

APPENDIX

Testimony

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NJ Department of Education

Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee

December 3, 2012

Good morning, Senator Sarlo and members of the Committee. It is my pleasure to meet with you today to update you on the status of our schools and students since the monumental storm, Sandy, arrived late last month.

Although New Jersey was braced for Sandy's arrival, no one imagined the magnitude of destruction we all have had to deal with this past month as everyone has tried to return to their normal lives. In fact, a return to normalcy became the imperative that guided our efforts at the Department in responding to the needs of children: getting children back into their classrooms and their everyday routines as quickly as possible.

On Tuesday, October 30, only 214 out of 590 districts were open. Those that were not open were dealing with structural damage, flooding, lack of power, and, in some cases, road closures that prohibited educators and students from getting to their school building. In the initial days after the storm, some schools were converted to shelters for those left homeless by Sandy. These temporary shelters have since been closed or moved to other sites.

In the days following the storm, the Department undertook a massive communications effort to assess the situation on the ground and to provide information to districts on available resources to help them return to normalcy as quickly as possible. First, within a day of the storm, our Executive County Superintendents ("ECS's") reached out to nearly every Superintendent in the State to assess the situation and provide daily updates through whatever means was available – phone, email, or text message. By Friday, November 2, I began to send daily emails to provide information and respond to frequent questions coming from the field. We also posted the information at a special broadcast site for retrieval once power was restored and we set up a hotline at the Department for districts that could not reach our county staff because of closed offices or other difficulties. We asked the ECS's to do whatever possible to develop creative solutions to get children back to school.

Almost immediately, we saw the strength and compassion of New Jerseyans at work. 280 students, displaced by flood waters in Moonachie, were welcomed into the Wood-Ridge schools, and were back in class by November 6th. Many other such arrangements followed--a great testament to the spirit and caring of all who value education.

Still, days after the storm, hundreds of districts were dealing with schools with no power, some with low or no fuel, flooding, road closures, inoperative traffic signals and a number of other challenges which prevented people from reporting to work and school. However, by November 5th, just one short week after Sandy hit, 1000 schools, or roughly 40 percent of all schools, had opened their doors and welcomed children back.

By Wednesday, November 7th, the Department had the preliminary results of an initial survey to assess damage to school buildings. This information has helped the Department and districts coordinate with FEMA and other appropriate state agencies for assistance. In obtaining this initial assessment of damage to schools, we recognized that some students would require alternative settings for their education, whether in another facility or in portable classrooms. Based on the information we received, we targeted our efforts by interfacing with power companies, fuel companies and by helping schools meet their individual challenges. We made Department staff available to help troubleshoot and assist districts connect to available resource agencies.

The Department organized meetings for districts to meet with FEMA and different state agencies. These meetings were held on November 8th in Hudson County and November 9th in Monmouth County. I also held conference calls to update superintendents and school board members on the status of recovery efforts and available resources to get their schools back on line.

Many students who lost their homes after the storm moved into temporary housing outside their districts. The Department regularly issued, and continues to issue, guidance to districts on the handling of those students who have been temporarily displaced from their home district. The Department strives to provide students with continuity of education, with as little disruption as possible.

Districts were also asked to report students whose whereabouts were unknown following Hurricane Sandy. In these cases, the Department assisted in locating these missing children by contacting shelters and accessing available statewide databases of displaced individuals. We also set up a hotline at the Department for any displaced family that did not know where to turn. To date, districts have only reported approximately 28 missing students.

During this process, our primary goal at the Department was to get every child back into a suitable classroom. Once we were able to ensure that all student in the State had a suitable educational placement, we looked to assess and address the damages sustained by many of our schools and the efforts that would be needed to rebuild. This is a continuous effort that will take months, if not years.

By Friday, November 9th, 80% of schools were up and running - a significant achievement for all personnel involved. By November 14, 99% of all public schools were open and serving students, up from 40% just after the storm.

As of today, only 11 schools out of 2417 are not in service. There are at least an additional 113 schools that have reported some damage as a result of the storm but continue to operate. These 11 schools, from an original list of 13, are those schools that sustained the most significant damage as a result of the storm. While alternative educational settings were made available for all students in those schools, some of these schools are not expected to reopen this school year as a result of extensive damage sustained. Moreover, close consideration must be given to the reconstruction efforts. We must ask, for example, whether the reconstruction of a building to its prior size is sensible in light of the significant destruction of housing stock and resulting displacement.

At the Department, we will continue to strive to deliver educational services efficiently and effectively as we work to close the achievement gap and prepare our students to be college- and career-ready. The progress we have achieved over the past month is due to the outstanding and dedicated educators and administrators who went above and beyond to reopen schools and ensure the wellbeing of their students. I cannot express my gratitude for their work in helping our children return to normalcy.



New Jersey School Boards Association

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To: Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
From: Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod, Executive Director
Date: December 3, 2012
Subject: Testimony of the New Jersey School Boards Association on Hurricane Sandy Relief and Recovery Efforts

On behalf of the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), I would like to thank the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact that Hurricane Sandy has had on our public schools.

We've all seen the reports: New Jersey sustained nearly \$37 billion in losses. This equates to more than 72,000 homes and businesses destroyed or damaged. In Little Egg Harbor Township alone, more than 700 homes were condemned and nearly 200 school children were displaced. This dreadful scenario was repeated many times in all too many of our school systems.

In all, it's the second costliest storm in U.S. history, next to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Immediately after the storm struck, NJSBA responded by directly contacting representatives from every school district in the state to assess the impact of the storm and determine their needs. NJSBA launched a Hurricane Sandy Relief Effort, with the goal of matching donors with schools in need. We've heard from over 120 businesses, organizations, schools, and citizens – some from as far away as California and Oregon, and many from here in the Garden State. Already, the Association has matched a number of contributors with schools that needed desks, equipment, books and supplies.

In addition, we've worked closely with other stakeholder groups, including school administrators, to coordinate local information gathering. And in coming months, NJSBA plans to host a training program on "Lessons Learned from Sandy," so we can hear firsthand from those affected by the storm and how local school leaders responded to the crisis.

While I am proud of the work of the NJSBA staff to assist local school districts, it's even more gratifying to see how the entire state has come together to rally around our schools.

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, schools became a focal point in many communities:

- Schools were utilized as shelters and emergency staging areas.
- Students throughout New Jersey – and in other states – initiated adopt-a-school programs, collecting funds and supplies to help their peers in storm-ravaged communities.
- And school districts opened their doors to take in displaced and homeless students from other communities. Keyport took in children from Union Beach. The tiny community of Eagleswood took in children from Long Beach Island – far more students than they anticipated.

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Many school board members, teachers, administrators and other staff members were displaced due to the storm. Yet, they worked tirelessly to bring their schools back to a sense of normalcy. We saw child helping child, school helping school, citizen helping citizen. Moving forward, we need to keep schools as a focal point.

NJSBA also applauds the efforts of our state's educational community and the responsiveness of the state Department of Education. The commissioner's office has provided up-to-date information and resources to schools, and it has been flexible with school districts impacted by the storm. For instance, the commissioner has allowed school districts to extend the October 31 deadline to implement key components of the Educator Effectiveness Evaluation System.

We also recognize the commissioner's responsibility to enforce the requirement that schools provide a minimum of 180 instruction days a year. At present, NJSBA is urging school districts to make the adjustments necessary to comply with the 180-day instructional requirement. However, we also expect that the commissioner, who has the authority to waive the requirement under special circumstances, will make the appropriate determination after taking into account any further school closures required by weather emergencies.

We appreciate that the state's flexibility – from the Department of Education as well as other state offices – will continue to be afforded to local school districts in the coming year.

If we knew long in advance that Superstorm Sandy was going to strike with such incredible force, government officials and citizens would have been able to take various measures to be prepared. As we enter the recovery and rebuilding phase, we ask state officials to do just that: *Be prepared*. There are very real problems our schools and communities will face, and they should not come as a surprise.

For example, the loss of ratables will affect local funding and local budgets. The storm damage will have a ripple effect on government funding and services, through the loss of property taxes and the large numbers of displaced students. We're also concerned about the impact that shifting enrollments will have on the allocation of school aid.

The recovery from Superstorm Sandy will be an ongoing process that will be measured in months and years, not just days or weeks. And any number of unexpected issues will certainly arise. During this time, we need to keep education as a focal point of our efforts. As those unanticipated problems arise, NJSBA asks state officials to provide school districts with the tools, the funding, and the flexibility they need to continue providing a quality education with our limited resources.

We've heard countless stories of leadership among children, teachers, and education officials. Today, we thank the Senate Committee for taking the lead in gathering necessary information from our communities and our schools so we can effectively rebuild and recover.

On behalf of nearly 5,000 board of education members serving approximately 1.4 million children, we thank you for your dedication.