

Florida Association of District School Superintendents

State Board of Education

October 18, 2017

Hurricane Recovery

Florida faced the wrath of Hurricane Irma on September 11, 2017. Hurricane Irma rolled ashore as a Category 4 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 185 miles per hour. Irma's 350-mile width put all of the state under a hurricane watch for the first time in recorded history. Tragically, some Floridians lost their lives. Many lost their homes and livelihoods. The damage brought by Hurricane Irma was widespread and included almost all of the counties in Florida except those in the western part of the state.

Of Florida's 67 school districts, only a handful of districts in the northwest region were spared the full physical wrath of Irma, yet according to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation (FOIR), Irma-related insurance claims have been filed in all 67 counties. While the full financial impact of Hurricane Irma will not be known for quite a while, as of October 6, policy holders have filed 626,910 insurance claims worth an estimated \$4.5 billion in insurance claim losses to both residential and commercial properties according to FOIR. The number is projected to increase.

Aside from the costly physical destruction, the lost instructional time for Florida students was significant. In addition to the mandatory statewide school closures on Friday, September 8 and Monday, September 11 issued by Governor Scott, 73 percent of Florida school districts were closed a minimum of four additional days beyond the mandatory 2-day closing. Specifically:

- 39 districts closed four additional days (total 6 days)
- 3 districts closed five additional days (total 7 days)
- 4 districts closed six additional days (total 8 days)
- 3 districts closed 9 additional days (total 11 days)

The number of Floridians who evacuated was unprecedented. Shelters served evacuees from all over the state, special needs individuals, mentally ill individuals and homeless individuals. Shelters, mostly public schools, were at capacity and staffed by public school personnel. School district staff worked tirelessly to provide a safe haven for Floridians fleeing Hurricane Irma. They coordinated and distributed meals to their communities and cleaned and prepared schools to reopen after the hurricane. Emergency personnel, school districts, and citizens faced a myriad of issues including:

- Lack of power.
- Fuel shortages for citizens, evacuations, emergency personnel and generators.
- Delivery of food, equipment and supplies.
- Closed/blocked roadways due to flooding/debris.
- Food spoilage at schools serving as shelters.
- Overall safety issues

School districts provide shelters for Florida's citizens during hurricanes and other emergencies. School personnel also staff shelters. Issues for future consideration include:

- Availability of power and generators.

- Availability of supplies and food.
- Adequate staffing of shelters during a mandatory evacuation.
- Availability of trained staff, including law enforcement personnel.
- Need for shelters to serve individuals with special needs, individuals with mental illness and homeless individuals.
- Need for shelters that can handle individuals with service animals, companion or comfort animals.
- Need for additional shelters (charter schools, state colleges and universities)
- Need to feed the community. Several school districts fed the community during and after the storm.
- Clean up and sanitization of schools before being reopened.
- Transportation needs (flooded roads/live electrical lines).

Preliminary Recommendations

Specific funds should be allocated to reimburse school districts, counties, etc. to defray the expenses of evacuating and sheltering Florida's citizens until FEMA reimbursements are provided.

State grants programs should be accelerated to ensure that shelters are adequately equipped (e.g. generators).

Chapter 252, F.S., relating to emergency management needs to be reviewed and strengthened to ensure the safety of all Floridians.

In addition to displaced students from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, school districts are enrolling students from Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria. The statutory and rule waivers initiated by Governor Scott and Commissioner Stewart will assist districts in serving these students. Additional funds for these students and additional measures may need to be taken depending on the number of students and families who are ultimately displaced as a result of the 2017 Hurricane Season.