

SPECIAL ENEWS

From: Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA

Re: TODAY'S UPDATE (9/9/05) – Hurricane Aftermath

MORE RESOURCES

>>For updates on State Responses to Students Displaced by Hurricane Katrina –

<http://www.serve.org/nche/katrina/states.php>

>>For more school relevant resources on Helping Students Cope --

<http://www.serve.org/nche/katrina/students.php>

>>From Jim Hill, Superintendent of the Arkansas School f/t Blind in Little Rock. -- The school is accepting hurricane victim students who are blind or visually impaired. Contact: Sharon Berry, cell phone # 501-351-0359. If additional information is required, call Sup. Hill at 501-831- 1731. There is no cost to the parent for the educational program and room and board are provided through the week. School also has a program for deaf-blind students.

>>FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES – (September 2, 2005) — “The Centers for Disease Control has estimated that there are at least 99,000 children with special health care needs in Mississippi, 193,000 in Louisiana, 488,000 in Florida, and 152,000 in Alabama. Those children affected by the hurricane face unique and difficult challenges, often needing specialized assistance to keep them healthy and alive. Survival often depends on breathing equipment, special diets, clean surroundings, frequent medications, and even 24-hour nursing care.”

“Family Voices, a national nonprofit organization that advocates for and supports families that have children and youth with special health care needs, has launched the *Families Helping Families* Hurricane Relief Fund to help fill the needs and relieve the pain of some of Hurricane Katrina’s most vulnerable victims. One hundred percent of the donated funds will be funneled to volunteer family leaders ‘on the ground’ in the affected states....”

“Donations are being taken via the Family Voices website (www.familyvoices.org) and via postal mail (2340 Alamo SE, Suite 102, Albuquerque, NM 87106). For more information, contact Rachel Tallman, 1.888.835.5669.” (“Family Voices, a national nonprofit organization, advocates for family-centered health care for all children and youth with special health care needs, promotes inclusion of families as decision makers, and supports partnerships between families and professionals.”)

>>”To meet the unprecedented need for resources and information in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has significantly updated all hurricane-related information on its Emergency Preparedness and Response Website <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/>. The website provides health and safety information on hurricanes and other natural disasters. Pages offer resources on hurricane preparedness, clean-up and recovery, in addition to general and clinical fact sheets for managing injuries that result from severe weather. Several fact sheets are available in a variety of languages including English, Vietnamese, Spanish and Creole, and all are available in hard copy or for viewing online.”

CDC's Injury Center has been working to include pertinent injury prevention and mental health information at (among others)

>>>Prevent Injury after a Natural Disaster” <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/injury.asp>

>>>”Disaster Mental Health Resources” <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/mentalhealth>

>>>Emergency Wound Care after a Natural Disaster for the Public

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/woundcare.asp>

>>The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) is posting up to the minute information on the educational best practices and resources for hurricane homeless children and families on <http://www.serve.org/nche>

>>The National Center for School Engagement partners with NCHE on the Web-Based

Professional Development to Improve Education of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students
See the NCSE e-newsletter for more info at:

<http://www.schoolengagement.org/newsletter/September05ncsenews.html#articles>

>>From the American Psychological Association – Online at: <http://www.apa.org/ed/>

>>>a listing of resources that outline assistance specifically offered by psychology organizations, in addition to, opportunities offered for psychology faculty, students, and interns affected by hurricane Katrina. Updated at the end of each day.

>>>a document entitled, “General Assistance Information offered by Educational Institutions” – contains general information about assistance offered by higher education institutions. This will be posted for the next several days, but not updated, because the APA is encouraging everyone to visit and review the extensive information clearinghouse for both institutions and students created by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). Review the site at: <http://www.campusrelief.org> If your institution is not listed, let them know.

NEWS BRIEFS

>>“Texas Expecting Up To 60,000 New Students” (Dallas Morning News)

“More than 6,100 students fleeing Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath have enrolled in Texas public schools so far and state education officials promise to release money immediately to help affected districts cope. The federal government is doing its part, sending \$250,000 apiece to six Texas regional education service centers, and the state is helping as well. The Texas Education Agency is urging districts to maintain records for Title 1 and FEMA reimbursement detailing how much money is spent on evacuee students.”

>> “School Leaders Assess Damages, Plan Recovery Effort” (Education Week)

“Louisiana officials are piecing together a picture of what their school system will look like in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For now, it appears that both the New Orleans district, the state's largest, and the nearby St. Bernard public schools could be out of commission for the entire school year, and other districts could take weeks or even months to reopen, said state Schools Superintendent Cecil J. Picard. In Mississippi, state and local education officials were considering setting up portable classrooms and establishing double-shift schedules at some schools to accommodate students whose schools were destroyed or are too damaged to use for months. And Houston one of the largest school enrollment efforts in local history is starting September 7 in Houston.”

>>“Still Waiting” (Inside Higher Ed)

“Newspapers nationwide are full of uplifting stories about students who fled New Orleans and have been enrolled by colleges all over the country. And a U.S. House of Representatives bill was passed on Wednesday to ease some student aid rules for those whose colleges were closed, and another bill was introduced in the House to do even more. As laudable as these efforts are, some worry that community college students may be particularly vulnerable and unable to benefit from the generous offers from colleges all over the country. Some 20,000 of them have been displaced from their colleges and unlike many students at four-year colleges in New Orleans, many of these students do not have families or financial resources elsewhere. They literally cannot get to colleges that are offering aid, many of which are focusing on students from their regions.”

>>“Reopening Poses Major Challenge in Some Areas” (*Jackson Clarion-Ledger*)

“South Mississippi schools shut down by Hurricane Katrina are targeting the first or second week of October to reopen. School had barely begun for most districts when Katrina came ashore on August 29. Now districts face countless problems, ranging from demolished schools to missing teachers to whether the football season will be canceled. Getting students back in classrooms will be a challenge for some districts. The Pass Christian system lost two of its four schools to Katrina and a third is out of service.”

PERSONAL COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

>>”The Georgia Parent Support Network has agreed to find homes for 800 families that are being temporarily or permanently relocated there. Sue Smith of Atlanta is spearheading this drive. Having received so many e-mails from different groups, it seems ... that so much of this is being done family to family across the nation that it would be important to collectively analyze the effects of parent support in this kind of tragedy. America has not seen the force of our families in a long time, and the importance of continued funding for this kind of work is imperative, especially for families of children with disabilities. No one else, including the federal agencies, knows what to do or how to do it.”

>>Some Reflections Related to the Hurricane Aftermath from Our Perspective

From Linda Taylor & Howard Adelman

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA

September 8, 2005

Because of our role as a national Center for Mental Health in Schools, we have been contacted by media asking various questions. Below are some of the responses we have given.

Q. What role are you trying to play in the aftermath?

A. Our Center focuses on matters related to mental health in schools. So, we naturally have been concerned with various ways to address the emotional and social needs of students and school staff as they cope with the aftermath of the disaster. This has involved enhancing the resources available through our website and communicating as widely as feasible about what’s available from us and others. On our homepage -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> -- anyone can click on “Responding to a Crisis – Hurricane Aftermath” and directly access the range of resources we have developed over the years and can link to invaluable others.

In addition to the focus on meeting the needs of individuals, we have stressed the need for school staff to begin planning on a systemic level in order to be proactive in meeting some of the major, predictable challenges that are ahead. In this respect, we prepared and widely circulated guidance notes for “Planning and Action for the MH Needs of Students and School Staff” (see online – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/planningneeds.pdf>). This resource highlights why it is essential at this juncture to plan for

- >Transition concerns from a mental health and individual engagement perspective
- >How to address Special Assistance for New Students Who Needed it Prior to the Disaster
- >How to address Special Assistance for New Teachers Who Needed it Prior to the Disaster
- >How to identify and provide special assistance for those who have been so-traumatized that they require Psychological Aid

We also have communicated the need for those in district and school leadership positions to create an effective coordination mechanism with a leader who understands the above matters. And, to the degree feasible, to link such mechanisms (e.g., through email), so that schools can learn from and help each other.

To facilitate communication of relevant information and sharing of resources, strategies, and suggestions, we have established a regular interchange with folks across the country and summarize what comes in, emailing it directly to almost 10,000 folks on a regular basis (e.g., daily for now). This includes information related to volunteering and coordinating mental health and related resources. We encourage others to forward all emails in order to disseminate them to as many folks as feasible.

Q. How many students have been displaced?

A. It is widely acknowledged that the many direct victims are the “tip of the iceberg.” As reported in the New York Times (9/7), “The total number of displaced students is not yet known, but it

appears to be well above 200,000. In Louisiana, 135,000 public school students and 52,000 private school students have been displaced from Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes.”

Over time, we all must be concerned not only about these youngsters, but their families and support networks, other vulnerable populations that are affected by indirect exposure, and we must do something about the mental health of the rescue workers, service providers, school staff, and their families and social networks.

Q. What should schools do to help students cope with emotional reactions in the aftermath?

A. A full range of emotional reactions will be seen in the aftermath. That is why schools must plan to address these concerns. And, since there is no way that there will be enough accessible individual and small group counseling for all who are affected, it is essential to introduce “natural” ways schools and communities can provide social and emotional supports. For example, school student support staff and community entities can help develop peer support groups for students, families, and staff; teachers can incorporate “lessons” that have been developed to help students cope. Families can be helped to understand how to implement coping strategies at home. Good resources to aid in all this can be accessed on the internet through our website. Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> and click on “Responding to a Crisis” for materials we provide and for links to other major resources.

Q. Will the impact be worse because of the 9/11 attack and other recent traumatic events?

A. The ultimate impact of this event on students and schools, coming on top of 9/11, the war in Iraq, previous disasters, etc., depends in significant measure on how well schools mobilize to substantively meet the emotional and social needs of students and school staff. This is a critical juncture for elevating concerns about social and emotional learning to a high priority level in school improvement. Prevailing school improvement plans give short shrift to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. If this continues to be the case, the prognosis is for more emotional, behavioral, and learning problems, leaving many children behind, and exacerbating the achievement gap.

Q. How much can we depend on altruistic responses?

A. It is already clear that the initial donations will match previous giving. The Wall Street Journal reports “Less than a week after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, charitable giving by Americans to help victims of the disaster has neared \$400 million, surging past the level raised in the first week after a massive tsunami ravaged the Indian Ocean region in December.” The problem is that such giving will decline over the coming weeks as the crisis loses its initial aura and the daily demands of their lives recapture the attention of donors and volunteers. Altruism is good, but is limited over the long-run. This is a public health matter, and we all must ensure that public agencies remain committed over the long-run.

Q. What are the implications for the mandates of the federal education acts?

A. Major education leaders already are indicating the need for waivers from the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in order to meet the challenge ahead. These will be essential if schools that are impacted are to do an effective job in addressing immediate and pressing problems. Discussions are underway with the U.S. Office of Education. It would be well if stakeholders around the country conveyed their support for easing testing and other mandates that will interfere with helping those in distress. For example, one communication we received from a school in Texas pointed out: “Students who are IDEA-eligible will be arriving and needing services without any records whatsoever. Typically, we would start serving those students after a transition multi-disciplinary team meeting, and when

we got no records after 30 days or so, we would initiate a re-evaluation. For certain students ... conducting a re-evaluation will be a total waste of time, money, resources, and services. These students are likely to be traumatized by the events surrounding the hurricane, safety issues, loss, grief, etc. and any evaluation will reflect that trauma, rather than their actual disability. ... [Someone needs] to petition the federal government to relax IDEA timeline requirements for mandatory re-evaluations for these students. Some of these students will take a much longer time to recover from their trauma than others. I would rather serve them than conduct formal evaluations.”

Q. What about the reported breakdown in civil behavior at the Superdome shelter?

A. Psychologists and sociologists concerned with aggressive and antisocial behavior and “panic” responses continue to offer theories and pursue research to explain these phenomena as related to people who are massed together in crisis situations. A special focus has been on collective behavior and group contagion in such situations. Recent research finds that under crisis conditions most people do not engage in the criminal and antisocial behavior that the media primarily reported in relation to those stranded in the Superdome and Convention Center. Note that there was an absence of “panic” behavior. Note how little attention was paid to the degree to which those in these situations helped and cared for each other, where cooperative rather than selfish behavior was the norm. Certainly, scarcity of food, water, etc. made sharing difficult. And, certainly, a few individuals acted immorally, but some of these probably engaged in such behavior prior to their time in the Superdome. The real tragedy in the situation was that so many financially strapped individuals were left behind to cope with the terrible living conditions in the group shelters. And, the questions that will have to be answered is why this was the case and whether the actions of some public officials are behaviors that warrant at least as much censure as has been directed at the despicable acts of a few criminals in the Superdome.

Q. What lessons can school stakeholders learn from the aftermath of the disaster?

A. First, every critic of the public school system should recognize that schools were among the first to recognize the needs of the dislocated. School professionals all over the country have extended themselves in a multitude of ways to help. Second, we will soon see whether schools are allowed to and can play the essential role needed in providing social and emotional support. If they do not, many students and staff will pay a dear price. Should that be the case, it will add another imperative to the call for schools to rethink the relationship between academic achievement and student and staff well-being.