

HELPING GULF COAST STUDENTS READ AND SUCCEED

April 18, 2007

"Today, we're here to celebrate the Gulf Coast Summer Reading Initiative, the kind of partnership that has been so instrumental in helping the people of this region get back on their feet."

--Secretary Margaret Spellings

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast region and its education system. More than 1,100 public and private schools were closed two weeks following the storms. About 158,000 students were still displaced as of October 1, 2005.

Thanks to **nearly \$2 billion in federal education support**—part of an overall federal commitment totaling more than **\$110 billion**—students from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and elsewhere were able to continue their education in the Gulf region and across the country while their schools were repaired, restocked, restaffed, and reopened.

One part of this effort is the **2007 Gulf Coast Summer Reading Initiative**. Secretary Spellings traveled to the region to launch the Initiative, which involves the distribution of **500,000 new children's books**. Donated by Scholastic, Inc., these books will go to students, families, libraries and community organizations in the five States (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Texas, and Florida) most affected by the storms.

The Initiative is the current phase of a yearlong Gulf Coast book distribution effort created by the U.S. Department of Education and the nonprofit First Book to support *Book Relief*, an industry-wide effort by publishers to donate five million books to communities directly impacted by the storms of 2005. Overall, the U.S. Department of Education and First Book will have collaborated over the last year to distribute **1.15 million** books under *Book Relief*.

THE RECOVERY TO DATE

The **2007 Gulf Coast Reading Initiative** continues the Department's strong record of aid and support to children whose lives were uprooted—and educations disrupted—by the 2005 hurricanes. This has helped the States of the Gulf Coast region and their education systems to make **great progress toward recovery**:

- Over **99 percent** of K-12 schools have reopened in Mississippi. ¹
- The number of schools open in Louisiana is at **95 percent** of pre-Katrina levels.
- Over **50 percent** of schools have reopened in New Orleans, meeting population needs.
- All major institutions of higher education in the region have reopened.

¹ On the school's original grounds or elsewhere.

THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE: EDUCATING DISPLACED STUDENTS

- **\$880 million** was provided in **Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students (Impact Aid)** to assist local education agencies in 49 states and the District of Columbia in paying for the cost of educating more than 150,000 displaced students enrolled in public, non-public and charter schools.
- Using data from the Impact Aid applications, **\$5 million** was quickly released under the **Assistance for Homeless Youths (Homeless Aid) Program** to help state education agencies educate students left temporarily homeless by the storms.

HELPING SCHOOLS REOPEN

- **\$750 million** was provided under the **Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations (Restart Aid) Program** to help repair, restock and reopen schools in the states most affected by the storms.
- A three-year **Charter School Grant worth nearly \$24 million** was provided through the *No Child Left Behind Act* to help Louisiana plan, design and create new charter schools, increasing the range of choices for affected families.

AIDING HIGHER EDUCATION

- **\$200 million** has been allocated for institutions of higher education to help reopen schools and educate displaced students. Up to \$1,000 per student has been awarded to help defray new and unexpected costs resulting from the disaster. An additional **\$50 million** was awarded under a supplemental aid package signed by the President in June 2006.
- **\$28 million** in unused federal campus-based aid was reallocated to assist institutions of higher education affected by the storms.
- The Department offered borrowers in federal student loan programs who were impacted by the disaster six months of **student loan-payment forbearance**. In addition, the Department capped interest rates and reduced loan fees to **Historically Black Colleges and Universities** damaged by the storms.

MANAGING ASSISTANCE FROM OVERSEAS

- Working with the U.S. Department of State, the Department of Education helped allocate more than **\$60 million in foreign donations** to the Gulf Coast region.
 - **\$30 million** was awarded to **K-12 education**, the majority of funds going toward the reconstruction of libraries, science labs and other physical assets.
 - **\$30 million** was awarded to **higher education**, largely for reconstruction.

MATCHING DONATIONS WITH THOSE IN NEED

- The Department launched **Hurricane Help for Schools** (www.hurricanehelpforschools.gov), an online clearinghouse to match schools in need with willing donors. To date, nearly **900 matches** have been made between donors and schools in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas.
- More than **13,000 items totaling nearly \$6 million**—including computers, printers, desks, chairs and bookcases—have been donated and delivered through the Education Department's and the U.S. General Services Administration's ongoing **Furniture for Schools Project**.