



Inquiry Response **Principals' Partnership** Sponsored by Union Pacific

Topic or Area of Inquiry: Assimilating students who are hurricane victims

Specific Question(s) or Subtopic(s):

- How are students likely to be impacted?
- How do schools work to assimilate and integrate students from affected areas?
- What should teachers do in the classroom?
- How can schools help students cope?
- What resources are available for schools?

Suggested Authors, Sources, and References: See online resources below.

Summary of Findings: Everyone was affected when Hurricane Katrina came ashore in the Gulf Coast, followed quickly by Hurricane Rita. Clearly, those most greatly impacted are the children and families who were directly exposed to the wrath of the storm. But the whole country is mourning the losses and how the hurricane has affected families from that area. Citizens from all over the country have mobilized to assist any way they can. Refugees are being relocated across the country and communities are opening their hearts and homes and shelters to displaced families. Schools will play a critical role in the response to and recovery of displaced children and adolescents. As stated in **Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Information for Schools:**

Obviously some schools will not re-open for months or longer, but their staff may be called upon to support the needs of families in the school community, facilitate the transition of students to other schools, and, in some cases, provide alternative learning opportunities. Schools in other locations that are accepting displaced students will need to be prepared for students with specific mental health needs, disabilities, and other special needs that may be aggravated due to their recent experiences. In the near term, those schools that can, may serve as shelters, resource centers, and places of familiarity and comfort. The return to school can provide a child with the healing environment of routine and structure, concrete expectations and predictability, and peer camaraderie and support; all of which are essential elements for reestablishing a sense of safety and security, and set the foundation for both recovery from hurricane related distress and continued academic achievement.

What follows is information, pulled mostly from the Websites of the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Child Trauma Stress Network, to help educators respond to those students. Please access the quoted resources directly. They go into much more depth and offer much more support and many more resources than the brief summaries and quotes here. Usually in the original, a paragraph (perhaps with additional links) follows each bulleted item; I have only included the header for each item. In many cases, the sites have fliers or leaflets that you can share with teachers and parents.

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How Students Will Be Impacted:

The devastation and destruction of Hurricane Katrina has been a major traumatic event for the affected students. This trauma can produce the following effects in adolescents: sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, aggression, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

Common reactions may include a preoccupation with what is happening; they can feel frightened and out of control and may feel completely helpless or imagine themselves as unrealistically strong and powerful. Adolescents can also become even more judgmental and critical of the adults around them and those dealing with the crisis situation. They may also act in ways that can put themselves and others in danger, such as increased experimentation with alcohol and drugs, reckless driving or other behaviors, which may serve an attempt to avoid feeling vulnerable and small. When faced with tragic events, adolescents' usual sense that nothing can harm them is lost, making them feel very unsafe. (from **The Parents' Guide for Helping Children in the Wake of Disaster**)

These students exposed to a traumatic event feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the event. They often experience feelings of shame and guilt about the traumatic event and may express fantasies about revenge and retribution. A traumatic event for adolescents may foster a radical shift in the way these students think about the world. Some of these adolescents may begin to engage in self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors, and reckless behaviors. There may be a shift in their interpersonal relationships with family members, teachers, and classmates. These students may show a change in their school performance, attendance, and behavior. (from **The Effects of Trauma on Students**)

A minority of children, though, may be at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).... Although extremely rare, some adolescents may also be at increased risk of suicide if they suffer from serious mental health problems like PTSD or depression and should be referred immediately for appropriate mental health support. (from **Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Children Cope**)

For most students, there is likely to be a direct impact on their ability to learn:

A traumatic event can seriously interrupt the school routine and the processes of teaching and learning. There are usually high levels of emotional upset, potential for disruptive behavior, or loss of student attendance unless efforts are made to reach out to students and staff with additional information and services. Students traumatized by exposure to violence have been shown to have lower grade point averages, more negative remarks in their cumulative records, and more reported absences from school than other students. They may have increased difficulties concentrating and learning at school and may engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior. (from **The Effects of Trauma on Students**)

Please keep in mind that, not only have these students lost their homes, pets, and belongings (and in some cases, family members), but most of them don't know where any of their friends are or what has happened to them. Also, even though your local students will likely be sympathetic to the relocated students, the local students may have a hard time relating to the relocated students, since they did not experience the hurricane in the same way.



How Educators can Help Students Cope:

Adults can help by using the adolescents' more advanced ability to think and talk to discuss their thoughts, feelings and worries. Some teenagers may feel more comfortable talking in groups with their peers and/or with teachers. Adults should be aware that drastic changes in adolescents' behaviors might indicate distress. Forcing adolescents to talk about their feelings may cause more harm than good; instead, adults should make sure that adolescents have a variety of opportunities to talk to whom they want and when they are ready. (from **The Parents' Guide for Helping Children in the Wake of Disaster**)

The following suggestions come from **Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Children Cope:**

- Remain calm and reassuring.
- Acknowledge and normalize their feelings.
- Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills.
- Emphasize children's resiliency.
- Strengthen children's friendship and peer support.
- Connect with support systems in the community.
- Monitor television and Internet viewing.
- Encourage children to talk about hurricane-related events.
- Engage children in activities they enjoy.
- Be prepared to discuss difficult questions.

How Schools Can Work To Integrate Displaced Students:

The following suggestions to facilitate integrating displaced students come from **Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Students Relocate and Supporting Their Mental Health Needs**

- Meet with your crisis team. Coordinate with community services.
- Meet with staff.
- Assign displaced students to schools together.
- Establish a "Welcome Taskforce."
- Orient the entire community to the process and needs of displaced students.
- Establish a mentoring program. Communicate with families.
- Monitor relocated students.
- Identify students' special needs.
- Provide time for students to express their feelings. (although, teachers should not be expected to conduct discussions if students are severely impacted or if they themselves feel unable to effectively talk about the issues.)
- Engage students in activities they enjoy.
- Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills.
- Emphasize students' resiliency.
- Identify children and youth who are at high risk and plan interventions.
- Support the mental health needs of staff.
- Ensure culturally appropriate services.

Taking on displaced students can stretch school and district resources, but help may come in the form of two federal programs. The US Department of Education maintains a Website where schools can ask for what they need and organizations can access that list when making donations (see the "What Schools Need" online resource below). Also, Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is intended to



ensure that homelessness does not cause these children to be left behind in school. Although formula grants from the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program are given to each state based on their share of Title I funds, schools and districts can apply for subgrants.

What Teachers Can Do In Their Own Classrooms:

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Students Relocate and Supporting Their Mental Health Needs encourages teachers to maintain the routine and structure. Efforts should be taken to alter workload expectations for the incoming students and avoid the introduction of too much new material during the transitional school reentry period. Teachers should:

- Meet and greet students as they enter the classroom.
- Remain calm and reassuring.
- Acknowledge and normalize feelings/reactions.
- Provide opportunities for children to share their concerns, but don't force discussion.
- Promote and praise positive coping and problem solving skills.
- Involve children in activities that permit them to make choices and re-establish some control over their environment.
- Involve students in recovery-oriented activities and projects.
- Consider the developmental stage and experiences of each child and tailor experiences of each child to their developmental needs and capacities.
- Incorporate disaster-related information into the curriculum, as appropriate.
- Provide collaborative activities that strengthen students' friendships and support.
- Do not require incoming students to complete homework as many of the students may not even have homes

Online Resources:

National Association of School Psychologists

The National Association of School Psychologists represents and supports school psychology through leadership to enhance the mental health and educational competence of all children.

<http://www.nasponline.org/>

NASP Responds to Hurricane Katrina

<http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/katrina.html>

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Students Relocate and Supporting Their Mental Health Needs

http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/katrina_relocate.html

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Information for Schools

http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/Katrina_schools.html

The National Child Trauma Stress Network

The mission of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States.

<http://www.nctsn.org/>



NCTSN Hurricane Katrina Tools and Links

This site has numerous resources including the following guides:

- Parent Guidelines for Helping Children after a Hurricane (PDF)
- What You Should Know about the Emotional Impact of Hurricanes
- What You Should Know about the Emotional Impact of Floods

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=nws_main

NCTSN Terrorism and Disaster Branch

Their mission is to promote the well-being of children and families by strengthening the nation's preparedness and response to terrorism and disaster. Includes specific information about earthquakes, epidemics, terrorism, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, and floods.

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_terr

NCTSN for School Personnel

This pamphlet includes suggestions for teachers taking care of themselves during stressful times, as well as tips on working with traumatized children. Resumption of schooling is important to promote the welfare of children and their families. Teachers play an important role in this process.

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_schl

The 3R's of School Crises and Disasters: Readiness, Response, and Recovery

A way to think about your school's level of preparedness is to measure what you have done to address the 3R's of School Crises and Disasters.

- **Readiness:** Readiness is the level at which a school is prepared to respond to a crisis or to an emergency if the crisis or disaster were to happen today.
- **Response:** Response is the sum total of the school's resources and skills to take decisive and effective action when a crisis situation has occurred.
- **Recovery:** Recovery is the process of restoring the social and emotional equilibrium of the school community. Links on this page lead to extensive materials in each of the 3R's.

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_schl_3rs_desc&Type=3rs

Teacher Guidelines for Helping Students after a Hurricane

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/assets/pdfs/teachers_guidelines_talk_children_hurricanes.pdf

The Effects of Trauma on Students

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_schl_effects#q5

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Children Cope

http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/katrina_cope.html

Trauma Information Pamphlet for Teachers (Word)

This pamphlet includes suggestions for teachers taking care of themselves during stressful times, as well as tips on working with traumatized children. Resumption of schooling is important to promote the welfare of children and their families. Teachers play an important role in this process.

http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/assets/word_docs/edu_materials/trauma_information_teachers.doc

For School Personnel

In-Depth Information on Childhood Traumatic Grief for School Personnel, as well as, Brief Information on Childhood Traumatic Grief for School Personnel

<http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/asset.do?id=439>



Parents' Guide for Helping Children in the Wake of Disaster

The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence at the Yale Child Study Center

http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/edu_materials/Parents_Guide_Sept_%202005.pdf

Courage To Remember Interactive Presentation

The "Courage to Remember" interactive presentation includes two digital videos and a printable (PDF) curriculum guide. A video designed for a wide range of professionals as well as the public, *It's OK to Remember*, presents basic background information on childhood traumatic grief. *The Courage to Remember* is a training video for clinical professionals who work with grieving children and families. It is accompanied by a training curriculum guide.

<http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/asset.do?id=777>

Education for Homeless Children and Youths Grants for State and Local Activities

The McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.

Each year, over 800,000 children and youth in the United States experience homelessness. Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is intended to ensure that homelessness does not cause these children to be left behind in school. Formula grants are made to the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico based on each State's share of Title I funds. Local SEA subgrants are available and US government is pointing schools in the direction of these subgrants as support for the assimilating displaced students.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html>

Hurricane Help for Schools

Providing Supplies for Schools Serving Students Displaced by Hurricane Katrina

Many schools are accepting students who cannot attend their own schools because of Hurricane Katrina. If your school is serving students displaced by the hurricane and if you need books, clothes, or other supplies, please **state what you need**. The name of your school, its address, and what you need will be posted on the "What Schools Need" page.

<http://www.ed.gov/news/hurricane/index.html>

What Schools Need Page

<http://www.ed.gov/news/hurricane/school-needs.html>

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