limited available funds. Therefore, schools need to consider the essential components and operations for resuming school functions in advance.

Providing students with a safe and clean learning environment requires that both the school grounds and school building be assessed for hazards to staff and children. LEAs will have to collaborate with community partners to make this assessment. For example, the Mississippi SEA provided schools with personnel and tractors and other landscaping equipment to clear debris from roads leading to the school and the school grounds. If there is extensive water damage, schools will need to work with the health department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to determine criteria for making schools a safe and clean environment. For example, the New Orleans RSD personnel, working with their community partners, determined that many water-damaged textbooks and materials had to be destroyed because they were contaminated with mold and staph bacteria from the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina and the broken levees in New Orleans.

Opening schools also means that LEAs must ensure that students have the classrooms, equipment and staff to support

their learning needs. Leading a school and teaching a class require staff have adequate information about the students. Records were destroyed, and schools had no access to data that tracked student test scores, grades or immunization history, as well as staff certification and employment histories. As a result of the 2005 storms, states are developing policies and procedures to share student and staff data in the event of another disaster. Converting these data into electronic formats and storing the data in secure facilities outside the LEA will prevent this from occurring again.

Find Creative Ways to Conduct Classes Following a Major Disaster

In many LEAs, there were not sufficient classrooms to house all the students, which required implementing numerous solutions. A common response in all states was to implement a time-sharing “platoon” system in which two schools share one campus until the damaged school completes its repairs. Other LEAs acquired portable classrooms to ease crowding. In addition to a shortage of school buildings, there was a shortage of housing for school staff following

Therefore, schools need to consider the essential components and operations for resuming school functions in advance. ... Providing students with a safe and clean learning environment requires that both the school grounds and school building be assessed for hazards to staff and children. LEAs will have to collaborate with community partners to make this assessment.

hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Chronic housing shortages made it difficult to hire school personnel, such as teachers, counselors and bus drivers. The Mississippi SEA provided school parking lots and playgrounds to set up trailers for staff housing. School cafeterias that were operational cooked and served meals to all staff living in the trailers and others without operable kitchens.

To support teachers during the transition and recovery times, states and LEAs had to be flexible and understanding. The Florida SEA urged LEAs to modify employees' work schedules providing them time to restore their homes and to get their affairs in order. Many LEAs also made long-term modifications to work schedules of employees suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or extensive damage to homes. LEAs and their employees struggled to find jobs, and to retain and recruit teachers. To recruit teachers for the RSD and other impacted areas, the Louisiana legislature established a fund that provided financial incentives and housing assistance for teachers who would return to the devastated areas.

Engage Students to Help Families Create a Family Disaster Plan

It is advantageous to increase awareness of potential effects of disasters by providing disaster preparation and mitigation education for students and families. Each year, schools can introduce information about creating a family disaster plan to students. Students can be encouraged to help their families develop plans that include both short- and long-term evaluation plans; information about what to pack; what documents (e.g. birth certificates, school records) to take; and how to register in other schools. Some Florida schools even sponsor a family night to help families scan

Each year, schools can introduce information about creating a family disaster plan to students. Students can be encouraged to help their families develop plans that include both short- and long-term evaluation plans; information about what to pack; what documents (e.g. birth certificates, school records) to take; and how to register in other schools.

important family documents and papers onto a CD for safe keeping that can be retrieved quickly and carried during an evacuation. See figure 2 for suggested activities to consider when creating a family disaster plan.

Conclusion

Although it is difficult to anticipate every procedure that should be in place prior to a natural disaster, SEAs, LEAs, and schools can build from the lessons learned from natural disasters in recent years to augment their own planning efforts. Each major natural hazard demonstrates the need for the SEA to assume a leadership role to facilitate collaboration and coordination among the federal government, state government and agencies, and LEAs. An emergency management plan developed with both state and local partners and other emergency management personnel that is tailored to the needs of a specific LEA or geographic location will help to increase an effective response. Having procedures and criteria for working with state agencies; implementing a COOP plan; pre-negotiating contracts for obtaining recovery

support; determining the roles and responsibilities of the SEA and LEA; accessing a pool of mental health professionals to support individuals in need; determining the safety of the school infrastructure; recruiting educational and support professionals for the schools; and accepting and disseminating

donations will improve the SEA's and LEA's abilities to survive a natural disaster and resume teaching and learning as soon as possible. With a coordinated and comprehensive plan, schools may open faster, and the school community receives greater support throughout the recovery process.

FIGURE 2. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING A FAMILY DISASTER PLAN

- Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather and earthquakes to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.
- Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
- Stock emergency supplies and assemble a disaster supplies kit consisting of such items as batteries, first aid kit, flashlights, radio, medical and duct tape, thermal blankets, etc.
- Think about what items (e.g., a favorite book, toy, trophy) and information (e.g., birth certificates, school records) each family member will take with them.
- Pick two places to meet:
 1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
 2. Outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.
- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your “family contact.” After a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact’s phone number.
- Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Be familiar with evacuation routes.
- Plan how to take care of your pets.

For more information, go to: http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_601_,00.html. (Last accessed on Dec. 18, 2007.)



The ERCM TA Center was established in October 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS). The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency and crisis response plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests.

For information about the Emergency Response and Crisis Management grant program, contact Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov), Michelle Sinkgraven (michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov) or Sara Strizzi (sara.strizzi@ed.gov).

This publication was funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education under contract number GS23F8062H with Caliber Associates, Inc. The contracting officer's representative was Tara Hill. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. This publication also contains hyperlinks and URLs for information created and maintained by private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or a hyperlink or URL does not reflect the importance of the organization, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. All hyperlinks and URLs were accessed last on Dec. 18, 2007.