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Still Waiting: Children, Students and Schools in the Gulf Coast

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Still Waiting: Children, Students and Schools in the Gulf Coast

Analysis of President Bush's Controversial Voucher Proposal and Inadequate School Relief Response

Democratic Action Plan to Aid Impacted Children, Students, Schools and Colleges in the Aftermath of the Gulf Coast Hurricanes

Committee on
Education and the
Workforce

Democratic Caucus

The Honorable
George Miller, Senior
Democratic Member

OCTOBER 2005

Bush response to Gulf Coast education crisis— too little too late

Hurricane Katrina and Rita's devastating impacts on the public education systems and colleges of New Orleans, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and Florida were immediate and without precedent.

- **Some 372,000 students in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the Gulf Coast region have been displaced from their schools for the foreseeable future.**
- **Over 400 school buildings were damaged or destroyed as a result of the storm and many will not reopen before the end of the year.**
- **More than 100,000 students and approximately 30,000 faculty and staff at 30 Gulf Coast colleges have been impacted by Hurricane Katrina alone.**

Yet, President Bush's response to the disasters fails to deliver urgent, targeted relief to public schools, teachers, colleges and students affected by the Gulf Coast Hurricanes. Out of the total \$2.6 billion in education relief funding proposed by the Bush Administration, **nearly one-fifth of the relief money would go to a divisive, federally funded school voucher proposal**, while schools, colleges and universities in the states hardest hit by Katrina are denied critical assistance.

Meeting the needs of the school districts, colleges and universities, and students and families will require a concerted effort by the Administration and Congress. Unfortunately, **the Administration's proposal is too little, too late.**

Democratic Plan Would Get Students Back in Classrooms, Rebuild Schools and Colleges and Help Revive the Gulf Coast Economy

Democrats have unveiled plans to help impacted K-12 schools and colleges rebuild and recover, and to assist schools and colleges that are absorbing displaced students. Key elements of these proposals include:

- **New funding for impacted school districts to help them get back to the business of educating students**, including funds to: pay teachers and staff; restart administrative operations; find new classroom space; replace instructional materials; and educate students—including special education students—immediately.
- **Increased resources to “host” school districts that are enrolling students displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes**, including funds to: hire new teachers and staff; purchase new instructional materials; find additional classroom space; provide counseling and after school programs; and, supplement special education funds.

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- **Additional funds for after-school programs**—both in impacted districts and in districts enrolling students displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes—to provide children with safe, enriching environments to go to after school while parents are working or looking for work.
- **Additional funds for school construction and repair** to ensure that students are learning in top quality facilities.
- **Providing impacted student borrowers with a 6-month deferment from making payments on their college loans**—during this deferment loan interest would not accrue. A typical borrower who has just graduated from college would save approximately \$600 on his or her loans.
- **Providing loan cancellation, of up to \$10,000, for students who attend and complete their education at an impacted Gulf Coast college;** and,
- **Establishing a one-time grant program for impacted colleges to recruit and retain their students, faculty and staff** with: need-based student aid; temporary housing for faculty and staff; temporary continuation of salary and health benefits; and, tuition assistance for faculty and staff.

The Democratic Plan makes education a priority and ensures that students, families, teachers, and faculty receive the assistance they need during this critical time.

Introduction

Hurricane Katrina and Rita's devastating impacts on the public education systems and colleges of New Orleans, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and Florida were immediate and without precedent.

The latest estimate from the U.S. Department of Education is that **372,000 students in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the Gulf Coast region have been displaced from their schools for the foreseeable future.**

In addition, **more than 100,000 students and approximately 30,000 faculty and staff at 30 Gulf Coast colleges have been impacted by Hurricane Katrina.**

For example, Dillard University, a historically black university in New Orleans, has been under water since Hurricane Katrina. In spite of this devastation to a historical educational landmark, the President's plan does not provide any direct assistance to Dillard, or other impacted colleges, to help them rebuild their damaged and flooded facilities.

The President's plan also fails to provide the necessary assistance to communities that are absorbing displaced children and students in their local schools and colleges.

Dillard University, Xavier University of Louisiana and Southern University at New Orleans—all historically black colleges and universities—suffered at least \$1 billion in flood and fire destruction.

--Washington Post, October 1, 2005

Over 400 school buildings were damaged or destroyed as a result of the Gulf Coast disasters and many will not reopen before the end of the year.

Host K-12 school systems are now faced with higher than normal student enrollment, and need assistance finding highly qualified teachers, accessing books and supplies and transporting students to and from school.

These school districts also need additional resources for displaced students with special learning needs, if they are to offer federally mandated evaluations and services. In

addition, teachers who were employed in school districts hit by the hurricanes must now seek employment in new states with new teaching requirements.

Meeting the needs of the school districts, colleges and universities, students and families will require a concerted effort by the Administration and Congress. Unfortunately, **the Bush Administration's proposal is too little, too late.**

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President Bush's Response on K-12 Education: Failure to recognize and provide relief for immediate needs of hundreds of thousands of students

*The Bush Administration's response to the Gulf Coast Hurricanes fails to deliver urgent, targeted relief to public schools, teachers and students affected by Hurricane Katrina. Of the total \$2.6 billion in education relief funding proposed by the Bush Administration, nearly **one-fifth of the relief money would go to a divisive, federally funded school voucher proposal**, while school districts in the states hardest hit by Katrina are denied critical assistance.*

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article made clear that **this and other divisive Administration proposals are more about ideology than about hurricane recovery** – the article said that “Congressional Republicans, backed by the White House, say they are using relief measures for the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast to achieve a broad range of conservative economic and social policies.”

Misguided Priorities: Administration's Voucher Proposal Takes Precious Resources Away from Schools that Need them the Most

In K-12 education, the Administration's failure to recognize the immediate needs of schools directly impacted by the Hurricanes is now compounded by an unprecedented nationwide voucher scheme for private schools.

- There is no evidence that the 61,000 students who attended private and parochial schools in New Orleans are being turned away from public schools in other states. In fact, public schools in Texas and as far away as Utah have opened their doors to relocated students. Yet the Administration is willing to spend \$488 million on an unprecedented and untested nationwide voucher scheme.
- Such an experiment presents myriad legal and administrative obstacles. First among them is deciding which students will be eligible for a voucher. This new program would be open to public and private school students who have been relocated by the Hurricane, yet the proposed funding level only covers one-fifth of the relocated students.
- Some private schools in New Orleans are offering to refund school tuition to students who have been relocated. However the Administration's proposal does not prevent “double dipping” – in other words, a family that receives a tuition refund from their child's private school may yet remain eligible for a voucher.

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- Public schools in Louisiana and Mississippi that are enrolling relocated students are facing the same resource and capacity issues as private schools. The Administration's proposal however, provides more funds to private schools than to the public schools that need the greatest immediate assistance. Even worse, the President's proposal would force the public schools that suffered direct damage from the storm to compete against other public schools that are hosting new students, potentially putting all public schools in those states at risk.
- The focus of emergency relief should be to get resources to schools in need instead of exploiting a natural disaster to push the Administration's narrow ideological agenda for school vouchers.

Administration's Proposal: Fails to Aid Impacted Schools in New Orleans and Areas Hit by the Gulf Coast Hurricanes

- School districts at the front of the storm suffered disproportionately and are in desperate need of immediate assistance as a result of the loss in local and state revenues.
- At the same time, school districts in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and Florida that continue to serve relocated students have pressing and distinct needs.
- Unfortunately, the Administration's plan would force these states to choose between **either** sending funds to help reopen schools **or** sending funds to districts receiving relocated students. No state should have to make this choice.
- This relief package should be reworked so that both receiving school districts **and** the districts in the Gulf Coast states with schools destroyed by the hurricane receive immediate and adequate relief and assistance.

President Bush's Response on Higher Education: Limited assistance for impacted colleges, universities, students and families

More than 100,000 students and approximately 30,000 faculty and staff at 30 colleges have been impacted by Hurricane Katrina alone.

President Bush has proposed spending just \$227 million on relief for impacted colleges, students, borrowers and families through loan deferment and aid to colleges receiving relocated students.

Although this proposal and others from Congress include some useful steps, they don't do nearly enough to help the colleges devastated by the Gulf Coast hurricanes.



There are colleges literally underwater that can't get immediate assistance grants under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to rebuild or repair their damaged buildings. The money allocated by this Administration for colleges and universities is simply inadequate to get students back onto their own campuses in a timely fashion.

The Bush Administration's plan doesn't provide any direct assistance to many colleges who must rebuild and repair their damaged and flooded buildings.

- While public colleges are able to get immediate grant assistance from FEMA to rebuild and repair, private colleges are not eligible for this quick relief and therefore they may not be able to rebuild, or may take many months to rebuild—during which time their students, faculty and staff will be displaced.
- Xavier University of New Orleans, a historically black college and university (HBCU), which was flooded and sustained significant structural damage due to Hurricane Katrina, estimates that it will cost almost \$140 million just to re-open their doors.
- Dillard University, another HBCU in New Orleans that was devastated by Katrina, estimates their repair and rebuilding costs at \$370 million.

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The Administration’s plan doesn’t address the critical need to help these impacted colleges retain and recruit students to their institutions.

- Institutions of higher education play a critical role in strengthening the Gulf Coast economy. If these colleges are unable to re-open their doors—the economy will suffer. Tulane University in New Orleans is the largest private employer—with 6,000 employees—in the city, which has few other economic engines.
- One-third of Tulane’s revenue comes from tuition and fees, and immediately after the hurricane Moody’s Investors Service predicted that the college could run out of operating funds by April if students didn’t return. Without students, Tulane may not be able to pay for the salaries and health care of their staff—which would leave countless more Gulf Coast residents jobless.
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College—which suffered \$15 million in damage—reopened in mid-September and reports that 25 percent of their faculty lost their homes as a result of the hurricane. Only about half of their students who had originally enrolled this fall, have returned to class.

If Tulane and other schools devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are to re-open their doors, re-enroll their students and continue to employ thousands of Gulf Coast residents, the President and Congress must provide immediate long term relief for these colleges to help recruit and retain their students and faculty.

It is critical that we provide immediate direct grant assistance to colleges and students for additional student aid, funds for temporary housing, health care and rebuilding efforts.

Rebuilding and Repair Costs for Select Colleges Impacted by the Gulf Coast Hurricanes

<i>College or University</i>	<i>Estimated Rebuilding and Repair Costs</i>
Southern University of New Orleans	\$416 million
Delgado Community College	\$350 million
All Mississippi Colleges and Universities	\$495 million
Alcorn State University	\$3 million
Dillard University	\$370 million
Jackson State University	\$6.05 million
Tougaloo College	\$2.06 million
Xavier University	\$138.5 million

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Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Gulf Coast hurricanes, hundreds of thousands of Gulf Coast residents are jobless, homeless and displaced. Rebuilding schools and communities will take a concerted and long term effort.

While President Bush's plan leaves students, families and schools adrift, Democrats have proposed immediate short and long term relief to students and families with the resources necessary to rebuild Gulf Coast schools, colleges and communities. Specific Democratic proposals include:

- New funding for impacted school districts to help them get back to the business of educating students;
- Increased resources to "host" school districts that are enrolling students displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes;
- Additional funds for after school programs in both impacted districts and in districts enrolling students displaced by the Gulf Coast hurricanes;
- Additional funds for school construction and repair;
- Providing impacted student borrowers with a 6-month deferment from making payments on their college loans;
- Providing loan cancellation, of up to \$10,000, for students who attend and complete their education at an impacted Gulf Coast college; and,
- Establishing a one-time grant program for impacted colleges to recruit and retain their students, faculty, and staff.

For more information visit:

<http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/>
